

Chapter 18

Note-taking

A personal system of note-taking is very useful not only in consecutive interpretation but also in simultaneous interpretation (e.g. to jot down the jargon of a meeting as it is taking place, or to jot down figures, names or proposed wordings in a drafting group), as well as for translators (who, in some jobs, are required to write summary records from notes). Developing a personal system of notes also helps to form the habit of summarizing and symbolizing words and phrases, which is an important aspect of the interpretation process.

Note-taking is most important to the consecutive interpreter. Consecutive interpretation relies on long-term memory. Psychological studies have shown that long-term memory fades very rapidly. However, they have also shown that, although it is very difficult to remember a large number of *words*, it is not so difficult to remember a series of *ideas* (Deborah A. Garretson, "A Psychological Approach to Consecutive Interpretation", *Meta* 26 (3), September 1981, p. 244).

Consequently, a successful note-taking technique for consecutive interpretation calls for a method of reducing words to ideas and putting the ideas into symbols that can then be re-expressed in another language. An interpreter must not try to write down word for word everything the speaker says because a hundred words may contain only one idea, while one word may imply several ideas.

A classic book on this subject is *La prise de notes en interprétation consécutive* by Jean-François Rozan (Librairie de l'Université de Genève, Georg & Cie., 1970). Study of Rozan's book is a good way to begin developing one's own note-taking system.

There are some basic guidelines on note-taking that should be followed:

- Your note-taking system must be your own. It must be one that *you* can easily use, based on your own style of handwriting.

- It is helpful to learn a stenographic system such as shorthand, or a note-taking system such as Speedwriting, or to invent your own way of “writing phonetically” (representing sounds as well as words or ideas). English, for example, has only about 40 sounds. But it is not helpful to get into the habit of trying to write down everything a speaker says verbatim.
- Adopt and use symbols that are useful for the subjects you are dealing with.
- Always use a symbol to mean only one thing in a given context.
- Use pictorial or graphic devices like circles and squares or lines and arrows. You are not “writing out the speech”; you are “drawing a picture for yourself” of the speech.
- Arrange your notes on the page in a meaningful way (for example, with the main points at the top and minor points at the bottom). Use indentations logically and consistently.
- Learn and use conventional abbreviations and acronyms (for example, the telegraphic business abbreviation “cak” meaning “contract”, or the morse-code acronym SOS to mean “help”).
- Adopt a simple, one-stroke symbol which, whenever you write it, will mean “the main subject of the speech”.
- Adopt a simple sign which will mean “three zeros”, so that you can write down large numbers quickly (for example, if – means “three zeros”, then 89 – – means “89 million”). Adopt another symbol to represent two zeros.
- Adopt or coin abbreviations or acronyms for often-used phrases (examples: asap = as soon as possible; iot = in order to; iaw = if and when).
- Invent symbols for common prefixes and suffixes, such as “pre-”, “anti-” or “-tion”, “-ment”.
- When you write out words, do not double any consonants, and delete any vowels that are not necessary to make the word recognizable or to distinguish it from another similar word.
- When interpreting consecutively, write your notes as much as possible in the target language.
- Always have enough sharp pencils or functioning pens at hand.

Notice that all of the following words are recognizable in the column on the left even though the consonants are not doubled and even though some or all vowels are missing:

zbr	zebra
arpln	airplane
hstry	history
cmtee	committee
elfnt	elefante
ptrlo	petroleo
bmb	bomba
invrn	invierno
cnrd	canard
Mrsl	Marseille
phlsphie	philosophie
asmlé	assemblée

Once you have adopted a symbol and assigned it a specific meaning, you can then build other symbols from it. For example, if the symbol x is used to mean "time", the following variations on it are possible:

$x-$	timeless, eternal
xx	many times, often
$xx+$	many times more
$xx-$	many times less
$x\ t\ x$	from time to time, occasionally
$=x$	equal time
$+x$	more time, longer time
$-x$	less time, shorter time
$2x$	twice
$3x-/\$	three times less than
$100x$	a hundred times
$100x+$	a hundred times more
$Ltdx$	a limited time
$oldx$	old-time, old fashioned
$x!$	It's time, the time has come
\underline{x}	now, this time
gdx	a good time
xly	timely, on time

unxly	untimely, late
x)	time limit, deadline
x>	future
<x	past
ovrx	overtime
xng	timing
sumrx	summertime
xtbl	timetable, schedule
prtx	part-time
x,x	time after time, repeatedly
x.	time period
wrx	wartime

