

外教社 翻译硕士专业 (MTI) 系列教材  
口译实践指南丛书 ①

Roderick Jones

# Conference Interpreting Explained

## 会议口译解析

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## 导 读

口译是这几年很热门又发展非常快的一门职业,也是很多外语学习者很想掌握的一门专业技巧。由于在我们国家,无论是教育管理层,还是专业教育界,以及普通老百姓,人们对翻译的认识都相对较模糊,总认为外语就是翻译,这在很大程度上导致了翻译专业人才培养上的误区,专业的不确立,以及教学理念和教学方法都在很大程度上沿用了外语教学的模式,如:把专业翻译课程完全按外语课程来教,口译课的教学和外语听说课的教学差别不大等等。这些在很大程度上导致了那些以“翻译”为名的教学实质上并没有培养出真正意义上的专业翻译人才,形成了名实不符的怪圈。口译教学则更是如此。

我们知道在不同种族、不同文化、不同语言背景的人之间进行交往的历史长河中,口译一直扮演着不可或缺的作用。口译这座人类交际沟通的桥梁随着人类历史发展到今天已经变得种类繁多。这其中有涓涓溪流上的小桥,也有滔滔江河上的大桥,更有汪洋大海上的长桥。虽然都起着沟通两岸的作用,但各自的功能和职责都有所不同。这就是口译。

自从1919年巴黎和会上正式聘用了有多种语言背景的口译员后,口译作为一种职业开始发展起来了。当历史进行到1945年的纽伦堡审判以及后来相继出现的各类国际会议和会谈时,口译作为一种正式的职业开始了全面的发展。纽伦堡审判以及后来召开的国际劳工组织大会和接着成立的联合国等国际组织对现代口译的产生和发展起了里程碑式的作用。现代口译由于口译员工作场合的不同、服务对象的不同、需求的不同导致了口译的不同分类。

专业口译员运用的口译技能可大致分为:同声传译(simultaneous interpretation)、交替传译(consecutive interpretation)、耳语传译(whispering)、视译(sight translation)等,其中的交替传译还分为常规交替传译和短交替传译或称对话传译(dialogue interpretation)。口译根据服务的对象和场合可大致分为:会议口译(conference interpreting)、法庭(务)口译(court interpreting)、政务和外交口译(diplomatic interpreting)、军事口译(military interpreting)、

公/商务口译(business interpreting)、联络陪同口译(liaison-escort interpreting)、传媒口译(电视口译)(media interpreting)等。

由罗德里克·琼斯(Roderick Jones)撰写的《会议口译解析》是以口译运用于国际间各类会议会谈为服务背景,以常规交替传译和同声传译的口译技能为主线的实践和应用型,并带有教学指导意义的会议口译学习指导书。会议口译分为两种模式的口译:交替传译和同声传译。交替传译指的是口译员边听讲边做笔记,然后将所听到的内容用另一种语言译出,口译员和演讲者以这种形式交替进行直至讲话结束。同声传译指的是口译员坐在译员厢内,一边看着会议的进行,一边通过专用电声设备听大会发言者的讲话,并同时(几乎同时)把讲话内容用另一种语言通过口译员的设备译出,而参会代表们通过电声设备接收口译员的翻译。

作者罗德里克·琼斯是一位具有二十多年口译实践经验,同时又具有丰富会议口译教学经验的职业译员,现服务于欧盟口译服务总司。对翻译来说,任何以源语词汇对目标语词汇进行逐字翻译都是不可行的,口译则更是如此。作者在本书第一章的第二段中就明确指出“口译是一种话语交际”。口译是通过口译员对演讲者的讲话进行听、辨析、记忆、还原、讲述等一系列的信息和语言处理来完成的,起着在不同语码之间交际的作用。这个理念无论是对从事口译的译员还是学习口译或者教授口译的学生和老师来说都是至关重要的,必须切记在心。

