

Ferdinand de Saussure – frequently considered the father of 20th century linguistics – contends that language must be considered a social phenomenon, a structured system that can be viewed *synchronically* (as it exists at any particular time) and *diachronically* (as it changes in the course of time). These two concepts – synchronicity and diachronicity – and a few others he introduced, proved fundamental for the development of several theories within the social sciences.

I will now borrow these concepts in order to apply them to the interpreters' world. We will see these axes at work at two different levels: first in discourse at a macro level and then at a micro level with phonemes. They can also be found at some other intermediate levels between phonemes and discourse: with prefixes and suffixes, lexemes or words, phrases, combinations of them, etc.

We will bring back some of the examples given in the previous chapters to illustrate the functioning of these axes. Whereas their functioning is similar at the macro and micro levels, we will contend that we can consciously use them only at the former level. At the micro level, it is only *a posteriori* that we can reconstruct their spontaneous involuntary work.

Speaker's words	Interpreter's words	
Amendment number ... eh ... deals with the first paragraph ... .. <u>one ..</u>	... eh ... eh ... la en- mienda diez se refiere al primer párrafo ... <u>... al primer inciso.</u>	... eh ... eh ... amend- ment ten deals with the first paragraph ... .. <u>... the first inset</u>

See page 48.

### Case N° 1

first inset

Let us begin by returning to an example we saw at the beginning of Chapter two. It will be remembered that the transfer from "one" to "*al primer inciso*" could only be explained by the presence of the interpreter in the act of enunciation which allowed him to draw on extra-discursive elements both for understanding and transmitting meaning. He could have said *one* but instead he opted for another solution.

These extradiscursive elements which justify the transformation of "one" into "*al primer inciso*" show the functioning of the *synchronic axis* thanks to which the interpreter integrates visual elements of relevant use into his oral perception.

### Case N° 2

Speaker's words	Interpreter's Words	
1 Thank you Mr. Chairman ...	<i>Gracias señor Presidente ...</i>	Thank you Mr. Chairman ...
2 There are ... three ... eh ... activities	<i>Hay tres actividades que aparecen en el proyecto de recomendación ...</i>	There are three activities which are in the draft recommendation ...
3 which are...eh...in the draft recommendation	...	
4 <b>tion which are not in the amendment.</b>	...	
5 ... eh ... (inaudible)	<i>... eh ...</i>	... eh ...
6 data collection in the social sciences, the	<i>acopio de datos en las ciencias sociales, las actividades sobre patentes y licencias y la traducción y la publicación ...</i>	data collection in the social sciences, the activities related to patents and licenses and translation and publication ...
7 ... eh ... activities related to patents and	...	
8 licenses and translation n production	...	
9 of S and T books and periodicals. I s want to	...	
10 confirm that this is a deliberate omission	<i>¿Esto es una omisión voluntaria? Porque esto no aparece en la enmienda propuesta ... o es simplemente ... se debe a cuestiones de ordenamiento.</i>	Is this a deliberate omission? Because this is not mentioned in the proposed amendment ... or is it simply ... or is it a question or rearrangement?
11 and not ... eh ... just hadn't been over-		
12 looked in this rearrangement.		

### Case N° 2

First, the situation: we are dealing with the "Meeting for the International Standardization of Statistics" at UNESCO, in Paris in June 1978. The delegates are discussing another amendment and a member of the Canadian delegation comparing the draft of the original article with a new version, detects the omission of three elements and wants to know why.

We must keep in mind that the speech rate is quite fast and the speaker has a peculiar accent which makes interpretation difficult.

The recording allowed us to go back over and over again and also have two persons whose mother tongue was English listen to the speech. When listening for the sixth time one of them thought he heard "*the general*" in the space in line 5 of the transcript and which until then we had considered inaudible. The conjunction "*and*" was almost totally assimilated by the final sound of "n" in "*translation*" (line 8) and the adverb "*just*" (line 9) was contracted to an "s".

We can also see that, starting with the hesitation in line 10 of the last part of the speech, there is a break in the grammatical sequence: the sentence has no subject and the listener is left to juggle with the ideas and re-accommodate them. The speaker's fast, halting rhythm, sprinkled with hesitations, "eh ... eh ..." contrasts with the more deliberate version of the interpreter who nonetheless pauses when omitting "which are not in the amendment" in the fifth line. In spite of the gap, her delivery does not lose coherence and the interpreter goes on to mention the three activities just mentioned. There is another "blank" in line 11; the interpreter does not translate "S and T books and periodicals" (S and T refer to science and technology) but does render *y la traducción y la publicación*

There are a number of divergences between the two texts, but what we want to analyse here is the introduction of *porque esto no aparece en la enmienda propuesta* in the interpreter's version, which is equivalent to "**which are not in the amendment**" (line 4 in the speaker's version). It is surprising to hear the interpreter introduce further on what she omitted in

and the translation and the publication

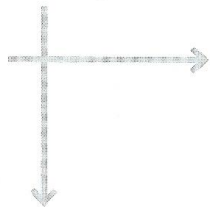
for this does not appear in the proposed amendment.

