

## Reflections on the Teaching of Interpreting

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**Abstract.** The importance of interpreting, as an act of oral interlingual communication, is increasing steadily in our world of today, characterized by the fast unprecedented progress in the field of information and communication. Because it responds immediately to the needs of speakers and listeners using different languages to understand and address each other, interpreting is perhaps the most suitable kind of translation for the “global village”, whose inhabitants have so far succeeded to break almost all barriers, except that of languages. Interpreting sections have been opened in universities in order to cater for the growing demand on qualified interpreters who can enable participants at international multilingual gatherings to exchange views and ideas. The principles underlying the practice and the teaching of interpreting are usually laid down at major international universities in the United States and Western European countries. Since these universities have features which are not shared by colleges in other parts of the world, interpreting principles need to be adapted to the situation in each country. This paper focuses on the ways interpreting can be taught at national universities in such a way that the principles of the profession are adhered to, while taking into consideration the needs and linguistic settings of each country. Interpreting is first defined and its types are introduced. It is then examined as a process consisting of three closely linked phases: *auditory perception of an utterance in the source language, dissociating its meaning from the linguistic form of the SL, and finally expressing the meaning of the utterance into the target language.* Each one of these phases has its requirements, principles and techniques which will be dealt with here, illustrated with examples taken from the actual experience of learning interpreting at an international university, practicing the profession, then teaching it at King Saud University.

### Introduction

In today’s ever-smaller world, distances between nations are rapidly disappearing, bringing them closer and closer in what is now widely known as the global village. Communication has become a basic need for modern nations whose peoples interact and exchange information in all fields of human knowledge and experience: technological advances, industrial inventions, scientific discoveries, environmental issues, etc. With the advent of the internet and other fast information technologies, the amount of exchange is increasing steadily at an unprecedented pace. One major obstacle stands in

the way of this trend and blocks the channels of contacts: the different nations use different languages and consequently cannot communicate directly. This is the defiant barrier of language which people need to surmount whenever they intend to communicate using more than one language.

Translation (capitalized to refer to oral interpreting and written translation) has confirmed itself as the only means of communication between people speaking different languages. The Translator (also capitalized to include interpreter and translator) plays a pivotal role in this inter-lingual communication. Because he knows the two languages used by the participants in a given situation of communication, he receives the message from the speaker/writer in one language (the source language, SL) in order to send it to the listener/reader in the other language (the target language, TL). In other words, he mediates between participants using different languages so as to enable them to understand each other despite the barrier of language.

The importance of interpreting is constantly on the rise not only due to the increasing number of international gatherings attended by delegates and participants from all nations with different tongues, but also in response to the urgent need for immediate translation; a trend that goes in line with the quick pace at which information flows in the global village.

In a country like Saudi Arabia, the need for interpreting is even greater. The reason for this is double-fold. First, Saudi Arabia being the land of the Two Holy Mosques, has millions of Muslims converging to it from the four corners of the world, all the year round. These pilgrims speak different languages, and therefore need interpreting so as to communicate with the authorities on religious principles, health matters, and other relevant issues. Second, this country has experienced, and is still undergoing, a process of modernization in all sectors: industry, education, medical care, services, etc. It needs to maintain constant ties with other countries, especially industrialized ones, so as to exchange with them knowledge and experience, and to keep up with the latest development in the different fields. It needs interpreters for establishing these ties, and also for maintaining them.

This paper deals with the training of interpreters who can aptly carry out the task of mediation to enable people to communicate in this multiplicity of fields. Interpreting is first introduced then examined as a process comprising three phases: *auditory perception* of a source utterance, *dissociating its meaning* from the linguistic form, and orally *expressing the meaning* into the TL. Each phase requires certain types of knowledge and skills. For auditory perception and comprehension of the source utterance to take place, it is necessary to have deep knowledge of the SL, together with enough knowledge of the subject dealt with in the text. Expressing the meaning extracted from the source text requires perfect command of this language, in addition to knowing the principles and techniques of interpreting. Some of these requirements are considered as prerequisites for admission to any interpreting program, and the program will only seek to enhance

them, others are acquired during training. The present paper attempts to point to the most suitable ways for building up and enhancing these types of knowledge and skills in the settings of an interpreting section at a national university.

The term “national university” is used in this paper to make it clear that difference there is between the training of interpreters at major international schools, mainly in Western European countries, and that which takes place at universities in other countries, like Arab ones. In the first, training aims to produce conference interpreters who intend to work mainly at international organizations, agencies and other institutions. In this case the accent is placed on simultaneous interpreting, and the rules of the profession are strictly adhered to, especially with regard to interpreting into one’s native language. At national universities, however, the aim is to train interpreters who can meet the needs of their country. Because these needs are diverse, training covers all modes of interpreting: from the simple liaison mode, to simultaneous interpreting, passing by consecutive, bilateral, etc. In addition, the direction of interpreting is not only into the native language, but equally into the foreign one.

The reflections are based on my personal experience of teaching interpreting at the College of Languages and Translation of King Saud University. For more than four years now, I have been charged with teaching consecutive interpreting to *Level 8* students who have received intensive English language courses for four semesters, then translation, as well as translation-related courses for three semesters. My teaching experience at this college is inserted into, and examined against a wider one including that of a former interpreting student at an international school of Translation, namely l’Ecole Supérieure d’Interprete et de Traducteur ( ESIT ) of the Sorbonne in Paris, and that of a practitioner of interpreting, mainly in Sudan.

