The "Tandem" Method Training Interpreters to Work at National Courts

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Abstract/Résumé
Les migrants ne sont pas toujours de anglophones, francophones, hispanophones, etc. et ne viennent pas nécessairement de pays pour lesquels les instituts prestigieux forment des plethores d'interprètes ou traducteurs. Les besoins linguistiques sont essentiellement tributaires des foyers de crise et variant en fonction de ceux-ci.
La difficulté essentielle désormais est donc de réagir en toute urgence, en fonction des flux migratoires et d'ajuster en conséquence la formation de nouveaux traducteurs et interprètes judiciaires.
Les auteurs exposant ici un modèle de formation directement inspiré de la théorie interprétative de la traduction développée à l'ESIT (Sorbonne Nouvelle) à l'initiative de Danica Selskovicitch et tout particulièrement, à un modèle de formation continue créé à Hambourg. Cette dernière s'étalait sur une année vis à réagir en souplesse à tous nouveaux besoins linguistiques. Les auteurs présenteront les diverses étapes de cet enseignement.

Keywords/Mots-Clés
Tandem method, interpreter training, court interpreting, legal interpreting, national courts

I. Introduction

In Europe there is practically no formalised training scheme for court interpreters to work at national courts as yet. Courses devoted exclusively to such training are extremely rare, although a number of university programmes and similar projects initiated and supported by the European Commission\(^1\) have long strived to define

\(^1\) Several projects, including GROTIUS, AGIS and EULITA, were funded by DG Justice. The EU Commission also initiated:
- Green Paper on Procedural Safeguards for Suspects and Defendants in Criminal Proceedings throughout the European Union. 19/02/2003. COM(2003);
training curricula and necessary qualifications - all this in the interests of due administration of justice and upholding human rights.

The interpreting profession itself is often underrated by national courts, which fail to realise its scope and potential and indeed are unaware of the application of interpreting techniques in the pursuit of justice, despite their acceptance in practice by international courts. Quite apart from this misconception, a degree of prejudice persists, albeit scarcely conceded, especially in cases of criminal proceedings. Frequently heard questions include “What is the point of interpreting everything for ‘that kind of person’?” or “Wouldn’t it be too expensive to hire real professionals?”

Interestingly enough on the other hand such questions hardly ever arise in the United States, where a number of interpreter certification programmes were set up pursuant to the “Court Interpreters Act” of 1978 and the “Court Interpreters Amendment” of 1988. Certification in the United States requires an in-depth knowledge of the respective working languages, complete mastery of the modes of interpreting such as consecutive (with and without notes) and simultaneous, competence in sight translation, an understanding of the legal procedural terminology as well as the application of a code of ethics.

There are nevertheless new developments within the European Union and pending legislation will lead to an increase in the recruitment of qualified interpreters at national courts within the member states. This in turn will lead to a growing demand for training opportunities.

As practising conference interpreters with experience of working at European and other international courts and tribunals, the authors apply the same interpreting

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1 A recent project: The Reflection Forum on Multilingualism and Interpreter Training convened on the initiative of former Commissioner L. Orbán with the support of the Directorate-General for Interpretation, representing various stakeholders, with the remit to draw up recommendations relating to the work and training of legal interpreters. The final report is available at http://scic.es/europa.eu/europa/jcms/pr_11885/reflection-forum-on-multilingualism-and-interpreter-training-final-report.

2 A convincing example of this awareness is The Consortium for Language Access in the Courts regrouping 41 US States to promote and support “programs to provide competent and effective interpreting and other language services for people with limited English proficiency involved in courts and tribunals” http://www.ncsc.org/Education-and-Careers/State-Interpreter-Certification.asp.

3 A promising development in this direction is the recent DIRECTIVE 2010/64/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 20 October 2010 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings.