Line 4. And I say "surprising", because I was the interpreter in this case and I know for sure that I did not hear the words when they were spoken. I was only able to infer them later from the context. This points to the existence of another axis, which we shall call the "diachronic axis"\*.

We can therefore note the functioning of two axes in speech: *the synchronic axis and the diachronic axis.*

Through the *synchronic axis*, we create a relationship between elements which can be of diverse nature: a fragment of speech and other objects or actions. A relationship is thus created at a specific point in time between two different perceptions: what someone hears or sees, feels, or senses, etc. It is like the vision one might have of oneself from above, looking at oneself listening, watching, sensing at a given point in time.

Through the *diachronic axis* which unfolds in time we create a relationship between elements that could be of the same nature but while some are still present, others no longer are. We establish a link between what we perceive now and what we sensed before, between our present perception and the memory of previous perceptions.



There seems to be a double to-and-fro movement: one following a horizontal wave along the synchronic axis and another one following a vertical wave along the diachronic axis. As the speech unfolds, the interpreter checks his past predictions, makes new ones and still hears the speaker's

new input; as he gives his own rendering, he also continues to take in the speaker's intervention as well as other elements from the environment. He also remembers what he said, goes back and self corrects in a double movement of feed-back and feed-forward.

### Case N° 3

We shall now apply this concept of the two axes to a case in which the interpreter made a mistake: the two axes worked at the micro level – on the surface, we might say – but the interpreter did not manage to consciously apply the two axes at the macro level so as to avoid producing the mistake.

During a conference on computer science held in Rio de Janeiro in 1993, a French delegate said "*lorsque l'ordinateur fonctionne à plein temps...*" which was rendered in Portuguese as "*quando o computador funciona na primavera...*"

Speaker's words	Interpreter's words	
<i>Lorsque l'ordinateur fonctionne à plein temps...</i>	<i>Quando o computador funciona na primavera...</i>	When the computer work in springtime
When the computer is working (full time)...		

Let us see what may have happened.

The Portuguese interpreter did not catch the word "plein" /plɛ̃/ since he missed one of its sounds: /l/. Then, something resembling a *simultaneity axis* may have functioned there without his being aware. Thus, phonemes /b/ /s/ /d/ /f/ /g/ /z/ /x/ /p/ /v/ etc., which cannot be found in this combination of sounds in French were automatically discarded. As a result of that implicit processing, the only ones left were:

a p	↓	ẽ t a
a p	j	ẽ t a
a p	w	ẽ t a
a p	R	ẽ t a
	↑	

The only phoneme that can make sense in this combination, in addition to /l/ is, of course, /r/. Unconsciously, the interpreter changed /a/ for /o/ and obtained a sound chain intelligible in French:

/oprētã/ = *au printemps*<sup>1</sup>

This replacement of sounds happened beyond (or beneath, certainly before) the interpreter's consciousness. It is only *a posteriori* that we can infer that something of the sort occurred. The interpreter – or any speaker for that matter – is faced with a certain “sequence” of sounds and cannot, on the spur of the moment, go back. But the interpreter in question could have done something else: consciously apply the axes at another level.

If he had used the *diachronic axis* at a macro level, relating *primavera* to the foregoing, he would certainly have realized that seasons, whether he liked it or not, have little to do with the functioning of computers. Regrettably the interpreter did not relate what he had understood (in the springtime) to the subject matter of the talk and made a mistake.

If we were to take into account only sound linearity when interpreting, mistakes of this kind would be frequent, especially in the Western world where interpreting is generally done into the mother tongue.<sup>2</sup> It is the use of these two axes at macro levels and using ever larger units in discourse which permits us to detect this kind of mistake and correct it.

<sup>1</sup> It is not very important to know if he had rightly heard /a/ or if this was precisely the sound that was lost, replaced by /o/ in the paradigmatic axis, which compelled him further on to change /p/ into /r/ or if indeed he had not heard either one and all he received was /p-ʌ/. This is only an effort to try and explain, step by step, what can happen in such cases: it goes without saying that neither the interpreter nor any other speaker would consciously do something like this.

<sup>2</sup> According to A.I.I.C rules (International Association of Conference Interpreters) interpretation should always be done from languages B and C (acquired) into A (the mother tongue).

Furthermore, as soon as we contrast the concept of *plein temps* to that of *mi temps* in the field of information technology, we realize that the use of one or the other is of vital importance from the point of view of profitability. The dichotomy *à plein temps/ à mi temps* is not only relevant in this matter, it is even fundamental. The interpreter should have known this. His mistake shows he was working only on the surface, at least at that moment.

Now, most speakers are not aware of the functioning of these axes in speech. Interpreters' examples have revealed their existence and showed that interpreters knowingly make use of them. It is precisely the correct management of these two axes that enables interpreters to correctly interpret simultaneously. But an interpretation mistake was used to prove that these axes also function at micro levels with a significant difference though: neither speakers nor interpreters are aware of them, let alone use them. We will then call these axes which we cannot consciously manipulate: the *paradigmatic axis* and the *syntagmatic axis*.