There are many sources of symbols. You will find them all around you, even on signs in the street. It does not matter from what source you borrow your symbols, so long as you use them consistently in your own note-taking system. Look for symbols that can be written quickly and easily, with few pencil-strokes. The following are a few possible sources of symbols:

- proofreader's marks (see, for example, back matter of dictionaries)
- symbols or abbreviations from dictionary entries, like ~
- mathematical and algebraic symbols, like $\sqrt{\quad}$ or $>$
- books on semiotics
- ancient writing systems, like Norse or Cuneiform
- conventional business and commercial symbols and abbreviations, like @, £, c.i.f. or a.s.a.p.
- foreign-alphabet letters
- pictographs borrowed from languages with pictographic script, like Chinese (for example, 立 to mean "standing")
- pictographs and pictographic devices borrowed from ancient hieroglyphic scripts (for example, runes, or the ancient Egyptian device of enclosing the proper names of important people in a "cartouche")
- punctuation marks, like ! or ? or / (for example, you could use +/ to mean "and or", and the ampersand (&) to mean "and")
- signs of the zodiac
- pronunciation symbols, accents, diacritical marks

- capital letters used for a specific meaning, like P to mean president, or F to mean France; or single letters used for a specific meaning, like c to mean “country”
- children’s “picture-writing” (e.g. ^ to mean “house” or “shelter”, or ☺ (to mean “happy” or “pleased”, or ♥ to mean “love”)
- symbolic logic
- scientific symbols, like ♂ for “man” and ♀ for “woman”
- musical signs
- legal symbols, like § to mean “section”
- monograms (combinations of letters, such as Æ)

Exercises

1 Compare the difficulty of the following pairs of mental tasks and the speed with which they can be performed.

- Describe a spiral. Draw a picture of a spiral.
- Describe a cone. Draw a picture of a cone.
- Describe an ellipse. Draw a picture of an ellipse.
- Describe the route you take from home to work. Draw a sketch of the route you take from home to work.
- Define the word “notwithstanding”. Invent an abbreviation for it.
- Define the word “motion”. Invent a symbol for it.

2 On a single, large sheet of paper, represent the story of “the tortoise and the hare” using only symbols, lines, shapes, pictures, and abbreviations. Then, using the same set of graphic devices, and following the guidelines above, make notes on the following news items:

Wayward Tortoise

Thirty-five years after Chester disappeared from his master’s backyard in Lyde, England, the escaped tortoise turned up a mere 500 feet from his original home. Chester was discovered ambling along a roadside by a local resident who cleaned him up and set out to track down the owner. Malcom Edwards, 44, who still lives in his boyhood home, recognized his long-lost pet immediately because of a white paint mark his father had put on the shell in 1960 to make the creature easier to spot in the grass. Edwards, who failed to say how Chester got away, hopes the turtle “might decide to stay home a little longer this time”. (*The Earth Times*)

Snail Mail

E-mail has such a reputation for speed that technophiles have long sneered at the inefficient "snail mail" delivered by the Postal Service. But while E-mail zips along at nearly the speed of light, sometimes the snail gets there first. An electronic message between two Manhattan offices a dozen blocks away, last month, for example, took two days to reach its destination. The reply took seven hours, which is faster than the post office's overnight delivery, except that the recipient had gone home and didn't see the message until the next day. (*The New York Times*, 7 January 1996)

3 Draw pictures of the following ideas:

the aircraft is taking off / the value of the dollar is rising / the runner has crossed the finishing line / troops have crossed the border / four speakers have spoken / this is the fourth conference held on this same subject in 10 years / the president has entered the room / the assembly welcomes the President of France / the water level has risen twice as high / the percentage of women employed in industry has doubled / there are 70,000 people in the country / there are 70,000 displaced persons in refugee camps in 24 countries / the witness is speaking / the witness for the prosecution is lying / the group is growing / the organization has grown too large / the level is declining / the level of funding has fallen too low / three times more people / there are 10 times more poor people in the southern hemisphere than in the northern hemisphere / I said this before / I have repeated this point many times before / the ship is sailing / the ship made its way through the archipelago

4 Using mainly abbreviations, pictures, lines, and symbols, make notes of the following news items:

Près de 150 chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement convergeant sur New York. On s'attendait à une belle pagaille pour le cinquantième anniversaire des Nations Unies. Mais chacune et chacun y mettant du sien, les choses se passèrent plutôt bien et dans la bonne humeur.

