

Interpretation

Techniques and Exercises

2nd edition

James Nolan

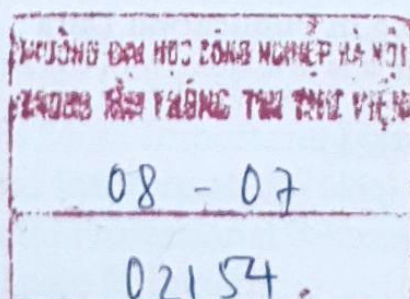


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MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

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Preface to the Second Edition

Interpretation can be defined in a nutshell as conveying understanding. Its value stems from the fact that a speaker's meaning is best expressed in his or her native tongue but is best understood in the languages of the listeners.

In the art of interpretation several complex interrelated processes make it possible to convey the semantic and emotive contents of a message from one language and culture to another. The complex interaction of these processes and the difficulty of coordinating them simultaneously in the oral/aural mode require alertness, sensitivity, intense concentration and mental agility. In some ways, training for interpreting resembles training for musicianship: the most fruitful approach is guided practice; individual aptitudes and skills are important; talent needs to be nurtured and encouraged; performance is improved by awareness of audience expectations; intuition plays a role; and there may be several valid ways of interpreting a particular passage. The skills required for interpretation, especially simultaneous interpretation,

Table 1 The interpreting process

Listening	
Comprehension/receptivity/empathy	Memorizing
Processing	
Analysis/visualization	Thinking
Reformulation/mimicry	
Inference/extrapolation/deduction	
Speaking/expression	
Reproduction of meaning	Remembering
Articulation, enunciation	
Meaning modulated by tone, intonation	
Emotion conveyed by tone, intonation	

must be developed through practice to the point where they become automatic.

The world has come to rely on interpretation for cross-cultural communication in real time. Although interpretation is not always perfect, if it is performed by professionals with training and a high degree of proficiency in their working languages the result is always better than the alternative method of cross-cultural communication, which consists of asking speakers of various languages to speak a single so-called 'international' language in which they may have limited proficiency.

A second advantage of interpretation is that the respect shown by addressing an interlocutor in that person's own language is conducive to successful diplomacy or negotiation. Learning a foreign language represents a major investment of time and effort, and not all statesmen, diplomats or executives have the time, energy or linguistic talent to master the language of each party with whom they must speak. The interpreter helps these speakers to discharge their duty to make themselves understood and helps listeners to satisfy their need to understand what is being said.

A third advantage of interpretation is that it supports specialization and thus enhances the quality of multinational meetings and deliberations. Where interpretation is available, it is not necessary to take knowledge of a particular language into consideration when deciding who will attend the meeting; consequently, it is easier to select delegates or spokesmen solely on the basis of their qualifications and abilities.

A further advantage of interpretation is that it serves as a psychological equalizer between participants in discussions that are adversarial or controversial. A delegate at an international assembly who is speaking his own language just as he would at home does not feel he is making undue concessions or giving in to pressures from others. Sovereign equality in the use of languages puts all speakers on equal footing.

Finally, interpretation serves as a buffer between different sides in an adversarial discussion, making it possible to use the interpreter as a messenger to convey ideas and positions: it is sometimes possible to say things through a 'linguistic intermediary' that one would hesitate to say directly in one's own language or the language of an adversary.

Because of these advantages, conducting multilateral diplomatic and economic relations in the multilingual mode has become the standard way to do business. But there has been a parallel development: the rate at which speeches are delivered at international meetings has increased dramatically, for several reasons. There are now 196 independent countries in the world and, among the 6000+ languages spoken today, the number of languages being used as a medium of international communication is growing in

parallel with the recognition of people's right to use their native languages. The European Union, for example, now uses 24 languages. Electronic and digital technologies have created an expectation that communication should normally be instantaneous, taking place in real time regardless of geographical and cultural distances. Consequently, there are a growing number of interlocutors on the world scene speaking a growing number of different languages and making their statements in the expectation of being immediately understood. And they all have a great deal to say about a growing number of pressing issues. But for practical and logistical reasons there are still only a limited number of hours in the day that can be used as conference time and those hours must be equitably shared among the many speakers vying for the microphone. The result is that spokesmen inevitably resort to speaking faster and faster during their all-too-brief turn on the world stage, further complicating the interpreter's already difficult task.