《会议口译解析》是一本讲解会议口译的实践指导书,书中很少涉及翻译理论。但是为了使那些对翻译理论有兴趣的读者继续钻研口译理论,作者在书中简明扼要地列出了主题明确的参考书目。正如编者指出的那样,参考书目对那些想更多地了解口译专业的发展和理论研究方面内容的读者而言起着引导的作用。

全书共分五章。第一章为引言,主要向读者介绍口译和会议口译的概念,以及与会议口译相关的工作现状等。对很多不熟悉会议口译的读者来说,什么是会议口译,会议口译包含哪些内容是很陌生的。很多人可能知道或听说过同声传译,但是对会议口译知之甚少。在我国开设这种专业的高等院校屈指可数。作者在第一章中向读者简单介绍了会议口译所包含的口译技能、工作环境、服务对象等内容。

第二至第四章为本书的主要篇章。其中的第二章“交替传译的基本原则”无论是对交替传译还是同声传译都有着同等重要的作用。传译的过程可分为三个阶段:理解、分析和重述。传译过程中积极地听,分析讲话的类型和信息,找出主要意思(谁做什么、说什么、想什么,发生了什么,时间和地点等等),并用各种快速书写的词和符号记录下关键信息,用接点符的形式记录下信息和信息之间的连接点(links),以及记忆的分配与使用等。作者



还强调了口译员作为公共演讲者的作用。

第三章“交替传译的笔记”的开始部分，作者着重指出了笔记的作用：“笔记并非口译的一切。笔记是完成口译工作的一种工具。”但是对口译员来说笔记记什么、怎么记都很重要。作者指出，首先、口译员应该记讲话中的主要信息。因为这些信息是讲话的主线和架构。第二、必须系统地记下一段信息与另一段信息的连接点。这些接点既要清楚地表现信息之间的连接，又要明显地区分信息间的不同。第三、讲话者的态度也应该清楚地记录下来。除此之外，表示时间的动词时态和语态等，以及其他重要信息诸如：数字、日期、名字(人名、地名、物名等)等都不应该漏记，以免造成信息错误。同时作者还对笔记中所使用的工具(笔记本)，以及记录时所使用的缩写、符号等都做了比较详细的介绍。当然，要想熟练运用笔记，那只有通过大量的操练，别无蹊径。

第四章“同声传译”开始就着重指出，所有信息处理的基本技能同交替传译差不多，不过口译员在信息处理过程中还有另外两个难点：第一、非自然讲话，即边听边说；第二、在口译过程中，有时口译员并不知道演讲者接下来讲什么。为此，作者在书中提出了很多有益的应对技能，如：语句简化、话语预判、长而绕弯语句处理(比如将长句切割成“意义单元”来处理等)、比喻处理、错误处理、数字，以及语速过快的演讲等任何同传译员在厢子中可能碰到的问题。书中还对那些进行同声传译接力翻译的译员给予了指导。(所有的术语都列在书后的附录中，并有书中出现位置的索引。)

在最后一章“口译的乐趣”中，作者非常简练地道出了口译在跨文化、跨语言交际中所起到的作用。作为跨文化、跨语言交际的桥梁，口译员起着打通语言交际障碍的作用，是国际间不同语言背景人士之间交际不可或缺的工具，承担着国际间交际的社会责任。口译员除了掌握口译专业技能以外，还要有广博的知识，处理语言难点的能力，以及不断进取和掌握新知识的毅力等。口译员通过为他人服务也得到了很大的满足，特别是那些在国际组织中服务的会议口译员，他们不仅为国际会议的进行起了关键的作用，同时又见证了国际社会的发展，有时甚至是具有历史意义的国际大事件的见证人。

无论怎样说，这是一本实实在在、直言不讳地描写会议口译这个职业和这个职业所涉及的各种技能的实践指导书。虽然这本书并非一本会议口译的自学教程，作者也并未想到要把它写成一本自学教程，但是本书对会议口译的实际操作，对这个专业的确立提供了很有价值的参考，因此不失为一本学习会议口译的优秀参考书。

柴明颀

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## Foreword

When I was invited to write this book, the idea put to me was that it would fill a gap in the existing literature on interpreting. It was to be a very basic and practical introduction to the fundamental techniques of conference interpreting. As a practising interpreter with an interest in understanding what I do when I am interpreting, and as someone who has been involved for about a decade in interpreter training, I was only too happy to accept the invitation. At the same time, I write only as an interpreter, not as an academic, a theorist or a researcher in the field of translation studies.