By these reflections I hope to draw a link between the principles of teaching and practicing professional conference interpreting established by major international schools, and the reality of training somewhat ‘local’ interpreters who are qualified enough to meet the demand in their country.

### **What is interpreting**

Interpreting can generally be defined as the instantaneous oral expression of what a speaker is saying in another language. It is an act of oral communication needed when interlocutors, in a particular communication situation, are unable to address one another directly because they do not understand each other’s language. They call upon the interpreter who speaks their two languages to intervene so as to enable them to communicate. The interpreter listens to what the speaker is saying in the SL, quickly grasps its meaning, and immediately expresses this meaning orally into the language known to the intended listener, i.e. the TL.

At least four types of interpreting are practiced nowadays. First, consecutive interpreting, in which the interpreter, with the help of the notes he takes while listening

to the speaker, renders a lengthy speech into another language immediately after the speaker has finished his address. Second, simultaneous interpreting which “takes place as the speaker is talking, providing a continuous translation which parallels the speaker’s speech” [1, p. 147]. In this mode, which is widely used in important international gatherings in which several languages are used, the interpreter works from a booth where the head-set enables him to listen to the SL speaker and speak to the target listener at the same time. Third, bilateral interpreting in which one interpreter works between two delegations or two sides, each consisting of a number of speakers, usually experts, discussing a particular technical issue, e.g. a ministerial meeting between two countries to deal with bilateral trade relations, agreements, etc. In this case, the interpreter renders respectively into the other language what the speakers of each side utter. The speech segments here are shorter than those of consecutive interpreting, and, unlike in the simultaneous mode, speakers usually pause to leave room for the interpreter to convert their message into the other language. Finally, liaison interpreting, or the “use of an interpreter as an intermediary in situations such as an informal discussion ... or a question answer session between two speakers who do not understand each other’s language or do so only imperfectly” [2, p. 200]. However, the situations in which liaison interpreting is used can range from informal conversations to highly formal *tete-a-tete* like conversations between presidents, ministers and other officials and personalities.

At international interpreting schools, training programs accord special importance to the simultaneous mode because they mainly focus on conference interpreting. At national interpreting sections, like that of King Saud University, the three other modes are highlighted. This is because most of the demand on interpreters is for liaison interpreting, for example in hospitals between patients and foreign consultants, visiting or resident ones, and equally between these and the local authorities. Bilateral and consecutive modes are also needed in ministries, firms, etc.

In the four types, with very slight differences as to the length of the source utterance, the process of interpreting, broken into phases, runs as follows: *auditory perception of an utterance* and grasping of its meaning, *immediate and deliberate dissociation of its meaning from the verbal form*, and finally *expressing the meaning into the TL* or production of a new utterance in the TL, carrying the meaning in its entirety, in a form intelligible for the target listener [3, p.9]. These phases do not occur in turn one after the other, they overlap at a speed which corresponds to that of the normal speech process.

Right from the start, interpreting seems to take a different path from its twin-sister translation. In the latter, a written text is read and possibly reread until it is sufficiently understood, analysed to extract its meaning from its words, and then a written text is produced in the TL to reexpress the meaning so extracted. In turn, the target text can be written and rewritten until its form is satisfactory for the translator. In interpreting, however, everything is to be carried out immediately, and only once: immediate auditory perception of the SL speech which the speaker utters usually once, immediately

discarding its form to retain its meaning, and also immediate production of a TL speech which carries the same meaning, without any possibility of revising the target text to put it in a better form or better expression. There is no time for consulting dictionaries or seeking help from other sources, no time either for hesitating over the wording, or looking for alternative terms and expressions. The interlocutors are there; they need to communicate but cannot do so because of the language barrier. There is urgency for the interpreter to intervene immediately so as to make mutual understanding between them possible.

The circumstances in which interpreting takes place differ significantly from those in which written translation is carried out. The presence of the participants (speaker and listener) together with the interpreter in the same place, the necessity of immediate action on the part of the interpreter, the scarcity of time allocated to the process and the use of the spoken language seem to have different bearings on interpreting. At times, they seem to make it harder than translation because they add to it extra requirements which are not high on the agenda of the written mode. For example, the interpreter is supposed to be familiar with accents and dialects specific to the spoken language, he is required to speak the TL fluently, and to have a quick response to the two working languages so as to quickly understand what is said in one, and to quickly retrieve words and expressions from the other. At the same time, these very factors seem to alleviate the pressure on the interpreter, facilitate his task and put him in a better situation compared to his counterpart, the translator. For example, the presence of the participants in the scene is a great help for the interpreter because they are usually experts of the field in question and, of course, know it better than the interpreter does. They are generally willing to cooperate with him, directly answering his questions, providing him with necessary information, on the terms and the concepts, and, if need be, rephrasing their utterance to enable him understand what they say. In the following pages reference will constantly be made to these factors when dealing with the different phases of the process of interpreting, what they require and how to meet their requirements.

### **Interpreting phases and requirements**

Though at first sight interpreters may seem to shift automatically from one language to the next, interpreting, as mentioned earlier, is in fact a process composed of three overlapping phases: *auditory perception* of a source utterance and immediate grasping of its meaning, *dissociating the meaning from the verbal form*, and immediate production of a target language speech in which the whole meaning is *expressed* in a form intelligible for the target listener. The first and the final phases are considered as the major ones, while dissociating the meaning from the verbal form is an inter-phase which serves as a link between them. It constitutes the final product of the first phase while it represents the starting point for the final one. The following pages deal with these phases in more detail.

