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SIM-CONS AS A NEW WAY OF INTERPRETING AND DIDACTIC MEANS

The paper focuses on the use of a new hybrid form of consecutive interpreting that uses modern communication technologies in order to facilitate the work of an interpreter. The article also deals with the issues and considerations of communication situations, in which the sim-cons technique could be used and who can take the most advantage of it.

В статията е представена нова хибридна форма за консекутивен превод, при която се използват съвременните комуникационни технологии, чрез които се улеснява работата на преводача. Разгледани са критериите за комуникативните ситуации, при които е препоръчително прилагането на техниката sim-cons, както и кои от участниците са облагодетелствани от нея.

Keywords: *sim-cons interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, didactics of interpreting, interpreting technologies, short-term memory*

New challenges and opportunities for Interpreters

Language service providers in the era of a new or second phase of digital revolution face new challenges that have brought a wide range of opportunities for using different kinds of technologies. The use cases are really unlimited and that is why largely penetrate into other sectors of national management, such as economics and marketing, banking, finance, media, or language services. The sector of translation services is experiencing

an annual increase just due to the expansion of translation tools for computer-aided translation, machine translation, online terminology databases, or the emergence of new areas such as, for example, localization, or audio-visual translation with the use of human speech transcription system. For the moment, it is clear that the fears of replacing people with machine-tools in translation have no justification, as the demand for translation-language services has been increasing hand in hand with the introduction of machine or computer-aided translation, paradoxically, also in smaller countries, such as Slovakia, since translation is a global phenomenon going beyond physical or mental boundaries. In other words, translation sector itself proves that technologies still cannot replace human beings.

Interpreters themselves face similar challenges, even though their work is very much different from the work of translators. Also, interpreters are exposed to stressful working conditions and a high workload, which is mainly related to strict time management and planning. It is equally important not only for translators, but also for interpreters to know how to process a huge amount of information, to be able to sort, store and use them accordingly. The everyday reality at work of an interpreter shows that nowadays it is not sufficient to have only high level of language knowledge and the interpreting skills, but also to have the ability to manage the marketing issues, to have the knowledge of law, the knowledge on ethics and data protection, the necessary skills of how to use and work with communication and information technologies. The professional interpreter should have a great deal of reference resources and tools in the form of various mobile applications or glossary software. Most of them need to be purchased, but there are also so-called „freeware versions“ to download. Due to their fluctuation in design, mark and prices we are not going with the application tools in more details.

Standard techniques in Interpreting

The very basic interpreting techniques that each conference interpreter should master include consecutive and simultaneous

interpreting. In the paper only these two techniques have been mentioned, since we want to introduce their use in the new hybrid form in the next section.

Consecutive interpreting is the oldest form of interpreting in which the process of interpreting starts only after a particular segment has been perceived and processed by the interpreter, whereas the interpreter relies on the short term memory and interpreting as an external form of memory. Because of the double presentation of the oral communication, consecutive interpreting is more time consuming. On the other hand, simultaneous interpreting is more economical in terms of time, but more demanding. It is the quasi-simultaneous, parallel and real-time interpretation of the speech. This type of interpretation is used to be practised in the booths and tends to be less demanding from the point of view of short-term memory load. However, it is not possible to claim which interpreting technique is of more importance for the interpreter in terms of use cases. That is in spite of the fact that simultaneous interpreting is frequently used in conference interpreting for both economic and practical reasons. However, consecutive interpreting still cannot be replaced in specific communication events, e.g. in court interpreting, or in interviews where there is not any interpreting technique (booths), or negotiation and protocol meetings where they use the so called „high“ consecutive interpreting (interpreting of speeches in duration of several minutes). In addition, consecutive interpreting is an irreplaceable technique in the teaching and preparing the would-be interpreters where, comparing to simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting has a wider scope for use thanks to textual segments, which the student can further analyze, process and then reflect in their interpreting assignments.

