

# Book review

SOMEYA, YASUMASA (ED) (2017) *CONSECUTIVE NOTETAKING AND INTERPRETER TRAINING*, LONDON/NEW YORK, ROUTLEDGE, 247 PP. ISBN 978-1-138-65673-4

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The volume comprises six chapters dealing with various aspects of consecutive interpreting and training from both the theoretical and practical points of view, with special attention on the underlying cognitive processes. It is a cohesive collection of articles on consecutive interpreting and notetaking by five Japanese researchers and one European. It therefore offers not only an interesting overview of consecutive interpreting research in Japan, but also an opportunity to reflect on consecutive interpreting between two such distant languages, as Japanese (an Austroasiatic language) and English (a Germanic one). A thorough comprehension of the processes involved in consecutive interpreting is needed to illustrate notetaking and consecutive interpreting between two languages structurally so different. Consequently, an overview of possible research paths and results is offered by the various approaches presented. The authors of the collection have long-standing experience as trainers and researchers, reflected in the empirical studies based on corpora of notations by professional interpreters taken during real work assignments.

Compared to the large collections of simultaneous Interpreting Studies, consecutive interpreting has more recently been less represented or even neglected

in T&I studies; hence, the volume offers a good opportunity for reviewing consecutive interpreting theories from a critical stance and integrating them with new insights from cognitive standpoints. New proposals and applications for consecutive training are described, though they are not always truly innovative.

The first paper of the collection by Tatsuya Konatsu is a general historical account of the interpreting profession and training in Japan since its inception and draws on his personal experience. The author – one of the pioneers of simultaneous interpreting in Japan – belongs to the post-World War II first-generation of interpreters and has contributed greatly to the history of interpreting in his country. The peculiarities of the situation in Japan in terms of professionals and market are critically illustrated suggesting a comparison with the development witnessed in Europe in order to understand similarities and differences. In the 1960s, when Konatsu began his career as an interpreter, there were no courses specializing in teaching interpretation – and hardly any professional interpreters. His training therefore, consisted principally in ‘learning by doing’. His experience in the U.S. within the “Productivity Program”, designed to provide interpreting in the U.S. for visiting groups of Japanese business and labour leaders, was paramount for his personal professional development. Back in Japan after 6 years in Washington D.C. between 1960-1966, he became active not only as a professional himself, but also promoted a company to provide interpreting services, Simul International. Based on his professional experience, Konatsu analyses how the interpreting market grew in Japan during those years and explains why AIIC rules were and are not always applicable, in his opinion, to the Japanese market.

The first generation of self-made interpreters with very good competence in L2, was followed by the second generation of Japanese interpreters, mainly graduates of a private university, the only one offering an interpreting program at the time. Although the program was limited, it produced a large number of interpreters from the 1970s to the present day, thanks to three factors: a charismatic leader of the programme, talented students and a favourable environment. Interpreting and translation agencies such as the company established by the author and other first-generation interpreters, played a very important role not only as service providers, but also as training institutions for training their own staff. From the beginning of the profession, interpreter training in Japan has been solidly in the hands of private agencies. Konatsu has trained interpreting students both at the Simul Academy, a private training institution and offspring of Simul International the agency he co-founded, and at universities.

The differences between interpreter training and praxis in Europe and Japan are further outlined with comments by the author on many of the principles laid down by Seleskovitch and required by AIIC but not always applicable in Japan. He believes that the reason lies mainly in the different language background and market requirements. Europe is a multilingual society but Japan is largely monolingual, therefore, perfect command of working languages is not possible in the latter, where interpreters work mainly between Japanese and English. Consecutive interpreting with two languages makes up 50% of the assignments, while multilingual meetings cover only 10% of the total assignments. At universities

there are no entrance exams for interpreting curricula, therefore, to begin with, courses are language enhancement courses rather than interpreting courses. Postgraduate courses have come into being only since 1995, but there is no independent specialized conference interpreting programme. They are all part of broader disciplines.

