Sequencing Instructional Materials in Interpreter Education

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Abstract

Effective interpreter education relies on a carefully integrated sequence of instructional units in order to assist students in gaining control of their interpretations. Thus, it is important to sequence instructional materials and experiences in a way that is supportive of cognitive development in an adult. Materials used for interpreter training can be developed to meet specific instructional needs. When materials are developed to meet a specific need, evaluation of student progress becomes less problematic and more useful. Moreover, materials can be used in multiple ways, provided that the instructor has clear ideas regarding the level of difficulty of the material and the current ability level of the students. A discussion of ways to review texts for interpretation practice is included. Videos are useful in creating materials, which can be used for interpreter education programs.

1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to suggest specific approaches to sequencing materials and experiences in order to enhance the effectiveness of the interpreter education curriculum. This in turn leads to greater reliability during evaluation of developing skills in interpreting students. A brief discussion of order of difficulty is presented. This is followed by a delineation of what kinds of cognitive skills need to be taught and in what order. Later, a broader view of organizing the curriculum is presented. Before specific materials can be assigned to specific courses, the courses in the curriculum must be sequenced in a way that enhances learning and makes good use of instructional time. When organizing materials, some of the variables to be considered are student developmental level, specific aspect of the interpreting process, and how to evaluate student progress. The student levels are called novice, intermediate and advanced.
2. Order of Difficulty of Tasks

There are several assumptions about the order of difficulty of tasks as they appear in interpreter education, which form the basis of this work. The first is that tasks which are relatively less cognitively demanding should appear in the curriculum and be mastered prior to tasks which are more demanding. For example, cognitive tasks such as shadowing, cloze, prediction, etc., are thought to be easier or more manageable by new interpreting students than more demanding tasks such as consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. The second assumption is that mastery of tasks at a certain level indicates readiness to move to a more difficult level. The third assumption is that training should proceed from intralingual exercises, which may be taught concurrently with the development of cognitive skills, to translation. Translation should be followed by consecutive interpreting, which in turn is followed by simultaneous interpreting of monologues and then dialogues.

3. The matrix for cognitive skill development

A sample matrix is presented here for the development of some cognitive skills. This sequence ideally occurs early in the interpreter education program, and can be used for drills at any level in the curriculum. This sequence of cognitive tasks can optimally be presented in the student's mother tongue (L1) first and then in the student's second language. This kind of chart will allow teachers to sort their existing materials into appropriate categories and maximize the use of materials. This kind of organization will also help teachers when they select tasks and materials to use with students. One way to organize these tasks is presented below.

3.1. Comprehension of source material

Comprehension of the source material is a skill that underlies all other skills in the cognitive development matrix as well as in the curriculum as a whole.

3.2. Summarizing

Summarizing the text means finding the main points and representing the information in a condensed form. Summarizing exercises should be done in L1 first and then in L2. This skill assumes the ability to remember correctly what has been heard. Of interest at this level would be the novice student's ability to summarize the text presented in L1 into one coherent sentence, or provide a
summary paragraph of a longer text. If these skills are missing, the candidate is unlikely to be successful in continuing their pursuit of interpretation as a career.

The student, who has demonstrated the ability to summarize a text into a paragraph at the novice level, may move on to summarizing in one sentence in L1. This student may also be asked to summarize a longer text in L2. At the intermediate level, the student may be asked to summarize a more difficult passage. For the advanced student, a summary of a difficult text is required. After a summary at the paragraph level, the student will be guided to select the single most salient point and create a summary sentence. The variables to be manipulated are language (L1 or L2) and difficulty of text.

3.3. Paraphrasing

The ability to paraphrase will illuminate the presence of the ability to restate the information without changing the meaning. It is important to see that students do not distort meaning when working L1 to L1. This does not necessarily mean a shortening of the overall length of utterance or length of text. This is designed to show the ability range of language use in L1 and L2 and find alternatives for linguistic expressions without changing the meaning.

Once the students have indicated their ability to paraphrase information at the novice level, they can be provided with exercises, which require paraphrasing with various amounts of detail. At the intermediate level, the amount of time allowed to create the paraphrase may be shortened and the amount of detail may be increased. The advanced student will need to demonstrate adequate control in finding the main point while paraphrasing an ongoing lecture. Both the lecture and paraphrase should be done in L1. A similar exercise can be created in L2. This exercise can begin laying the foundation for simultaneity.

