would involve that of opposing sides of an arbitration where both sides argue in ways that will favor their respective cases. If the uninformed observer who hears the long tirades or very detailed technical explanations is unaware of the purpose behind the statements (receiving compensation or avoiding fines) he will not be able to grasp the underlying meaning of the message and will miss the point.

Merely stating the purpose is sometimes enough to transmit the message. In consecutive interpretation, when the chairman of a meeting asks the interpreter to condense his translation, the interpreter could often accomplish this, at the risk of vexing the original speaker, by summing up a long statement with "X agrees."

I remember how surprised a member of the Board of Directors of a Franco-German consortium was when, at a meeting on mining, he ran into an interpreter whom he had often seen at meetings involving politicians or electrical engineers. He could not understand how it was possible for an interpreter to perform with the same skill in such different areas. I told him that knowledge was quickly acquired when one understood the purpose of a speech -- which, in this case, was making money. On the basis of this essential principle, the statements presented by the various members of the Board on the freezing of soil around a drilling site became easy to understand.

3. ANALYSIS

Interpreting means visualizing the image which has been created, taking a stand, stating emphatically that "that" is what is meant, and even swaying an audience when necessary. In these three respects the interpreter works like a musician or an actor whose art does not merely involve reproduction or repetition, but successful interpretation. The interpreter enjoys greater freedom than the musician or actor, since he is not called upon to strike the

note indicated by the composer, nor to deliver the line written by the playwright. However, he is subject to a greater constraint, since in order to say "the same thing" as the speaker has said in another language, he must comprehend the total message.

Let us leave aside, for the moment, questions involving the role which analysis, memory, comprehension, rapid learning and intelligence play in exploring meaning, and examine the circumstances under which the interpreter works. He is in the situation of both the speaker and the listener and hears the speeches in context. The messages which are exchanged have a purpose which he discerns, and although the medium is oral, and the words vanish as quickly as facial expressions, the meaning lingers on.

Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpretation

In consecutive interpretation the interpreter has the advantage of knowing the line of argument before he interprets. Speeches given at international conferences (excluding written statements)[1] generally last a few minutes, giving the interpreter time to analyze them. He analyzes the nuances and subtleties of the speech, although the message is delivered at a speed averaging 150 words a minute. Few activities require such concentration or cause such fatigue!

When conference interpreting first began, some 30 years ago, the speakers offered to stop after every sentence and give the floor to the interpreter. This was a manifestation of the belief that interpretation consisted of a mere word-for-word translation and the speakers felt that, by using this method, the interpreter could commit to memory all of the words in the preceding sentence and then translate them. However, the meaning of an individual sentence is rarely clear when it is taken out of context, and today interpreters request that

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1) See Chapter V.5.

speakers carry on with their discourse because the rest of the speech will often clarify a statement which was obscure and reveal the assumptions underlying any one sentence.

The time lag which the interpreter enjoys in consecutive interpretation is cruelly lacking in simultaneous interpretation. It may therefore seem inconsistent to claim that simultaneous likewise provides an opportunity for exploration and comprehension of the message. But let us look more closely at simultaneous interpretation before examining the methods of analysis used in interpretation in general.

The observer is struck by the fact that the interpreter manages to do two things at once: listen and speak. But that is not exactly the case. In order to understand what simultaneous interpretation involves, let us look more closely at what happens. When we speak spontaneously our words do not come out in spurts: we do not first think out what we are going to say and then stop thinking while we speak; nor do we stop speaking in order to mentally compose what we are going to say next. On the contrary, our speech is continuous. To be specific, it involves two superimposed processes in a cause and effect relationship: mental impulses and their oral expression. Seen in time, however, the words are uttered at the precise moment the following thought is conceived; at the precise moment the product of the conceptualizing process is uttered, the mind is already focused on further development of the thought which is to be expressed in the following statement.

The simultaneous interpreter does virtually the same thing as when he is speaking spontaneously. He hears the next sentence while he is stating the preceding idea, yet he does not listen to the next sentence but to the sentence which he himself is delivering. He does, however, hear the meaning of the sentence being delivered by the speaker and it is this meaning which he retains in order to deliver the sentence himself immediately afterwards. Thus, just as when he speaks spontaneously, the words he hears while interpreting are those which he utters,

but the thoughts which his mind focuses on are those which will produce his next words. The difference is that, here, the thought he will utter comes from an outside source.

This is just a very common occurrence carried to extremes. We might go as far as to say that there are no thoughts which are completely the product of one individual, or completely original, and that in any situation what one says is only the end product of a thought which is born of the input of countless outside sources which nourish us as children and enrich us as adults. The work of an interpreter is, therefore, only an extreme case of reconstruction of ideas from outside sources. In practice, however, the simultaneous interpreter is relieved of the immediate task of developing the thought he has just stated. In place of this he substitutes analysis and comprehension of the speaker's line of thought. Simultaneous interpretation involves "hearing" the thoughts of another instead of one's own thoughts. It also involves speaking spontaneously because all speaking involves talking and listening at the same time, although usually one "hears" one's own thoughts. Simultaneous interpretation means reordering the steps in the mental process which we all experience when we speak spontaneously.

