

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING PRACTICE EXERCISES

- Q. Had you ever been to the residence at 2953 Bradley St. prior to the incident that occurred on January 12, 1991, when you were stabbed with a knife?
- A. No, that was the first time I had ever been there. John had invited me before, but I never went there until the night of the party, when I was stabbed.
- Q. Did you recognize any of the individuals who were present at the party at John's house, at 2953 Bradley St., that night of January 12?
- A. Well, there was one fellow I knew from work, and of course, John and his wife, and then there was the guy who stabbed me. I had seen him before with John playing soccer after work.
- Q. What about the person you were acquainted with from your job, can you tell us his name and describe him?
- A. Yes, his name is Fred Bridges, and he's about, well, I would say about six feet tall, and he has reddish blond hair, and he's kind of a burly fellow, you know, pretty big and muscular.
- Q. Now, what about the person you say allegedly stabbed you at the party on January 12? Can you give us his name, and/or describe him for the record?
- A. Well, I know his name now, but I didn't at the time. He's sitting over there at the defense table. He has long blond hair in a pony tail, and he's wearing a suit and tie. That night he had on a leather outfit.
- Q. I'd like you to tell us about the events that led up to the stabbing that night at the party on January 12. Did the defendant say anything to you, or did you say anything to him?
- A. No, man, I didn't say or do anything to him. He was raging around the place, probably high on something, he was yelling at everyone. Then he suddenly pulled this knife, and since I was the closest person to him, he stabbed me.
- Q. What was your reaction to -- strike that. What part or parts of your body, if any, were touched by the knife when he allegedly stabbed you?
- A. First he got me in the upper arm, here, in the biceps of my right arm. Then, as I tried to dodge him, he stabbed me again in the left shoulder area and down lower, in the left kidney area. I'm lucky I'm still alive to tell you.

Purse Snatching

(From The Interpreter's Edge, generic edition, © 1993 ACEBO)

Clerk: Do you solemnly swear the testimony you shall give in this case will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?¹

Witness: Yes, I swear.

Prosecutor: Mrs. Wallace, please state your full name and occupation for the record.

Witness: My name is Mary Katherine Wallace, and I'm a housewife.

Prosecutor: Mrs. Wallace, I direct your attention to the evening of April 24 of this year at about 8:00 PM. Do you remember that date and time?

Witness: Yes, I remember it as if it were yesterday.

Prosecutor: Could you please tell the court and the jury what, if anything, happened to you at that date and time?

Witness: Well, I'll tell you. I was on my way home from the supermarket when I felt someone pulling on my purse. When I turned around, I saw this dark fellow pulling on my purse, and then the strap broke; he went running off with it,

Prosecutor: Did you see the face of the person who took your purse?

Witness: I sure did. I saw his face as clearly as I see yours.²

Prosecutor: Could you point out that individual if you see him in court today?

Witness: Yes. He's the one sitting over there wearing a blue shirt.

Prosecutor: Your Honor, the record should reflect that the complainant has pointed to the defendant, Ronald David.

Judge: Very well. Do the People have any further questions of this witness?

¹The wording of this oath may vary.

²The witness is being very emphatic; make sure you retain the emphasis and convey how certain she is of her recollection.

Prosecutor: Yes, your Honor. The People do have a few more questions. Mrs. Wallace, you stated that you were coming home from the supermarket on the evening of April 24 when someone took your purse.

Witness: Yes, that's just what I said.

Prosecutor: Were you alone on the evening in question?

Witness: Yes. I was alone because I only went to the market to buy milk.

Prosecutor: You also said you felt someone pulling on your purse?

Witness: Well, I felt a strong pull, and it was when I turned around that I saw that young man that's over there.

Prosecutor: Are you sure that the young man sitting here is the same one you saw pulling at your purse?

Witness: I already told you that it was light, and I saw him just like I see you standing here right now.

Prosecutor: Could you tell us what the individual who allegedly took your purse was wearing that evening?

Witness: He was wearing a blue shirt, peach-colored pants, and a blue cap.

Prosecutor: Did this individual say anything to you?

Witness: He didn't say anything. It happened very fast. He just grabbed my purse and took off running.

Prosecutor: Did you go after him or call for help?

Witness: Look, I was so startled that I couldn't even yell, but a man who was close by went running after him, and he caught him two blocks away.

Prosecutor: Did there come a time when you saw the defendant again?