Sim-cons Interpreting technique

Many practicing interpreters are trained for both techniques – consecutive as well as simultaneous interpreting. However, in practice, it is often the case that simultaneous interpretation

is used (even for the reasons outlined above) much more often. However, both interpreters require regular training and practice. Otherwise, the interpreter may lose flexibility and fluency in the process of interpreting. In particular, “high consecutive”, stands for interpreting of segments in several minutes. This type of interpreting is not used so often, which results in lesser contact with the required skills, since the interpreter can improve and maintain the level of his/her skills only through regular practicing. Therefore, it came from purely practical motivations, away from any academic intention to using the new, hybrid “sim-cons” technology, the concept which was proposed more than 10 years ago by a former interpreter for the EU Commission, Michele Ferrari. His reasons for using sim-cons instead of classical consistency were formulated as follows:

I have always felt a sense of dissatisfaction in performing a consecutive, as if it was a constant struggle against impossible odds. Indeed, I firmly believe it is impossible to do a perfect consecutive, when faced with a difficult, dense and fast speech. Even in the best consecutive of this world, there is always a little something missing. [...] This [consecutive interpreting] entails a lack of rigor, which has always troubled me ever since my first consecutive, and which led me to find a better solution, to fully respect the speaker's original speech, in all its aspects. (Gomes, 2002, p.5).

As already mentioned, the sim-cons interpretation technique has not been fully established in the curriculum for teaching interpreting, and therefore there are various opinions that have encouraged some academics to carry out partial research concerning the quality examination of the interpreting technique sim-cons. This issue was elaborated by Franz Pöchhacker from the Institute of Translatology of the University of Vienna. Several Master theses on sim-cons interpreting technique have been written (e.g. Hamidi 2006, Hiebl 2011, etc.). Nor is there a fixed term for the sim-cons technique, which appeared in some academic works under the following names:

„Digitally remastered consecutive” and “Technology assisted consecutive” (Ferrari, 2002),

“DRAC – Digital recorder assisted consecutive” (Lombardi, 2003),

“Digital voice recorder assisted CI” (Camayd-Frexas, 2005),

“SimConsec” (Hamidi, Pöchhacker (2007)

Due to the lack of sufficient research data the sim-cons technique is used on experimental basis, rather than on real theoretical background based on specific languages. This approach might focus the attention of training institutions to introduce the technique in the learning curricula. On the other hand, using technology in interpreting “puts additional pressure on the coordination effort” (Moser-Mercer 2015).

How does Sim-cons work?

The Sim-cons is primarily a technique for experienced interpreters who have gained experience in simultaneous interpreting and who do not have enough practice in consecutive interpreting, which is the reason why they need to keep practicing. It should be noted, however, that the sim-cons technique may not be the right choice for every interpreter because the simultaneous interpreting method, in which the speech is carried out quasi simultaneously, does not take place longer in the booth, but directly in front of the recipients. This fact might cause more stress for interpreters and might affect the quality of interpreting performance. The whole process takes place in the following way: While listening to the source speech the interpreter records a speaker on a recording device (e.g. a PDA-Dictaphone, a smartphone, etc.) instead of using the interpreting notes and, after presenting the speech, releases the recording through the headphones that simultaneously translate the contents of the recording into the target language. However, the quality depends on many external variables, such as, the acoustics and the size of the room, speaker and speaker proximity, speed of the delivery (“slow down”) and the source language (A-language or B-language of the interpreter). This interpretation technique could be used for some communication events where the interpreter has been given a permission to record a speaker’s

speech instead of note taking, since it may often be the case of sensitive and confidential information that the presenter does not wish to record on the audio, to protect the information and prevent from disclosing the interpreted content to third parties.