### 1) Auditory perception of the source utterance

Auditory perception of the SL utterance relates to the interpreter's ability to understand what the SL speaker says, be it technical, scientific, political, or only of a general nature. Comprehension of what speakers say depends on two types of knowledge: knowledge of the language, and extra-linguistic knowledge.

Concerning the first type of knowledge, that of the language, it is to be noted here that, for reasons which will be discussed later in this paper, interpreters are supposed to work from a foreign language into their mother tongue, i.e. they listen to utterances in the foreign language to produce utterances in their native language. The SL is, therefore, usually a foreign language for the interpreter. Auditory perception of the SL utterance requires smooth and natural comprehension of what is said in this language on first hearing.

This latter facet of the requirement is all logic, for in real-life situations when people address each other in a language they know, they usually understand what is said on first hearing. Listeners do not ask speakers to systematically repeat whatever they happen to say. The same should apply in interpreting which is supposed to resemble normal oral communication, as if the participants were speaking one and the same language. This point is to be taken into consideration in interpreting classes, students are to be trained to listen only once to the source utterance. Allowing them to listen twice or thrice to the utterance will but falsify the exercise and make them take the unprofessional habit of waiting for the utterance to be repeated instead of concentrating so as to understand it right from the beginning. To avoid students asking for a second hearing of the SL text, the instructor can use several techniques, such as taking a gradual approach from very easy and short texts to slightly harder and more complex ones.

Also, at the level of teaching interpreting, to facilitate comprehension on first hearing only spoken texts are to be used in interpreting exercises, written texts read aloud are to be categorically discarded because they, too, will falsify the exercise. Spoken texts are, by definition, easier to understand for, "in general, the grammar of spoken sentences is simpler and less strictly constructed than written sentences... because the speaker relies more on the hearer's understanding of context and on his ability to interrupt if he fails to understand" [4, p.23]. Conversely, written texts are more tersely and elaborately constructed because the writer knows that his text will remain permanently available for the reader who can read repeatedly whatever extract he fails to understand, and who can obtain help from dictionaries and other reference materials. For this reason, in real-world situations of interpreting, if speakers are to read texts written in advance, the interpreter is also given in advance a copy of the text. If written texts are sometimes difficult to understand on first reading, they are definitely more difficult, if ever possible, to understand on first hearing. However, if, due to the absence of spoken material, written texts are to be used in exercises, they should not be read systematically, but modified

to resemble spontaneous speech. For instance, they should be simplified by splitting up the lengthy sentences into shorter ones, or by pausing between sentences and filling the gaps by words and expressions which are characteristic of speech, such as *now then*, *...well*, *... you see*, *... kind of...*, etc., and “hesitation fillers like *er.. um ...*” [4., p. 23].

The second and most important facet of the above requirement is the ability to understand the speaker’s utterance naturally and smoothly. This facet relates to the deep knowledge of the SL the interpreter is supposed to possess. As mentioned above, the SL is usually a foreign language from which the interpreter works, he is therefore supposed to understand whatever is said in it, to have a knowledge of comprehension of this language. The depth of this knowledge is set at a very demanding level, since the interpreter’s ability to understand it “should be almost comparable to that of a native speaker” [3, p.79].

For the comprehension of source spoken texts to run smoothly, no words or expressions should protrude to hamper understanding. On the contrary, like in normal communication, the words and expressions should only serve as a means for conveying thought and ideas, they should flow unnoticed, and disappear immediately leaving the meaning they carry. Once words and expressions stand out because they are ‘difficult’ or not known to the interpreter, they will obscure the meaning and obstruct comprehension. In addition, they will retain the interpreter’s attention, and consequently, instead of striving to follow the speaker who will continue to speak anyway, the interpreter will miss parts of the source text, his perception and comprehension will only be partial. If comprehension is incomplete, interpreting will not be complete either, it will not be successful because, as mentioned earlier, comprehension of the entire meaning is the first condition of interpreting. After all, as Kussmaul puts it, “successful ‘interpreting’ is often nothing else but the verbalization of our comprehension” [5, p.102].

For this reason, in the training of interpreters at major interpreting schools, like the ESIT of Paris, if a student’s ability to understand source texts is too often jeopardized by foreign words and expressions he does not know, it will be concluded that his knowledge of this language has not attained the level required for interpreting. In which case he will be ‘advised’ to suspend his registration at the School, and to resume it only after having spent one year in a country speaking that language. At national interpreting sections, if sending students abroad to improve their foreign language knowledge is not always possible, it is important to find other solutions to the problem. For instance, students with insufficient comprehension ability can be exposed to the spoken language in intensive courses of listening/comprehension which would take place in the language laboratory. In these classes, students will listen to spoken texts of all types and fields, and take notes, not only on the most important points, but in as much detail as they can. They will then be asked to summarize the texts orally in the same language, briefly giving the main ideas at the beginning, and then gradually adding more pieces of information until they are able to rebuild the whole text.

However, knowing a foreign language to the extent of being able to understand immediately and naturally what its speakers say, requires more than just knowing its words, expressions and grammatical rules. Other factors come into play, especially regional variation if the language is widely spoken as a mother tongue, or as a language of public communication, like English. The interpreter who works from English faces the problem of a diversity of regional and geographical accents and dialects ranging from the British English to that of Australia, passing by the American English, the one spoken in Nigeria or that which is used in India.

