ON TEACHING CONFERENCE INTERPRETATION BETWEEN COGNATE LANGUAGES: TOWARDS A WORKABLE METHODOLOGY

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Preface

Conference interpretation is currently the subject of active research at world level. Old theories are confirmed or discarded on the basis of scientific tests. Consideration is given to language-specific aspects. Of these, the ones posed by interpretation between cognate languages appear to be particularly interesting and worthy of pedagogic attention. Indeed, when very different languages are involved, students are easily alerted to the relevant interpretation problems and are equally easily convinced of the need fully to study their source language (SL) and its culture, as the meaning of SL speeches is otherwise absolutely undecipherable. Furthermore, basic conference interpretation techniques (lagging, attention to the sense of the message rather than to the words in which it is couched, etc.) are immediately seen as unavoidable if target language (TL) intelligibility is to be achieved. When translating a cognate language, however, students often come to the conclusion that the message is generally transparent and that, even if rendered in the TL with little, if any, mediation, it still sounds somehow “right”. Any pedagogic approach to the teaching of conference interpretation between cognate languages must therefore come to terms with this underlying problem. Students must be led to realize that interpretation between cognate languages is as difficult as between very different languages and that failure to implement specific and tested strategies can have devastating effects on the accuracy and, sometimes, the very intelligibility of their delivery.

In the present paper, I describe some typical problems raised by conference interpretation between cognate languages, with examples taken from my professional and academic experience as free-lance interpreter for the European Communities and the private market as well as lecturer of conference

2 See, for example, The Interpreters’ Newsletter, Special Issue No. 1, 1992, entirely devoted to the specific aspects of translation and interpretation from and into Japanese.
interpretation from Spanish into Italian at the SSLM (Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori) of the University of Trieste. On that basis, I propose a preliminary approach to the development of a teaching methodology with a list of ad hoc exercises, most of which have been empirically tested in the classroom.

Part I: Inherent difficulties in interpretation between cognate languages

Introduction

In an article published in the third issue of The Interpreters' Newsletter, I gave a brief overview of the areas most likely to impair interpretation quality between cognate languages, with special reference to the Spanish-Italian combination. Here, I endeavour to build on that initial assessment and gain fuller insight into problems most likely to arise when translating, in particular, a Spanish speech into Italian.

Morphosyntax

Morphosyntactic problems often underlie clumsy or even utterly mistaken interpretation between cognate languages. A classification of Spanish problematic structures according to their degree of morphosyntactic dissimilarity with corresponding Italian structures has been the subject of a graduation thesis at the SSLM, later presented in an abridged form during a round table organized at the School (Russo, 1990). The author's categories and examples already provide a valuable working basis for the preparation of "targeted" exercises in which students are asked to develop translation automatisms. However, practical observations during my professional and academic activity were instrumental in detecting further morphosyntactic aspects that have been the subject of pedagogic attention in my lessons. The following are a few instances of such aspects.

Gender matching

Students learning to interpret a language similar to their own are soon faced with the problem of SL and TL paronyms that have similar meaning but different gender. In the Spanish-Italian case, a large number of Spanish masculine terms, like "énfasis", "análisis", "desmentido", "eclipse", "apéndice", and "origen" are feminine in Italian, while quite a few feminine words in Spanish, including "cárcel", "carga", "magneto", "proclama", "señal", and "orden" are masculine in Italian. Although, after some training, students generally manage to add the right article to the TL paronym, they often keep using the wrong gender with more distant attributes in sentences like the
following: "En este sentido, considero que deben apoyarse las dos enmiendas presentadas por el Grupo Socialista, una de las cuales tiende a reforzar precisamente la implicación de las autoridades de las regiones con vocación textil [...]."³

Word order

The need to change the word order in a sentence is rarely felt by interpreting students when the SL is cognate to the TL. The result of this attitude, almost invariably a clumsy or rather artificial translation, occasionally is actual misinterpretation. For example, the Spanish adverb "también" often misleads Italian interpreters as it does not always appear next to the expression it modifies. Such difficulty is clearly shown in sentences like the following: "Comprendo lo que han dicho algunos de ustedes: "Atención, en el Convenio de Lomé III había también unas previsiones de consulta y no siempre se hicieron."⁴

More often than not, students will assume the adverb refers to "previsiones" and deliver a formally correct but practically mistaken translation. Indeed, the modified expression is "Convenio de Lomé" and the quoted statement indicates that [...] "Anche nella Convenzione di Lomé erano previste delle consultazioni, ma non sempre hanno avuto luogo".