3.4. Shadowing

At the pre-interpreting or entrance level, simply the presence or absence of the ability to shadow in L1 should be noted. Lambert & Meyer (1989) indicate four categories into which shadowing performances tend to fall; those for whom it is effortless, those who can begin the sentence but cannot complete it properly, those who provide the speaking in the pauses of the source text, and those who are totally incoherent but keep talking.
3.4.1. Levels of Difficulty within Shadowing

Shadowing in L1 is routinely used at the pre-interpreting or the admission stage as a screening technique in order to determine if the interpreter can listen and speak simultaneously, an essential skill in the interpreting process. There is some discussion in the spoken language interpreter education community as to the overall value of shadowing in training. In the field of signed language interpreter education, there is an even stronger caution. It is unlikely that shadowing a signed language will have the same impact and importance as shadowing in a spoken language. In shadowing drills in signed languages, students should be limited to drills without interference and without dual-tasking. Shadowing of spoken languages can also be used at the beginner level by providing either delay or interference, during which time the student must continue to shadow and the four criteria already described can be used again. The evaluation tied to this is to see that the message is not degraded by the addition of delay or interference. At the intermediate level shadowing can be replaced with multitask exercises. Again, these should be rated or evaluated separately from other tasks in order to help students determine where cognitive weakness may reside. In general, the evaluation is of the actual performance of the task rather than of the memory for the material presented. For the advanced student, evaluation would be centered around capacity management skills related to simultaneity.

3.5. Speaking rapidly

Speaking rapidly is the next area within the matrix of cognitive skills in student competencies. Support for the development of this skill is seen in Longley (1989: 106). While the ability to speak rapidly is an essential skill for any interpreter, it is of special interest in the case of signed languages to spoken language interpretation.

Beginners must demonstrate the ability to speak rapidly without interference. Interference may be provided by external noise such as a radio playing, another speech being given, etc. The intermediate student must demonstrate the ability to speak rapidly while using amplification. This would lead to lessons, which provide information regarding the use of microphones, FM systems, closed loop systems, and other devices, which amplify the speech of the interpreter.

The advanced student must be able to speak rapidly within the context of simultaneous interpretation. Other variables, which can be used at this level, include using amplification and using information from a back-up interpreter. Parallel exercises may be developed in L2. When L2 is a signed language, the
issue of amplification may be paralleled in learning to sign clearly enough for platform interpreting.

3.6. Quality of speech

The ability to speak in a manner that is easily understood must be evaluated at the time of entry into the program, as well as throughout the program of study. When the student moves into the novice level, additional aspects of increased volume and pitch control may be added. The intermediate student is expected to use clear speech, which must also be present during consecutive interpretation drills or repeating drills. For the advanced student, clear speech may be tested during simultaneous interpretation and it should not be degraded when backup information is used. This principle also applies to clear, intelligible signing.

3.7. Cloze

Cloze drills are those in which a word is deleted and the listener must fill in the missing word with a word which makes sense in that context. This task was originally designed to evaluate levels of language competence. Typically every 10th word is deleted. Cloze drills can be used at the initial stages of cognitive development and throughout the program as practice material.

3.8. Prediction

Prediction skills form another subset of skills, which are necessary for interpreters in training as well as working interpreters. Oller & Conrad (1973) describe this as "active hypothesis testing." Thus, prediction involves more than just guessing what would come next in the text. Interpreters need to check their hypothesis against what has already been heard and against what appears later in the text. Prediction skills can be taught in a variety of ways. The beginning student can add onto the text by using prediction and provide more than one possible outcome. The intermediate student should be able to add levels of argument, defend and explain their reasoning. For the advanced student, the prediction skills should be nearly automatic. This will allow greater capacity management. The advanced student should also be able to provide enough insight into the processes that they are using so that they could explain the level of argument and reasoning used. The difficulty levels can be made more difficult by reducing the amount of time permitted for response and by using texts, which contain more ambiguous materials.
3.9. Multitasking

This cognitive skill has also been called dual-tasking and usually involves such exercises as shadowing a spoken text while writing some information from memory. The term dual-tasking is then a misnomer because shadowing is already two tasks at once (listening and repeating). If an additional task such as writing is added, the exercise should be called multitasking. Examples of this kind of exercise include shadowing while writing something from memory such as a well known poem, or writing multiplication tables forward or backward, or even writing numbers as in counting forward or backward. Other tasks, which can be added to shadowing, are motor skills such as finger tapping. It is also possible to add decalage exercises to shadowing which imposes an additional memory burden on the trainee.