It is true that the variety with which the interpreter usually deals, i.e. the one used in meetings and public gatherings, is "the educated spoken English" which cuts across the regional and geographical boundaries and which is used by "...any institution which must attempt to address itself to a public beyond the smallest dialectal community". [6, p. 3]. However, despite the use of the educated variety in their speech, speakers' dialect always escapes their notice and comes to the surface adding a regional color to their utterance. It will therefore be an important asset for the interpreter to be to some extent familiar with these varieties and to master at least the two major ones: British English and American English.

This familiarization should be included in interpreting exercises where the bulk of the texts to be interpreted should be selected from the two main varieties on an equal footing. The other varieties, in particular the most representative ones, can be dealt with at least from time to time in classes, for instance an African variety from Ghana or Nigeria, an Asian variety from India or Pakistan, etc.

At international interpreting schools, the problem of regional variation is to, a large extent, resolved by the presence, sometimes in the same classroom, of students from different nationalities and different tongues. For some of them English is the native language, for some others it is the language of education and public communication, as is the case in certain African countries. When these students participate in classes, they offer a chance for other students to be familiar with their different accents. At national interpreting sections this gap can be filled by recording source texts from different radio stations and satellite television channels, and also by using the different accents and dialects, which are usually included in the recorded teaching materials available for listening courses.

The necessity of understanding the source utterance on the spot, without the possibility of seeking help to resolve a problem of difficult wording or opaquely technical expression, in addition to the problem of regional variation, are some of those extra-requirements which seem to make the task of the interpreter harder compared to that of the translator. But, outweighing their effect is the soothing one of certain features and elements specific to oral communication and its medium, the spoken language. The first feature is that in oral communication, as mentioned earlier, the interlocutors are present on the scene, the interpreter as well. Speakers aim, first and foremost, to get their

message across to their listeners from whom they seek to elicit a certain reaction, e.g. approval of what is being said, a counter-argument, a different point of view, etc. To this end, speakers present their message in a form that facilitates immediate comprehension for the listener. If, from the reaction of the latter, it appears to the speaker that he has not been fully understood, he will try to redress the balance by all means available to him. For instance, he can rephrase his message to further simplify its wording, he can add more information to a point, explains another, etc. In addition, he can rely on “the devices we use to transmit language by speech (stress, rhythm, intonation, tempo, for example)”[6, p. 7]. He can also make use of body language to further clarify his message by nodding, gazing, smiling, waving his hands, etc. And he can use visual aids, like slides, pictures, maps, etc. All these elements contribute to ensure immediate comprehension for the listeners who know the language of the speaker, and likewise for the interpreter who is a listener at this phase of the process.

As for the extra-linguistic knowledge, it is composed of two aspects: knowledge of the outside world, and knowledge of the subject matter dealt with by the interlocutors. Knowledge of the outside world relates to the general type of knowledge one acquires through reading, traveling, getting informed about major events in the world, etc. Knowledge of the subject matter refers to the somewhat specialized knowledge necessary for understanding technical communication. This latter type is particularly important in interpreting because practically in all interpreting sessions, the interpreter mediates between specialists who exchange expert views on issues relating to their fields.

When experts meet in a conference or any other form of gathering, they are not expected to deal with the basic concepts of their field, explain its terms, or discuss elementary issues. They gather so as to deal with the state of the art, to get informed on newly introduced techniques, or recently developed processes. They usually discuss technical problems that they encounter in the course of their work, listen to researchers who brief them on the findings of their investigations, to manufacturers who introduce new machinery, etc. When they address each other, they know that they all share a common basis of knowledge acquired in the technical and specialized education they have received. They refer to specialized concepts using technical terms which are perfectly familiar to them because they constitute the ‘ordinary’ language of their field. However, these concepts and terms may be totally opaque and unintelligible for an outsider of the field, like the interpreter.

For instance an engineer of spinning and weaving may tell his colleagues in a meeting that in his mill “they have decided to stop using the ring-and-traveler method because of the very high rate of end-breakage” and that they “have tried the tension weights which can only resolve the problem partially”. The participants, who are specialists of the field, understand this statement immediately because they know the *ring-and-traveler* method, the problem of *end-breakage* and the *tension weights*. For the

interpreter, who is an outsider to the field, the meaning of the terms cannot be deduced from their form, and consequently the statement remains ambiguous.

It is the appropriate knowledge of the subject field that clears the ambiguity of the statement by fixing the meaning that the terms have in the field concerned and discarding all other possibilities. Thus, the *ring-and-traveler method* is a spinning method in which a smaller ring moves, or 'travels' around a bigger one, taking the yarn along with it so that it can be twisted and strengthened, that the problem of *end-breakage* is the annoying problem of the yarn breaking frequently at further weaving operations and interrupting the production processes, that the *tension weights* are metal discs used to add more weight and apply more tension on the fibers so as to improve the resistance of the yarn. Without sufficient knowledge of the field acquired prior to the interpreting session, the terms risk to be mistaken for words of the ordinary language, referring to any of their possible meanings.

However, sufficient knowledge for comprehension is not tantamount to specialized knowledge, for, it will be inconceivable to require that the interpreter has expert knowledge of all the fields in which he may be called to work. Besides, the interpreter is not required to use his subject knowledge so as to participate in discussing problems, making decisions, or choosing between alternatives. In the example above, the engineer's knowledge qualifies him to change from one method of spinning to another, the interpreter is not expected to have a similar level of knowledge because he does not need to make the decision. What he is supposed to have is at least a knowledge base which is broad enough for the information exchanged by experts to rest upon.