The same problem arises in connection with the adverb "igualmente": "Señora Presidenta, quiero felicitar igualmente al Sr. Cunha de Oliveira por el excelente trabajo que ha hecho en defensa de los intereses de un colectivo y de unas regiones importantes para la Comunidad, sobre todo para la parte sur de la Comunidad Económica Europea [...]."⁵

If the interpreter were to introduce the Italian "anche" or "parimenti" in the same position as its Spanish equivalent, the sentence would be understood as meaning that the speaker, after congratulating somebody else, now wishes to acknowledge Mr Cunha de Oliveira's work, too. In fact, he simply wants to join previous speakers in congratulating his colleague.

Relative clauses

Relative clauses are much more frequent in Spanish than in Italian. Therefore, if indiscriminately kept in the Italian translation, they would often sound correct but unnatural. For example, in sentences like: "El alto mando militar norteamericano ha pedido a la Casa Blanca que no acelere el estallido del

⁴ Marín, EC Commissioner, E.P., pr. ed., 15.5.90.
conflicto"\textsuperscript{6}, Italians would normally use an infinitive clause ("di non accelerare [...]").

In the following case, however: "El desmentido se produjo horas después de que el diario israelí Maariú publicará tal información"\textsuperscript{7}, a nominal clause would be the normal Italian choice ("dopo la pubblicazione [...]").

Furthermore, relative clauses such as the following: "Posteriormente, el pleno del Senado fijó en 6 pesetas la subida que experimentará el gasóleo desde el 1 de enero, rebajando en 2 pesetas las pretensiones de Hacienda"\textsuperscript{8}, can be omitted altogether with no sense loss and be replaced by a simple or compound preposition ("[...] ha fissato a 6 pesetas l'aumento del gasolio a partire dal primo gennaio [...]").

Finally, much more treacherous instances exist in which maintenance of the relative clause in Italian results not only in clumsiness but also in ambiguity. The following sentence is a case in point: "De hecho, en un primer momento, el ministro de Obras Públicas y Transportes, José Barrell, se mostró receptivo a sus peticiones y elaboró un informe que llegó a estudiar la Comisión Delegada del Gobierno"\textsuperscript{9}.

If the relative clause were kept in Italian, doubts would be raised in the listeners' minds as to whether the report went so far as to study the activities of the Government Committee, or whether, as the speaker actually meant to say, indeed it was the Committee that eventually studied the report. In this case, the best way to convey the sense of the original message would be the use of a past participle ("studiato dalla Commissione [...]").

**Modal verb omission**

Interpreters are often put off by Spanish sentences beginning with an infinitive that later turns out to be the second element of an elliptic modal verb combination. Sentences like the following, pronounced by a Spanish delegate in a meeting of the "Foodstuffs Legislation Group" at the EC Commission in Brussels, are heard quite frequently in normal interpreting practice: "Señor Presidente, un poco al hilo de lo manifestado por la delegación británica, decir que también tenemos unas dudas sobre la oportunidad de actuar de esta forma".

Modal verb omission ("quiero, or quisiera") before the infinitive "decir" might lead the interpreter to regard the infinitive as the subject of a non-existent subordinate clause. In this case, the suggested strategy would be to try and guess the real sense of the verb from the speaker's tone and, if uncertainty persists, resort to neutral sentence beginning, only adding the modifier, if necessary,

\textsuperscript{6} El País, 27.12.90: 1.
\textsuperscript{7} El País, 27.12.90: 2.
\textsuperscript{8} Laso D'Iom A., Larrañaga, "Los transportistas, dispuestos a convocar movilizaciones antes del final de este año", ABC, 19.12.91: 77.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
when the sense of the message becomes clear. In the previous example, one could start as follows: “Signor Presidente, [...], anche noi nutriamo dei dubbi sull'opportunità di questo modo di procedere”, and conclude the sentence there if modal verb omission eventually proves to have been the case, or add something like: “[...] ma questo non ci impedisce di accettare la soluzione proposta in uno spirito di collaborazione” if the infinitive turns out to have been the subject of a clause ending, for example, with: “no es óbice para que aceptemos la solución que se nos propone en un espíritu de colaboración”.