The aims of this book are therefore both modest and ambitious. They are modest in that the book can in no way rival with modern theoretical works on interpreting, which draw upon such diverse disciplines as neurolinguistics, computer sciences, semiotics and the philosophy of language. Nor is this book primarily to be read as a teaching manual: it does not tell the reader *how* to acquire the techniques of conference interpreting; it merely sets out to describe them. But that is also why it can be seen as ambitious. When one is interpreting, an awful lot is going on at one time. You are listening, understanding, writing things down, reading documents used in the meeting, analyzing ideas, talking. And all of this while perpetually switching from one language to another, using at least two languages, maybe more. Everything seems to flash by so quickly that it is very difficult to step back and analyze one's work, to know exactly what one is doing and why.

This book is thus an attempt by a practitioner to unravel the processes of conference interpreting and present them in a structured, digestible manner. I hope it will be of interest to four groups of people. First, to students of interpreting and perhaps novice interpreters, who may use the book as a handy compendium of techniques. Second, to teachers of interpreting, who may find in it a codification of a number of the skills they wish to help their students acquire. Third, to colleagues who have asked themselves the same questions as me, even if on a number of occasions I may seem to be stating the obvious. And lastly, to those non-interpreters who have always been mystified as to how an interpreter functions.

For the last nineteen years I have been a staff interpreter for one of the institutions of the European Union. The basic techniques of interpreting, however, are the same whether one is a staff interpreter of an international organization or a freelance interpreter working on the private market, and whichever geographical area one lives and works in. This book is thus designed to be generally valid for all conference interpreting. Of course, the ideas expressed in it are my own and cannot be taken as representing those of the European Union, any of its institutions, or any service of those institutions.

At the end of chapters two, three and four the reader will find some suggestions for practical training activities. These suggestions are put forward in all modesty. The vast majority of exercises in interpreter training are quite simply consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. Their usefulness and efficacy as exercises will depend largely on the ability of the trainer to select the right kind of speech, to achieve progression in the difficulty and typology of speeches, to target skills to be developed, and to provide useful and above all constructive criticism for students. Suggestions such as those included in this book can therefore not claim to be a complete guide for trainers.

Crucial moments in interpreter training are often those where a new phase begins: starting consecutive, or note-taking, or simultaneous. That is why I have chosen to make suggestions for such moments, calling them 'Getting started...'. I hope that trainers and students will draw some benefit from them.

# 1. Introduction

## What Is an Interpreter?

Imagine two people sitting in a room. They may be politicians, businessmen or women, trades unionists or scientists. They wish to discuss their work but speak different languages, and neither speaks the other's language well enough for the discussion to be useful. So they call in someone else, who speaks both languages, to explain what each is saying in turn. That person is an interpreter.

This scenario gives a better idea of what interpreting is all about than a pat definition such as 'immediate oral translation'. Interpreting is about communication. The example given above is simplified to caricature but represents the essence of interpreters' work, whether they find themselves in a room with two individuals and two languages or in a large conference hall with hundreds of participants and a multiplicity of languages: people who wish to communicate with one another, and who are prevented from doing so by a barrier.

Clearly, that barrier is first and foremost linguistic. Hence a definition such as 'immediate oral translation'. Interpreters only exist because of that language barrier, and they must obviously have sufficient linguistic knowledge if they are to translate correctly.