The different levels of knowledge can be illustrated by the inversed triangle which the late Professor D. Seleskovitch used to draw for her students. The sides of the triangle extend beyond its base to point to the infinity of knowledge.

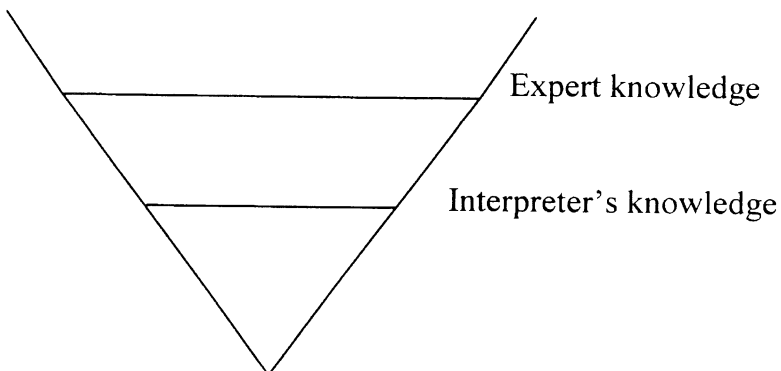


Fig. 1. Levels of knowledge.

From this figure it is clear that the broader the knowledge base of the interpreter, the more room is given for the new information to rest upon. If the level goes upwards, it will approximate that of experts, and comprehension of what they say will be immediate and full. If the interpreter's knowledge remains at the narrowest edge of the triangle, the new information will not find a basis against which it can settle down. As a result, comprehension will need great effort and much time, a need which cannot be met in interpreting because understanding is required to take place immediately.

The interpreter seeks to acquire the necessary knowledge of the subject as a preparatory measure for the meeting or the conference he is going to interpret. Students should be instructed as to how to build up the necessary base of knowledge when they are asked to interpret in specialized fields. They should be trained to consult reference materials like glossaries, encyclopedias, etc. which are now available on the internet, and which inform them on the basic concepts of the field. They should also know how to make use of reports, notices, letters, and other documents which can be obtained from the meeting or conference organizers. In all these documents, they should learn to look for information, not only for the terms. However, the knowledge such acquired will be further enhanced during the interpreting sessions from the interventions of participants, and also from the different documents distributed during sessions, for example, abstracts of research papers, statistics, illustrations, etc.

## 2) Dissociating the meaning from the SL form

Dissociating the meaning from the verbal form is more easily attainable in interpreting due to the nature of the spoken language which readily evaporates, leaving but the meaning it serves. Speakers usually forget the words they have just uttered, but remember the point they have raised, the argument they have advanced, or the ideas they have expressed. Listeners do the same; they focus on the idea, or the message the speaker intends to convey to them, but very rarely on the words in which it is conveyed. When, in addition to this tendency, the interpreter makes a deliberate effort to retain the meaning but get rid of the form, he finds himself in a situation similar to that of the normal speech process in which one starts from the idea to look for a suitable form to present it.

The aim of this phase is to reduce to the minimum the negative influence of the SL structure and choice of words on the target text. In other words, it aims to combat the notorious language interference which risks to produce target language forms different from what target listeners are accustomed to hear in their language. For instance, odd expressions in Arabic like {yumkinuka an tagola dhalika marratan ukhra}, whose structure is copied from the English one *you can say that again*, instead of simply conveying the meaning regardless of the verbal form {uwafiguka}, i.e. I agree with you, or else {yagsiru lhuwwa} from *to bridge the gap* instead of {yugaribu wighaat annathar}, literally: to bring the points of view closer. This sort of bizarre expressions result from wrongly transferring the SL structure instead of conveying the meaning of the utterance and discarding the form. Faced by this type of wording, the target listener

may not be able to understand what the interpreter is saying to him, for he will be busy struggling out to guess what the odd forms may probably mean.

The importance of this phase should be stressed throughout interpreting classes. Students should always be reminded to focus on the meaning which they must dissociate from the SL form. However, during exercises, students do not always 'feel' the oddness of the forms they utter when they overlook this phase and produce a TL text under the influence of the SL structure. The odd forms do not obstruct comprehension for them because they still remember the meaning of the SL utterance which they have listened to and understood. One way of making them aware of the consequences of jumping directly from the SL expression to a TL one without discarding the form, is to make them listen to striking examples of interference chosen from the interpretation of students from other classes. In this case, they will be in a situation similar to that of the TL listeners who have no access to the speaker's utterance because they do not know the SL. Here, because students have no idea of the source utterance, they will stop at each and every odd expression of the type given above, to wonder about its possible meaning.

### **3) Expressing the meaning into the TL**

The importance of this final phase of interpreting resides in the fact that it leads directly to the final product of the process, i.e. the target speech. It is this speech that reflects the outcome of the first two phases of the process and shows whether they have been carried out appropriately or not. It is also this speech which will be addressed to the intended listener and trigger one of two possible effects. The first and most desired one is that the target listener finds the interpreter's speech intelligible, understands what the speaker intends to convey to him and responds to it accordingly allowing communication to take place smoothly and naturally. The second and unwelcome one effect is that the listener finds the interpreter's expression confusing and difficult to understand; as a result he becomes bewildered as to what the speaker's message is all about, and communication will not take its course.

