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SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION IN RUSSIA: DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH AND TRAINING

Simultaneous conference interpretation was first practiced in Russia towards the end of the 1920s on rather primitive equipment. Research in simultaneous interpretation began in the 1960s and the concepts of the primacy of the sense of the message and the significance of interpreters' extra-linguistic knowledge underlay the training from the very beginning. A brief description is given of the history of the few schools of translation and interpreting existing in Russia. The author shows to what extent ongoing research in SI in Russia had an impact on the curricula of the schools. Finally, several suggestions are made on how to improve both training methods and lab equipment in future.

Introduction

Patricia Longley, a well-known conference interpreter and former professor of conference interpretation at the Polytechnic of Central London, wrote in 1968: "Today... the Russians have interpreters as skilled and as good as any we have in the West, and Moscow has a school which is training interpreters for the Russian booth at the United Nations" (Longley 1968: 32).

One can discern a note of surprise in that statement. The surprise can be easily explained by the existence of the Iron Curtain, which at the time separated the West from the Soviet Union no less that it separated the Soviet Union from the West. Consequently, our colleagues knew even less about developments in Russia than we knew about them. We could at least read some of the literature published in English while most of our Western colleagues could not reciprocate, without a working knowledge of the Russian language.

First steps

Nevertheless, the fact is that simultaneous interpretation appeared in the West and in the Soviet Union at practically the same time: A conference in Geneva in 1927 and the VI Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1928. A more marked difference was in the equipment used. A patent of an SI installation was issued to Gordon Finley, an IBM engineer, in 1926, while the first Russian simultaneous interpreters worked in a somewhat less advantageous environment. Quoting from Gofman's article: "In 1928 the *Krasnaya Niva* magazine published a picture showing interpreters sitting in chairs in front of the podium. Around their necks they have saddle-like gadgets supporting the microphones. They have no telephones and the sound is reaching them directly from the rostrum..." (Gofman 1963: 20).

The trial of major German war criminals at Nuremberg used the services of both Western and Russian interpreters from its beginning in 1945 (see Gaiba, in this issue). And after the introduction of SI by the UN Secretariat in 1950, it was quite extensively used at various international gathering in Russia too.

The interpreters who worked at those first conferences came out of the Nuremberg Trial Interpretation Service where they had made their debut as simultaneous interpreters. They had been an assortment of young graduates of the then Military Institute of Foreign Languages (established in 1942 on the basis of the Military Department of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages), where they were trained as military translators-interpreters (Mishkurov 1997), Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow University, and the Institute of Philosophy and Literature (IFLI), as well as several staff members of the Foreign Ministry and the Society for Cultural Exchanges with Foreign Countries (VOKS) (Gofman 1963: 20). Some of the most capable among them formed the first post-war group of free-lance conference interpreters in Russia. None of them had actually been *trained* as simultaneous interpreters, they all became conference interpreters by trial and error.

The first group of five SI professionals trained in Russia as conference interpreters (working from English and French, or English and Spanish, into Russian) graduated from the UN Language Training Course (UNLTC) (actually, the first Russian School of Translation

and Interpreting) at the Maurice Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages in 1962.

Training in Consecutive and Escort Interpreting

Previous to that in the early 1950s some primitive attempts were made to train students of the Translation Department of the Maurice Thorez Insitute in consecutive as part of the translators' curriculum there (note-taking was based on Rozan's (1959) and Herbert's (1952) manuals). R. Mignar-Beloroutchev at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Relations published several monographs and manuals on note-taking in consecutive (Mignar-Beloroutchev 1959, 1969a, 1969b, 1980, 1996, 1997). Yet, consecutive was never really taught in Russia on a professional basis with note-taking (allowing to interpret long passages, with a ban on interrupting the speaker). Most of consecutive conference interpretation in Russia, even when performed by brilliant SI interpreters, is done paragraph by paragraph. A question may arise: Why? I think that the explanation should be sought in historical sources of the two types of consecutive, adopted in Russia and in the West. It is the difference between the official conference and round-table (negotiating) situations. If in the West the "rules of the game" in consecutive were first laid down at a *conference with an official intergovernmental status* (Paris Peace Conference) and later in the League of Nations, where the speaker preferred to deliver his/her statement in one piece uninterruptedly, and there were enough people in the audience to listen to the original while it lasted, that was not the case in Russia. Even today too many speakers relying on consecutive hate to be inactive while a long passage is being interpreted, and the audience hates to be bored while waiting for the interpretation in the face of a long chunk of the original speech they do not understand. The second reason, as I see it, boils down to that prior to the appearance of Mignar-Beloroutchev's manuals, training in consecutive had been strongly influenced by the practice of military interpreting and training methods (predominantly reliance on memory, as against notes) used at the Military Institute of Foreign Languages (Mishkurov 1997; Mignar-Beloroutchev 1994; Shveizer 1966).

