

## **RHETORIC AND CONFERENCE INTERPRETING TEACHING**

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У статті розглянуто вимоги, що висуваються до усного перекладача-професіонала, коротко викладені деякі історичні моменти розвитку риторики та її застосування в навчанні усних перекладачів. Наведено декілька практичних вправ, які слугують “сходінками” до досягнення перекладацького професіоналізму.

Ключові слова: риторика, усний перекладач, професійна поведінка, фонетика, граматики, лексика.

В статье рассматриваются требования, предъявляемые к устному переводчику-профессионалу, кратко излагается история риторики в её применении к обучению усных переводчиков. Приводится несколько практических упражнений, служащих “ступенями” к достижению переводческого мастерства.

Ключевые слова: риторика, устный переводчик, профессиональное поведение, фонетика, грамматика, лексика.

The article describes the demand for and requirements to professionally trained conference interpreters, and offers some insight to the ancient art of rhetoric and its contribution to interpreters’ training. Several practical exercises are included to demonstrate “steps-to-proficiency” in training interpreters.

Key words: rhetoric, (conference) interpreter, professional behavior, phonetics, grammar, lexicology.

In today’s market, the demand for conference interpreters, who are expected to interpret from at least two foreign languages (B and C) in their native language (A), is rather small, and few graduates can expect to find jobs in international organizations such as the UN, IMF, WTO, EBRD, etc. which require professional conference interpretation services. Needless to say, the demand for the more glamorous positions of personal interpreters for state leaders, etc. is virtually non-existent, even though most of Conference Interpretation (CI) incoming students are initially attracted to interpretation as a profession by the image of interpreters, standing at the “shoulder of history”.

On the other hand, the demand is great for professionally trained interpreters who can perform the more routine, but no less demanding services of interpretation at international conferences and seminars, business meetings, on-site events, accompany delegations and individuals on their business visits abroad, etc. They are expected to be proficient in at least two foreign languages and interpret with equal ease and grace from A into B and from B into A.

But more recently there emerged a new species, a new kind of orator: the professional freelance conference interpreter who does not owe his/her allegiance to any party, and reminds one of the Sophists of Ancient Greece who were ready to argue any side of the issue in search of the truth. This interpreter is a “mercenary” at the service of anyone who would pay his/her fees. But isn’t it true of all professionals? Professionals do not identify with the people they work for. They are just doing their job.

It is just the same with professional freelance conference interpreters. They are there to provide a valuable service to society. They are there to serve people who want to get at the truth. They are the trained professions, with their own code of conduct. They guarantee complete confidentiality. This attitude to the profession helps put things in proper perspective. If diplomatic interpreters tend to have slightly inflated egos, deriving their prestige from the proximity of their patrons, freelance conference interpreters know exactly what they are. They are professionals who are numerous and therefore not irreplaceable, and they compete with each other which ultimately only helps to raise the standards in their profession.

Bidirectional consecutive and especially simultaneous interpretation reveal the problems and drawbacks of foreign language training for the professional interpreter training. To a considerable extent these problems relate to rhetoric as the art of public speaking, which dates back to antiquity.

According to the Greek philosopher Plato, the art of rhetoric emerged in Syracuse in the 5th century BC. Exiles returning to Syracuse in the wake of the civil war entered into litigation for the restitution of their lands from which they had been dispossessed by the despotic government, and since there were no written records to go by, claimants had to plead their cases themselves in the courts of law. It was at that time that certain teachers began to offer something like systematic instruction in rhetoric. Looked at from this point of view, rhetoric began as very much a practical art.

It was not until Aristotle that the art of rhetoric was placed on a firm scientific foundation. The great Greek philosopher did not fail to see the importance of language as an instrument of mind in its search for truth.

According to Aristotle, rhetoric falls into three divisions, determined by the three classes of listeners to speeches. Four of the three elements in speech-making are: the speaker, the subject, and the person addressed. And it is the last one, the hearer, who determines the speech's end and object. Aristotle clearly recognized that the ultimate goal of communication is to produce the desired effect on the listener, or the audience. Aristotle also recognized the importance of the orator's personal character: *"As to his own character; he should make his audience feel that he possesses prudence, virtue, and goodwill"* (5, 46).

Over the centuries the benign word "rhetoric" has accumulated much prejudice around itself, and such prejudice was often promoted by the authority of many distinguished persons. This attitude has been later legitimized by dictionaries, and still later led to rhetoric falling into an almost complete oblivion.

The great revival of rhetoric came in the first half of the 20th century, when the new mass information media based on modern technology created the need for a theory of mass communication. The new rhetoric began as a study of communication in a new situation when the press, the radio, and later the TV made it possible to reach vast audiences, and through skillful use of language affect, or even manipulate people in a desired way. It was only natural, therefore, that scholars turned back to rhetorical traditions for help.