In the Conclusion, the author recognizes a clear decline of the social status of professional interpreters (p. 24), although the demand for interpreters has not yet decreased and the profession is still fairly popular. Countering the trend and keeping the profession attractive for young people requires much attention to training and integrating curricula with what is lacking at present: a broader academic and theoretical background in the programmes of agencies and greater attention to practical aspects at the post-graduate level in universities. This picture of conference interpreting and interpreter training in Japan underscores developments and problems that have also been faced in the past by many European countries with a limited conference interpreting market. The solutions depicted to improve the overall situation in Japan are similar to those that have been or are being applied in some European countries. In particular, the presence of International Organizations in Europe is probably one of the elements fostering the profession as we know it in Western countries, with positive effects on the profession as a whole.

The second chapter of the volume by Hiromi Ito presents in the first part the Interpretative Theory of Translation (ITT) developed by Seleskovitch (1975) and Lederer (1981). The short summary and review examine the ITT from a historical point of view embedding it in the time of its emergence to stress its innovative value during that period, which, unfortunately, in her opinion, was not recognized by researchers outside Translation Studies. Ito indicates the reasons, i.e. the difficulties encountered in designing experimental studies to include the parameters encountered in interpreting. In fact, the ITT has often been criticized as based on personal experience. The author, Hiromi Ito is in charge of the Japanese interpreting section at ESIT in Paris, where in addition to other subjects, she trains students with English and French in notetaking for consecutive interpreting from or into Japanese. Her research activity has been devoted principally to consecutive interpreting and the underlying comprehension processes. The ITT is the point of departure for discussing the pros and cons of the training programme for notetaking at ESIT based on the ITT, and its applicability in consecutive interpreting from Japanese into English or French, i.e. whether it is a universal method (p. 38) or whether some language pairs are excluded. Based on her experience as a trainer for Japanese at ESIT, Ito has reviewed the cognitive psychology literature relevant to consecutive interpreting “in order to update the ITT cognitive model and to complement analytical tools” (p. 39): the third section of the chapter is a summary thereof.

The paper is principally a review and defence of the ITT based on the author's PhD. In particular, the review of cognitive psychology presents those studies that corroborate the model of interpreting based on the ITT. Studies on working memory, expert memory as well as research on speaking and writing and their relevance for interpreting are discussed by the author, stressing the links

between these studies and the ITT. The Ericsson and Kintsch model (1995), for example, is seen as “basically comparable to the cognitive model of ITT” (p. 47). Undisputedly, interpreting, both simultaneous and consecutive, is based on cognitive processes, whereby memory and attention are fundamental. Since the 1960s, interpreting, in particular simultaneous interpreting, has been seen by cognitive psychologists as a viable research paradigm to test research hypotheses about attention, memory and comprehension. The point is, that cognitive studies should also be applied to interpreting, but, given its complexity, no comparable studies have been conducted so far on interpreting nor will be in the foreseeable future, as Hito also recognizes (p. 61).

Finally, in the last section, a study on students’ notes is reported. The study was conducted to understand how students manage to overcome difficulties and specificities when interpreting complex speeches from Japanese into French in consecutive. To this end, she recorded interpreting classes over two years and analysed students’ notes. The last section presents some of the results and a comment on the importance of anticipation in consecutive interpreting and notetaking for structurally different language combinations.

“Notation language and notation text” is the title of the third chapter by Michaela Albl-Mikasa. It presents a concise English version of her book in German in which she developed a cognitive-linguistic model of consecutive interpreting. The book was published in 2007 and was one of the first publications applying cognitive research to notetaking. In the meantime, there has not been much further research on notetaking from this point of view. This abridged English version is a good opportunity to refresh traditional views on consecutive interpreting in the last century in a comparative way. The author illustrates how, from an approach to notetaking as a technique used to capture source text sense or ideas, research has moved “towards a thorough cognitive-linguistic understanding of the issues involved” (p. 75), where notetaking and its specific means of linguistic-expression can be described as a *language* (p. 77). After explaining the various levels (word level, discourse level) and principles involved in the notation language, Albl-Mikasa presents and illustrates a cognitive model of notetaking. The theoretical foundation is provided by cognitive and psycholinguistic research on the processes of comprehension and production of language and texts (cfr. van Dijk/Kintsch 1983; Rickheit/Strohner 1993). Moreover, Relevance Theory is also applied to explain how notations are enriched, completed and expanded. Finally, an empirical study is reported to corroborate the model described, based on consecutive interpretations by students at different levels of their Interpreting Studies.