On the other hand, many language schools in the former Soviet Union (most of them being teacher training colleges) introduced some kind of exercises in interpreting a dialogue

(a rough approximation to escort interpreting) in typical phrase-book situations (as "a visit to a doctor", "checking in/out at a hotel", etc.), sometimes as part of a translation course, sometimes even as part of language training, particularly after the appearance of the two simple exercise books by Yudina (1962; 1976) containing texts for interpretation. Two more of those were published in the late 1980s, for Italian (Shchekina 1986) and German (Gofman & Kurilenko 1987). This situation resulted in the appearance of numerous low level escort interpreters on the interpretation market of the country, very few of whom later, through hard work, trial and error, became conference interpreters.

Theoretical Background

Training translators and conference interpreters in Russia was substantially influenced almost from the very beginning by theoretical translatology. Starting in the early 1950s, when the first works in the area of linguistic translation theory appeared in Russia (Retsker 1950; Fedorov 1953), a number of monographs and numerous articles on translatology were published. A particularly significant role in the development of translation and interpretation theory was played by Tetradi Perevodchika (Translator's Notes) on which 24 issues have been published since 1963 and where most of the ideas in the area of translation and interpretation theory were tried out before they appeared as comprehensive models in the form of monographs. What influenced the UN training course for interpreters was, from the beginning, the implicit recognition of the fact that instead of simply dealing with words, the interpreter should render the ideas of the speaker. Hence from the start, the curriculum of the UNLTC (or the School of Translation and Interpreting) included substantive disciplines like the UN structure, the political map of the world, international law, economics, and other subjects with the interpreter-to-be would have to deal with working for a UN agency. Besides, only UN agencies' speeches were used for training. Students' weekly assignments in translating UN texts (mostly, official records of meetings of UN bodies) also contributed significantly to their knowledge of specific UN terminology. That, as well as very strict selection criteria for the course candidates (in fact the multi-stage selection process of half

a dozen candidates lasted a whole academic year prior to the beginning of the 10-months' course itself) accounted for the success of the course, where the drop-out and failure rate (at the final UN exam) was extremely low. Five to ten Russian simultaneous interpreters graduated from the Moscow UN School annually between 1962 and 1992. As a matter of fact, quite a number of today's well known stars in Russian conference interpreting (such as P. Palazhchenko, S. Berezhkov and many others) are graduates of that school.

Intensive research into simultaneous interpretation began in Russia towards the end of the 60s. In 1967-69, when I worked as an associate professor in translation and interpreting at the Maurice Thorez Institute, I initiated a research seminar attended by several young instructors, postgraduate and senior students. The seminar was comprised of about 50 sessions which were addressed by several prominent theorists, and included short courses on original theories by Irina Zimnyaya, a psychologist, Vilen Komissarov, now a well-known translatologist, lectures by Otto Kade and Alex Zholkovsky, and many others, with subsequent discussions. About half a dozen participants passed through a parallel SI training course and are now professional free-lancers. Within the seminar's framework, an important experiment in SI, supervised by I. Zimnyaya and myself, was carried out (Zimnyaya & Chernov 1970, 1973; Chernov 1978) at the end of 1969 to test a hypothesis of probability anticipation as a major psycholinguistic mechanism of SI. Several seminar participants took part in working out methods of temporal analysis of SI with the use of a specially designed lab installation, on which a patent was obtained. The instrumental methods developed (Chernov, Gurevich & Lukanina 1974) permitted the later elaboration of a number of substantive conclusions about SI's psycholinguistic mechanisms (Chernov 1979, 1987, 1994). Thus, when a two-year postgraduate course for training translators and interpreters was opened at the Maurice Thorez Institute, certain theoretical bases already existed for the SI course.