But the problem does not end here. Let us go back to the second example in this chapter. When the interpreter hears “which are not in the amendment” and translates it, the speaker is saying “and not eh ... just hadn't been overlooked” which the interpreter hears since he will introduce it in his delivery. The linear development of the interpreter's version *overlaps* the functioning of the diachronic axis (memory); he does not say, “they are not in the amendment” but rather proposes the adequate linkage: – *porque no están en la enmienda propuesta*. If we go back to the first example we shall also see that the operation of the *synchronic axis* is superimposed on the linear operation of the *diachronic axis* of the words whose temporal succession the interpreter hears and repeats. When the interpreter says ... *al primer inciso* the speaker is saying: “and it suggests that we should drop the word ...”, which the interpreter hears, as evidenced by the fact that he says it.

full time

part time

full time/part time

axes

Because they are not in the proposed amendment

the first inset

The simultaneous functioning of these two axes in speech brings with it the dislocation and the disrapture of the one and only single point of view: elements at work showing the existence of the two axes are not of the same kind nor do they belong to the same levels and the "time" dimension is considered simultaneously from at least two different viewpoints. As I stated above, in a somewhat clumsy effort to put into words something I find particularly difficult to describe, on the synchronic axis (or simultaneity axis) one gets the vision one might have of oneself from above – as in a kind of snapshot – looking at oneself listening, watching, sensing at a given point in time. On the diachronic axis, one feels the unfolding of "memory" and time, the succession of elements coming one after the other ... It is in the actual "here-and-now" that we face the intersection of both axes. Their intersection at the macro level appears as a synthesis of many other intersections. When things flow at the micro levels, we are not, and we cannot possibly be, aware of the functioning of those axes, we are simply aware of their results; we can, though, become conscious of their malfunctioning when errors occur – but only *a posteriori*.

## Conscious and Unconscious Acts of Perception and Memory

### Summing Up

Perception of a given element allows us to identify it and isolate it from the rest of the elements, associate it with a word or a name and to memorize it as a given unit. *Perceiving* implies seeing, listening, sensing, feeling, tasting, smelling, intuiting, and recognizing. We know, though, that we perceive and store in our memories much more than what we are aware of. We also know, since Ribot,<sup>3</sup> that perception and

<sup>3</sup> Théodule Ribot (1839-1916) was a French psychologist who studied mental processes and memory disorders. I will eventually refer to his works and to the concept of "affective memory" he created.

movement are closely linked. There are certain movements that are too fast for our consciousness to grasp separately; so, we group them. Experiments have proven that perception takes place through the detection of a slight movement or its consequences.

In order to work "simultaneously" the interpreter exacerbates some typical mechanisms of speech and in so doing he becomes an expert in the manipulation of two axes that silently operate in discourse: the *synchronic axis* which relates simultaneous perceptions of different nature and the *diachronic (or successive) axis* which relates present to absent elements. "Time" is simultaneously considered from two different viewpoints: *diachronically* thanks to our memory and *synchronically* thanks to our senses.

Certain examples taken from conference interpretation and others from psychological experiments (as we will see in chapter 16) disclose the functioning of these two axes below the threshold of our conscience. We said we would call them differently in order to differentiate the voluntary and automatic levels. Those axes whose function it is to present to our conscience already structured units were called the *paradigmatic* and the *syntagmatic axes*. The elements they handle move at such a fast speed that consciousness can only seize them in units or groups. The notion of "time" becomes even more complex because a third viewpoint should be added to the other two already mentioned: the infinitely more rapid one of our "unconscious".

The automatic functioning of these two axes would explain why we cannot listen to a series of phonemes following one another when we listen to somebody speak. We normally cannot "disintegrate" words into sounds in normal speech as much as we cannot disintegrate objects into atoms and molecules when we open our eyes and look around. Perception seems to operate holistically: a "whole" can be conceived as a unified entity – different from the sum of its parts, but from which several pieces can be detached so as to create new and different entities. Some of the principles of the Gestalt theory can be easily

applied to discourse perception. We can set a parallel between these two types of perceptive phenomena:

- Boundaries between objects – as between words – can create some perceptual problems.
- In the same manner we infer the invisible faces of a cube, we also consummate the incompleteness of what we hear.
- Every visual, auditory, tactile element announces more than it contains.

Parallels made between several examples suggest that the perceptual processes at work for *understanding human speech* are similar to those for understanding what we see. *Seeing and speaking are similar ways of structuring the environment through different means.* “The art of seeing” and “the art of talking” would thus be more than just good friends.

It is perhaps easier to use a visual example to perceive that feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty – as if in quicksands – when confronted by some ambiguous images our paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes have not yet circumscribed. The following pictures enable us to stay for a while in that intermediate “no man’s land” where multiple virtual probabilities are still possible.



What sort of woman can you see on your left? An attractive young lady looking to her right or an old big-nosed woman looking down?

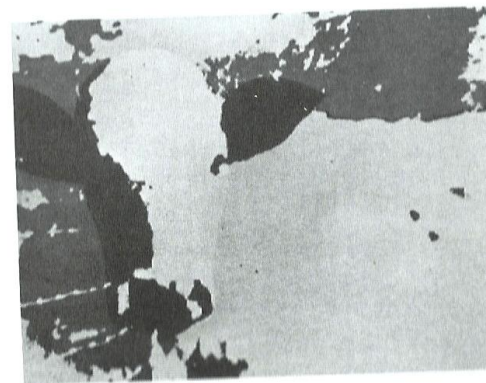
Both are possible. This illusion was first published in Puck in 1915 and it was entitled “*My Wife and my Mother-in-law*”.

