A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO STRUCTURING SPEECHES THROUGHOUT THE COURSE

Previous documents explain how to go about preparing speeches, and how to deliver speeches. What this guide aims to do is to draw the speech maker's attention to the purpose of making speeches, and how to structure and tailor speeches to your (and your students') needs.

The main purpose of a speech is to allow the students to acquire the skills necessary for interpreting , but their performance also reveals how well they understand the source language, as well as how solid their general knowledge is.

Given that the speech is the main tool that trainers have for teaching the techniques of interpreting, it follows that getting it right is essential. This means that:

*   making the right kind of speech for each stage of the course is KEY

*   the speech is the raw material for the class, and so the success of the lesson depends on this

*   you should think what you want the students to achieve first and then build a speech which allows you to get them there. This can be a general, group or individual objective (e.g. visualise) or a more specific group or individual objective in the later stages (e.g. practising numbers)

*   if you invite along external speakers to the course, it is essential that they know exactly what you want them to do. This will depend on which stage you are at.

The different stages of the course

At the beginning of the course several weeks should be dedicated to listening and concentration exercises, so as to hone the skills of listening, analysing and communicating before moving onto note-taking. The kind of speeches you make depends on what you are asking them to do:-

<u>Listening and concentration exercises</u>

You want them to	**So the speech should**
Learn how to get beyond words and instead 'see' the speech	be easy to visualise and grasp
Identify the structure	Have a clear and obvious structure
Distinguish between the main message and details (primary and secondary info)	Have both bones/branches (main points) and flesh/ thinner branches (secondary points) and skin/leaves (details)
Be engaging and communicative	Be delivered in a natural and engaging way, and be something *you* are interested in – contain a personal anecdote of some kind
Learn how to listen in a special way ('mitdenken')	All of the above will help this

Good examples of these kinds of speeches can be found on the Speech Repository, classified as basic (especially Helen Campbell's speeches in English). The ideal length for these kinds

of speeches is in the range of 2 (right at the beginning) to 4 minutes (just before introducing notes).

As the weeks pass, the speeches will change, and become more challenging (see 'speech progression' below), but the basic tenets of speechmaking would still be as above. The same is true for consecutive with notes.

Consecutive with notes

The ultimate aim of taking notes is to allow the interpreter to listen better, though the opposite often happens at the outset, i.e. students stop listening and focus too much on taking notes. This is why it is so important to focus on just listening at the beginning, and to go back to these exercises whenever it is felt students have stopped listening.

You can use the same speeches as for the first phase, building on them to make speeches appropriate for note-taking practice. There could be more arguments, more proper names and dates, more examples etc. but a lot of the fundamentals remain basically the same. New, unknown speeches will be used as the students' progress.

You may want to teach different, specific things at any one time and you can build speeches for that specific purpose (e.g. figures/lists/humour/asides etc), but generally the following would apply:-

You want them to	**So the speech should**
Take clear and useful notes	Be 'noteable', i.e. oralised, not too fast or dense
Clearly note and reproduce links	Have obvious links (especially at the beginning)
Be able to follow a reasoned and logical argument (think!)	Include a reasoned argument
Distinguish between facts and personal beliefs or opinions	Include "I" references, be personalised at times
See the structure, distinguish between primary and secondary information	Have a clear structure, with flesh and bones
Get the beginning and the end	Start gently, and have a clear and obvious conclusion

Again speeches will get longer over time, starting at around 3-4 minutes and working up to 6 to 8 (SCIC consecutive test speeches last 6 minutes).