But the barriers to communication, and therefore the role of the interpreter, are more than that. People from different countries may not only speak different languages but have behind them different bodies of knowledge, different educations, different cultures, and therefore different intellectual approaches. The fact that such differences have to be coped with independent of the language barrier can easily be seen by looking at a hypothetical discussion between an Englishman and an American. If the Englishman litters his comments with cricketing metaphors the American will have difficulty following, and the American in turn will find it easy to wreak revenge by falling back on baseball and American football.

Communication difficulties are thus much more than pure translation difficulties. The cultural difficulties referred to above can manifest themselves both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, a speaker may make references to political, economic, social, academic institutions and systems, intellectual concepts or television catchphrases (the list is endless) that have no direct equivalent in the language of the person they are addressing, and indeed may be totally unknown – and therefore meaningless – to that person. The interpreter's task is to instil meaning into the text for the target audience, if necessary (and if possible) by providing the requisite explanations or even changing the original speaker's references, provided this conveys to the audience precisely what the speaker wanted to say.

Implicitly, and much more insidiously, the intellectual approach to any given question – and therefore the means used by a speaker to express their ideas – will depend on the speaker's cultural background. Certain forms of expression – understatement, hyperbole, irony, etc. – may be difficult or even impossible to reproduce in a different language in given circumstances without betraying the intentions of the speaker. For example, let us just take the adjective 'interesting', when applied by one delegation to a proposal made by another delegation in negotiations. In the mouth of a diplomat given to the habit of understatement (typically a British one), it may mean 'At last, the best idea we've heard for six months!' In the mouth of another diplomat in different circumstances and with the right tone of voice it may well be ironic and mean 'Absurd, how could anyone arrive at such a conclusion?' The interpreter must make their audience understand the real meaning, either through judicious choice of synonyms or by rewording a sentence, or at least through the appropriate tone of voice.

Alternatively, it may be possible semantically to respect both the original form of expression and the original meaning by a literal translation, but the result then sounds downright silly or, still worse, rude. The straightforward forms of address and modes of expression of certain Scandinavian delegates could seem barely civil if put, say, into French or Italian; on the other hand, an artificially flowery style borrowed from another language could make a Swedish interpreter sound ridiculous.

In all of these cases, indeed in all of their work, interpreters must bridge the cultural and conceptual gaps separating the participants in a meeting. This is why, in my opening paragraph, I quite deliberately said the interpreter is called in to *explain* what each of the participants wishes to say in turn. The interpreter should have something of a pedagogical streak, their work being one of continuous explanation and explication. Unlike a teacher, the interpreter does not express their own message; but like a teacher, their task is to make sure that the message is genuinely assimilated by the audience.

## **What Is Conference Interpreting?**

The above comments on explanation do not mean that an interpreter is entitled to convey the speaker's message in just any way, using all of the circumlocutions and providing all of the explanations they see fit, and as a corollary taking as long as they like.

The conference interpreter must be able to provide an exact and faithful reproduction of the original speech. Deviation from the letter of the original is permissible only if it enhances the audience's understanding of the speaker's meaning. Additional information should be provided only if it is indispensable to bridge the culture gaps referred to above: it should in no way involve the interpreter's adding their own point of view to that of the speaker.

The conference interpreter, in a way, becomes the delegate they are interpreting. They speak in the first person when the delegate does so, not translating along the lines of 'He says that he thinks this is a useful idea...'. The conference interpreter must empathize with the delegate, put themselves in someone else's shoes, espouse their cause. The male interpreter must be able to say, 'Speaking as a woman who has gone through four pregnancies...' in a perfectly natural and convincing manner.