The Sim-cons is carried out in the following order:

1. Consecutive (for recipients): active listening, content memorization, notation + recording = reproduction after segments
2. Simultaneous (for interpreters): Linking multiple activities:
 - a) Note taking and retention
 - b) Controlling the recording device (functions)

This concept is based on the well-known effort model by Daniel Gile, which has been developed and analyzed in various interpreting publications under the following structure:

Phase 1 Listening 1 and analysis 1

- *Short-term memory operations*
- *Note-taking*

Phase 2 Listening 2 and analysis 2

- a. *Short term memory operations*
- b. *Long term memory operations (reconstructing the speech)*
- c. *Note-reading/Retrieving information/Anticipation/Operating the pen*
- d. *Production*

The interpreter uses the following tools for sim-cons techniques:

- a. notebook, A3 block, which can be completely replaced by a recording device or a digital pen
- b. a pen – classic or digital
- c. the tablet is used for writing using a digital pen or for a connection to iPad, iPhone, or a tablet
- c. a digital pen with specially modified digital paper with point structure
- d. a recording device, such as different types of recording devices (PDAs), which can greatly contribute to the translucency of more dynamic conversations
- e. small headphones, which should be inserted into the ear

Why using the cons-sim technique?

Even before using the sim-cons technique, it is necessary to get familiar with this technique in an instrumental manner and to get information about its potential risks and circumstances that may disrupt the whole process of interpreting. The interpreter, though, should take into consideration of whether it is necessary to use this technique, if it helps the interpreter or not. Prior to the interpreting, it is advisable to find out

- a. the content of **what** will be interpreted,
- b. the form of **how** it will be interpreted and
- c. the recipient – for **whom**, or for what number of people the interpreting will be carried out.

It is also important to see a difference in the quality of this technique, based on the direction of interpreting, from A-language, or from B-language. The potential impacts on the outcome could have the length of speeches, the acoustics in the room, the size of the room, etc.

Therefore, the sim-cons technique is appropriate to use mainly for:

- simultaneous interpreters with more years of practice, because they have the experience and also the necessary skills required here,
- experienced interpreters who have acquired the techniques of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting,
- interpreters from the A-language, since via several tests it has been proved that it is easier to process the discourse from the mother tongue more easily,
- interpreting of longer parts, segments that the interpreters do not need to remember and make notes
- for training of interpreters, whose teachers and students take the most advantage from because of the use of both techniques, as well as multimedia in a close connection with electronic glossaries which enable an audio feedback for the teacher.

Speaking on pros and cons seems to be difficult here because there are as many risks as benefits, even due to the fact that there is a real lack of long term research of the concept of sim-cons mentioned above.

The benefits of using sim-cons could be seen as follows:

- Interpreting longer segments, and particularly fast speech delivery with an option to use the slow down function on the device, in order to render the message in an interpretable form
- Memory support, which means that exhaustive and time consuming note taking system is no longer necessary.
- Notation economy, which enables the interpreter to use a limited number of note taking symbols
- Further use of interactive glossaries, which can be connected to the digital „smart“ pen
- Automating the activity and training of both interpreting techniques

On the other hand, the hazards seem to emerge in

- Simultaneous handling of more tools, which is technically demanding, since previously, the interpreter was taught to concentrate on the spoken word and notes.
- Room acoustics and possible technical failure can happen any time and the interpreter should be prepared to solve any inconvenience
- Simultaneous interpreting stress that takes place outside the interpreting booth means that interpreter interprets in front of a larger audience and not in the booth, which is a fact that many interpreters tend to forget
- Confidentiality issue due to a number of communication events which do not allow to make recordings due to confidentiality issues and the interpreter should get the consent of the speaker or an organizer to record the speech (speeches).

Practical use of reproduced interpretation using communication technologies

The sim-cons technique could also be called the technique of reproduced interpretation, in which we include the following two forms:

1. PDA Device Simultaneous-Consecutive Interpretation – the speech is interpreted simultaneously on the recording device through which the original source speech is „almost“ simultaneously (the second hearing of the original) interpreted into the target speech. The advantage is that, without using the classical note taking the interpreter can concentrate on the content of the conversation. It could be used via smartphone or a recording device.