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techniques when working at national courts. Against this background and given their experience as interpreter trainers for several courses, including interpreter training courses organised by the European Commission / DG SCIC, the authors were motivated to devise and implement training courses for court and legal interpreters on the principle that professional interpretation can make a valuable contribution to the enforcement of human rights as stipulated in the European Convention on Human Rights.

II. Constraints on the practice of court interpreting and their impact on training

In order to develop and implement sustainable training programmes which are capable of contributing to the proper administration of justice, it is important to understand the specific constraints of court interpreting and by corollary their impact on court interpreter training. At the same time it must be borne in mind that “interpreting is interpreting” whatever the environment and that any concession in terms of quality of interpreter performance in comparison to that of the trained conference interpreter is morally unacceptable. The following are some of the principal constraints and obstacles to be overcome in such training programmes:

2.1 Suspicion and lack of prestige

The training of conference interpreters is firmly anchored within universities and training institutions and enjoys a certain degree of international prestige. The training of court interpreters on the other hand has often been viewed with a certain degree of

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7 The European Masters in Conference Interpreting for example is a consortium launched in 1997 by the European Commission and the European Parliament which drew up a core curriculum for training conference interpreters and encourages the partner institutions to pursue a common policy in this respect.

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suspicion and sceptis owing to the absence of recognition of the profession and because of the disparity among its members, particularly in Europe, in terms of qualification. In fact in most European countries courts are not obliged to engage trained interpreters and in many cases, especially with languages of lesser diffusion, recruitment is based on the availability of the nearest person with a vague understanding of the languages concerned. As a result, training courses for court interpreters are offered by very few universities and training institutions.

2.2 Lack of consensus on curricula

The market requirements for interpreters working at international organisations are well defined and precise, so that there is a general consensus among interpreter trainers as to the techniques to be taught to conference interpreters (consecutive, simultaneous, sight-translation, sight-interpretation, conference preparation, etc.).

However, very few judges and administration services at national courts are aware of such techniques, let alone understand their usefulness and require their application during court hearings. As a result there is no consensus regarding the skills required by interpreters working at court or what should be included in training curricula.

2.3 Constraints of bidirectional interpreting

The goal of conference interpreter training is to achieve a very high level of performance interpreting into the native language, the A language, from the B and C languages, and a solid performance from the A language into the B language, the second working language. Interpreting at national courts on the other hand is by necessity and almost exclusively bidirectional. Despite the obvious drawbacks, this

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7 For this reason EU Commission DG Justice promoted the creation of EULITA, the European Association of Legal Interpreters and Translators www.eulita.eu with the remit to harmonise training and the profile of the profession.

8 As the European Convention on Human Rights and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights give neither detailed indications as to the required qualification of an interpreter nor to the scope of interpretation, national laws, such as the German Courts Constitution Act (Gerichtsverfassungsgesetz) (§ 185 GVG) are also silent on this matter.

http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gvg/englisch_gvg.html#GVGengl_000P184

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situation will not change in the national courts of any European country in the near future. This means that command of the B working language must be very close to native language level, while a passive C language is rarely useful. Therefore curricula and qualifying examinations for court interpreters must take this specific feature into account.

2.4 Heterogeneous nature of communication in court

There is also a sharp contrast between the conference setting and that of the courtroom. The setting of international meetings is generally homogeneous: specialists (engineers, doctors, sociologists, diplomats, etc.) more or less on a par in relation to training, qualification and social level. They may lack knowledge of certain languages but still wish to exchange views and communicate with the aid of interpreters. The latter are less versed in the subject but master the techniques of preparation and interpretation necessary to facilitate this type of international communication.

At court on the other hand the parties come from completely different socio-cultural worlds. The court interpreter often bridges chasms of incomprehension which are not always solely linguistic. To varying degrees the court interpreter is better or less informed than one or other of the parties:

- The interpreter generally knows the legal procedure better than his foreign client, who on the other hand has more knowledge of the facts.
- The interpreter generally has a poorer knowledge of the legal proceedings than the members of the court or tribunal.
- On the other hand by comparison with the members of the court or tribunal, the interpreter in most cases has a superior knowledge of the language and culture of the accused or the foreign witness.