These visual perceptive exercises were a favourite brain tickler at Harvard Business School for years.

Can you see the Dalmatian?



Can you see the cow?



Can you experiment with how you end up structuring the image of an animal, almost voluntarily in this case?

Perception lies at the roots of knowledge but knowledge often helps not only to “adjust” perception but even to per-

ceive. Perception, knowledge and memory are closely interrelated. Their inter-relatedness is more difficult to reveal at the non-conscious or automatic levels. But we should be able to explain one day how we can perceive, store and process information without really being aware of what we are doing.



## CHAPTER

# 7

### Simultaneity of Operations

*Of the multiplicity of elements and processes being handled simultaneously as revealed by an analysis of the example "now I understand the amendment ..."*

The following example will show how the interpreter handles the two axes at the same time while he elaborates a hypothesis about the objectives of the speaker and perceives and communicates the implied contents. Our purpose is to underscore the *simultaneity* of these operations, which overlap in time those of translation and delivery of the speech. The task of description is complex in itself, since the spoken word is, by definition, fleeting and the processes of perception, reasoning and thought difficult to apprehend.

The situation is as follows:

During the meeting of the International Standardization of Statistics (UNESCO, Paris, June 1978) the Chairman of the meeting announced a new amendment to be considered by the delegates. It was a proposal submitted by the United States calling for a change in the placing of article 2.g.4. referring to the "translation and publication of books and periodicals". The delegate from the Soviet Union asked his American colleague for an explanation: "What did he mean when he referred to the publication of books?" The Secretary of the meeting explained that there had been a change in the amendment which now mentioned "translation and **publication**" whereas the original document referred to "translation and **production**". In his view it was merely a problem of terminology, but this did not detract from the fact that the two texts differed.

The American delegate took the floor to state:

**Speaker's words**

Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to thank the delegate from the Soviet Union for pointing this out and apologize to the Secretariat and to the other members. This was my mistake ... I meant to duplicate the words exactly ... but ... eh ... in my haste I fear I picked up the wrong word. My intention was to ... eh ... move the ... eh paragraph on translation and production ... eh ... of S and T books and periodicals exactly as it is written to the section dealing with Science Information.

**Interpreter's words**

Muchas gracias, Sr. Presidente. Me gustaría agradecerle al delegado de la Unión Soviética por haber hecho esta observación y pedir disculpas a la Secretaría y demás. Este fue un error de mi parte ... En mi apuro creo que inserté la palabra errónea. Mi intención era trasladar el párrafo sobre traducción y producción de libros de la misma manera, exactamente como aparece escrito, a la sección que se refiere a las ciencias.

Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to thank the delegate from the Soviet Union for pointing this out and apologize to the Secretariat and others. This was my mistake ... In my haste I think I used the wrong word. My intention was to move the paragraph on translation and production of books, exactly as it is written, to the section dealing with Sciences ...

At this point, the Chairman of the meeting takes the floor again:

As I understand the amendment then that is on the floor it is essentially to use the identical text which was under 2.g.4 but to move it to an earlier part of the text in there ...

Entonces entiendo que la enmienda que estamos discutiendo es simplemente usar el texto idéntico – el mismo texto – que aparece en 2.g.4. "Traducción y edición de libros y Publicaciones", pero pasarlo a otra parte del texto.

So then I understand that the amendment we are discussing simply consists in using the identical text – the same text – which was under 2.g.4. "Translation and production of books and periodicals" but to move it to another part of the text.

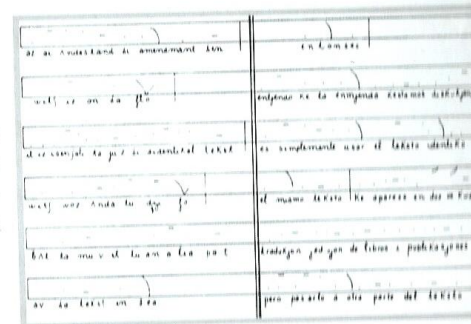
A lag should have appeared in the transcript to reflect the brief lag in time between both speeches and remind the readers that when the interpreter says something he must at the same time listen to something else.

Let us analyse the example. We see, first of all, that the interpreter begins to speak only after the speaker has uttered five words, only after hearing the adverb *then* and it is precisely with the Spanish word *entonces* that he begins his delivery. This adverb of little content is used here as a link to understand what came before and will come after. We could paraphrase it by *this being so, in that case or after what we have just heard*, for what the chairman of the meeting is saying is that after having listened to the previous comments, like those mentioned by the author of the amendment, his understanding of it has changed and he would like to share his new interpretation with us. The implicit content of *then* underscores the contrast between the old and the new understanding of the amendment.