Through this discussion, it becomes clear that the courses in the program must be carefully sequenced and the level of difficulty of each text must also be evaluated. The remainder of this paper addresses these central themes.

4. Overall curriculum design

A graphic representation is presented here which shows the main variables of student level and areas of study within the interpreter education curriculum. This kind of graphic representation can help in designing a new curriculum and in creating new courses to modify an existing curriculum.

5. Factors which affect difficulty of text

After the main courses in the curriculum have been determined, the process of selecting appropriate materials for each course begins. It is important for teachers to know the content of the videotapes or audiotapes available to them. It provides a more uniform training experience if the source material is pre-recorded, at least at the beginning of training. This allows the teacher to move more rapidly through the beginning stages of training. Knowing the source material well will allow teachers to select appropriate texts for specific tasks. This is very important to the success of each lesson. If materials are selected which are too difficult for the student's current level, or the materials do not include the features being taught that day, then instructional time is not well used. One way that signed language source material can be organized is illustrated in the figures. Naturally, the same will need to be done with spoken language materials. In general it is good practice to begin working into the students' L1, or in this case from signed materials into spoken language.
Several of the factors illustrated in the figures, combine to form the density of the text. Density refers to how much new information is presented and at what speed. It also refers to the technical information involved. In the figures, the variables have been separated for convenience. With regard to density of information, the novice student should be able to handle materials, which have relatively low density. The density may be increased for the intermediate student. By the time the student reaches advanced level, speed and load can be increased.

6. Signed language practice materials for translation or consecutive interpreting

Text selection for signed language materials for translation or consecutive interpreting must include a variety of factors. Materials are carefully selected to allow students to be successful at their current level of achievement. If materials are too difficult, the student cannot master the task at hand. Areas of difficulty for students include fingerspelled word recognition, classifiers, negations, rate of delivery and knowing the referent.

7. Selection of signed language materials for simultaneous interpreting practice

Many of the materials used in the consecutive interpreting unit described above can now be used for beginning simultaneous interpreting practice. The use of "warm" or familiar materials, which have already been translated or used in consecutive interpreting, is a logical beginning point for simultaneous interpreting practice. The development of "cold" materials should include the considerations listed in the figures.

Once a matrix has been established which defines student competencies and the order in which they must appear for a specific program, materials can be developed which address these specific needs. Often teachers can videotape themselves if commercially produced videotapes are not available. Another way to develop materials at low cost is to invite live participants to class and videotape their speeches or conversations. Within a few years there will be a satisfactory library of materials, which can be copied for student practice. Practice with recorded materials can be followed by practice with live materials at all levels.
8. Evaluation

Interpreter educators often can find relatively successful approaches to teaching course content and evaluating skills. This can happen by designing materials, which meet instructional goals, and evaluating student progress on the component parts. However, disappointments often arise, when upon holistic examinations, students fail to integrate the parts of the process into a reliable, integrated message. All too often the result of the attempted interpretation is "word salad", or a mixture of lexical items lacking in syntactic organization. This distressing and common phenomenon maybe the result of inadequate meshing of lesson plans with materials and evaluation approaches. So, it is important to organize lessons and materials, which lead to the overall ability to perform simultaneous interpretation. The evaluation of separate skills is not enough. At the end of the program it is also necessary to evaluate the overall interpreting performance.

9. Summary

In conclusion, the goal is to begin with the end in mind as Covey (1989) suggests. If the goal is to graduate well-educated and well-trained interpreters, who can function successfully in simultaneous interpretation, then perhaps the most effective way to accomplish this goal is to create a typology of texts and students. These two typologies intermeshed and used sequentially may lead to a more cohesive curricular experience, as well as a more effective training experience.

References


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Fig. 1. A matrix for skills for cognitive skill development in interpreter education

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<th>Content Areas</th>
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Fig 2. Matrix for interpreter education curriculum - overall design
### Features

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<th>Rate of delivery</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reported speech</th>
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Fig. 3. Typology of Materials: Factors which affect difficulty in signed language source materials

### Features

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Fig. 4. Sample typology of signed language materials for translation or consecutive interpreting practice for intermediate to advanced students.
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Fig. 5. Sample typology of signed language materials for simultaneous interpreting for advanced students.