Court interpreter training therefore should be strongly biased towards thematic content (legal proceedings) while at the same time concentrating on the techniques of socio-cultural communication.

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2.5 Lack of interpreter training opportunities for languages of lesser diffusion

Since conference interpreters work mainly with languages commonly used in international communication, training institutions usually have no difficulty in finding trainers who are practising interpreters, native speakers and who have the necessary pedagogical skills.

By contrast, this poses a major difficulty in organising training courses for court interpreters working with languages of lesser diffusion, particularly in response to the rapid fluctuations in migratory population movement. Political turmoil and the relaxing of travel restrictions in Europe towards the end of the 20th century, coupled with the enlargement of the European Union, resulted in large numbers of people moving from one country to another, especially from Eastern Europe to Western Europe, seeking temporary or permanent residence. This phenomenon brought with it an increasing need for intercultural communication at every level and more precisely at national courts. Languages such as Polish, Czech and BCS (formerly Serbo-Croat) were now being used increasingly in court as well as Albanian, Azerbaijani, Bulgarian, Georgian or Romanian. The situation became critical owing to the lack of qualified interpreters and the almost total absence of training opportunities.

III. Obstacles can be surmounted applying what finally came to be known as the “tandem method”

3.1 The initiators

The authors were able to overcome the obstacles mentioned above by applying and systematically developing a teaching model created by Danica Seleskovitch at ESIT in the late 1950s to train the first interpreters in Arabic and French at the time of the Suez crisis. The method was known as the “triangular course” (for special cases) and was developed for the training of conference interpreters in languages other than the conference languages in frequent use at that time. Karla Déjean le Féal also applied the same method, not only for training interpreters at ESIT in what she called “exotic
languages but also in the field, in Thailand for example. For this she coined the English designation “team teaching”. Colette Laplace has also directed a similar project for the training of Vietnamese interpreters for several years. The same method was then taken up in the training programmes for the language service of the European Commission / DG SCIC to train interpreters from the new member states in courses for which the number of interpreters and interpreter trainers available was initially very limited. And consequently the authors also started to apply this method to train conference interpreters (Finnish, Swedish, etc.) for the European Commission and the European Parliament.

3.2 Why is it called “tandem”?

Gradually the term “tandem” became established and was retained by the authors in the context of the training courses for court interpreters which were subsequently developed at the University of Applied Sciences of Magdeburg-Stendal and the University of Hamburg. Etymologically, before it was applied to a bicycle for two riders, the term designated a carriage pulled by two beasts of burden. This image aptly illustrates how the training method operates, in that the training task is divided somewhat unevenly between two distinct functions: linguistic expression on the one hand and interpreting technique on the other. The interpreter trainer manages and guides the teaching, relying on the linguistic evaluation provided by the language expert. It is important to note that this is much less a matter of acquiring or honing language skills than of specifically learning interpreting techniques.

IV. Objective and structure of continuing education courses to train court interpreters

The court interpreter training courses offered by the University of Applied Sciences

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of Magdeburg-Stendal and the University of Hamburg were developed to provide an opportunity for candidates with the necessary language skills to qualify as sworn interpreters to work for courts and public authorities both from and into German. These are part-time courses providing training in specialised professional skills.

4.1 Aim and content

The courses were designed to prepare candidates to become sworn interpreters at German national courts. There is a growing awareness of the importance of qualification in this field and the authorities ratifying the qualification of sworn interpreters have now recognised that a command of the following skills is essential:

- Sight translation
- Consecutive interpreting with and without notes
- Whispered simultaneous interpreting
- Legal translation
- Knowledge of legal proceedings requiring interpreting

4.2 Structure of language groups and duration of the course

Ideally the individual language groups should be restricted to a maximum of five participants, working with one language expert per group. In cases where there are only one or two candidates per language and where for reasons of cost it is impractical for the language expert to be present at every group session, it is recommended to form “mixed” language groups for the benefit of interaction among the participants. The mixed language group can work together with an interpreter trainer and have fewer sessions with the language expert in each language, since the sessions with the expert are necessarily more intense due to the size of the group. For example, a mixed group could be made up of one candidate with Korean, two with Vietnamese and two with Thai.