This is why, if correctly taught, simultaneous interpretation can be learned quite rapidly, assuming one has already learned the art of analysis in consecutive interpretation. The problem in simultaneous interpretation stems not from the technique used, but from a series of other problems which we shall study in Chapter V under the heading "Interpreting in Practice." Let us simply say here that simultaneous is too often considered as a simple word-for-word translation, with a certain number of words stored in the memory (probably to avoid the trap of false cognates and not translate actuel by actual) and then repeated in the target language. During the time lag which separates the speaker's words from those of the interpreter, the interpreter has better things to do than memorize the words he has heard, because the speaker relentlessly continues

to develop his idea and the interpreter must do the same to avoid sputtering out snatches of ideas. Even memorizing a half dozen words would distract the interpreter, whose attention is already divided between listening to his own words and those of the speaker. It would be impossible for him to memorize a certain number of words while uttering the preceding ones in another language. It is humanly impossible to listen attentively to one thing while saying another. The interpreter listens and says the same thing. By avoiding the pitfall of word memorization the interpreter manages to understand the thought which will produce his next words. Thus the simultaneous interpreter is an analyst or mind-reader, not a parrot. His memory does not store the words of the sentence delivered by the speaker, but only the meaning which those words convey.

Memory

Perhaps the reader will be surprised to see the subject of memory discussed in a chapter entitled "Understanding." It is because, in interpretation, memory and understanding are inseparable; the one is a function of the other.

"Consecutive interpretation must require extraordinary memory," "a photographic memory," participants at international conferences have often told me after having listened to a ten-minute consecutive interpretation. They had the impression that the original speech was preserved, literally, in the interpreter's memory. Although some interpreters do have excellent memories (one of the founders and former presidents of the International Association of Conference Interpreters, A. Kaminker, was reputed to have memorized both parts of Goethe's Faust), this impression is misleading because many are not so blessed. They forget telephone numbers, they cannot remember names, they are not at all observant and are incapable of learning anything by heart. And yet all of them, those with good memories and those with bad, render speeches in consecutive interpretation which may last anywhere from three to fifteen minutes (the

time necessary to produce from 500 to 2,500 words, or even more) and this is done without summarizing, condensing or paraphrasing, without saying "just anything," and without being inaccurate.

What is useful in interpretation is not the ability to learn something by heart or to remember sounds, figures, words or texts in prose or verse. Studies of memory retention have determined the amount of time necessary for learning to take place, the length of time a memory is retained and the accuracy of recall in relation to the information given. These studies have shown that the less "meaningful" the information, the longer it takes for it to be committed to memory and the harder it is to remember. However, they also reveal that memory is improved if one attaches an imaginary meaning to syllables or figures which lack immediate meaning.

This relationship between meaning and memory can help us to understand how an interpreter remembers. Let us compare the type of memory which allows one to memorize a 500-word passage with the type of memory which would allow a person to remember a full-length film. A person who could almost effortlessly remember what happened in a film would need about an hour to memorize a 500-word passage. (Perhaps he would be unable to recount all the details of the film, but he would know how to reply to any question asking for clarification of details and, for at least a few hours, he could recall the entire film.) Thus there are two types of memory: substantive memory and verbatim memory.

As soon as information is assimilated, it becomes part of substantive memory, whereas it takes about twenty times as long and much repetition to memorize words verbatim (it will take several hours to memorize from 1,500 to 2,000 words, which is the equivalent of 10 to 15 minutes of speaking time).

Substantive memory is the result of rapid analysis which is necessary for complete understanding of the message. In fact, the reason the moviegoer remembers the film is because he understood it. Even though he is not under the same pressure as an

interpreter, he too concentrates because he uses two out of his five senses. The information he receives is both visual and auditory and this quite naturally makes him attentive. Furthermore, he is conversant with the various themes found in films, through personal experience, through books or through other media. These themes include love, sickness, travel, jealousy, horses, sheriffs, pretty girls, good and evil. Since all the themes of film are familiar to him, and only their treatment is more or less novel, the movie-goer can easily and fully process the "information" conveyed, and for this reason he remembers, at least for a little while.

It seems clear that substantive memory is a function of comprehension. If, for example, you hear a speech given in a language you do not understand, you can no more remember the speech than you can understand it. Thus, absence of comprehension results in immediate oblivion, whereas comprehension is synonymous with retention. The memory which the interpreter retains of what he has comprehended is of paramount importance both for consecutive interpretation, where he must reproduce information at the end of relatively long speeches, and for simultaneous interpretation, where he lags a bit behind the speaker. In both of these situations he is like the pianist whose hands play the notes of one bar while his eyes are already reading the notes of the next one.

To resist the temptation to rely on verbatim memory, which would be more of a hindrance than a help, the interpreter immediately separates meaning from wording. This separation is extremely important for him since his task is to restate in the target language what has been said in the source language, and thus express it in a structure which is completely different from the original one. It is to his advantage to immediately forget the original wording used since that is not what he will reconstruct, and to clearly retain only the full meaning of the message with all its nuances, just as he remembers not the tone of the speaker's delivery, but rather the meaning which the tone conveyed.

The interpreter "forgets" the original wording of the message and refuses to mindlessly store a string of hundreds of words in his memory, because he does not "process" wording in the same way as he handles semantic content. You only remember something if you have paid attention to it, if you relate the significance and meaning to your own experience; in short, if you reflect on it in such a way that you experience what is commonly known as "awareness." Memory is much more dependent on what you do with the information than on how your senses perceive it.