We are thus able to see that there are discrepancies between the speaker's words and the interpreter's delivery. They are underlined in the examples. There are elements in the interpreter's delivery, which are not found in the speaker's words. There is also a semantic element in *earlier* – the concept of previousness – which disappears when translated as *en otra parte*.

then

in another part



A prosodic analysis and analysis of intonation curves – using Lilia Armstrong and Ida Ward's IPA System – shows:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With acknowledgements to Adriana Boffi de Caneva for making the transcript available to us.

the same text

The analysis of the intonation curves shows that the interpreter not only underscores *identical text* as does the speaker (manifested in the transcript by the highfall accent on *identical*) but also repeats the idea in other words and with an even more marked intonation curve in *el mismo texto*. The interpreter knows that an extended discussion has taken place because of an inadvertent mistake made by the author of the amendment. He also knows, since he has been present at the conference since its opening, seven days before, that the chairman wants to be clear and concise in order to save time. And the interpreter *knows* it not only because the chairman said so a number of times but also because he acted accordingly: setting schedules which he was the first to adhere to and chairing the meeting in an active and vital manner. The interpreter thus knows that the chairman wants to make it clear to all the delegates who are going to vote on the amendment that he is not proposing any change in the text. The repetition of the same idea and the tone of voice seem to be indicating: "Beware! No change is contemplated here as we believed at first." We once again find here the implicit dimension of speech and the hypotheses about the speaker's intent.

As from Jones, Kingdom and O'Connor onwards (and studies conducted firstly in English) we know that the tone of voice, the intonation, is a carrier of meaning. Stanislavski<sup>2</sup> even said:

"The accent is like a pointed finger. It stresses what is essential in a phrase. For it is in the word thus underlined that we shall find the soul, the intimate essence, the highest point in the sub-text".

<sup>2</sup> Constantin Stanislavski, *La construcción del personaje*. Madrid, Alianza, 1975. Page 177. (Building a Character. Theatre Arts Books, Reprint edition, June 1989).

If in the framework of the situation described above, the interpreter had accentuated the number of the inset, 2.g.4, for example, or emphasized that it was a matter of transferring the text to an earlier part of the document, he would have lost focus and misled his listeners. Had he emphasized *inset 2.g.4*, he would have created a mistaken cross-reference, for every term that is emphasized requires, at the very least, a second term of comparison. In the situation described there is no such opposition. To signal non-existing oppositions in the speech is tantamount to putting out false clues for establishing relationships and recreating meaning. "A misplaced accent malforms a word or mutilates a sentence ..."<sup>3</sup>

It took the speaker 17 seconds and 36 words to say what he wanted to say. It took the interpreter 16 seconds and 35 words to hear, understand, translate and make his delivery, communicating the implied contents, and drawing up at the same time a hypothesis on the intentions of the speaker. His many simultaneous tasks did not end there. During that same brief period the interpreter was also able to "read" the title of the amendment: "Translation and publishing of books and periodicals" and include it in his delivery without losing the thread of the statement. He strayed from what the speaker said in order to complete the information. This addition shows the functioning of the *synchronic axis* overlapping the functioning of the *diachronic axis* within a time span of 16 seconds. This addition reveals the simultaneous functioning of the two axes.

Did the interpreter not hear well? Or did he not understand? Or was it his purpose to stress even more the idea of

<sup>3</sup> In this fashion, a report on the proceedings of a meeting can alter the description of what happened without any omissions or inaccuracies; the change in emphasis, the insistence on a specific idea rather than another can bring about deep alterations of meaning. It is sometimes amusing to compare different versions of the same conference in the media. The comparison of headlines of local and national newspapers on the days following the Mar del Plata Summit (November 2005) provides good examples of this.

*the same text* as opposed to *another part*? It does not matter. When listening again to the recording we realize that 18 seconds before the American delegate had indicated the place where the new text should go: *the section dealing with science information*. Be that as it may, whether he heard correctly or decided not to include this concept, the interpreter *knew* that this information was not necessarily relevant since it had recently been made explicit somewhere else. The diachronic axis is in action; the memory of the earlier parts of the speech comes to the rescue of the interpreter and lets him: 1) interpret a new fragment and 2) decide what elements to keep and which to eliminate.

It is precisely in these "spots" of the speech where the interpreter underlines, adds, eliminates or transforms, where we can see most clearly that he is taking responsibility for his version and becomes the true enunciator in this twofold act of enunciation. This is where the contract between speaker and interpreter is sealed, a contract we have called "of complicity", wherein the interpreter commits himself to adopt the point of view of whoever has the floor.

This case has allowed us to underline the importance of stress and intonation, detect the number of elements which are handled in the same period of time and the juxtaposition of simultaneous activities.

It also allows us to see how the interpreter respects the *four cooperative principles*\* as spelled out by Grice<sup>4</sup> (and even how he modifies them depending on the speaker).

According to H. P. Grice, human conversation implies a cooperative effort: there normally is a purpose or set of purposes – or at least a mutually accepted direction – when we engage in conversation. Within a certain logic then, at each stage, some possible conversational moves should consequently be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. Grice's *general*

<sup>4</sup> H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation" in *Syntax and Semantics, Pragmatics*, edited by Peter Cole, London, Academic Press, 1975.