Lexicon

Paronyms, that is word pairs that look and/or sound similar but may have deep semantic differences, are the most serious and common lexical problem when translating a cognate language. For teaching purposes, a distinction between generic and technical paronyms has proved useful in raising students' awareness to the problem's different dimensions.

Generic paronyms
Connotatively different

Although probably less serious than outright misinterpretation, the use of a TL term that more or less conveys the same meaning as its SL paronym but would not normally be used by a TL speaker in the same context because of misleading connotations remains a hurdle to “transparent” interpretation. Furthermore, if frequent, it seriously impairs interpretation quality. Indeed, when an unusual, although understandable, term is used, listeners' attention shifts from the speaker's message to the words in which it is couched. Moreover, listeners may be led into thinking that the unusual term was employed by the original speaker for some unclear reason, with the result of further distraction and confusion.

Consider, for example, the following sentence: “El esfuerzo del Sr. Saridakis y de la Comisión de asuntos jurídicos para hacer lo más abierto posible y diáfano el mercado del seguro de vida es un esfuerzo realista que tiene en cuenta las dificultades existentes”.

If the interpreter were to translate the Spanish “diáfano” with its Italian paronym “diafano”, listeners would probably have no doubts as to the ultimate meaning of the word but would either get distracted by its unusual use in that context (the correct Italian equivalent would be “trasparente”, as “diafano”, although having basically the same meaning, immediately conjures up images of ethereal maidens) or start wondering whether the original speaker was being deliberately ironic.

The same can be said for the paronymic syntagms “dominio público” and “dominio pubblico” (which are almost homophones, too) as applied to the following statement: “La inclusión en este espacio, también, de bienes señalados en el artículo 3.º de la Ley de 28 de julio de 1988, es decir la Ley de Costas, o sea, las zonas de dominio público marítimo-terrestre, y la influencia de los procesos geológicos que allí se dan sobre la conservación del Parque Nacional [...]”11, where the use of “dominio pubblico” instead of the correct “de manio” (“State property”) once again draws the listeners’ attention to the peculiar use of the expression, away from the speaker’s message.

Classic

Classic paronyms, that is word pairs that even people with little or no SL knowledge have learned to mistrust because of the plethora of anecdotes recounted by tourist friends or which have been experienced first hand during a journey abroad, do not pose serious problems to interpretation students, who are expected to have been alerted to their existence in the early stages of language learning. Some pedagogic attention, however, should be devoted to the fact that some of the SL terms whose TL paronyms students would never use may have more than one meaning and accordingly pose problems to the unwary interpreter. Just to mention an example among many, the Spanish “amasar” is generally known to mean “impastare” (“to knead”) rather than “amassare” (“to accumulate”), but few students would recognize the verb as meaning “to plot” in sentences like: “¿Qué está amasando tu hermana?”

Lesser known

Lesser known paronyms include word pairs that are not easily recognized as treacherous but cause serious misinterpretation problems unless their full semantic contents are well known beforehand. The Spanish-Italian combination is particularly rich in such paronyms, which include, on the Spanish side, words like “bizarro” (“valoroso”, “valiant”, not “bizzarro”, “bizarre”), “boato” (“festo”, “pompa”, “ostentation”, not “boato”, “roar”), “comparsa” (“gruppo di persone in maschera”, “group of dressed-up people”, not “comparsa”, “bit player”), “dormitorio” (“camera da letto”, “bedroom”, not “dormitorio”, “dormitory”), “éxito” (“successo”, “success”, not “esito”, “result”), and “farfallón” (“balbuziente”, “stammerer”, not “farfallone”, “womanizer”).

An instance of gross misinterpretation arising from a Spanish word with an Italian paronym having a completely different meaning occurred at the SSLM during the 1991 Summer session of the final exams, when a candidate was...