While the speaker is speaking, the interpreter concentrates on both his meaning and his wording. When he grasps the meaning, it becomes a part of his active memory; the wording leaves only a faint impression in his memory, lasting just long enough to enable the interpreter to recognize certain words or expressions that may come up again in another speaker's reply.

Thus, the speaker and the interpreter both retain the same information. This fact becomes apparent whenever the speaker understands the language into which his speech is rendered. He is the best judge of the accuracy and completeness of the interpretation, for his judgment is based not on his recollection of what he said, since he has forgotten the exact words he uttered, but on his memory of the meaning of those words. And when he hears his train of thought reproduced he recognizes it. He is then seen to nod his head in approval, smile at his own subtleties, and laugh upon hearing his own jokes come out of the interpreter's mouth.

We can thus see that memory in consecutive interpretation consists of nothing more than understanding the meaning which the words convey. If this understanding is complete and correct, the interpreter will have the transient memory required for the re-expression of information without having to resort to mental gymnastics in order to memorize it.

Moreover, there is a relationship between the speed with which information is assimilated and the length of time it is retained. Information which

has been assimilated in the fraction of a second it takes for it to be perceived can only produce a memory of short duration. If it is to become a permanent part of the memory, it will have to be repeated and used a number of times. Herein lies the difference between what is understood and what is absorbed: one is evanescent knowledge and the other is more permanent.

The memory which the movie-goer retains of the movie is short-lived, unless he thinks about it frequently and speaks about it at regular and frequent intervals. In interpretation, memory also lasts only a short time; once the conference is over the interpreter moves on to another one, often changing contexts, subject matters, speakers, etc. This does not mean that he retains absolutely nothing of the knowledge which he acquired temporarily. The interpreter does not erase the memory of a speech from his mind as one erases a recording from a tape in order to record something else. But what was once a part of his active memory seeps into his passive memory. The interpreter is able to confirm or deny the accuracy of information heard at a conference for a much longer time than he can repeat it. Thus, for similar assimilation times, the information contained in the passive memory is retained much longer than that which is contained in the active memory. Information which is vivid in one's mind at the moment when it is perceived is gradually shifted into one's passive memory and can no longer be tapped at will. We are all familiar with the situation where we find ourselves unable to recall somebody's name but nevertheless know immediately whether the name someone else suggests is the name we are looking for or not.

Substantive memory acts the same way in interpretation, i.e., it is either active or passive, and reactivation of passive memory is one of the essential techniques of interpretation. Let us consider consecutive interpretation. The image which the description evoked, the meaning brought out by the speaker's position and his style might all be forgotten a few minutes later when his speech is to

be interpreted if there is no outside stimulus to reactivate what has become passive knowledge. This is why note-taking is so important in consecutive. You jot down certain key points which indicate the essence of what you will say, just as you tie a knot in your handkerchief to remind you to do something. Consecutive interpretation is a constant exercise in shifting information from passive memory to active memory, both of very short duration. You may actually have understood an idea quite well and have acquired a temporary knowledge of it, but you will still be likely to omit it entirely in your interpretation if it does not appear naturally through association of ideas at the time when it is to be redelivered in consecutive. Yet this idea could be rendered without difficulty if you use a "reminder"; this is what note-taking is used for.

In consecutive interpretation you do not jot down all the details of the unprocessed information (shorthand is never used), but instead you note the results of your meaning analysis. In other words, the interpreter writes down what he intends to say and not what he has heard, just as a panel member jots down a word which will help him to remember the argument he will present in his reply. Note-taking acts as a mnemonic device, a memory aid which triggers the memory of what was understood when heard.

Reactivation of passive memory also serves another function. As he works in very diverse areas, the interpreter acquires extremely varied knowledge. He is not, however, always capable of tapping it at will and it is often necessary for him to reactivate some of it during meetings to make use of it again. To understand how he manages to do this, one must understand the circumstances under which he works. Speakers appear in succession and the interpreter gives them his undivided attention, temporarily converting his permanent passive memory into short-lived active memory. Thus, if it has been several months since he worked at a meeting dealing with magnetic plates, he has the impression that he no longer knows anything about the subject until the

moment that the speakers take the floor. At that point he remembers what he understood before and this reactivates his knowledge which, in turn, facilitates his comprehension of the new speech.

In interpretation it is not only knowledge of different topics that undergoes this reactivation process. Over the years, interpreters acquire an enormous technical vocabulary but they can only retain a small portion of those words in their active memory. The rest are pushed back into passive memory and are not always there when one needs them. (That is why interpreters set up vocabulary card files.) I do not know how many times, when interpreting into French at conferences on metallurgy, I have had to resort to circumlocution to explain the English word "scales" or the German word "Seigerung" because my memory was unable to provide me with the French equivalents, "calamines" and "ségrégation." However, since the knowledge which is stored in the passive memory is much more permanent than that of active memory, as soon as I heard these two terms mentioned in a speech given in French I knew immediately that these words were the equivalents of "scales" and "Seigerung." Memory reactivation is, then, quite simple: the interpreter merely has to hear a term a second time and he will remember it until the end of the meeting.

There are certain features of consecutive interpretation, such as proper names, headings and certain numbers, for which message analysis is of no help. If you tried to retain them it would be an exercise in verbatim memory which would hinder the essential analytical task. Thus these words are retained not mentally but on paper. They constitute an important part of the interpreter's notes.