*principle of conversation* implies you should make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs. Four principles derive from that:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange. Do not say more than necessary.
2. Try to make your contribution one that is true:
  - a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
  - b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Be relevant
4. Be perspicacious:
  - a. avoid obscurity
  - b. avoid ambiguity
  - c. be brief
  - d. be orderly

Let us see what the interpreter does:

1. **Quantity.** The interpreter finds and adds the title of 2.g.4. "*Translation and Publishing...*"
2. **Quality.** Now that he knows that an error has slipped into the previous explanations and desirous to be truthful, he chooses to complete the information.
3. **Relevance.** He omits the concept of previousness in his translation of *earlier* for *otra* (another) since he knows it is not necessarily relevant.
4. **Clarity.** Committed to be clear he feels free to stray from the speaker's words. (Listeners and readers will decide if he was successful or not).

*not always the case*

Talking for Grice is a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational behaviour. We find this classification useful even if we know that not always do our daily exchanges meet this requirement. Not only emotions, feelings and confusion often complicate the logic of the exchange or the rationale. We are also aware of cases of intelligent conversation not really fitting into this frame, like the koans by Zen masters for example.



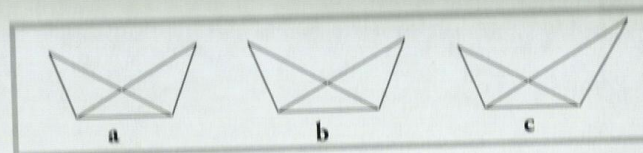
And then the wish to be clear is often not enough, nor is the addition of a personal note a guarantee of clarity of meaning, as we recall from the illustration taken from R. Ekvall<sup>5</sup> who witnessed the misunderstanding created by the interpreter during negotiations about North Korea under the chairmanship of Belgian statesman Paul Henri Spaak in 1954 (see page 52).

### The Concept of the Whole

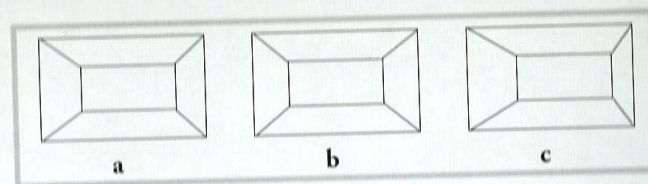
Working "in simultaneous" implies working with organized "wholes" (or structured units) and respecting the relations between the various elements which make them up.

The three following figures contain the same number and kind of elements. Changing one single relationship changes the perception of the whole.

<sup>5</sup> R. Ekvall, In *Faithful Echo*, New York, Twayne, 1960. Cited by P. Watzlawick in *La réalité de la réalité*, Paris, Seuil, 1978.



When a group of subjects are asked to copy figure "a", there are basically two reactions: some improve the symmetry (b) and the others exaggerate the asymmetry (c).<sup>6</sup>



"An ill placed accent can malform a word or mutilate a sentence" in Stanislavski's<sup>7</sup> words.

In this way, the minutes of a meeting can misrepresent what happened, even when nothing of what was said is omitted and nothing false is added; the displacement of emphasis, the prevalence of one idea over another, a minor change in whatever was implied can all produce deep semantic alterations. It is thus sometimes amusing to compare the versions of the same press conference as reported by newspapers of different tendencies.



<sup>6</sup> R. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, Buenos Aires, Eudeba, 1962. Page 47.

<sup>7</sup> In *La construcción del personaje*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1962. Page 177. (Building a Character, *Theatre Arts Books*, reprint edition 1989).

No interpreter, translator or bilingual person in his or her right mind would translate *entre nomás y tome una silla* by “between no more and drink a chair”. However, each of the French or English words corresponds to a possible translation of each Spanish word. Finding a logical connection between each word and the ones preceding and following it is the fundamental law of translation.

come in please  
and sit down

With no change whatsoever in sounds, the mere changing of accents will transform the meaning and offer a number of variations of *entrenomas!*:

Entré nomás	=	I came in.
en_tre no_mas		Je suis rentré sans plus.

Entre Nomás	=	Come in, Nomas.
_entre no_mas		Rentrez, Nomas.

En tre'* nomás	=	Only in three of them.
en_treh no_mas		Dans trois seulement.

*\*(Argentina and Uruguay vernacular (no /s/ sound at the end of some words).*

Entre nomás	=	Come in! or Come in, please!
_entre no_mas		Allez rentrez! o Rentrez s.v.p.

The fact that "entre no más" is followed by "tome una silla" eliminates the three first possibilities and makes the fourth option mandatory. It also conjures up the image of the speaker in his office in some Latin American country (but not in Spain because of the use of "nomás") at the moment when he is, for instance, welcoming a customer.

Even if:

Entre	=	between; among parmi, entre
no	=	no non
más	=	more, most, etc. plus, etc.

Entre nomás y tome una silla. ≠ Between no more and drink a chair.  
Parmi non plus et buvez una chaise.

But rather

Entre nomás y tome una silla. = Come in please and sit down.  
Rentrez s.v.p et asseyez vous.

A thorough knowledge of English and Spanish and of certain mechanisms of translation have led Basil Thompson to develop this kind of linguistic humour and share it with his numerous readers in the "Buenos Aires Herald". The aforementioned quote is one of his examples.