11 Martínez-Campillo García, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, 26.6.90: 2225.
translating a speech by the then UN Secretary General, Pérez de Cuéllar, on drugs abuse and control.

"Me satisface, naturalmente, que la iniciativa surgiese en buena parte de mis coterráneos de América Latina; y, en forma más general, me ha complacido el amplio apoyo y aliento que los Estados Miembros han dado al fortalecimiento de los programas del Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Fiscalización del Uso Indebido de Drogas, la Junta Internacional de Fiscalización de Estupefacientes y nuestra División de Estupefacientes".

The student's usage of an Italian paronym ("fiscalizzazione") to translate the Spanish "Fiscalización" gave the Secretary General's statement a ludicrous overtone, as if he was proposing to levy a tax on the illicit use of drugs. Indeed, while the Spanish term implies the idea of enforcing controls, its Italian paronym only refers to taxation.

"Double edged"

SL lexical ambiguity is sometimes complicated by the fact that one of the senses of the ambiguous lexeme is roughly equivalent to that of its TL paronym. For the Spanish-Italian combination, a fitting example of such "double-edged" paronyms is given by the Spanish adjective "tremendo", which adds to the meaning of "terrible", shared by its Italian homonym, that of "enormous" or "extraordinary". While in sentences like: "Señor Presidente, creo que nadie puede negar el tremendo interés con que este Parlamento ha seguido siempre la evolución de los acontecimientos en la República de Sudáfrica, reflejo de esa preocupación que sienten todos los pueblos de Europa", an interpreter with a good knowledge of the language and of the profession would have no difficulty in rendering the real sense of the adjective, matters get more complicated if the speaker mentions the "tremenda experiencia que tenemos nosotros en este campo", because in this case the meaning only becomes clear after listening to the following bit: "[...] ya que llevamos casi diez años trabajando sobre este asunto".

Technical paronyms

Technical paronyms, that is paronyms pertaining to specialized areas, are the subject of particular attention in interpretation classes. In this case, proficiency in both the students' mother tongue and SL is no longer sufficient to avoid misinterpretation. A thorough knowledge of the relevant discipline is required to

12 Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, statement before the UN Third Commission, 28.11.84.
14 Spanish delegate in a meeting of trade union representatives, EC Commission, 17.3.92.
ascertain whether the TL paronym is indeed used in the same field with the same meaning or whether another technical term is more appropriate. Consider, for example, the verb “reescalonar” in sentences like the following: “La deuda pública ya ha sido reesclalonada, el pasado 27 de febrero.”

Although the verb “scaglionare” does exist in Italian and, by extension, its compound “riscaglionare” could appear to be a legitimate translation of the Spanish lexeme, the correct technical term would be “rinegoziare” (“reschedule”).

National institutional terms

Institutional terminology, a special sub-category of technical terminology, poses serious problems to all interpreters, but creates particular confusion and sometimes serious misunderstanding when it concerns a cognate language, as the SL term often has a TL paronym in the same institutional area, which may however stand for a different referent. For the Spanish-Italian combination, particular difficulties are posed by the institutional terminology related to the recently established Comunidades Autónomas, which are roughly equivalent to the Italian Regioni and have come to play an extremely important role in Spanish public life (see Fusco, 1991). Indeed, not only are problems posed by the fact that different Comunidades use different, and sometimes even contrasting, terms to indicate the same bodies, but also by the existence of Italian paronyms that indicate completely different bodies at regional level. For example, the Spanish “Consejo” (de Gobierno) translates the Italian “Giunta”, while its paronym “Consiglio” is, in the case of Asturias, a fitting translation for “Junta”. Likewise, the Spanish “Junta”, which is used in different Comunidades to indicate the legislative body (Asturias), the executive body (Galicia, Estremadura), and all governing bodies taken together (Andalusia, Castile-La Mancha), should only be translated with its Italian paronym “Giunta” if employed with reference to two Comunidades out of the five in which it has been adopted. Therefore, in a sentence like the following: “Existen, además, en la zona dos parajes naturales declarados por la propia Junta de Andalucía”¹⁶, the real cultural equivalent would be the term “Regione”.