The author is aware that the study has a bias, because notations by professionals should have been examined to evaluate the usefulness of the methodological tools taken from Relevance Theory. However, the author believes that the principles she has developed also may be applied to professional interpreting. A transcription method for notation is devised that helps analyse the reduction and expansion steps in consecutive: the reduction necessary for notation and the expansion required from the notation to the target text. Traditional notetaking is compared with the results of the study and didactic implications are listed, whereas Albl-Mikasa adopts a very critical stance towards the notation of the

“deverbalized” which is invalidated “by the psychological reality of cognitive and linguistic constraints” (p. 108).

Cheng-shu Yang’s paper is centred on the relation between the inner logic and the outer form of the notetaking symbols and examines the correspondence between symbols and information. After a brief overview of definitions, functions, features, abbreviation rules and structure of notation symbols from the relevant literature, special reference is made to the “cross space mappings” by Fauconnier (1985) to understand the mapping relations for the transmission of verbal information from the source domain to the target domain (p. 121). The author conducted a study analysing meaning and types of symbols based on a corpus of consecutive notes by mainly professional interpreters working at different official events. Notetaking symbols are classified and explained on the grounds of cognitive psychology, in particular, the concept of “image schema” developed by Fauconnier (1997) with its properties and functions. Symbols are divided into four classes: the first one is ‘word symbols’ i.e. content words, including abbreviations and full writing. Abbreviations are divided into a further four classes and full writing into three. As for the latter, notes were mainly taken in the source language.

The second class is ‘ideographic symbols’. It is divided into pictographic and ideographic schemata comprising figures, schemata or symbols with a modal function expressing degree, increase or decrease. The subclass ‘ideographic schema’ comprises five further categories within which different kinds of arrows play a very important role.

The third class devised by Cheng-shu is ‘relation symbols’ through which connective or connotative relations are expressed. The fourth class ‘segment symbols’ is made up of three subclasses consisting of a combination of dots, lines, spaces or special layout.

The notes from the corpus have shown that the “features, meaning, functions and use of symbols are in accordance with their purpose of intermediary representation between two languages” (p. 131). The paper is rich in examples and the four appendices comprise the consecutive notes, the source text and the target text in Japanese, Chinese and English.

A theoretical model of consecutive notes and notetaking is put forward in Yasumasa Someya’s chapter based on linguistic-cognitive studies. The point of departure is that interpreter’s notes reflect understanding of the source text. A sound understanding should then be reflected in the notes. “Interpreters’ mental process of speech comprehension and the mechanism supporting it” can be recognized to a certain extent in his/her notes (p. 147). Sections 2-4 present the theoretical foundation on which the model of interpreter’s notes is based. After defining what is “understanding/text comprehension” from a cognitive-psychological point of view, Someya illustrates the semantic representation of a sentence (based on Halliday 1985), and the semantic properties of arguments. Finally, the Dynamic Propositional Network Model or DPN Model is presented. Herein the target text is represented as a chain of propositions, where the order of Predicate and Argument(s) is determined individually depending on the language and is updated automatically as new information is added (p. 158). Fur-

thermore, the author proposes a revised model of the standard Predicate-Argument(s) schema for interpreter's notes, the Thematic P-A schema, through which it is possible to accommodate the reality of language use (p. 168). The underlying structure of interpreter's notes can thus be explained, albeit theoretically. Evaluation criteria and the pedagogical implications of the model are then presented with a schematic process model of consecutive interpreting.

The last chapter of the volume by Someya is a follow-up to the previous chapter reporting on an experimental study on notetaking in consecutive interpreting. The aim of the study is to find evidence to support his theoretical arguments. Therefore, the small-scale study addresses four of the research questions identified in a previous theoretical study by Someya, which has been revised and updated in an English version and included in the volume as chapter five. The questions range from whether information processing in consecutive interpreting is "text based" and whether the notes are taken on a propositional basis, to whether Thematic A-P depicts actual notes taken by professional interpreters and whether "deverbalization" actually occurs, and, if it so, to what extent.

These questions lie at the heart of research on consecutive interpreting and the author is aware that his study, given the limited number of subjects, can only give tentative answers or indicate a trend. Nevertheless, the study is detailed and clear in all its parts and deserves replication, as the author also suggests. The final part discusses the kind of *editing* included in the process of rendering the target text from the notes and recognizes three categories: minor editing instances, textual/discourse markers and major editing instances based on quantitative data. The research questions that could not be answered or dealt with in the study are to be pursued in future research.

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