Due to the decisive role of the clarity of expression in this final phase of the process, it is required that the interpreter works into his native language. In fact, re-expressing the meaning which someone else has already expressed in another language implies even greater fluency and greater ease of expression than just being able to express one's own thought and ideas in one's own words. In this latter case, one chooses the verbal form suitable for what he wants to say, for the purpose he wants to serve and also for the person or persons he wants to address. For the interpreter, the idea belongs to someone else, an outside source who has already selected the verbal form of his utterance, determined its purpose, and fixed those to whom it is addressed. This outside source may well speak politics, economics, culinary art, tourism, medicine, fashion, etc. In order to be able to express the most subtle shades of meaning in all these fields, the interpreter needs to have perfect command of the language into which he works. In general, it is only possible to reach this command in one's native language. An educated person is expected to have "at his command a range of registers, or usages, amongst

which he can move as speaker or writer without difficulty and often unconsciously. When we find ourselves in a given communication situation, we automatically switch ourselves into the 'set of mind' for producing or receiving messages in the appropriate register". [7, p. 9].

However, perfect command of the native language is not to be taken for granted, like we usually tend to do. Language undergoes a constant change, a constant growth, if not in its grammar, at least in its lexis. In order to cope with the ever increasing demand for naming new concepts flowing into the community as a result of new inventions and new technologies, the words and expressions of the language are constantly on the move, they go from one field to the next, acquiring new shades of meaning, new usages, or extending their meaning to cover new areas. In the sole field of the internet, for example, hundreds of new words, or more precisely, new applications of words have come to light in the past three or four years alone. Words such as *mouse*, *messenger*, *chat*, *inbox*, and their Arabic equivalents *fa'ra*, *mursaal*, *dardasha*, *'ilbat alwaarid*, are all new applications of existing words. The interpreter must keep up with this change, not only by knowing the sole words, but also how they are used in combination with other items to express new concepts. His knowledge of the native language should constantly be updated and reinforced, a process which should be started from the very beginning of interpreting classes. Students' knowledge of their native language, in our case Arabic, is far from being enough for interpreting which requires full mastery of the techniques of expression. For this reason, "... the extreme value of mother tongue knowledge and skill, often grossly underestimated by the translationstudent" [8, p. 7], should always be stressed. This knowledge and skill can be strengthened by means of reading newspaper and magazine articles, preparing press and book reviews, researching and preparing presentations on different fields.

When producing the target text, the interpreter must display the utmost fluency as if he were expressing his own ideas naturally and spontaneously in the TL. He should not hesitate on how to say things, nor should he look for his words and expressions. In addition to the wealth of vocabulary he is supposed to have, he is also required to have "at his finger tips a great deal of formulaic transfers, ... these prefabricated routines and prefabricated patterns of language"[9, p. 17] which abound in interpreting. The reason is that meetings and other types of gatherings have certain recurrent patterns, for instance, *Your Excellencies, distinguished guests...*, *It gives me great pleasure to introduce our first speaker ...*, *I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to ...*, *The meeting is called to order*, etc. In Arabic we have equivalent sets of expressions: *ashaab us-sa'ada*, *hadharaat udhuiyoof...* *yous'iduny an uqadim ulmutahadith ala'wal...*, *awadu 'an u'ribu 'an shukry wa mtinani ...*, *nu'linu bidaiyat aligtima' ...* etc.

Over and above this knowledge of TL words, expressions and formulaic transfers, the interpreter must possess textual competence in this language, he must be able to produce texts. Incomplete sentences which do not make sense, and likewise complete sentences which are totally disconnected and isolated from one another, do not serve the

purpose of interpreting. The sentences produced by the interpreter must be interwoven in texts, exactly like in normal communication situations where speakers almost never utter fragments of sentences, nor lists of disconnected ones.

As students we used to be constantly reminded of the importance of listening to ourselves while interpreting, so that we make sure that what we are saying makes sense. As a teacher I found it a good exercise to record students' interpretation and make them listen to what they have recorded. Here, they discover the disparate nature of their rendering, especially in consecutive interpreting. In this type students are supposed to reproduce, with the help of the notes they take while listening to the speaker, a rather lengthy text which lasts about five minutes. The notes are supposed to help the student remember the most important points of the source text, including the logical links that exist between the different parts of the content. Students usually concentrate on the pieces of information the text contains, but seem to overlook the links that show the relation which holds between these pieces. For example, links signaling opposing views, or points with a relation of cause to effect, etc. When it comes to using the notes so as to build up the target text, students especially those with deficient notes, usually give incoherent texts that hardly make sense. For instance, they will mention in their interpretation that "the rate of unemployment in a given country stood at 12% in the year 2000", but will miss a word like 'only', which gives an indication as to how to interpret the figure in relation to other countries mentioned in the text. Or, they will say that in one country "the percentage of the house waste that goes to landfills is 25%", but may fail to tell whether it is the percentage that a recycling program has set as a goal, or that it is only what has been reached so far, and a new program is criticizing the ineffectiveness of existing techniques. A simple connector, like 'but', 'whereas', 'on the contrary', etc., will sometimes do the job of relating the different pieces of information to each other so that they constitute a whole argument with an internal logic.

In all cases, students should be trained to render what they have understood in a confident, convincing way. They should learn to speak clearly, and articulate what they say in a clear voice. They should be trained to speak raising their head and keeping constant eye contact with their listeners, not to 'chew' their words thinking they will conceal the gaps they have in their interpretation because of a point they have missed, a word they failed to understand or a number they have omitted to note. The motto that our instructors used to repeat incessantly in classes is a useful one: 'When in doubt shout'. What the interpreter, or the student, has missed is inevitably missed, it cannot be retrieved by 'chewing' the words, or muttering them in a hesitant low voice. It is better to present what one has understood in a clear voice, so that the listener can make use of it. The rules of the game in interpreting should always be observed, one of them is to gain the listener's confidence by speaking clearly and confidently, for "it appears that the interpreter's voice and self-assured delivery have a confidence-inspiring effect. Conversely, beginning interpreters with a somewhat hesitant voice are often mistrusted by delegates, however faithful and clear the informational content of their speech" [10, p. 33].