The same applies to another sentence taken from the same speech: “En cambio, referente a la propuesta de incorporar al Parque Nacional las superficies calificadas por el Parlamento andaluz como Parque Natural del entorno de Doñana, entendemos que sería necesario sustentarla con la elaboración de un exhaustivo estudio [...]”¹⁷, where the Italian paronym “Parlamento”, although

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¹⁶ Martínez-Campillo García, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, 26.6.90: 2225.
¹⁷ Ibid.: 2229.
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not creating serious misunderstanding, belongs to a higher government level (national) and is not as immediate as the real equivalent “Consiglio” (regionale).

Culture-specific terms and idioms

This category of the SL lexicon is normally the subject of special attention in interpretation courses whatever the language combination involved, because it accounts for a large part of interpretation problems and mistakes. When cognate languages are concerned, however, it becomes a critical pedagogic tool in that it helps the teacher show students, who are all too often appeased by external similarity, that the language they are translating is the expression of a very different culture from their own and that only its in-depth study can prevent blunders. In the Spanish case, a pervasive aspect of the country’s culture is bull-fighting (see Fusco, 1990a). Indeed, it so affects the Spanish character that the language itself is full of idioms born from this world, often difficult to understand and translate without a good knowledge of the underlying phenomenon. Consider, for example, the following statement: “y eso no se puede resolver al revuelo de un capote por el simple expediente de convertir a dieciocho colegas [...] en diputados de este Parlamento”18, in which the expression, that literally refers to a variant of relance, a move executed taking advantage of the bull’s exit from a previous such move, is used figuratively to mean escamotage.

References to actual bull-fighting are quite frequent, too: “En este caso no lo ha tenido en cuenta, ni ha tenido para nada en cuenta que existe una asociación internacional de futbolistas profesionales que también debe intervenir - es lo mismo que decir, cuando se hablaba de los toros, que solamente pueden hablar los toreros. No señor, han de hablar los toreros y han de hablar los apoderados y han de hablar todos los funcionarios que viven del toreo. Por lo tanto, el futbolista, que es un elemento esencial dentro del fútbol, deberá tenerse en cuenta”19.

The previous excerpt, taken from a speech used at the SSLM in the February 1991 exam session, was translated by a candidate as follows: “[...] E’ come dire, parlando delle corridre, che possono parlare solo i toreri. Bisogna invece far parlare anche i tori [...].”

Faced with the impossibility of grasping the full message (probably because of lack of concentration and terminological confusion), the candidate resorted to inferencing20. However, the only ideas she had about the bull-fighting phenomenon were the ones aired outside of Spain by animal-rights movements.

19 Lafuente López, on the free movement of professional footballers, E.P., pr. ed., 19.11.91: 144.
20 In the sense given to the word by Beaugrande (de) & Dressler (1981).
Therefore, in the absence of a sound knowledge of this cultural phenomenon and of its terminology, she attributed to the speaker a statement (“Let the bulls have their say, too, when it comes to bullfighting”) that would have been plausible in other contexts but was fully out of place, and utterly misleading, in the actual circumstances. The very reference to the world of bull-fighting as a case in point and the usage of the relevant terminology (“apoderados”) should have suggested that the speaker was more likely to be an aficionado than an animal-rights campaigner.

Part II: Didactic strategies
Introduction

In general terms, most of the exercises described in the following part fall within a single, multi-stage didactic strategy. First of all, situations are created in which students by themselves acknowledge the existence of a specific problem and submit it to the teacher's attention. This occurs during the first two analysis levels that always follow any student's performance, that is self-assessment and comments by fellow students. Secondly, a brainstorming session is held in which the problem is thoroughly discussed, explanations are provided by the teacher if necessary, and solutions are proposed. Once the most suitable solution is found, the behavioural automatism that is needed for its implementation is built. This is done through a series of ad hoc exercises that are essentially based on deliberate repetition. In the fourth and last stage, an assessment is made to see whether the desired behavioural pattern is more or less automatically elicited. A first check is introduced at the end of the lesson in which the automatism was built, generally by asking students to translate a full-length speech in which the problem is only a part of a much larger structure. Later, with a few lessons' follow-up, actual interiorization of the required mechanism is re-assessed.