Government Intervention

Mignar-Beloroutchev (1994) mentions a short course held in 1953 for training French-

Russian, Russian-French simultaneous interpreters at the Moscow Institute of Foreign Relations. But it was not until 1970 that a much more significant attempt was made in Russia to begin training professional conference interpreters, when the Government issued an executive order (signed by the then prime-minister A. Kosygin, with appropriate funding provisions) to organize a two-year postgraduate course for training professionals in translation and interpreting at the Maurice Thorez Institute, Moscow University and at Leningrad University. The course in Leningrad, to be best of my knowledge, has never materialized, while Moscow University soon arranged for two such courses in parallel: one, at the Department of Philology, for combinations of Russian with one of the Slavic languages of Eastern Europe; and the other one–at the University's School of Asian and African Studies, for combinations of Russian with one of the oriental languages. In both cases I was invited to give an introductory series of lectures on the theory of simultaneous interpretation. The Maurice Thorez Institute was the only institution to organise the translation-interpretation course as a post-graduate School of Translation and Interpreting–for combinations of Russian with one of the major world languages (English, French and German, with occasional enrollments of Spanish and Italian speaking students). As a result, most of the free-lance professionals now active in Moscow (and Western Europe, as far as the Russian language is concerned) and periodically employed with a Russian language combination by the IMF, the World Bank, commercial companies and other agencies, are graduates either of UNLTC or the School of Translation and Interpreting at today's Moscow Linguistic University. No other school in Russia has ever systematically produced conference interpreters.

C-to-A or A-to-B?

Here a note on the mode of conference interpreting prevailing in Russia would be appropriate, since the course at the Maurice Thorez Institute was based on that system. Historically, in the Soviet Union, people with a knowledge of a second language, usually had no third language, although their command of their second language allowed them to work

both ways: into their native tongue and into their second language. Hence, the relay mode was the prevailing mode of work at most multilingual conferences. The number of booths was usually X minus one (Russian) which was the pivot language. That meant that whenever the speaker used any other language except Russian his/her contribution was translated into Russian by a corresponding booth and then relayed into other languages by the other booths. That naturally resulted in an overall loss of information if the pivot booth lost it.

Since about the mid-eighties, the free-lance market in Russia has been primarily for bilingual interpretation (English into Russian and Russian into English mostly, some German-Russian and Russian-German and only a very low percentage of French). Multilingual conference interpreters working in Russia today very often find their third language to be redundant. Hence, the curriculum of the two-year postgraduate course at the Maurice Thorez Institute (now: Moscow National Linguistic University) is designed to produce bilingual (A into B and B into A) conference interpreters. They are trained both in consecutive and simultaneous, although not on a sequential basis, as is the case in many other schools, and more attention is given to the latter. There is no possibility for the faculty to forecast where exactly the services of their future graduates would be required, and that results in a difficulty that the UN course did not have when selecting extra-linguistic disciplines for the course. A certain amount of economic and legal terminology is learned from the materials translated and interpreted in the course of two years. An important addition to the SI course is a term mock conference, usually requiring substantial preparation by both the students and the faculty (Mikheyev, Semyonova, & Chernov 1989). Under various names, the Course continues to produce several graduates each year with a diploma in conference interpreting. The curriculum now covers, among other subjects, a course on the theory of simultaneous interpretation.

Basic Models in Use

Chernov's monograph entitled "Introduction to simultaneous interpretation" (Chernov 1987) is used to support the lecture course on SI theory (the monograph bears an official stamp of

approval of the Ministry of Education as an appropriate manual). This book is a result, as well as a summary, of about a decade of research into the psycholinguistic mechanisms of SI in Russia and the West. It offers a theory of probability anticipation, first advanced as a hypothesis by Zymnyaya and Chernov (Zimnyaya & Chernov 1970) and later developed in detail by Chernov, as a basic psycholinguistic mechanism of simultaneous interpretation.