It is to be noted here that the principle of interpreting into one's native language is not always possible to observe, especially in countries and places other than major translation and interpreting centers of the world. These centers are the big cities in which the headquarters of international organizations attract translators and interpreters of different nationalities and different working languages. In cities like New York, Paris or Geneva interpreters can choose to work only into their native language. In other parts of the world the situation is different. Too often, if not always, interpreters are asked to convert speeches from their native language into a foreign one [11, p. 258]. For this reason, students must be equally trained to interpret into the foreign language, and the training program must contain classes for improving the foreign language speaking skill.

However, when interpreting into a foreign language, students should be trained to make a sustained deliberate effort to discard the verbal form of the SL. Here, the fact that the SL is also the native language which by definition interferes with the foreign language's structure, expression, choice of words, etc., makes the task of getting rid of the verbal form even more difficult. Without being constantly aware of the necessity of expressing starting only from the meaning, not from the form of the native language, interference may attain a level which might totally obstruct comprehension of the target utterance.

One of the ways I have found useful in this respect, is to ask students to start by 'translating' into Arabic the Arabic texts they listen to, i.e. to simplify, and further simplify their wording until they express the basic bare idea of the text in the simplest way they can.. If they succeed to communicate this basic idea in a simple, but intelligible English form, more than half the task will have been done, and they will be on the safe side. It is only after this step is fully mastered that they move to the next one which consists of adding more detail in a more elaborate form.

In general, when *expressing the meaning* into a foreign language, it is always better to take the safest path, one should rather choose the simple, even plain expressions which one knows and can use correctly, than looking for elegant, far-fetched forms at the risk of making errors in the word order, collocation or grammar. Even when the source text contains elegant idiomatic expressions, it is safer to render them by plain ones which are grammatically correct, easy to pronounce, and intelligible for the listener. In an Arabic text which they should interpret into English, students faced the expression *yagifu hajra 'athratan fi tarigihim* for which some of them wanted to find the *exact* English equivalent by all means. The expression could easily be rendered by a plain one which conveys the meaning, like "constitutes a problem for them, a difficulty, a hurdle, etc". It was not required at all from these students at this stage of training to find an equivalent of meaning and form of such a figurative expression. On the contrary, it will be quite enough for them to render the meaning correctly in the foreign language. English does have an expression which equals the Arabic one in meaning and resembles it in form: 'to be the *stumbling block* for them'. But, unless they know the English

expression perfectly well, students run the risk of being influenced by the Arabic wording which may push them to change the word 'block' into 'stone', like in Arabic, and thus make an error they could have avoided. After all, the overriding objective of interpreting should always be kept in mind, it is simply to help someone understand an utterance in a language he does not know. Interpreting is not an exercise of finding equivalents for isolated words, expressions or even sentences. It is an act of mediation and explanation intended to help people speaking different languages to break the barrier and understand each other.

The phase of expressing the meaning into the TL, like the other two phases of interpreting, is also largely imprinted by the features of oral communication and its medium the spoken language. Some of these features, as mentioned earlier, help to make the task easier for the interpreter. First, interpreting compared to translation "is generally less demanding as regards linguistic correctness or terminological usage" [10, p. 146]. In other words, like in the spoken language, errors of grammar are more tolerable in interpreting than in written translation. In Arabic, an error in the agreement between the number and its specification, like saying *khamsun wa ishroona talibatun*, meaning *twenty five female students* instead of the grammatically correct form *khamsatun wa ishroona talibatun*, is a less striking and less serious error in interpreting than in writing or in translation mainly because the spoken word, as mentioned earlier, evaporates quickly and leaves only the meaning it carries.

Concerning terminological usage, the interpreter, who is certainly not a field specialist accustomed to using the terms of a given field, may well forget, or simply not know, the appropriate term for a specific concept. Here, as long as he understands the concept, he will find a means for referring to it by paraphrasing, using a generic term or a superordinate, etc. In a meeting between trade experts of Sudan and a number of neighbouring African countries, I was unable to find the Arabic equivalent for the French term 'accords de troc', in English *barter trade agreements*, although I knew what it referred to. I rendered it as *itifagiyat at-tabadul as-sila'iy*, literally *agreements on exchanging goods for goods*. Of course, what I gave was only a paraphrase, not the appropriate term. However, it did not obstruct comprehension. When the Sudanese delegate took the floor, I immediately noticed the Arabic term *itifagiyat almugaidha* which I started to use in the interventions that followed. This is here another factor which helps the interpreter accomplish his task, that is, the possibility of finding the terms he is looking for in the interventions of different field experts attending the meeting.