While it is true that the circumstances under which an interpreter works are conducive to comprehension of the message, and that there is nothing unique about the memory he relies on, comprehension is not totally automatic with the interpreter. It is also a deliberate act which is based on a technique.

Spontaneous Comprehension

In order to determine the nature of this technique, let us look once again at our example of the radio broadcast of a sports event. The commentator sees what is happening on the field, understands it and expresses it. His visual perception of the information is reduced to meaning which is, in turn, expressed orally. The conversion of visual information into meaning is a very common process, and also a very unconscious one. We say that we "see Paul," when what we really see is form, color and movement. Only painters pause to examine this visual image. Others understand what they have seen before they have finished looking at it. They relate what they have perceived visually to their previous knowledge about Paul and they have the impression that they have "seen Paul." This process takes place almost unconsciously. A similar process converts auditory perception into meaning. Interpretation is constant proof that comprehension is nothing more than a conversion of information into meaning, which can then be expressed in any given code of communication. If you hear a noise in the sky, you realize that it is made by an airplane passing overhead. The way in which this idea is expressed will depend on the language spoken by the parties involved and on the relationship between the perceived information and the speaker's immediate situation. In this connection, the reader would probably accept the idea that there are as many ways to express a concept as there are languages on earth and contexts for the message. Reasoning along these same lines, we could further accept the idea that, regardless of the language in which it is expressed, any oral communication can be reduced to the meaning of the message it conveys. Thus interpretation is a triangular process and not simply a linear process of transfer from one language to another. The language is perceived (perception stage), reduced to meaning (comprehension stage), and finally expressed in another linguistic form (expression stage).

To put it metaphorically, we could say that, if the interpreter works from French to English, he

reduces the French cloth to shreds, cards the material and reweaves it into English cloth. In other words, before restating what he hears, the interpreter reduces the speaker's formulated thought to an unformulated thought. Once this is done there is nothing to prevent him from expressing the thought, which is now his own, just as spontaneously as he expresses his own ideas when he is not interpreting.

In this way the interpreting process is not inherently different from the process which every human being goes through every day whenever he formulates his thoughts. The mental process used by an interpreter grows out of constant, daily practice. He uses the faculty which every human being possesses to understand an infinite number of ideas and to store them non-verbally (which has nothing to do with memorizing words or learning something by heart); he can then express thoughts and concepts in a verbal form, which appears spontaneously when voiced and vanishes just as quickly. Much of the interpreter's technique is thus based on a spontaneous mental process -- the thought-language process. Looking more closely at this, we can see that the process is reversible and that, when reversed, this process produces comprehension. What does this mean? It means that the words, "I see Paul," heard by an outsider are understood because that outsider reduces the name of Paul to a vague mental image, and that he moves from the oral expression to thought in order to understand what he was told.

If we carry this study of the relationship between thought and language a bit further, we find another similarity with the field of interpretation. We have discussed the thought-language process as well as the reverse language-thought process, yet neither thought nor language is static. We have seen how one word can conjure up a vast range of meanings, and also how thought, at the other end of the process, finds countless ways in which to express itself. If we examine this dynamic relationship more closely, we realize that there is a constant interaction between language and thought. Anyone who expresses

himself finds that the words he utters inspire thought, clarify it and develop it. Language, therefore, simultaneously expresses and generates thought. There is a constant two-way flow between the thought impulses, which inspire the words, and the words, which inspire new thoughts. The consequent discourse is the result of the exchanges between shapeless thought and speech. Compared to this thought-language-thought process, the uniqueness of interpretation lies only in the fact that, before formulating "his" thought, the interpreter appropriates the thought of another person. We might say that interpreting is a process of speech-thought-speech, in which the words of the speaker become the thought of the interpreter and are then reconverted into speech by him.

An interpreter's understanding can work in two ways: through spontaneous processes or through deliberate acts. The former, which we have just analyzed, are basically a function of the interpreter's intelligence and the degree of his awareness of the technique (because the interpreter who attempts to translate word for word hinders and inhibits the spontaneity of his understanding). To a lesser degree, they are also a function of the similarity of the interpreter's and the speaker's mental structures. The interpreter understands much better when he has an affinity with the speaker's mental functioning. The line of reasoning which he hears then seems logical to him.

No matter how intelligible a message may be, it can only be completely understood with the help of the person to whom it is addressed. In order for this to happen, the listener must be willing to receive the message, consider it and meet the speaker at least part way.

However, only certain parts of the message that is delivered to the passive listener (the type of listener present at public meetings) get through. Some parts of the message do not interest him and thus are ignored. Other parts reach him and hold his attention for a certain amount of time, and

therefore other information goes unnoticed. As for the active listener (the participant at a conference), he listens to what is said while mentally preparing the arguments he will use to confirm or rebut what he has heard. The arguments heard serve as a pretext for the development of individual arguments and thus his attention is also divided, since it is focused on both what he hears and what he is going to say. He ignores certain trivial or odd-sounding statements and retains those to which he has reacted. This reaction directs his attention to certain ideas, which he focuses on, analyzes and replies to, while ignoring others; he spontaneously concentrates on certain points. The listener remembers what has impressed him and this serves as a point of departure for his argument. He only retains the ideas which have served as a springboard for his own thoughts. What he remembers of what the other person said actually depends on his own reaction.