Witness: Yes. When the police brought him in the patrol car.

Prosecutor: Had you ever seen this young man before that day?

Witness: Never. And I hope I never see him again for as long as I live.

Prosecutor: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Judge: Counsel,³ do you have any cross?

Defense: Yes, your Honor. Just a few questions. Now, Mrs. Wallace, in your earlier testimony, you said that you saw the person's face very clearly, is that correct?

Witness: Yes. That's what I said, and that's how it was. I'm not telling you anything but the truth, like I said when I was sworn in. I'm certainly not lying to you.

Defense: Yes, thank you. But isn't it possible that you could be mistaken in your recollection?

Prosecutor: Objection, your Honor, argumentative.

Judge: Sustained.

Defense: Let me rephrase that. Mrs. Wallace, let me show you what has been marked as People's Exhibit 3 for identification, a police report. I ask you to read the second paragraph to see if that refreshes your recollection.

Witness: But I can't read English, ma'am. Tell me what this report says. I don't remember this.

Defense: All right, Mrs. Wallace. It says, "Victim states assailant was a Hispanic male in his early twenties." Do you recall saying that to the officer who interviewed you?

Witness: Well, I don't know what I might have said to him. Like I told you, I was so shocked that I couldn't even speak. And to this day, it gives me chills.

Defense: Yes, Mrs. Wallace, but I ask you now to look at the defendant in this case, Mr. Davis. Wouldn't you say that he is clearly of African-American descent, not Hispanic?

Witness: Well, that is . . . I . . . I don't know what to tell you. I don't know anything about races or any of that stuff, but what I do know is that there are a lot of blacks who are Hispanic, too. At least that's the way it is in a lot of countries.

Defense: Mrs. Wallace, do you ever wear prescription lenses?

³In this context, *Counsel* is a form of address and is singular; in other contexts, it may be second person or third person, singular or plural.

Witness: Pardon? What're those?

Defense: I mean, do you wear glasses or contact lenses to help you see better?

Witness: No, only to read. When I'm out on the street, when I'm doing my chores, I don't wear anything. I'm not wearing anything right now.

Defense: Thank you, Mrs. Wallace. I have no further questions.

SIGHT TRANSLATION PRACTICE EXERCISES

The exercises outlined below will help you develop skills in sight translation. Practice them in all your working languages.

Exercises in Public Speaking

1. Reading aloud - stand in front of a mirror and read passages aloud from any book, newspaper or magazine - a legal textbook, code book or other legal text is a good idea to become used to legal language. Record yourself and play back the tape when you are finished. Listen (and, if you can, videotape yourself, also observe) yourself critically and pay attention to your voice, pitch, tone, hesitations, sighs, projection, enunciation and posture.
2. Controlling emotions - practice controlling your emotions, while reading aloud, texts with high emotional content such as fear, anger, humor, etc. Make sure you convey the author's intended emotions, not your personal reaction to the subject matter.
3. Public speaking - practice speaking before a group of people at every opportunity. People you know will provide a less threatening audience and will allow you to ease your way into public speaking and build your confidence. Court interpreting is an ongoing exercise in public speaking, with witness interpreting and sight translation the consummate interpreter's arena.

Reading Ahead in the Text

1. Extensive reading - build up your reading speed and, as a bonus, also your vocabulary by reading as much as possible in many different fields.
2. Analyzing - analyze the content of each text and practice picking out the subject and verb to help find the core of meaning. (Example: although less influential than in Argentina, migration from Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected the development of Chilean political culture. Subject: migration; verb: affected)
3. Identifying sentences and embedded sentences - read a text aloud and as you are reading, break up long sentences into smaller, more manageable units. (Example: juvenile delinquency, which is seen most often among minority youths in urban ghettos, nevertheless cannot be attributed to the urban environment alone, as it plagues the suburbs as well. There are three embedded sentences in this complex sentence:

- A. Juvenile delinquency is seen most often among minority youths in urban ghettos.
 - B. It cannot be attributed to the urban environment alone.
 - C. It plagues the suburbs as well.
4. Deciphering handwriting - obtain texts written by hand (e.g. letters) and practice deciphering the handwriting on the first oral reading.