But the interpreter should only revert to paraphrasing if, and only if, he understands what the term refers to, otherwise it may be safer to use the source term as it is. This is so especially if the SL is widely spoken like English, and that experts in the majority of cases know the English terms of their field. One thing is to be avoided in all cases, that is the literal translation of the linguistic form without first understanding what it refers to in the context. In the same meeting mentioned above, the term 'grey' figured on a list of

goods exchanged between the countries attending the meeting. The list included vegetable oil, cotton seeds, coffee beans, and of course 'grey'. All these items were measured in thousands of tons. Although the meeting organizers gave me a copy of the list in order to help with the figures, it did not give me the least indication as to what 'grey' could possibly be. I used the English term of course, and waited impatiently for the nearest opportunity to ask for help. The answer was simply the following: 'grey' refers to *grey fabric*, the end product of the weaving section of textile industry, which is at the same time a raw material for the following section of finishing. In Arabic it is called *gumaash khaam*, raw fabric. This experience, at the very beginning of my career, was enough to confirm in practice what never seemed to be sufficiently repeated to us as students, 'never ever translate without prior comprehension'. This applies especially in interpreting because the interpreter is on the scene together with the participants, any absurd rendering, like translating 'grey' by *ramady*, may trigger laughter and put the interpreter in an embarrassing situation which may be detrimental to the mediating role he plays, at least in that specific situation of communication.

### Conclusion

By way of conclusion, we can say that interpreting, as an act of interlingual communication, is unique of its type. Although it stems from the same root as translation, it branches into a discipline in its own right. It is true that the two professions share the same requirements and are composed of almost the same phases, but the requirements and the phases of interpreting are specific to this profession because they are colored with the features of oral communication.

The most important of these features is perhaps the necessity of having a quick and immediate response to what speakers say in a given situation of communication. In interpreting, this response is composed of the three phases of the interpreting process: immediate *perception and comprehension of the SL utterance, dissociating its meaning from its form* so as to prepare for the final phase which is quick and immediate *expression of the meaning into the TL*. The first phase requires deep passive knowledge of the spoken variety of the SL, complemented with sufficient knowledge of the subject field dealt with in the exchange between speaker and listener. The aim is to grasp the meaning of whatever is said in that language and in that exchange. The second phase, or *extracting the meaning of the SL text*, is a transitional one which represents the end-product of the first phase, while it constitutes the starting point of the third and final one. It is important for retaining the meaning while discarding the form of the SL, which will otherwise interfere with the TL reducing the intelligibility of what the interpreter says. The third phase requires perfect command of the spoken variety of the TL so as to be ready to re-express, clearly and correctly, whatever is said in the SL. Knowing the two languages is, of course, a prerequisite for admission to any interpreter training section. Nevertheless, each program seeks to enhance it so that it attains the staggering level required in interpreting.

Interpreting integrates the two interactive communicative skills of reception and production at the normal delivery of speech in such a way that the interpreter listens to the speaker and speaks to the listener almost at the same time. At first sight this may seem difficult, not feasible or even impossible. However, with practice comes competence, on condition that the basic requirements are met, and the principles of the profession are observed. If this is the case, the reward, like everything in interpreting, is but immediate. In fact, nothing equals the feeling of satisfaction the interpreter rightfully has when he sees that communication is taking place smoothly and naturally through him although the participants are speaking different languages. They are able to discuss issues, exchange views, ask questions, obtain answers, etc. An indication that the interpreter has played his role of mediator successfully.

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## تأملات في تدريس الترجمة الشفوية

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(قدم للنشر في أبريل ٢٠٠٣ م ؛ قبل للنشر في يونيو ٢٠٠٣ م)

ملخص البحث. الترجمة الشفوية ، بوصفها إحدى وسائل التواصل عبر اللغات ، تلقى إقبالا كبيرا يتنامى بفعل التطور الهائل السريع الذي يحدث في مجال الاتصالات والمعلومات . ولأنها تنفرد باختصار عامل الزمن فتربط ، في الحين واللحظة ، خيط التواصل بين المرسل والمتلقي الذين لا يتحدثان ذات اللغة ، فقد أصبحت أكثر أنواع الترجمة ملاءمة للسرعة الفائقة التي تناسب بها المعلومات في "القرية الصغيرة" التي لم يعد يفصل بين سكانها سوى حاجز اللغة. وملاقاة الحاجة الماسة المتزايدة للمترجمين الشفويين لتغطية المؤتمرات واللقاءات بين المختصين والخبراء من مختلف الدول ، أفردت الجامعات أقساما لتدريس الترجمة الشفوية وفقا لأسس ومبادئ تقوم بوضعها غالبا الجامعات العالمية الكبرى في أوروبا وأميركا. لهذه الجامعات سمات لا تنطبق علي بقية جامعات العالم ، مما يحتم تطوير الأسس والمبادئ لتلائم الظروف السائدة في كل جامعة وفي كل بلد. يتناول هذا البحث الخصوصية التي يتسم بها تدريس الترجمة الشفوية في الجامعات الوطنية ممثلة في جامعة الملك سعود ، مقارنة بما يحدث في الجامعات العالمية الكبرى ممثلة في جامعة السوربون . بعد تعريف الترجمة الشفوية وأنواعها المختلفة ، يتم عرض المراحل الثلاث لعملية الترجمة وهي : الإدراك السمعي للكلام بلغة المصدر ، ثم فصل معنى الكلام عن شكله اللغوي ، و أخيرا التعبير عن المعنى في لغة الهدف. لكل واحدة من هذه المراحل متطلباتها التي لا بد أن تتوفر لدى المترجم ، كما أن لها أساليب يلزمه أن يتعلمها . هذه المراحل والمتطلبات والوسائل تأتي في هذا البحث مدعمة بأمثلة عملية منتقاة من واقع تعلم الترجمة في جامعة عالمية ، ثم من ممارستها ، ثم تدريسها في جامعة الملك سعود.