The rationale for the development of such behavioural and mnemonic automatisms can be found in Gile's Effort Model (1992:13-14), which decomposes interpretation into different components called “Efforts” that, in turn, require certain amounts of processing capacity (PC). As, in Gile's words, “Total PC requirements appear to be generally very close to the total available capacity and occasionally exceed it”, any strategy that enables interpreters to solve recurring interpretation problems right away because of acquired automatic reactions is most welcome, in that it reduces the amount of PC used as a routine and leaves a wider margin of it available for really unforeseeable circumstances.

21 The third and last level is the teacher's comment that, if necessary, adds to previous remarks and guides the discussion while introducing the necessary advice.
Proposed exercises
1. Compulsory décalage

As indicated in the Introduction to this paper, students learning to interpret a very different language from their own are easily convinced of the need to lag considerably behind the speaker if they want to say something intelligible in the TL. When the SL is a cognate language, however, only the teacher's forceful intervention can prevent them from translating the speaker's first word right away and subsequently follow the speech word by word. Awareness, here, is generally raised by submitting to students a speech that begins with a problem structure and by having them listen to a recording of their translation. Alertness to the pitfalls of following the speaker too closely, however, has proved not to be sufficient to prevent students from doing the same in further exercises. Hence the introduction of compulsory lagging, probably nothing new under the interpreters' sun, but certainly a very effective way of driving the message home in students' minds. Students are asked to translate a speech, but are only allowed to start speaking at a teacher's sign, which will come too late for them to remember and repeat the language structure used by the speaker and will therefore oblige them to render the sense of the message only.

2. Neutral sentence beginning

Whenever faced with an unusual sentence beginning, or with verb-object separation owing to a more or less long interpolated clause, students are advised to omit the unclear part and retain it as a merely linguistic element either in their minds (active storage) or on a piece of paper. The latter procedure is to be preferred because it frees the interpreter's mind from an unnecessary burden. Then, when the sense becomes clear, the initially omitted element may be reintroduced in its most appropriate TL form. Here, after the first two stages, the automatic reflex is built through translation of a list of speech excerpts containing unclear sentence beginnings or verb-object separation, in which students are obliged to implement the proposed solution.

For example, in a sentence like: "Yo tengo que añadir que, por la intervención del Presidente en todos estos sucesos de acuerdo con el ejército, el golpe de Estado no es menos golpe de Estado: la gravedad aumenta cuando la persona elegida por el pueblo y por las instituciones de la democracia es el soporte o el impulsor de la negación de las libertades del Estado de Derecho," the adverb introducing the interpolated clause would be omitted, and the sense it gives to the whole sentence would be rendered at the end of the clause, in this case with an appropriate verb: "Devo aggiungere che l'intervento del Presidente in tutto questo d'accordo con l'esercito non rende meno grave il colpo di stato: [...]."

3. Compulsory sentence conclusion

Unlike others, this exercise is not pre-planned and is introduced whenever a student, despite the strategies acquired with the above exercises, makes a bad start and feels that correct sentence conclusion becomes a problem. In these cases, the speaker stops delivering his/her speech and the student is invited to find a face-saving solution, which will invariably entail conclusion of the problematic sentence. To this end, the student is first asked to specify whether the problem was caused by failure to grasp the message altogether or by the fact that no matching conclusion was found given the syntactic or lexical choice made for the beginning of the sentence.

In the former case, the brainstorming session should lead students to consider that a plausible and neutral conclusion is the most advisable solution. The meaning of the words “plausible” and “neutral” is discussed and elements of judgment listed. They will typically include considerations regarding the speaker (age, gender, nationality, political and religious beliefs, profession) and the situation (place where the speech is delivered, time, subject of the speech, audience). The automatic reflex is then built with a series of unfinished sentences, first in Italian and subsequently in Spanish, for which adequate contexts are provided and which students are asked to repeat in Italian with a plausible and non-compromising conclusion.