This relationship between the speaker and the listener is derived from the process we have already described whereby language generates thought. This relationship is just as operative when the thoughts are one's own as when they come from an outside source. This process corresponds to spontaneous comprehension and it allows a dialogue to take place even if part of the message goes unnoticed.

Concentration: A Conscious Act

The effort of concentration required of the interpreter is completely different. What is normal in a dialogue situation no longer applies when it comes to interpreting because the interpreter, interposed between the speaker and the listener, must comprehend all of the speech in order to transmit it without omitting, distorting or adding anything. It is only by transmitting everything to the listener that the interpreter gives him the opportunity to sort out what interests him and use it to sustain a dialogue.

In order to understand everything, the interpreter relies on more than just the process of

spontaneous comprehension. He must consciously analyze all of the message, in a way that is more intuitive than verbal and, of course, he must do this quickly. There must be a deliberate division of thought; he allows enough associations of ideas to emerge in his own mind to enable him to grasp the message, but he does not develop them into his own ideas. He focuses his attention on all the nuances contained in the statement and at the same time holds back the development of the thoughts which they inspire. If he did not make this conscious effort to listen to everything that was said, but instead listened only to what interested him, it is clear that he would not "hear" even half of what was said. This capacity for concentrated listening, accompanied by immediate analysis which reduces language to the meaning of its message, is one of the most important requirements for conference interpreting and one of the rarest qualities around. It keeps the interpreter from reacting like the listeners who ignore certain parts of the message. If the interpreter relied purely on spontaneous comprehension he would transmit a partial message, stressing points which he thought were important.

If, however, he completely refused to associate ideas, and ceased to analyze, he would replace interpretation with a rough, literal translation, and would convey an unrefined message which would force the listener to attempt to reconstruct the meaning and prevent him from reflecting on the message and reacting to what was said.

Thus the interpreter does not receive a message passively. He actively analyzes each and every part of it and only with regard to minor points does he take the liberty of keeping what is worthwhile and dropping what is not (repetitions, slips of the tongue, etc.).

The density of the message which the interpreter assimilates is much greater than the listener realizes. This total assimilation of the message requires a degree of concentration rarely seen, a deliberate selection and elimination of sensory

perceptions, with their corresponding mental images. Among the half dozen perceptions and ideas which our mind has to grapple with simultaneously in all kinds of situations in everyday life, we manage to sift through, select and give priority to those items of information which we consider most important, ignoring the rest. People scarcely notice a radio playing when they are discussing something, whereas the ringing of the telephone interrupts a conversation; we are accustomed to blocking out certain types of noises in order to concentrate on things which are of immediate concern. When he interprets, the interpreter is under pressure. He therefore gives priority to outside information over his own thoughts and other possible distractions.

It should be pointed out that even the best interpreters would be incapable of doing "cold" what they manage to do at a meeting. The interpreter is there with his listeners; he sees them and his words are intended for their ears. Furthermore, in consecutive interpretation, he has to give his speech immediately after the speaker finishes his; in simultaneous he must switch on his microphone as soon as the speaker begins to talk. This in itself would be a source of stage fright for many, and would leave them speechless; yet for the interpreter it is a stimulus which allows him to carry out the intense work of analysis needed in order to grasp what is implied. This mental exercise is exceptional because it takes place with split-second speed. Thus we can say that interpretation approaches the creative possibilities of original thought.

Moreover, the audience which the interpreter addresses is not a priori trusting or charitable, for the interpreter has none of the built-in advantages of those who usually speak in public. He is not a teacher who addresses his students and enjoys the prestige his position affords him, nor is he a lecturer who has the double psychological advantage of addressing an audience that wants to hear what he has to say, and also of knowing more than they do.

The interpreter is well aware that his listeners will note only the problems he may run into with terminology and that, most often, the inner workings of the interpretation process will completely escape them. They will tend to be louder in their praise for the consecutive interpretation of an after-dinner speech than for the simultaneous interpretation of remarks concerning the most complex subjects; the more knowledgeable they are about a given subject, the more critical they will be. This position of relative inferiority increases the stress under which an interpreter works. Knowing that he must win his listeners over, he succeeds in analyzing in a few micro-seconds what would take him very much longer to accomplish outside the context of a meeting.

When learning their profession, interpretation students are faced with countless problems: an idea may stump them because of its novelty, the language may be too obscure, they may be paralyzed with stage fright or they may not concentrate hard enough on what they are hearing. Here are two examples which illustrate this.

In an interpretation exam, the students were required to interpret a speech by Pierre Mendès-France which contained the following passage: "Partout où il y a action collective: BATAILLE, construction d'un immeuble, organisation d'une entreprise privée ou publique...il faut un plan pour déterminer les conditions d'exécution les meilleures -- sinon c'est le gaspillage et finalement l'échec."[1]

This text was interpreted six times that morning and not one of the students translated "BATAILLE." Why was it omitted? The word would

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1) "Wherever collective effort is involved -- battles, construction sites, establishing public enterprises or private corporations -- a plan is needed to determine the best way to set about the task at hand. Otherwise, the result is a squandering of resources, and ultimate failure."

have been extremely easy to translate if it had been frozen in a written text, but it was oral, and too unexpected in this context to be understood by inexperienced young people. When questioned afterwards, the students all remembered having heard the word but to them "bataille" evoked the idea of conflict rather than solidarity, and they were unable to translate it because they had not understood it. They did not understand it because they failed to make the proper associations. We would add here that we consider this example to be striking proof of the existence of the triangular process in interpretation, i.e. speech-meaning-speech, where the meaning and not the words are translated. Because the meaning of the word was not understood, it could not be translated.