In fact, essentially, two schools of thought prevailed in Russia about the basic mechanism underlying the SI process, capable of ensuring the simultaneity of listening and speaking. The first one was offered by Kochkina (Kochkina 1963). She suggested (on the basis of an experiment whose subjects were undergraduates without any experience of SI) that the interpreter relies mostly on the pauses between chunks of speech of the source speaker. Later this suggestion was transformed into a suggestion that simultaneity of listening and speaking was based on the possibility of listening to the original communication in "micropauses" in the speech produced (Shiryayev 1973; 1979). This concept correlated with the idea expressed by Leontyev, an outstanding Russian psycholinguist, who suggested that the "internal program" of the interpreter's utterance ("Plan"–in the terminology of Miller, Gallanter & Prigram 1960) was a "broken program" borrowed from the original speaker, each chunk more or less corresponding to a syntagm (the kind of interpretation that Seleskovitch and Lederer of ESIT called "transcodage").

The trouble with these results was that these investigations were never done on actual simultaneous interpreters, only in experiments where the subjects used were mostly students, or interpreters with very little experience of simultaneous interpretation at international conferences. If the internal program is indeed borrowed from the speaker, even "appropriated" by the interpreter, its "broken nature" can only be observed either with non-professionals, or in occasional passages of particular difficulty. Despite the apparent failure of the "micropause" model, Shiryayev made a major theoretical contribution to the theory by showing that SI in principle is a specialized kind of speech and by investigating several important issued in SI studies: the question of simultaneity; SI and speech rates; speech compression in SI, and others. He also made some useful suggestions as to the methods of teaching SI (in fact his book on SI bears a subtitle: "... and methods of teaching simultaneous

interpretation").

The other school of thought had its roots in the idea of anticipatory reflection of reality (Chernov 1994: 145), advanced by Pyotr Anokhin, Pavlov's disciple, as a result of half a century of investigations conducted at a neurophysiology and neuro-cybernetics research center he headed (Anokhin 1968; 1978). Some of the several levels and modes (Chernov 1994: 146), the four-tier source of classification, and probability anticipation were investigated in greater detail by Russian linguists and psychologists. One of the significant studies published concerned the syntactical mode of probability anticipation (Lukanina 1974; 1975). Lukanina pointed to the existence of "prognosticating elements" that serve as pivotal points for the interpreter in perceiving the syntactical structure of the SL utterance and in producing a TL syntactical structure as part of the interpretation process. Yermolovich has investigated the psychological aspects of simultaneity of listening and speaking in SI (Yermolovich 1979). As to the level of the utterance, several undergraduate term papers were written in 1972 under the author's supervision demonstrating experimentally that any attempt at interpreting separate sentences that are not part of a coherent text only result in the translation of every second or third sentence (coherent texts had been broken into separate sentences that were reshuffled and offered to the professional interpreter subjects for SI translation in random order). Specific methods of temporal analysis of simultaneous interpretation (later used in the analysis of SI translations of UN speeches–both the originals and their translations recorded concurrently on two tracks of the magnetic tape) were developed and described in the work cited above (Chernov et al. 1974).

Other Contributions to the Theoretical Background

During this decade several important contributions were also made to the discussion of different aspects of simultaneous interpretation relevant for the training of interpreters. Among them the following are worth mentioning:

1. Zwilling (1966) suggested a whole program of investigations into the theory of

simultaneous interpretation on the basis of a multi-aspectal comprehensive approach to research in SI. Unfortunately, Zwilling has never followed up on his program, although it was partly covered by the research described above.

2. Shveizer (1967) discussed the mode of relay interpretation with the use of the Russian channel as pivot (see above) pointing to the danger of information loss in this mode that was prevalent in the Soviet Union (system of the lead language). Later, Chernov (1977) argued that the prevailing mode in the West was only possible when the number of conference languages did not exceed four or five and if not "exotic" (for a given country) languages are involved. He indicated that even at the United Nations relay interpretation was used for Chinese and Arabic. As to the European Union institutions, where the number of languages involved is almost a dozen, the official requirement of direct interpretation is, to the best of my knowledge, far from being fully observed at all meetings. This discussion in fact had no impact on either the organisation of conference interpreting or the training of interpreters in Russia and remained a purely academic exercise.
3. Palzhchenko (1981) published an article on the interpreter's work with the written text of a speech. If available at all, it is given to the interpreter shortly before the speech is delivered. This article remains a very useful instructor's tool in the teaching of interpreting to the present day.
4. Denissenko's paper on "Communicative and interpretative linguistic" (Denissenko 1989) initiated a heated discussion at the First Symposium on Conference Interpreting at the University of Trieste. The author argued that an interpretation from A to B is preferable to the other way round because ease of understanding is preferable to ease of expression, from the point of view of rendering the meaning of the message. His view was supported at the symposium by the then chief interpreter at the Secretariat of the European Communities, Renee Van Hoof-Haferkamp (Denissenko 1989: 199). This idea went a certain way towards supporting the existing system of training interpreters in Russia. The more so that the Russian conference interpretation market has in the last decade required mostly this type of bilingual SI and clients in Russia

(including Western companies) are, as a rule, not prepared to bear the cost of two booths whenever the conference is bilingual, as most of them in Russia are today.