The training courses generally comprise ten to twelve teaching blocks of 10 hours per

13 http://www.ww.uni-hamburg.de/dolmetschen-uebersetzen-gerichte-behoerden.htm

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month, the block extending over two days. Each block consists of 6 hours of interpreter training and 4 hours of subject-related teaching (judicial proceedings, police, notarial matters, etc.), aspects which will not be elaborated here.

A further 300 hours of personal study is required from each participant throughout the course.\textsuperscript{14}

Time constraints are such that the interpreter trainers must start bidirectional interpreting (A-B, B-A) at a very early stage and on a variety of specific subjects, paying particular attention to monitoring progression. Material constraints are such that the approach must be pragmatic and creative.

4.3 Participant profile

In the main the courses are directed towards speakers of languages of lesser diffusion, including users of sign language. They will be graduates or have the equivalent of a university degree. They may be practising translators, interpreters or lawyers or they may come from a completely different academic discipline. These requirements are similar to those of the DG SCIC training courses and enable the trainers to concentrate on the essential matter of legal interpreting.

4.4 Trainer profile

The interpreter trainers should be practising interpreters with a high level of professional experience both in interpreting and in interpreter training.

They work in "tandem" with language experts for languages of lesser diffusion, if possible native speakers or speakers for whom the language is the language of culture. The language experts will possess a high-level command of the teaching language and they should be university graduates, preferably in the social sciences, languages, translation or other related disciplines.

\textsuperscript{14} Total workload 410 hours corresponding to 13.5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) points

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4.5 Equipment and teaching environment

It is recommended to create a workshop atmosphere with chairs arranged in a semi-circle, trays attached to chairs, rather than desks arranged in traditional school-room fashion. This is usually easy to arrange since the language groups are limited in size. It is also important to have the use of a sound projector or any other equipment to display video recordings and a portable wireless system ("bidule") for whispering interpreting. It may also be useful to have a camera to record the performance of participants during class exercises and during oral examinations. Not essential, but practical would be the use of interpreter booths for simultaneous interpreting. Since time is of the essence, the use of any equipment should be planned well in advance. Setting up technical equipment must not encroach upon the valuable time required for exercises.

4.6 Progression of the course

The intention at this point is not to discuss the further content of the training course, such as legal subjects, code of ethics, legal written translation and terminology. The focus is rather on the tandem method applied in the teaching of the following techniques:

- Sight translation
- Consecutive interpreting without notes
- Consecutive interpreting with notes
- Whispered simultaneous interpreting

The pedagogical principles applied are essentially those described by Seleskovitch & Lederer in "Pédagogie raisonnée de l’interprétation" with the exception of certain details, slightly different in the case of conference interpreting, to which we will return later, since they relate to the need to practise bidirectional interpreting at a very early stage and to the selection of texts and contents.

The primary advantage of the tandem method is nonens volens a sharp pedagogical

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distinction between language and interpretation techniques.

The learning targets are devised around well defined objectives prior to each exercise. The participants concentrate firstly on those targets without fear of the detailed criticism they will later be subject to but which they could not cope with at this stage. Priorities obviously develop as the exercises progress.

During the initial exercises in sight translation, for example, the interpreter trainer concentrates on the student acquiring a three-part rhythm: understanding the meaning in the source language, processing the message\(^{16}\) and raising the eye from the page to look at the audience while formulating the message in the target language. Any distortion of meaning will be mentioned at this stage, without dwelling however on linguistic style.

The method therefore comprises two phases, the first centred mainly on interpreting techniques. Once the knowledge acquired in the first phase is assimilated, the second phase concentrates on the linguistic means necessary to transmit the meaning faithfully: correction of the language and accuracy in terminology, inter alia.