The second example involved young Tunisians who were listening to an American agricultural instructor. He was describing the qualities and knowledge necessary to be a good agricultural extension agent. He listed several factors which included, among other things, knowledge of soils, animal pathology and faith in God. All of these young people had been educated under the French system and none of them could bring himself to repeat "faith in God," which seemed so out of place in this context. When questioned about this later, they recalled having heard the words "faith in God" but they had not understood what was meant.

So the mere fact that information is heard does not guarantee that it will be included in the interpretation. Analysis for interpretation requires interrelating the constituent parts of the speech to the point where the entire speech forms a coherent whole and nothing is omitted.

Techniques of Analysis

Reference to Pre-existing Knowledge

We have said earlier that, in order to understand for purposes of interpretation, one must reduce language to the meaning it conveys, and that hearing the name "Paul" involves dimly visualizing a

conceptual image of Paul. We further stated that interpreting involves comprehension of the entire speech through a process which is half spontaneous and half deliberate. Let us now look at how one moves from language to meaning by referring, once again, to the example of Paul, and analyzing the process which makes us believe that we have seen him. We only see a figure but we know that this figure is Paul. In order to say that we have seen Paul we relate the new information to our pre-existing knowledge, the connection is made immediately and comprehension is the equivalent of renewed knowledge. If the gap between the new information and our pre-existing knowledge is too large, the connection is never made and understanding does not take place. In other words, if you did not know Paul before you saw him you would not know it was Paul you saw. Comprehension is what occurs when new information ties in with related knowledge. If such knowledge is absent the new information is ignored. The intense analysis which is a part of the interpretation process results from the need to assimilate the complete message, which means linking up new information with relatively unrelated knowledge.

Every item of information brings to mind a vast semantic range, as we saw in the case of our plumber. When the semantic range which the speaker's words awaken in the mind of the listener overlaps with the listener's pre-existing semantic range there is a renewing of knowledge. If the overlapping is slight and if one must reconstruct the whole of the semantic field from this small fragment, actual invention or discovery can take place. Interpretation does not go quite as far as discovery, but it does proceed in the same direction.

It is not necessary to awaken the entire semantic range but one must open up enough to understand the information received. By applying logical thought processes, it is possible to go beyond immediate superficial comprehension and link up information (which at first seemed incomprehensible) with knowledge which is sometimes more closely

related to other areas. One quickly realizes, when teaching interpretation, that a student who says, "I don't understand," when he hears a technical passage really means, "I don't know what they are talking about." He naturally refuses to make a special effort, which would amount to reducing the technical information to an understandable, popularized version. It would of course be highly personalized, since the individual involved would be its only user; but this approach clearly describes how one can link up the most specialized type of information with the relatively basic knowledge which one has of the subject matter.

Let us take an example involving the Concorde. The man on the street has heard that this supersonic plane can cross the Atlantic in three hours. In order for this information to be meaningful for him he must have some prior knowledge about the length of time it takes other planes to cross the Atlantic, which he can then relate to the new information. He will then see, immediately, that the Concorde will be faster than a Boeing 747. If, however, he has no previous knowledge of the subject he will not be able to come to this conclusion and he will miss the point.

Let us consider another example. You learn at a conference that the wheat crop in the USSR has been poor, which is something you did not know before. This new knowledge allows you to understand why the meeting seems to expect the price of gold on the London market to drop. Since the interpreter already knows that the USSR produces gold, when he learns that its wheat crop is poor and that a drop in the price of gold is predicted, he will quickly understand (a) that the USSR is buying cereals for gold and (b) that this is why the price of gold is expected to drop. This comprehension becomes knowledge which will aid the interpreter in understanding additional information.

When we state that analysis for the purpose of understanding involves associating incoming information with pre-existing knowledge, we define

knowledge as all things known, even if the knowledge was acquired the instant before. Thus we could say that all information, once understood, becomes acquired knowledge which allows the interpreter to develop his analysis. In fact, although the speaker is not a teacher addressing students and does not move gradually from material which is known to material which is unknown, but is instead a specialist communicating with colleagues, his message always contains information which can be readily acquired as knowledge.

The interpreter immediately understands certain parts of the information, he is obliged to analyze others, and thus, in the course of the meeting, he acquires the requisite temporary knowledge which allows him to gradually close the initial gap between himself and the speaker, thereby facilitating his analysis.

In his analysis, the interpreter does not limit himself to linking the message to his pre-existing knowledge, but he also analyzes the interrelationships within the message itself. He knows that he can only understand the message if it appears coherent to him. Here is an anecdote which circulated among interpreters at the time of the disturbances in Congo-Kinshasa. A United Nations plane had been circling for an hour over a landing strip. One of the passengers, who was an interpreter, asked the Belgian liaison officer what was happening and was told,"Le pilote ne sait pas atterrir."[1] The interpreter was unfamiliar with this Belgian use of "savoir"[2] where the French would use "pouvoir,"[3] and thought that he had just been told that the pilot was incompetent.

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1) The pilot does not know how to land.

2) To know.

3) To be able to.