Modern rhetoric tends to favor a rather down-to-earth approach. It relies more heavily on external realities, such as statistics, facts, data, etc., rather than mental interpretation; complicated structures have been abandoned in favor of simpler structures; and, more importantly, there has been a major change in style *"from the convention of the imperial dress to the convention of the business-suit"* (3, 113).

In contemporary rhetoric the text has emerged as the linchpin of effective communication. In the classical tradition (the works of Plato, Aristotle, and others) it featured very prominently as a major component of the rhetorical situation, but modern rhetoric has made an important step forward by formulating the need to study not only the text as such, but to make a two-fold distinction between its content, semantics, or argumentative structure, on the one hand, and its persuasive purpose, or communicative intention, on the other. This distinction is all-important. Modern rhetoric is far more than a collection of terms borrowed from classical rhetoricians. The perspective from which it views a text is different from that of other disciplines. History, philosophy, literary criticism, and social sciences are very apt to view a text as though it were some kind of a map of the author's mind on a particular subject. The rhetoricians, accustomed by their traditional discipline to look at communication from the communicator's point of view, regard the text as the embodiment of an intention, a design – not as a map. The text is regarded not as an artefact or a product, but as a process and, significantly, the result of an intention.

In conference interpretation it is the intention of the speaker that shapes the text, and it is figuring out the intention that the interpreter must be concerned about in the first place. Intention comes through in the choice of words (or diction, to use a term from rhetoric), idiom, sentence structure, etc. It can be thought of as a particular point of view on the world.

Another mark of modern rhetoric is its emphasis on effective communication. Unlike stylistics, which is concerned more with the philological analysis of the text as the product of an individual style of the author, rhetoric is concerned with the process rather than the product, and places a heavy emphasis on creation. What is particularly important in interpretation, which is speaker-generated but almost entirely audience-oriented, is that modern rhetoric shifts the focus to the audience, so that the audience with its expectations, social disposition, etc. emerges as its most important concern.

So, it looks like rhetoric can still serve a useful purpose. And if one talks about the business of training people to be effective speakers, and if one agrees that interpretation is a kind of oratory, then one can look to rhetoric to provide the tools to make interpretation more effective.

Contemporary rhetoric as the art of public speaking can be very helpful in formulating the language proficiency requirements expected of students of interpretation. Let us take a closer look at what rhetoric can contribute to those who wish to become professional interpreters.

While not offering any specific language teaching methodologies, the importance of rhetoric in interpreter language training can be shown in such traditional domains of language training as phonetics, lexicology, and grammar. But it is worthwhile to begin by saying a few words about something which is outside foreign language training proper, but has long been recognized as a legitimate concern of rhetoric.

Professional behavior. Interpretation is a mediating activity. While remaining a distinctly separate person with his or her own carefully cultivated professional image, any interpreter is very closely identified with the speaker he or she is interpreting for. This creates a symbiosis where the distinctions of sex, age, status, etc. are blurred, so that the interpreter, always speaking in the first person, would be closely identified with the speaker who may be of a different sex, age, and social status. One of the most gratifying compliments a professional interpreter can hear is for the members of the audience to say that they did not notice that there was the interpreter mediating between them and the speaker. This is total identification of the interpreter and the speaker, something that every interpreter must strive for.

It is clear that professional behavior (credibility, dignity, posture, gesture, voice management, etc.) of the interpreter should be commensurate with that of his principal, a person who empowers another to act as his or her representative in speaking. It is true that sometimes this degree of identification is difficult to achieve.

It can be argued with good reason that such things are outside foreign language instruction, but at least some exposure to professional behavior through role playing in foreign language instruction could be of great benefit to future interpreters. The roles assigned to students should not be limited to just everyday situations we are facing when travelling abroad or introducing ourselves to foreigners, but include more complex roles involving different sex, age and status identities.

According to Robert Ekvall [1, p. 97-98], “...*identification with his principal, as complete as is humanly possible, is the interpreter’s secret of fidelity*”. So from this point of view the success of the interpreter depends largely on the personal identification with his/her principal, and the latter actually expects the interpreter to deliver the message in exactly the same way, including the intonation.

But if the interpreter’s personality can to a certain extent be used as a tool in consecutive interpretation, where she/he is physically present at the side of his/her principal, in a situation of simultaneous interpretation, with the interpreter tucked away in a sound-proof booth, his/her personality can no longer be brought to bear on the process of communication.

With their personalities out of the way, in simultaneous (conference) interpretation the interpreters' only weapons are the language tools available to them. They can only achieve the desired effect through the text which they generate. Text, therefore, becomes the central element in the interpreter's oratory.

Phonetics. *"The interpreter with a beautiful voice will always get the benefit of the doubt"*, wrote Jean Herbert, one of the greatest interpreters of our times [2, p. 60]. Clear and accurate pronunciation is the single most important asset an interpreter can have. But experience also shows that just as important is another aspect of speech generation – pauses. Successful interpreters with smooth professional delivery are the ones who can skillfully disguise their frantic search for the right word or phrase by appropriate pauses which "sound" like emphasis. They must learn to take "their sweet time" and give weight to every word. Once the following image to describe their work was suggested by conference interpreters: smooth and graceful interpretation is similar to a swan gliding majestically over water. But, perhaps, hardly anybody guesses what mental efforts are undertaken by the interpreter, or sees the swan's feet are paddling wildly.