"Il nous faut aujourd'hui concentrer nos efforts sur l'adaptation de notre organisation, sur sa rénovation et d'abord lui donner les moyens de fonctionner," a dit Jacques Chirac à l'occasion des cérémonies du 50e anniversaire des Nations Unies à New York. . . .
 "Thank you, Larry, and see you soon." C'est par ces mots que le président français a conclu plus tard dans la journée son interview, en

anglais, dans l'émission du journaliste-vedette Larry King sur CNN. . . . Le président français, qui maîtrise bien l'anglais, n'a dû que rarement se tourner vers son interprète pour solliciter son aide.

One of the most powerful temblors to strike Sumatra in decades left at least 80 people dead, and tens of thousands of homes wrecked in and around Sungai Penhu. The magnitude 5.8 quake was felt as far away as Singapore and southern Malaysia.

The environment program will convene participants in Washington to adopt a plan for enhancing the international Montreal Guidelines on the Marine Environment, agreed to in 1985. The conference runs from October 23 to November 3. The meeting is planned to finalize agreements on promoting better waste-water treatment and management, more control over pollution and protection of wildlife, among other goals.

Over the 1987-94 period, U.S. exports to the BEMs (Big Emerging Markets) grew \$65 billion, or 177 percent, for an average annual compound gain of 16 percent. U.S. exports to the rest of the world grew by 95 percent over the same period, for an average annual compound gain of 10 percent.

El noviembre pasado, las fuerzas armadas brasileñas se unieron a la policía de Río de Janeiro para poner fin a una ola de criminalidad que parecía haber llegado a un nivel insostenible. Seis meses después, la escalada de violencia sigue irrefrenable y su víctima es la población civil, principalmente la que vive en las favelas.

El gobierno boliviano privatizará las 78 empresas estatales del país en lo que queda de 1995, vendiéndolas por 2,050 millones de dólares, informó el subsecretario de Promoción Económica de Bolivia. . . . La enajenación de los seis colosos fiscales aportará 2,000 millones de dólares al fisco y otros 50 millones de dólares ingresarán a las arcas estatales gracias a la venta de otras 72 empresas de menor envergadura.

- 5 Read out the above news items into your tape recorder at a moderate speed. Play them back one at a time, make notes for them, and try to orally reproduce the gist of each item from your notes, first in the same language, then in a language other than the source language. Record your performance and check it against the original for accuracy and completeness. Repeat this exercise regularly with other news items of your choice from recent newspapers, in each of your languages.

- 6 (a) The following is a simplified passage on HIV/Aids written for a high-school audience. Read it out into your tape recorder at a moderate speed. Play it back, make notes, and try to orally reproduce the entire passage from your notes, first in the same language, then in your other languages. Record your performance and check it against the original for accuracy and completeness. While the wording may vary, all of the ideas should be present. Repeat the exercise at progressively faster speeds.

Le SIDA

Le SIDA est la phase finale d'infection par le virus VIH. Le virus attaque et affaiblit le système immunologique de la victime. Ainsi, certaines maladies qui normalement ne se manifesteraient pas, comme la pneumonie *Pneumocystis carinii* ou le sarcoma Karposi, peuvent menacer la vie du malade. Chez certaines personnes, le virus peut s'attaquer aux cellules du cerveau, précipitant des problèmes psychiatriques.

Selon les chiffres de l'OMS, environ 6,000 personnes sont contaminées par le VIH chaque jour. Le SIDA ou VIH peut être transmis de trois façons: transmission par les rapports sexuels; transmission par le contact direct avec le sang infecté, c'est à dire, lorsque des toxicomanes partagent des seringues, ou bien accidentellement durant des interventions médicales; et transmission par une femme infectée au fœtus qu'elle porte, ou à son bébé. En 1991 il y avait environ 3 millions de femmes infectées en âge d'avoir des enfants, et les experts prévoient que, d'ici l'an 2000, il y aura entre 5 et 10 millions d'enfants en dessous de 5 ans porteurs du virus VIH.

Selon les dernières observations, environ 50% des personnes qui portent le virus tomberont malades du SIDA dans les 10 ans après la première infection.

Un aspect remarquable de cette maladie est le fait qu'une personne infectée de VIH peut vivre entre 2 et 12 ans sans symptômes. Donc, on peut être infecté sans le savoir, et ainsi transmettre le virus sans le savoir.

Le SIDA est une maladie inguérissable. Comme avec toute maladie inguérissable, la seule démarche logique est la prévention. Comment s'y prendre pour que cette maladie ne se répande pas?

Pour empêcher la transmission du virus, le contact sexuel avec toute personne qui porte la maladie ou qui pourrait la porter doit être évité. La méthode préventive la plus efficace est l'abstinence, ou de limiter le contact sexuel à une seule personne non-infectée.