2. The smart (digital) pen that reproduces any sound of the meaningful unit that should be written down. When you click on the entry, a specific part of the speaker statement is played back. It is also recommended to connect the headphones, too. The following questions are essential from the point of view of the effectiveness of using sim-cons techniques that need to be verified through further partial tests:

1. Where should the interpreter be located during the interpretation of sim-cons?

a. How to adjust the volume, sound quality and the speed of speech?

2. From which language is the interpreting suited better?

a. Which language (A-language or B-language) is better suited for interpreting by sim-cons?

3. What type of interpretation in a consecutive form is more appropriate and what should be trained: reproduced simultaneous interpretation using a PDA device or using a digital pen?

4. Can I avoid the omissions or deformation of the ideas of the initial communication using the sim-cons technique?

a. The ability to prepare and organize interpreting devices when the interpreter is just under pressure.

b. Automation of device control and its functions are an essential part of preparation (e.g. battery charging).

Sim-cons with smart pen

The technique of contextual interpretation without digital notation is completely new and does not necessarily need to be used only in interpreting. This is the new digital pen with a small earpiece attached to it and through which we receive audio input by tapping a word, phrase, or sentence that we have written in real time with a digital pen. Everything seems to be simple until we address the issue of the effectiveness of this new technique, that is, if the interpretation of the pen does indeed produce better results than the traditional consecutive interpreting with Marc Orlando's record at Monash University, a study in which a small sample of four professional interpreters (French-English) tested and compared interpretive interpreting and digital pen translation techniques. The results of this study are manifested clearly in favor of interpretation with a digital pen. Individual aspects such as accuracy, eye contact, hearing, and so on have been tested. The results are summarized as follows (Orlando, 2014):

Accuracy: 80% vs 60%

Eye contact: 60% vs 40%

Hesitations: 50% vs. 30%

Performance: better in consecutive interpreting

„Slow down“ function has been used

Overall satisfaction with cons-sim technology: 100%

The further trials have been made by a practicing interpreter and instructor Ester Navarro-Hall (2013) who focused on smart pen features with consequences of economical note-taking.

A future outlook and recommendations

All the information above have their restrictions and they can be valid only when the interpreter is fully aware of their potential hazards and if he or she is able to distinguish the possible from the impossible assignment. Thus, ten principles are advised to follow:

1. It is advisable to always begin with consecutive interpreting.
2. Technical devices do not make sense if we are not able to manage them perfectly and if we do not use them regularly.
3. Good performance goes hand in hand with an appropriate training.
4. Sim-cons stands for an option, it is not an obligation!
5. Good organization, planning and technical preparation are essential!
6. Technical specifications of the device needs to be checked before the interpreting starts.
7. The Interpreter should get as much information as possible on the subject of the interpretation
8. The interpreter should an insurance in case of unpredictable events
9. It is advisable to stay in touch with the speaker before the event, since the more information an intepreter has, the better he or she can perform the interpreting task
10. Information and communication technologies do not result in a miracle. When not informed and trained about how to use them, the interpretation outcome may turn out to be unprofessional and inefficient.

Conclusion

Consecutive interpreting is a technique that is still used in spite of the considerable need for simultaneous interpreting. Not only in the field of translation, but also in the field of interpreting, several methods are being introduced to facilitate and speed up the work with communication and information technologies. It is the sim-con technology that is available to professional interpreters as one of the options where interpreters using simultaneous interpreting more than consecutive interpreting can, if necessary, carry out their interpretations through sim-cons techniques. Here, however, it is important to point out that without the adequate preparation and understanding of the communication context and the technical tools being used, this technique will not necessarily

be very helpful, as it might appear at the first sight. There is still a need to carry out a number of partial studies on different groups of interpreters and languages, where further findings could be further developed. Especially, the practicing interpreters do not seem to be very suitable target group for testing. However, the example of Marc Orlando study positively demonstrates the use of using digital interpreting techniques, it would be appropriate to test this technique for beginners or younger generation of novice interpreters that belong to the new „digital generation“ that have actively been using digital media for several years. This is why, if that is the case, the interpreting will be regarded as a highly professional activity that tells us again that a good interpreter is like wine: He/she becomes mature after years of experience.

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