But his fear was quickly dispelled by his speedy analysis which led him to conclude that, since the pilot knew how to take off, he must know how to land. Since he understood that he had been misled by this unusual use of the word, the interpreter correctly asked, "Isn't the runway clear?"

The deliberate act of comprehension encompasses even the most ordinary information. When someone says that a satellite reaches the highest point in its orbit when it is 750 kilometers away from the earth, the interpreter does not let this number go by without understanding it, i.e. visualizing the distance. By thinking of an analogous distance, for example,the approximate distance between Paris and Toulouse, the interpreter will not make the stupid mistake of saying 75 kilometers or 7,500 kilometers when he transmits the information.

Analysis becomes so much a part of the interpreter's thought process that he uses it all the time, as when he questions the simple logic or likelihood of an item of information that has appeared in the newspaper, or when he cannot rest until he is satisfied that he has understood some aspect of another culture. I remember a meeting in Addis Ababa which took place shortly after the Queen of England's visit to Ethiopia. Outside of the meeting, one of the participants at the conference said that the route to be taken by the Queen had been lined with trees specially for the occasion and added, with a derisive smile, that three days later the trees had withered and that surely the Queen had not been fooled. I was amused by the reply given by one of my colleagues who remarked that the tree planting had undoubtedly been done to pay homage to the Queen as a sort of gigantic bouquet of flowers, and was not intended to deceive her. This explanation seemed logical and it proved to be the right answer. Thus the interpreter always walks the thin line between logic and likelihood.

The Interpreter's Stance

Message analysis often involves another element of comprehension: the interpreter's own views with respect to the argument presented.

We do not need elaborate arguments to defend the interpreter's right to have views of his own. Since his personal thoughts are not articulated, they can be radically different from the speaker's. The interpreter is often harsh in his judgment, just as harsh as the notes a reader writes in the margin of a book indicating the passages which have pleased or offended him. It is this judgment which molds his understanding and allows him to relate the arguments he hears to his pre-existing knowledge.

In the interests of shedding some light on this process, let us look at the interpreter's attitude by examining a specific example. The following passage is an excerpt from a speech given during a conference on the training of journalists: "We are amazed, as are many others, that recruitment into a profession which is one of the most complex and one of those which carry the greatest social responsibility, has been -- and continues to be -- left to chance and even made according to the wrong criteria."

Here we shall only analyze how the interpreter manages to retain the two characteristics attributed to the profession of journalism which shape the meaning of the entire message: (1) it is one of the most complex and (2) it is one of those which carry the greatest social responsibility. The interpreter might agree with the first statement because he sees a certain similarity between interpretation and journalism. By comparing his job to that of the journalist he has "taken a stand" and this will be sufficient to enable him to remember what was said. Let us suppose, however, that he does not agree with the second statement and that, in his eyes, the journalist is no decision maker and has little responsibility when compared to a politician, for instance, whose very purpose is action. The interpreter feels that the journalist takes advantage

of not being in a responsible position to say exactly what he pleases. Even if he does not carry his analysis through, the fact that he notes his own disagreement, takes an opposing viewpoint, and reacts to what was said by taking a stand, ensures that he will accurately reproduce the speaker's thought.

Thus by taking a stand for or against an argument he hears, the interpreter understands the argument more thoroughly, remembers it and can give it back. The interpreter's analysis and the reasons for his agreement or disagreement will not show through in his translation, because the more conscious the interpreter is of what has been said, the more aware he is of the difference between his own point of view and that of the speaker. Sometimes disagreement can take the form of a mental exclamation mark and agreement is registered as amusement; but in interpretation, an interpreter can never remain neutral with respect to an argument, for if he did, he might forget or distort it.

When you observe interpreters at work, you notice that they sometimes feel the need to make observations, to add a footnote to what the speaker says; an interpreter at work will turn to his colleague and whisper a comment which the latter usually fails to understand because he has not been listening attentively to the speaker.

It is when he analyzes abstract reasoning and grasps the line of argument in a message that the interpreter truly merits his name, because he performs an exegesis of it for himself before transmitting it. But among all the exchanges which take place at international conferences the interpreter has to deal with more than just abstract messages. Descriptive style abounds, and the effort needed to comprehend description is not the same as that needed to understand concatenations of ideas. Here it is no longer a question of analyzing but of visualizing.

Visualization

Let us imagine that we have to interpret the following passage: The whine of the engines increased in intensity, signaling the approach of the presidential jet. Then the Caravelle landed, gracefully and lightly. The sun glittered on the wings, making them sparkle. The president emerged, his features drawn with fatigue, and greeted the crowd of onlookers who had come to the airport out of curiosity."

Aside from the arrival of a president, not much else happened. The interpreter hears a description whose elements are known and only has to pay attention to how they are put together. The description itself can be reduced to images without any difficulty whatsoever.

The mental image which the interpreter visualizes upon hearing the description abounds with details of the airplane, the sun, the airport and the crowd. This in turn allows him to evoke the same image in the target language without remembering the words which described it. His experience with sun and heads of state probably does not exactly fit the event described, but it is sufficient to allow him to express an image which will evoke the same mental picture in the minds of his listeners that they would have gotten from the original commentator.