The interpreter must be able to do this work in two modes, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation. In the first of these, the interpreter listens to the totality of a speaker's comments, or at least a significant passage, and then reconstitutes the speech with the help of notes taken while listening; the interpreter is thus speaking *consecutively* to the original speaker, hence the name. Some speakers prefer to talk for just a few sentences and then invite interpretation, in which case the interpreter can perhaps work without notes and rely solely on their memory to reproduce the whole speech. However, a conference interpreter should be able to cope with speeches of any length; they should develop the techniques, including note-taking, to enable them to do so. In practice, if an interpreter can do a five-minute speech satisfactorily, they should be able to deal with any length of speech.

Since time is usually of the essence for meeting organizers, the interpreter working in consecutive must be efficient. They should in no circumstances take longer over a given speech than the original version, and as a general rule should aim at taking three-quarters of the time taken by the original.

The second mode of interpreting is simultaneous. Here the interpreter listens to the beginning of the speaker's comments then begins interpreting while the speech continues, carrying on throughout the speech, to finish almost at the same time as the original. The interpreter is thus speaking *simultaneously* to the original, hence again the name. (Some people say the interpreting is not genuinely simultaneous as the interpreter is by definition fractionally behind the speaker throughout, arguing then that this mode should be called 'quasi-simultaneous'; yet this appears to be a rather futile quibble, and we shall continue to use the term 'simultaneous'.) In most cases nowadays simultaneous is done with the appropriate equipment: delegates speak into microphones which relay the sound directly to interpreters seated in sound-proofed booths listening to the proceedings through earphones; the interpreters in turn speak into a microphone which relays their interpretation via a dedicated channel to headphones worn by the delegations who wish to listen to the interpreting. However, in some cases such equipment is not available, and simultaneous interpretation is whispered (so-called 'chuchotage'): one participant speaks and simultaneously an interpreter whispers into the ear of the one or maximum two people who require interpreting services.

Clearly, simultaneous interpreting takes up less time than consecutive.



Moreover, with simultaneous it is much more feasible to provide genuine multilingual interpreting, with as many as six languages (UN) or even eleven (European Union). Given these advantages and the proliferation and widening membership of international organizations, more and more interpreting is being done in simultaneous. But all conference interpreters should be able to work in both modes, as one can never rule out being called upon to work in consecutive.

From this brief description it is clear that whether working in consecutive or in simultaneous, the interpreter has first to listen to the speaker, understand and analyze what is being said, and then resynthesize the speech in the appropriate form in a different language (the difference being that in simultaneous the interpreter begins resynthesizing before having been able to hear the totality of the speech to be analyzed – a problem we shall return to). It is this continuous *analysis and resynthesis*, a constant active intellectual apprehension of speech and its meaning, that enables the conference interpreter to walk the tightrope between travesty a speaker's message by over-literal translation and betraying it by inaccuracy, which may in turn be involuntary or due to excessive liberties taken with the text by the interpreter.

It is also clear that conference interpreters work in 'real time'. In simultaneous, by definition, they cannot take longer than the original speaker, except for a few odd seconds. Even in consecutive they are expected to react immediately after the speaker has finished, and their interpretation must be fast and efficient. This means that interpreters must have the capacity not only to analyze and resynthesize ideas, but also to do so very quickly and when working under stress.

## **The Context of the Conference Interpreter's Work**

Besides the technical difficulties of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation – which are the object of much of this book – the interpreter is faced with the problem of working in different contexts and with a vast range of subjects.

One may work for international organizations, or one may be turned more towards the private sector, offering one's services on an ad hoc basis to private companies, trades unions, ministries, political parties and all kinds of scientific and academic conferences and seminars, as well as the countless meetings organized by the ever-growing cohort of international lobbies.

In an international organization interpreters are nowadays likely to work essentially in simultaneous. In the vast machines that these organizations have tended to become (one thinks of de Gaulle's 'grand machin') they generally remain an anonymous voice, with little or no personal contact with the delegates they are working for. If one works regularly for the same organization, either as a member of staff or as a freelance interpreter who prefers to take regular employment from it, then a certain amount of the work becomes routine: one is acquainted with the procedures, the topical issues, one may even