5. Zubanova (1997) offered some very useful tips on how to build a syntactically correct sentence without changing the co-relation of topic and comment in interpreting from an analytical language (Russian) to a synthetic language (such as English), based on her experience of teaching SI to Russian postgraduate students. It is worth noting that the significance of that research becomes clear if one takes into account that the training of conference interpreters with predominantly bilingual combinations is more often than not combined with advanced studies of the students' second language, in parallel with training in conference interpretation as such.

The latter remark should not in any way undermine the basis of all conference interpretation courses that may be summed up by Carroll's adage "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves".

These are some of the concepts that underlie the courses of conference interpreting now offered in Moscow. Essentially, such courses are offered at postgraduate level by two institutions: one at Moscow Linguistic University (since 1971) and a shorter course at the private Moscow International School of Translation and Interpreting (MISTI) (since 1991). MISTI also offers refresher courses for the Russian-English and English-Russian combination internationally, on an ad hoc basis.

A new training course for conference interpreters at undergraduate level is now being offered on an experimental basis by the Moscow Gaudeamus Institute of Foreign Languages, a private institution. The first two conference interpreters graduated from the Department of Translation and Interpreting of that Institute in 1999.

Greater Reliance on Computer Technology

Several ideas on the theory of conference interpreting are currently being investigated which may later be used for interpreter training.

Until now the interpreting community has had almost no say whatsoever in interpretation equipment design. I believe that the time has come for the conference interpretation community to begin thinking about what state-of-the-art electronic technology can bring to the interpreter. Equipment designers and engineers should be made aware of the basic requirements of the interpreter, and I believe that we are now in a position to formulate some of them. Requirement number one is the need to ensure adequate *redundancy* (objective and subjective) at all levels of perception. At the acoustic level it has been taken care of in modern equipment design. We must now insist on the next step: state-of-the-art electronic computers should also be used in the booth to provide computer support to the interpreter during his/her actual work.

A very obvious difficulty for the interpreter today is the need to provide his/her services to all kinds of conferences (being unable to specialize, mostly for economic reasons), the growing number of them being of a narrowly specialized technical or scientific nature. Even with adequate thematic preparation, the problem of terminology always surfaces for the interpreter during the course of the conference. On the basis of personal long-term observations, I would strongly support Selekskovitch's idea (Seleskovitch 1975: 42-43, and misquoted in Gile 1990) that as a rule no more than a 100 (very often no more than 10, or 20) technical terms are used at a *given technical conference* (Seleskovitch never said "in any specialized field", as quoted in Gile 1990: 30). The difficulty lies precisely in isolating the terms that are likely to be used at a specialized technical conference when preparing for it.

An electronic aid could be envisaged for the interpreter, capable of flashing the translation of the term on a screen in the interpretation booth. There are several possible ways of overcoming the problem of how the interpreter can *order* the required term during interpretation in the booth.

The use of a computer with good retrieval possibilities may be very useful for all kinds of situational background information on the conference, like names of participants, names of their organizations or their parent bodies, that very often crop up in delegates' remarks, but are unknown to the interpreters, etc.

Conclusion

To sum up: the training of conference interpreters in Russia began at almost the same time as the development of translation and interpreting schools in the West but has followed somewhat different routes. It benefited from early reliance on certain theoretical supports, and, no matter how strange it may sound, perhaps even from a certain degree of isolation from the West. The strong side of the Russian school of interpreter training is its reliance on two-way interpretation (B to A and A to B), frowned upon by some conference interpreters in the West, and yet implicitly admitted by AIIC Yearbooks. Another lesson of the Russian school of training is that SI skills in C language(s) to A language combinations are transferable, and therefore could be independently added by the interpreter, were such a need to arise.

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Source : *Interpreting*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999, p. 41-54.