Analytical Skills

1. Reading for content - read a text aloud to a friend and afterwards have the person ask you questions about its content.
2. Chunking - choose a text and mark off the units of meaning in it. (Example: I was getting ready/ to go out to lunch with/ my mother-in-law/ when/ all of sudden/ I felt sick to my stomach./ It occurred to me that/ it might be/ something psychosomatic,/ but I later found out that/ I was simply allergic to/ the perfume she always wore.
3. Using transcripts - perform the same task with transcripts of court proceedings (or any document with a question-and-answer format). Try to establish a hierarchy of importance of the units of meaning. (Example: Now, Mr. Jones, in your earlier testimony you mentioned that you had seen the defendant in that bar prior to the date of the incident. Can you tell us, or give us an approximation of how long before the incident it was that you first saw the defendant in the El Camino bar?)

Hierarchy of importance:

- A. How long before the incident
 - B. You first saw the defendant
 - C. In the El Camino bar
 - D. Tell us, or give approximation
 - E. Had seen defendant prior to date of incident
 - F. Mentioned in earlier testimony
 - G. Mr. Jones
 - H. Now
4. Completing phrases - have a friend write a series of incomplete phrases. Complete the phrases and determine whether the resulting sentences convey the same idea the friend originally had in mind. (Example: After being reprimanded unfairly by her boss in front of her coworkers, the secretary tendered . . . The judge determined that the defendant had strong ties to the community and therefore released him . . .) As you do this exercise, take note of the errors you make and be aware of how susceptible we are to reaching false conclusions based on partial information.

5. **Paraphrasing** - read a text out loud and rephrase it as you are going along, taking care not to change the meaning. (Example: Since political parties are found almost everywhere in Latin America, they would seem to be a common denominator in the region's political life. Yet this is not the case. Cultural, environmental and historical influences on party development are so varied they challenge conventional notions. Most nations hold periodic elections, but, like parties, the implications of elections differ profoundly from those we assume from our own culture. Rephrased: Because political parties can be found in just about every Latin American country, one might conclude that they are a common thread in the political life of this region. This is not so, however. There is such a great variety of cultural, environmental and historical influences on the development of parties that commonly held ideas are contradicted. Elections are held periodically in the majority of countries, but the implications of these proceedings, like those of parties, are very different from the assumptions we can make in our own culture.)

6. **Expanding** - read a text aloud and expand it (that is, say the same thing in more words) as you are going along, again taking care not to change the meaning. (Example: In spite of what you may have heard, scientists are just like other people. A scientist walking down the street may look just like an insurance agent or a car salesman, no wild mane of hair, no white lab coat. Expanded: Although you may have heard assertions to the contrary, there are no differences between scientists and people who are not in that profession. As a matter of fact, if you stroll on the sidewalk, you might mistake him for a person who sells insurance, or an automobile dealer. Scientists don't all have wild manes of hair, and they don't always wear white laboratory coats.)

7. **Condensing** - read a text aloud and condense it (that is, say the same thing in fewer words) as you are going along, retaining the same meaning. (Example: The multiplicity of cues which are utilized in the categorizing and sorting of the environment into significant classes are reconstructed from the strategies and modes of coping with the problems presented to the subjects. In many situations, no certainty can be achieved; the varying trustworthiness and merely statistical validity of the cues frequently make inferences only probable. Condensation: Many cues are used to classify the environment. They are reconstructed from the subjects' problem-solving strategies. Often, because the cues are not uniformly reliable and are only statistically valid, the results are not certain.)

8. **Manipulating the register** - read a text aloud and alter the register or language level as you go along, being careful not to stray from the original meaning. (Example: As I was driving to work in the morning, I noticed that the stop sign which used to be on the corner of Main and 1st had been removed. Higher level: Upon transporting myself to my place of employment in a motor vehicle at some point in time prior to noon, I observed that the insignia which had formerly been stationed at the intersection of the thoroughfares known as Main and 1st to cause motorists to bring their vehicles to a stationary position, had been displaced. Lower level: On my way to work in the morning I saw that they took out the stop sign that used to be at Main and 1st.)

EXERCISES TO DEVELOP AND TO IMPROVE SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING SKILLS

The suggested exercises listed here are based on experiences gained in the training of both conference and court interpreters. Since the various modes of interpretation involve many of the same mental tasks, the exercises recommended in the sight translation and consecutive interpretation sections will contribute to the development of simultaneous interpreting (SI) skills as well. The exercises in the sight translation section that are designed to develop analytical techniques are particularly applicable to SI, as are the memory building exercises outlined in the consecutive section.