If, however, the problem is due to unfortunate formal choices in the beginning of the sentence, the student is first reminded of the importance of lagging and then invited to find either a formally acceptable way to conclude his/her utterance or, when that proves not to be viable, to introduce something like “Or, rather” followed by a repetition of the first part in a manner compatible with the second. The flexibility required to implement the first, and more advisable, choice is improved by exercises in which students are asked to find different formal ways to express the sense conveyed by a series of given sentences.

An instance of problematic sentence ending due to formally incorrect beginning is likely to occur when translating the following sentence: “Los miembros de la Asamblea ACP y de la Comisión de Desarrollo agradecemos especialmente las propuestas de la Comisión Ejecutiva y el Parlamento Europeo, sobre todo en lo que toca a la participación de éste en el trabajo de la inspección, a la luz de sus funciones y competencias de aprobación y control presupuestario”

Here, the apparently harmless beginning might lead a not too skilful interpreter to neglect the lagging imperative and start translating right away. When the verb eventually comes, however, the problem arises of how to reconcile a plural third person subject in Italian, which does not include the speaker, with a plural first person predicate in Spanish. A possible practical

23 Arbeloa Muru, on EC presence in Member States and Third Countries, E.P., pr. ed., 11.3.92: 204.
solution could be the following: after mistakenly saying "I membri dell'Assemblea ACP e della Commissione Sviluppo", and before introducing the verb, the interpreter might add "tra i quali mi annovero", thus saving both the sense of the message and the subject-predicate concord.

4. Clozing

This exercise, which has been part of interpreters' training for a long time and was recently re-proposed by Sergio Viaggio [1992b] in a different format, seems to be particularly fit for teaching interpretation between cognate languages as a further tool to help students concentrate on the sense of the message. I also propose to use it as the suppression of sublexemic elements from the SL phonetic chain as would normally occur in real situations (because of the speaker's blurred pronunciation, sound interference, or temporary loss of the interpreter's concentration). This exercise should further convince students of the importance of having a thorough knowledge of a language that they believe they fully understand already, but that suddenly becomes obscure if some phonemes are lacking. Students are first shown that in sentences like the following: "Esta dificultad proviene básicamente del cambio de escenario en el que discutirá la actividad de la empresa española"24, - where the syntagm "de escenario" ("of scenery") was perceived by a fourth year candidate during the February 1992 exams session at the SSLM as "decenario" and translated with "decennale" ("ten-year") - misinterpretation could have been avoided if the candidate had known that the adjective "decenario" is extremely uncommon in Spanish25 ("decenal" being the most frequent choice) and that therefore the phonemic expression she had heard almost certainly stood for something else. Afterwards, exercises with clozed sentences are made according to the protocol illustrated in the Introduction to this part of the paper.

5. Compression

This is another classic exercise that was recently re-proposed by Viaggio (1992a) and has proved useful in teaching interpretation students between cognate languages to avoid TL repetition of SL structures that do not sound utterly mistaken but the sense of which would normally be rendered in a much more concise way in the TL. Examples like the one already illustrated on p. 20: "Posteriormente, el pleno del Senado fijó en 6 pesetas la subida que

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24 Canalejo, M., Chairman and Director of Alcatel-Standard (further details about the source are unknown).

25 In point of fact, the Maria Moliner dictionary only refers to the term as an uncommon noun with two meanings: "decade" and "old type of rosary with ten beads".
experimentará el gasóleo desde el 1 de enero, rebajando en 2 pesetas las pretensiones de Hacienda” are cases in point. Although “l’aumento che subirà il gasolio” is formally correct in Italian, the more normal, and concise, Italian form would be “l’aumento del gasolio”. As the importance of stylistic considerations is not easily recognized by student interpreters, the message is driven home in the classroom according to the following protocol: students are asked to interpret a speech including examples of the above structures, which is delivered at a speed that prevents them from keeping up with the speaker if the original Spanish structure is followed. Faced with the impossibility of rendering the full sense of the speech, students come to recognize the importance of finding more concise, and generally more natural, ways of rendering SL structures. They are identified during the analysis stage and then implemented through repetition exercises with ad hoc speech excerpts.