4.7 The interpreter trainer working alone during the first phase

The interpreter trainer initially works alone with the entire class of students to give a theoretical introduction and establish the interpreting techniques. During this phase, teaching is practised in the lingua franca and in the presence of the entire multilingual group. The class may also be divided up at any time if more than one interpreter trainer is present. Only after two or three teaching blocks in this initial phase does the tandem phase begin, with interpreter trainers working alongside the respective language experts in separate language groups. The first phase comprises the following stages:

- How to communicate: The very first stage necessarily starts with a brief introduction to communication techniques specific to legal interpreting (which scarcely differ from those of any other kind of interpretation). The following are some of the points addressed:

1. Use of the first person when speaking on behalf of the parties, third person when the

\(^{16}\) "De-verbalisation" according to the Interpretative Approach (Theory of Sense) by Seleskovich & Lederer.

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interpreter is speaking on behalf of himself
- When and how to ask for clarification
- Basic rhetorical skills to inspire credibility (breathing techniques, stress management, visual contact, staying-power, etc.).

These principles are put into practice during simple exercises describing persons, objects, places, biographies, etc. in preparation for questioning and cross-examination in court which will feature prominently in the future activity of the court interpreter. In practising interpreting techniques the students must first prepare specific topics to be presented in class with a minimum of notes and preferably in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. They must not read a prepared text, but deliver their presentation applying the rhetorical skills previously addressed and communicating in a plausible manner.

Theory: During the second stage, also in plenum, the interpreter trainer proceeds with a brief theoretical presentation of each of the interpreting modes as they are introduced one by one. This should be a segment of 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the group. The principles are those established for conference interpreter training.

However, in consideration of the specific context of legal interpreting, emphasis is placed on the precision of transcribing in each interpreting mode. The interpreter must render place names, people’s names, figures, dates, descriptive elements, specialist terms (legal, technical, medical) with the highest degree of precision. For ethical reasons the court interpreter will be called upon at times to say things that he knows are blatantly wrong or even stupid, at a level of language he would not normally use, if they are said by the person whose speech has to be interpreted.

Practical exercises: During the third stage the theoretical knowledge is put into immediate practice into the native language, A language, or into the working language, B language. Bidirectional interpreting is required by the circumstances previously described and consequently it must be practised as early as possible.

The teaching materials used for sight translation may be newspaper articles dealing with various facts including terms frequently encountered in police and court environments: crimes (murder, rape, human trafficking, etc.), various offences (theft, assault, drug dealing, bill dodging), standard procedures (police custody, remand, enforcement of sentences, deportation, extradition). Presentations for consecutive and

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simultaneous interpreting are given by both students (A and B languages) and interpreter trainers on relevant topics to be decided at the beginning of the training course.

If the interpreter trainer has no knowledge of one of the languages, the speakers of that language among the students are invited to comment on the interpretation as to whether it was complete and faithful to the original. Given the admission criteria for the training course and stringent requirements of the admission test, the participants are certainly capable of providing reliable criticism at this stage.

All of the participants, even those who have no knowledge of the source language, are also invited to assess the quality of communication on the basis of the objective criteria previously discussed. This third-party evaluation is important to illustrate to participants the kind of formulation, bearing and performance to be emulated or avoided, and is often more convincing than any comments offered by a teacher.

A rapid transition is made from general subjects dealing with social matters, daily politics to various scenarios involving legal and police-related terminology.

Once the principles of one interpreting mode are mastered, the next mode is introduced. Nevertheless, once they have been taught, each mode is systematically practised during each session. A typical session will start with sight translation exercises followed by consecutive without notes (dialogue interpreting), consecutive with notes and finally whispered simultaneous interpreting. To make full use of the teaching material and to save time it is also possible to use the same presentation for whispering simultaneous and consecutive interpreting in parallel.