L'éducation des gens dans les écoles et dans la communauté est devenue la stratégie principale pour éviter l'infection. Beaucoup d'écoles ont établi des cliniques de santé qui distribuent des prophylactiques aux étudiants. Mais ce programme est controversé car beaucoup de gens estiment que de discuter en classe l'emploi des méthodes contraceptives implique le consentement à la sexualité en dehors du mariage.

Empêcher l'abus des drogues et renseigner les toxicomanes sur le danger de ce virus est aussi une démarche importante pour contrôler l'épidémie. Parmi les mesures utilisées pour éduquer les toxicomanes sont des programmes d'information sur le sexe et la santé, aussi bien que des programmes permettant aux toxicomanes d'échanger leur seringue usée pour une nouvelle stérilisée.

Cependant, la stratégie idéale pour empêcher la propagation du SIDA devrait comprendre plusieurs volets: désamorcer la question, de façon à ce que l'on puisse en parler plus librement; persuader le public à ne pas pratiquer la discrimination contre ceux qui sont déjà atteints de la maladie; faire comprendre aux enfants, aussi bien qu'aux adultes, comment le SIDA se répand et comment ne pas l'attraper; et encourager les gens à obtenir régulièrement une prise de sang.

(b) Translate the above passage into English, Spanish, or your other working languages. Using whichever version you prefer, do the following exercise step by step:

- Read out the entire passage aloud.
- Try to repeat the first full paragraph from memory, and record yourself. Play it back and check against the original. Jot down any errors and/or omissions.
- Try to repeat the first two full paragraphs from memory, and record yourself. Play it back and check against the original. Jot down any errors and/or omissions.
- Proceed as above through the entire passage.
- Examine the list of errors and/or omissions, and work out a notation sign or symbol that would enable you to quickly jot down each concept you missed or got wrong.
- Record the full passage at moderate speed, play it back, and make notes on it, using the new signs or symbols you have devised. Try to reproduce the full passage from your notes, and record yourself. Check yourself against the original.

- Repeat this exercise with other passages of your own choosing, trying gradually to use longer and more difficult ones.

7 Create simple symbols to represent some of the common economic descriptors listed in Chapter 14 (p. 237). Try to draw pictures or symbols of some of the items listed in the “potpourri” of figures of speech in Chapter 7 (pp. 85–94).

8 Translate the following symbolic statements into verbal ones, first orally and then in writing:

- vlu £ = ¥ all '93 but in '94 ¥ > £
- ± 90% child ♥ choct
- ± 95% UK ♥ tea
- In F wrkr mvmt united but in UK Lbour ÷ed
- Pres Bnk: Cttee rept was ♪ to ears!
- Pres Clint: Free “ is Γ stone of dmcrcy
- Pres Tuns: un-dev was % src of pol vlnc
- Bundsbnk Pres: If \$ ^ +, we buy DM
- Bsnia Gen: We pro peace but n @ any prx!

9 Create a symbol, sign or abbreviation for each of the frequently used technical concepts listed below. Update the list periodically by adding concepts you encounter in your work or reading. List your symbols on cards or on a separate sheet of paper and go over the list periodically to see whether you recognize them all and can restate them in each of your working languages.

ozone layer / ozone depletion / ozone hole / global warming / drift-net fishing / straddling fish stock / allowable catch / by-catch / highly migratory species / endangered species / climate change / geo-stationary orbit / remote sensing / epidemic / pandemic / endemic / chemical precursors / the green revolution / improved seed varieties / locust infestation / desertification / erosion / environmental degradation / ecosystem / dual-use technology / acid rain / new and renewable energy source / non-renewable resource / resource endowment / sustainable development / gene pool / genetic diversity / genetic engineering / ecology / cybernetics /

cyberspace / electronic data processing (EDP, informatics) / robotics / optical fiber / enriched plutonium / nuclear fuel reprocessing / fast-breeder reactor / ultraviolet radiation / megaton / kiloton / megabyte / kilobyte / byte / sea level / real time / archipelagic state / small island state / least-developed country (LDC) / liquid crystal display (LCD) / air quality / emissions / effluents / mass transit / the demographic transition / superconductor / structural adjustment / structural unemployment / gross national product (GNP) / gross domestic product (GDP) / biomass / biomass energy / geothermal energy / photovoltaic energy conversion / the water table / groundwater / aquifer / arable land / nuclear power source / user-friendly / on-line / off-line / the information revolution / the information superhighway / local area network (LAN) / mainframe computer / central processing unit / server / national technical means / life expectancy / infant mortality / fertility / fecundity / morbidity / biodegradable / non-biodegradable / artificial intelligence / virtual reality / marginalization