6. Deliberate omissions

This exercise is used to teach students how to manage emergency situations in which the speaker’s speed is such as not to allow full translation even if compression mechanisms, learnt with the previous exercise, are implemented. Discourse analysis lessons are held in which students learn to distinguish major from secondary chunks of information. They are followed by application sessions in which deliberate omission of secondary information is required. The exercise is not language-specific, but is particularly useful for interpreters dealing with cognate languages, as the latter generally have similar levels of concision and do not allow for considerable linguistic compression.

7. Creation of mnemonic automatisms

With this exercise, which follows the normal protocol, linguistic conversion automatisms are developed. Students find adequate TL equivalents for frequent problematic structures and learn to implement them almost automatically through deliberate repetition. The basis for the exercise is made up of Russo’s categories (1990) and other typologies mentioned above.

The same method is used, in association with others, to solve specific lexical problems, such as the ones posed by numbers (for example “mil millones”, which interpreters tend to translate with the Italian paronymic expression “mille milioni” instead of the more common “miliardi”).
8. Concentration on lexical aspects

Whenever a TL paronym is improperly used to translate a SL term or syntagm, students are invited to analyze the semantic components of both expressions to see where they differ and why. Normal contexts for both are found and compared, and an effort is made to identify the expression(s) that a TL speaker would normally use in specific contexts. For recurring problematic lexemes or syntagms, lists of clozed sentences are used, in which the deleted expression is the one that creates difficulties. Students are asked to sight translate them and automatically reintegrate the omitted part. Since situations vary from sentence to sentence, comparison between sight translations and the full SL sentences should convince students of the fact that no fixed word-pairs exist and context only can determine the right linguistic equivalent for a given SL expression.

Gender matching problems, too, are tackled within this framework even if they are of a morphological nature. Indeed, they result from the lexical choice made by the interpreter, who opts for a TL paronym that has a different gender from the SL term and often forgets to adjust the rest of the translation accordingly. Once again, the normal protocol is followed, with lists of long sentences containing various attributes of terms that have TL paronyms of different gender as material for the deliberate repetition stage. Students are invited to note the TL paronym on a piece of paper and refer to it whenever they hear an attribute of the SL term.

9. Analysis of parallel texts

Spanish and Italian texts on the same subject (for example, speeches delivered during the same debate) are studied to see how Spanish and Italian speakers would express the same ideas. Lexical and morphosyntactic differences are identified and commented on. It is a useful exercise further to demonstrate how different two cognate languages can be, and is instrumental in introducing students to the interpretation of specialized speeches. Indeed, during the second year of the interpretation course, which is divided into a series of "technical" units (normally economics and law, science, medicine, and information technology), students' attention is drawn to technical expressions in Spanish that have Italian paronyms which, however, do not translate the meaning of the Spanish term. To this end, parallel texts on a specific technical subject are studied to obtain contextualized phraseology and terminology (see Cellerino, 1992, on the principles governing the science of terminology and their practical application in the interpretation process).
10. Familiarization with congress phraseology

On the basis of the previous exercise (analysis of parallel texts), students are invited to collect, study and compare SL and TL sentences and expressions for most typical congress situations (e.g. welcome, thanks, congratulations, ...). Class usage will include translation of a series of SL sentences belonging to the same category and subsequent comparison of the translation's recording with real-life examples of Italian speakers to assess the stylistic appropriateness of the interpreter's performance.

Conclusions

Upon taking up lecturing at the SSML, I soon realized that the pedagogic strategies I had implemented so far as teacher of conference interpretation between English and Italian needed to be adjusted in the light of the peculiar problems posed by the cognate languages between which my students were asked to translate. After initially identifying some of the most frequent problems met by my students, I started thinking of possible didactic strategies to overcome them. Implementation of some of them has seemed to confirm their usefulness. Further refining is obviously required, and some form of scientific validation for the ones that eventually pass longer-term empirical tests will have to be found. Discussion and comparison with different approaches followed by colleagues in similar positions are, to my mind, equally essential for the development of a fully-fledged methodology. This is the reason why I am grateful for the opportunity of sharing my experience with you.

References


26 At the Civica Scuola per Interpreti e Traduttori of Milan.