The image which the interpreter obtains from the words he hears is thus colored by his own experience and is not exactly the same as the experience which inspired the original words. The conceptual image which the interpreter visualizes and converts into language will similarly evoke an image in the minds of those listening to him; the image they visualize will be colored by their own experiences, but the image may well correspond to the image they would have visualized if they had heard the original words.

The interpreter's image may be very different from the speaker's because the interpreter may not possess the speaker's and listener's specialized knowledge of the subject. The interpreter's careful analysis is, however, sufficient to enable him to

evoke the original image in the mind of the listener. He is helped in this task by the fact that the listener and the speaker share the same sphere of knowledge. Allow me to explain. If an archaeologist were to say to a colleague (through an interpreter), "I discovered a beautiful bracelet in a Punic tomb," the interpreter who had never seen an excavation would undoubtedly visualize bracelets and tombs which would be very different from the actual Punic ones. Yet the image he would create would evoke the correct image in the mind of the other archaeologist.

Thus, although the image which the interpreter visualizes to aid his own understanding is not necessarily identical with that of the speaker, it allows him to correctly relay the image which the speaker visualized.

Upon hearing the speaker's words, the interpreter is reminded of certain images, functions, and cause and effect relationships, which he associates with the ones he is hearing. This allows him to understand that which is unknown to him and which has been only partially elucidated by the speaker.

However, even when he understands, the interpreter is still only a listener or, at most, a participant for himself alone. He makes no judgments on the soundness of the argument being presented because he does not know all the elements of the situation and only uses the analogy he draws to reconstruct the argument he has heard.

The technique used in interpretation to relay a descriptive message, i.e. visual imagination, is relatively easy to apply provided the described object or a similar one is known to the interpreter. Understanding a descriptive message thus requires greater knowledge than is required to understand a line of argument. But the technique is less involved because it does not require quite as thorough an analysis.

There is another type of description which does not lend itself so readily to the creation of mental imagery; it involves a series of events, none of which are described in detail. In such cases one tries to understand the successive stages in the

development of events. Consequently, if a speaker says that "Family X made a fortune in Algeria, sent its money home when the disorders broke out, started a publishing house in Paris, and began to publish a quarterly magazine in 1962, which became a monthly in January 1964," the image left in one's mind would not be comprehensive but fragmented into a string of rapidly sketched images connected by the cause and effect relationship which binds together the different stages of the description.

A conscious analysis of a descriptive speech involves bringing out its images, and noting the stages of its development. This conscious analysis allows us to take an active interest in what was said and to relate what was said to what we already know in order to understand. In any case, it is imperative that the interpreter maintain an active interest during each stage of the description in order to be able to reproduce it accurately in the target language.

Observing Style

To complete our treatment of the subject, let us take a look at another type of speech: the emotional speech. Its purpose is to elicit laughter, to please, to extend thanks, to praise, etc. These speeches are delivered as after-dinner speeches, opening remarks, funeral orations, all of which the interpreter classifies as "blah-blah-blah." This type of speech is the most difficult to analyze because all one has to work with is the objective of the person speaking. Instead of bringing out the logic of an argument, or attempting to visualize images, the interpreter turns his attention to the motives and the style of the speaker. He makes it a point to remember a particular descriptive expression and to note whether the tone of the speech is friendly or critical and adjusts his tone accordingly. In this type of speech the subtleties of style are very important.

This is the type of speech where the beginning interpreter trusts his memory least and

where he takes the most notes. But the seasoned interpreter knows a number of ready-made formulas, for he has heard them so often in so many contexts that they come to mind automatically.

We should remember that the distinction made between different types of speeches is never as sharp in practice as this discussion might suggest. It would be difficult to imagine an after-dinner speech which would not require the interpreter to visualize images or take a stand on an argument, in addition to having to analyze the speaker's motivations and observe his style. Conversely, it would be difficult to imagine a declaratory speech which did not make some type of emotional appeal, or a descriptive speech which contained no progression of ideas.

In fact, although we have, for the purposes of analysis, isolated the elements which are found to varying degrees in all speeches, they are intimately related and sometimes appear together in the same sentence. Thus -- for the interpreter -- analysis, images, attitude, highlighting of stylistic nuances intertwine and overlap in a speech, even if the general tone of the speech shows a decided preference for one type of message.

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Thus we have begun to see how different the process of interpretation is from the commonly held ideas which we mentioned at the beginning of this book. Far from being a rote translation of the words of a speech, interpretation involves the immediate forgetting of words. By ignoring the wording of the message, the interpreter can turn all his attention to analyzing the content of what he has heard in order to understand it in its entirety. His analysis can be viewed as a reaction to the message or, if you prefer, the taking of a stand. Comprehension, far from being a secondary tool of the interpreter, a type of intellectual luxury which he may occasionally allow himself, is in reality the very basis of his work. One could say <u>interpreting is first and foremost comprehension</u>.

The term comprehension, however, is ambiguous because it covers many areas. One could "comprehend" all the words in a message without comprehending its meaning and, conversely, understand a message without having understood all of the words. We hope we have shown how the interpreter understands and how his understanding differs from that of the speaker and listener. We must now examine the two principal elements which are indispensable for immediate and comprehensive understanding. To understand what is going on around him, every individual depends on two types of knowledge in his daily life: <u>knowledge of words and knowledge of things</u>. Given the special circumstances under which he works, the interpreter finds these two types of knowledge of primary importance. We will examine them in more detail in the following chapters and determine the kind of understanding needed for interpretation.