For practical reasons the language expert does not enter the scene until all of the interpreting modes have been taught. From a pedagogical standpoint however it is certainly feasible for him to start gradually after each mode has been introduced, as is the practice for the degree course at the University of Applied Sciences of Magdeburg-Stendal.

4.8 Trainers and language experts in tandem

It is of primary importance to define the role of each player from the start. The "director" is the interpreter trainer who arranges the exercises in accordance with a scale
of progression, of which the language expert must be previously informed. Whatever
the exercise, it is important to distinguish between the technical aspects of interpreting,
the correction of language and the accuracy of terminology. Peer input from the
students is also a valuable tool in this respect.

An exercise in consecutive interpreting with notes, for example, would be conducted
as follows: When the interpreter student has performed the exercise, the interpreter
trainer will first ask the language group about the overall impression, including positive
elements or where there is room for improvement. Any questions should be structured
and the comments must be objective (avoiding lengthy discussion). Important in a court
environment are:

- Quality of communication (bearing, gesture, visual contact, voice, delivery)
- Rendering the full meaning (conformity, completeness)
- Accuracy of terminology (socio-cultural and legal aspects).

After the first round the language expert will then give an assessment, first of
substance:

- Faithful rendering of the message
- Correct terminology.

This is followed by an assessment of form:

- Quality of communication
- Correction of the language
- Influence on the faithfulness of the transmitted message, which is of particular
  importance when interpreting into the B language.

Unless he is an experienced interpreter himself, the language expert will not assess
the interpretation as such. A teacher always puts himself at risk when criticising
something he cannot do himself.

The interpreter trainer now enters the playing field. The first task is to establish a link
between successes and shortcomings in the interpreting performance and the command
or lack thereof of the relevant interpreting mode:

- Poor note-taking and its effect on the faithful rendering of the message
- Excessive concentration on written notes reducing credibility and indicating that the role of note-taking has not been understood, etc.

The interpreter trainer should refrain from interfering in correction of a language he does not have a good command of.

4.9 Scope of assessment by trainers and peers

The assessment should be concise and concentrate on the essence. It must address solely the performance and not the personality of the candidate and must not be subject to personal preferences. Objectivity takes the first place in determining the faithfulness of the rendered message. Only systematic errors or clumsiness of style should be highlighted for the benefit of the entire group (including speakers of other languages). Any oversight or slip of the tongue may be ignored.

It is essential to note and indicate progress and to offer encouragement. To remedy weaknesses, criticism should be accompanied by concrete suggestions. These may take the form of specific advice on how to improve the B language or recommendations to practise sight translation on a daily basis, using recording devices or even practising in front of a mirror.

V. Conclusion

The tandem method has been applied successfully in teaching students on degree courses at the University of Applied Sciences of Magdeburg-Stendal since the programme was initiated in 1999. Legal interpreters, sworn to work at a number of national courts have been trained applying the method not only in certain less “rare” languages, for example English, French, Spanish and Russian, but also in Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Polish and Ukrainian. The differences between the degree courses
and the part-time continuing training model are seen in two aspects. First, the degree course extends over seven semesters and there are fewer time constraints. Second, despite a stringent admission test, students participating in the degree course often lack the required maturity, which the teaching programme then has to take into consideration. These aspects were not be discussed in detail here.

The purpose of this article was to present a method known under different names and already practised with a high degree of success in training conference interpreters\textsuperscript{17}. The “universal” techniques of interpreting apply equally to court interpreting and interpreter trainers can rely with confidence on the key works which have been cited here. However, it should be noted that this teaching method must be adapted to the specific requirements for interpreting at national courts and for public services, taking into account the need for bidirectional interpreting, the preponderant role of transcoding monosemic legal terms and the legal component. By applying the tandem method it has been possible to train court interpreters in many languages in line with market requirements and to meet the growing needs arising from migratory shifts in population.

\textsuperscript{17} It is also applied to translator training: Roux-Faucard, G. (2005).
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