After an initial surprise due to the non-sense of the sentence there comes, for bilinguals, a zigzagging movement from English into Spanish and back to English; it is the itinerary

covering the distance between the false English version and the correct one, indispensable for understanding the joke, that makes its functioning transparent and produces hilarity.

This example allows us to make explicit *the fundamental law of translation* and an important *strategy* of the interpreter: relate the matter to be translated to what precedes and to what follows it; relate the part to the whole; relate what is heard or read to what is already known, and what is heard to what is seen or felt.

Let us take a look at the other strategies used by interpreters.

The examples given, carrying divergent signals (*nonetheless*) show that one frequently used strategy is *silence*: if you do not understand something, you had better remain silent and wait.

When translating "time sharing" as *programas* (see page 108), the interpreter brings to light another strategy: when speed, difficulties in content or terminology create problems or when incoherence and fatigue are great because of the information overload, she will go from specifics to generalities. In such cases, if possible, she can seek protection in the use of a *deictic*\* rather than repeat long terms difficult to articulate.

Thus, in a Colloquium on Adipositis (held in Montecarlo in March of 1982), when the speaker, mentioning thyroid hormones said: "la différence entre les effets de la tiroxine (t4) et de la triiodotironine (t3) est que la triiodotironine (t3) ...", the interpreter simplified by saying:

fundamental law

strategies:  
1) silence

programs  
2) from specific to generalities  
3) deictic

The difference between the effects of thyroxine (t4) and triiodothyronine (t3) is that triiodothyronine (t3) ...

**Speaker's words**

La différence entre les effets de la tiroxine (t4) et de la triiodotironine (t3) est que la triiodotironine (t3) produit ...

**Interpreter's words**

La diferencia entre los efectos de la tiroxina (t4) y de la triiodotironina (t3) es que (esta) produce ...

The difference between the effects of thyroxine (t4) and triiodothyronine (t3) is that (this one) produces ...

Indirect to direct act

"This", "this last one" or even "t3" were enough in this case for an unambiguous reference to trilodothyronine.

Another strategy for gaining time is the transformation of an indirect act into a direct one, as in the example (see page 128) where the interpreter transforms an indirect request into a plain and simple question thus saving time enabling him to include "for this does not appear in the proposed amendment".

Speaker's words	Interpreter's words	
I want to confirm that <u>this is a deliberate omission and not ...</u> ... just hadn't been overlooked in this pre-arrangement.	... ¿Esto es una omisión involuntaria? ... porque esto no aparece en la enmienda propuesta ... o es simplemente, se debe a cuestiones de ordenamiento.	... Is this a deliberate omission? ... ... because this does not appear in the proposed amendment... or is it simply a question of pre-arrangement ...

Let us now consider those cases where there undoubtedly was an interpretation error. The example on page 131 shows how the Portuguese interpreter, when not understanding *à plein temps* ended up saying *lorsque l'ordinateur fonctionne au printemps*. He used the relationship strategy only at a superficial level. Had he gone into a deeper level, he would have rejected "*au printemps*". One could argue that if he had not heard "*à plein temps*" and if he had rejected *au printemps*, what else could he have said? Knowing that probably he could clear up the information subsequently, thanks to the possible repetition of the concept; thanks to his own capacity for retroactive inference, or to the assistance of his colleague in the booth, he could – and should – have used the *generalisation strategy* and say, for instance: "when computers function in these conditions" or "when computers are in operation."

full time  
when computers work in springtime.  
In springtime

retroactive inference & generalization

In the example on page 114 the interpreter makes a mistake because he has already said too much and cannot remain silent ("lithium is not as abundant as ...") and not being able to detect the ambiguity (Is lithium more or less abundant than uranium?), he must somehow complete the comparison – and the sentence – in one way or another. Since he has already said "lithium is not as abundant ...", the interpreter covers up the "hitch". He could correct himself later on if necessary.

Any speaker can make mistakes or talk nonsense. He can hesitate, mutter, restart, interrupt himself or leave some sentences unfinished. So can the interpreter. But there are some types of mistakes that a speaker normally does not make and which the interpreter must consequently avoid. We would have serious doubts about our speaker's clarity of mind if he repeatedly interrupted his sentences before the completion of the expression of an idea or of a certain unit of meaning, for instance:

"Having reached this point of ... I believe that ...",  
 "... The entrance is next to ...",  
 "... What matters most is the ..."

In these cases, the final blanks would leave interlocutors amazed.

*Formal pulchritude* in the use of the language must be added to the *strategy of silence*. When the interpreter does not understand something he prefers to remain silent and sin by omission; in this way he can skip a whole phrase, a subordinate phrase, some qualifiers or some elements inside a listing. When he has said too much and cannot remain silent he will prefer, in any case, to give the sentence a good ending, at least from the syntactic point of view. He will leave no

corr

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sentence half finished. In other words, it is not a question of just skipping something. It is a question of knowing exactly what can be omitted<sup>1</sup>. And in any event the interpreter keeps in his hands the thread of the *diachronic axis* which will let him complete the information *a posteriori*.

There is another characteristic of interpreters that greatly helps them at work.