In consecutive and particularly simultaneous interpretation pauses are what interpreters survive on in a situation characterized by extreme stress and split-second decision-making. Interpreters should be trained to make a pause at virtually any point in a sentence, including not only "logical" pauses, but also pauses at most illogical points, such as after auxiliary verbs, articles, prepositions, etc. A useful exercise to help students learn this technique is to have them read modern blank verse poetry with sentences wrapping over to the next line.

Lexicology. The Greeks took a special kind of delight in speech. The free citizens of Athens spent most of their time in public places: in market-places, in courts, and they took an active part in the affairs of state, and frequently spoke in the Popular Assembly. The power of words to move men's minds and influence their actions had for the Greeks something magical and divine about it.

In conference interpretation training the same attitude to speech should be promoted to help students become aware of the power of speech. For example, a course on the world's greatest speeches could be a very valuable addition to any interpreters' training school curriculum.

Most, if not all, interpretation is public speaking which requires mastery of the official register, or formal diction. Also, with the few exceptions of social functions and very informal meetings, even dialogic speech in interpretation becomes an exchange of monologue statements requiring an appropriate register. Unfortunately for students of languages, most language training is based on (classical) literature. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that all students experience some degree of difficulty with the official register of speech in both native and foreign language. The first thing they realize when they enroll in an interpretation course is that they cannot interpret a political speech if they do not possess the required official speech register.

Students must also learn the clichés of political rhetoric which are anathema to the purist. This is the kind of diction that is used in the official sphere of communication. Apart from including texts of official (political) register into CI training classrooms, it is advisable to learn also some examples of "all-purpose political speeches"\*.

Grammar. There is no question that correct grammar is all-important. In English the sequence of tenses, use of articles, prepositions, and other aspects of grammar pose problems to students and should be given adequate attention in language instruction. Graduating students must be able to use correct grammar, if they are to succeed in interpreter training. But even more importantly, they must have a developed ability to use one and the same word in different grammatical constructions.

And finally, some basic exercises should help students learn the skills required for interpretation. Unfortunately, there are no miracles and shortcuts. The way to go is to reproduce, paraphrase and generate.

The first exercise is "reproduce". Students should learn to reproduce the original faithfully: sound articulation, timbre, intonation, and the all important pause, starting from one or two sentences,

and up to a paragraph of four to five sentences long, containing a fully developed thought complete with a topic sentence, paragraph development, and conclusion. Students should learn to identify this basic structure of thought in longer passages. This exercise is also useful for training memory which is so important for interpreters. The “reproduce” exercise should aim at full awareness of the meaning of what is being said. Very early on students must learn to identify with what they are saying, and not only speak but BE what they speak, whether the original is spoken by a person of another sex, age, or a different social status.

The next exercise is “paraphrase”. A restatement of a text or passage in another form or other words as a studying or teaching device has been widely used and continues to remain the much employed device in foreign language instruction. Again, what is needed here is the emphasis on identification with what is being said. Another way of describing this exercise would be to call it “generate from”. In paraphrasing students should always use only the first person singular, and the same gender as in the original.

The last exercise is “generate”. Students must learn to generate speech as if they were the politician, the scholar, the journalist, or the expert speaking on the subject. And again identification is the key to success. The instructor should give students an opportunity to try themselves in a variety of roles. This exercise brings together the previous two exercises of “reproduce” and “paraphrase”. Students should try to retain some of the general characteristics of the original delivery as regards the rate of presentation, articulation, intonation, the use of pauses, etc., and use appropriate diction and grammar.

These are just some considerations foreign language instructors should be aware of when preparing students for a career in conference interpretation. Those students who successfully master the techniques of “reproduce”, “paraphrase”, and “generate” in one language will find it much easier to learn the techniques of interpretation between two languages, and the techniques of interpretation proper which largely rely and build on them.

Let us recall Quintilian’s description of the training of an orator: “... *Let no man hope that he can acquire eloquence merely by the labor of others. He must burn the midnight oil, persevere to the end, and grow pale with study: he must form his own powers, his own experience, his own method; he must not require to hunt for his weapons, but must have them ready for immediate use as though they were born with him, and not derived from the instruction of others. The road may be pointed out, but our speed must be our own*” (4, 171).

It is clear that achieving the highest standards in CI career will require a lot of time, effort, and patience, and there are no miracles or shortcuts in language training. One consolation both instructors and students can have is that “a stitch in time saves nine”.

#### **Примітка**

\*For example, “All-purpose political speech suitable for any candidate of any political persuasion at anytime” by A.P.Nevin, published in 1927, or “The all-purpose political speech” by W.Safire, published in 1968.

#### **Literature**

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