The following exercises, designed specifically to build the skills involved in SI, are divided into those that emphasize dual-tasking and those that emphasize input analysis. These exercises should be done in all of the interpreter's working languages, beginning with his native, or more dominant, language. They should be practiced daily, for about a half hour at a time, as SI skills must be acquired over time to allow for maximum routinization.

Dual-Tasking Exercises

1. Have someone record passages from magazines or newspapers on tape, or record radio or television talk shows or interview programs (news broadcasts are not suitable for these exercises, because the pace is too fast and the content is too dense). The subject matter of these passages is irrelevant, but it should not be too technical nor contain too many statistics and proper names. Essays and opinion columns are good sources of texts for recording. As you play back the tape, "shadow" the speaker: repeat everything the speaker says, verbatim. Try to stay further and further behind the speaker, until you are lagging at least one unit of meaning behind.
2. Once you feel comfortable talking and listening at the same time and are not leaving out too much, begin performing other tasks while shadowing. First, write the numerals from 1 to 100 on a piece of paper as you are repeating what the speaker says (make sure you are writing and speaking at the same time, not just writing during pauses). When you are able to do that successfully, write the numerals in reverse order, from 100 to 1. Then write them counting by 5's, by 3's and so on. Note what happens whenever numbers appear in the text you are shadowing.
3. When you are able to do exercise 2 with minimal errors, begin writing out words while shadowing. Begin with your name and address, written repeatedly. Then move on to a favorite poem or a passage such as the preamble to the U.S. Constitution (always choose a passage in the same language as that which you are shadowing). When writing this text, you should copy from a piece of paper placed in front of you; do not try to write the passage from memory while shadowing the tape.

4. While shadowing the tape as in the previous exercises, write down all the numbers and proper names you hear. Then play the tape back and check to see if you wrote them correctly.

The purpose of the above exercises is to accustom your mind to working on two "channels" at once and to force you to lag behind the speaker. If you find yourself breezing through the exercise with no problem, move on to the next one; you should be taxing your mental capacities to the fullest at all times. On the other hand, if you are having difficulty keeping up with the speaker and are barely able to mumble a few words at a time, move back to the previous exercise until doing it. These exercises should be repeated as many times as necessary over a long period of time.

Analysis Exercises

1. Using the same tapes you prepared for the above exercises (or with new ones, if you have grown tired of those), rephrase what the speaker says rather than simply repeating it (see the example of the rephrasing exercise in the sight translation section). Stating the same message in different words forces you to lag behind the speaker, waiting until he has said something meaningful for you to work with. In order to change the wording of the message without altering the meaning, you must thoroughly analyze and understand the original message. This exercise also develops your vocabulary, because you are constantly searching for synonyms and alternative ways of phrasing things. It is perfectly acceptable and even advisable for you to look up words and phrases in a dictionary or thesaurus before attempting to rephrase the passages on the tape. It does not matter how many times you go over the tape again; even if you have memorized the passages, you are still deriving benefit from the exercise. Rephrasing simulates mental processes required in SI in that you must abandon the original wording and put the message into a different external form, while retaining all of its meaning.
2. To develop your ability to predict the outcome of a message based on your knowledge of the source language's syntax and style and on your common sense and experiences, do the following exercises with written passages from a magazine or newspaper:
 - A. Cover up the latter half of a sentence and try to predict the ending of it. Did certain key words provide important clues?
 - B. Read the title of an entire article or essay and try to predict the content. Confirm or reject your conclusion as you read the article.
 - C. Read the article, paragraph by paragraph, predicting what will come next. Again, pick out key words that contain hints about the direction in which the author is heading.
 - D. Repeat exercises A and B with oral input, having someone read the passages to you.
 - E. Just as you increase your awareness of key words, learn to look for pitfalls that can lead you astray, such as embedded clauses and dangling participles. Develop your ability to skip over those distractions and get to the heart of a sentence or passage.

3. Using all the techniques you have developed in the preceding exercises, begin interpreting from the source language to the target language. At first, use the tapes you have already recorded and worked on in the other exercises. Then make new tapes specifically for interpreting practice. You may want to choose texts related to law and the courts for this purpose, but do not make them too technical at first. When you feel you are ready, use some actual court proceedings for practice. Court reporting schools are a good source of professionally recorded tapes of law-related texts. Additional exercises and recommendations for improvement can be found in the Federal Court Interpreter Examination Manual (Gonzalez, 1986).