I consider it so important that I have, in fact, taken it so far for granted: their versatility, flexibility or capacity to adapt to the most unexpected turns, both structurally and semantically. Suppose the interpreter, anticipating the speaker, has already said something – she has used for example a feminine article in Spanish only to perceive an instant later that she should have used the masculine one. While beginners would most probably go back and self-correct themselves, professionals take the challenge to go on, looking for synonyms or turn around expressions (for ex.: “*la ... razón; el ... motivo*”). If a word stays in the tip of their tongue, or if simply they had never heard it before, interpreters will often find a way out – sometimes through colourful images or metaphors. “Hand shoes” was for example Mansilla’s spontaneous explanation of the meaning of “gloves” to some Ranqueles indians who had never been acquainted with the object or the concept before. Adaptation and creativity should also be added to their strategies’ list.

Our last example will be another joke taken from an actual conference. During a seminar on Business Management held in Wiesbaden in 1983 a German speaker ended his presentation with a joke. What does the interpreter do? With the greatest of ease, instead of translating the joke, he drops the first person singular – typical of simultaneous work – and says with seductive complicity to his listeners: “The German speaker is telling a joke ... Please laugh now to make him happy. I’ll tell it to you later.” The participants, surprised

by this change in enunciation began to laugh. A complicity was thus created between the audience and the interpreter (everybody knows how difficult it can be to translate certain jokes or puns) and if everybody in the room laughed at the same time, each half did so for different reasons; the German auditors laughed at the speaker’s joke, the English-speaking participants because the former simply did not know that the latter were laughing at something else.

This joke is exactly at the opposite end of the one at the beginning of this chapter. In the example “between no more and drink a chair” the imaginary bilingual gets stuck at every individually translated word without being able to even construct a meaningful sentence in English. In the last case, however, the interpreter – taking all liberties – interrupts the speech, changes the enunciation, does not repeat what the speaker is saying but does however manage to get the same result: his public breaks out laughing. This is proof of how, by recreating and not reproducing an *illocutionary\* act*, it is possible to obtain an equivalent *perlocutionary\* act*.

A fleeting “view of the whole” – situation, context, tone – the quick evaluation of the speaker’s objectives and the conviction that the joke, if told in another language, would fall flat, led the interpreter to stray totally from the speaker’s words. His strategy was to relate not only one word with those coming before and after but the joke as a whole with the context, situation, objective and means within his reach even before the speaker had finished telling it. His objective, amply attained, was to produce an equivalent effect in the audience by different means.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 15, “Tying Up Loose Ends”, page 245.

## Strategies in Conversation

A quick look at our daily conversations or the analysis of television or radio interviews will show that the strategies used by the interpreter are the same we use in our daily talk.

It sometimes happens that we understand something different from what has been said – something bizarre or funny, ridiculous or irrelevant. On the whole, we remain silent and wait. The continuation of the dialogue sheds light on the matter and we come to grasp both the original meaning and the sound-based reasons for the incident. But we seldom confess to this. When we realize what has happened and can own up to it without losing face it is already too late. To do so would interrupt the flow of conversation. Often, also, we hide our ignorance or embarrassment behind a curtain of silence.

To this day Grice's principles of conversation are the best description I know of what happens when we indulge in conversation, where not only roles, functions and power can be at stake but also strategies and tactics to consolidate, change or overturn them.

What can we do, for example, when we are asked in public a question we do not want to give an answer to?

Faced with questions we would rather not answer, we can divert other people's attention by referring to analogous or similar subjects to those proposed. We can also cover up the clues with contradictory information so as to send our listener directly back to Square One.



Faced with questions for which we have no answer, we also tend to react through association or connection: "I don't know much about that but I can, however, tell you something regarding this other subject ...". We often go from specifics to generalities: "I can't remember the year exactly but it must have been towards the end of the war".



Other possibilities are also at hand: we could, in either case, directly reply: "I don't want to tell you" or "I do not know" which could be considered a spontaneous manifestation of utter sincerity or a well pondered choice after a quick assessment of the available options. Any of these replies closes the exchange: after such manifestations it is necessary indeed to start anew.



But it is equally possible to relocate the issue in another context through a comment or a question on the type of exchange: "Are you asking me that out of courtesy?" or "Why do you insist on cornering me like this?" We shift from one level to another to communicate on how to communicate.



When our interlocutors bring in ideas that are troublesome for us or double meanings through the use of subordinate clauses or when we are involved in a situation just by being mentioned in passing, it is better to clear matters up to avoid feeling trapped. This is not always easy. The flow of communication must be stopped and the ball sent back using, if possible, also a subordinate clause. I recall, for instance, an ex-

change at lunch time between a rising socialist French minister and a French businessman where the topic was politics and commerce: the minister gave a long explanation in the middle of which he verbalized the assumption that the businessman had never visited one of the unpretentious neighbourhoods in the East of Paris. Surprisingly, the businessman happened to live in that area, a fact which facilitated his chance to get back to the fleeting comment and at the same time help break the minister's stereotype.

Defense strategies in conversation are therefore basically the same as those used when interpreting: relate or associate; delay response or remain silent; go from specifics to generalities or go up the abstraction ladder; react to hidden meanings, or at least uncover them. As for an offensive strategy, it will mainly depend on the objective pursued when asking the questions.