Different types of structures for consecutive speeches (both with and without notes)

In order to help students see the structure of a speech, it is important that the structure is clear. This is why reasoned speeches are the best ones to use in the earlier stages. Typical types of structures for reasoned speeches are the following:-
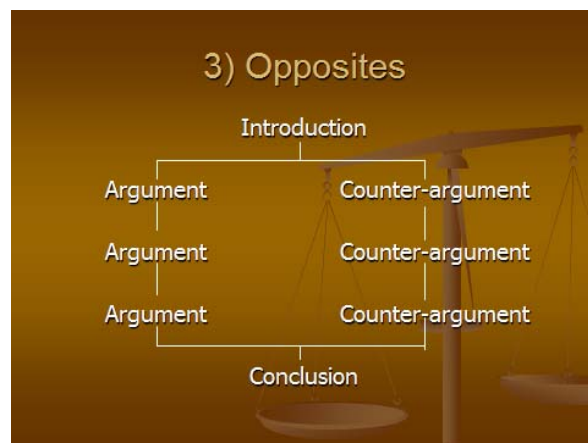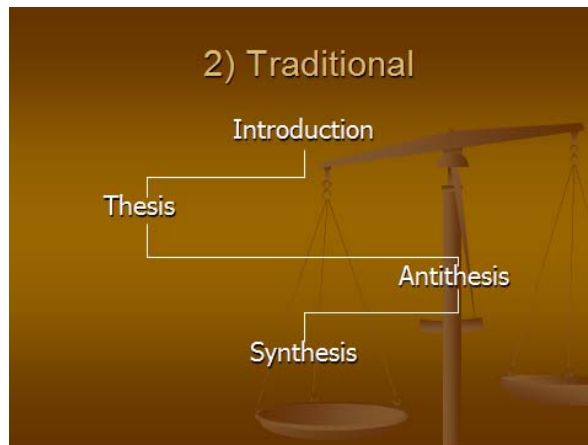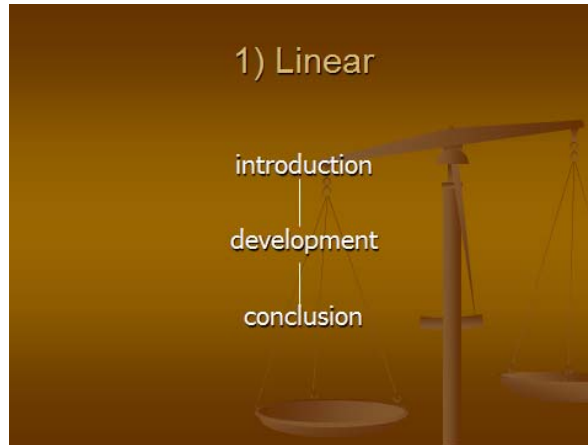
(source: Andy Upton)

If students are having difficulties identifying the structure of a speech, you could ask them to draw up a schema like the ones above. Similarly, if they are having trouble extracting the main pieces of information, or being able to distinguish between primary and secondary information, you can have them fill in grids like the ones below for a whole speech, e.g.

LINK		PRIMARY INFO	SECONDARY INFO	DETAIL
		Obesity a problem	children	Shortness of breath
Why? Because	1)	Eating wrong food	Too much fat and sugar	Problems with labelling
	2)	Not enough exercise	No playing outside on the streets or walking to school	

This kind of discourse analysis (which can be done with aural and written material) will help students grasp the differences between these different types of information. Use different analogies to help them – it could be bones/flesh/skin or the image of a tree with main branches, secondary branches and leaves (details). If they find that idea means something they could write a schema of a speech in the shape of a tree.

Be sure to make speeches which can be broken down in this way!

Simultaneous speeches

The fundamentals again still apply i.e. speeches should NOT be read out, instead they should be oralised and ideally your own speech on something you want to talk about. The pace should be fair, and the information not too dense.

The structure can be looser than for consecutive, though it should still contain an inherent logic of its own. They are often more explanatory, with repetitions and asides.

Like for previous stages there will of course be progression in the kind of speeches that are given (see below), as well as in length – 4-5 minutes to start with, moving to 10-15 minutes by the end of the course (SCIC simultaneous test speeches are 10-12 minutes long).

Speech progression

Whilst the fundamentals, as described above, always apply, the level of difficulty of the speeches has to change over the length of the course, in order to prepare students for final exams and working life.

Below is a table which aims to list different basic criteria for assessing the difficulty of a speech to help pitch it at the right level (beginners/intermediate/advanced).

	Beginners	Intermediate	Advanced
1. Choice of TOPIC (Familiarity of topic)	widely known, often discussed in the general media	familiar to students who are reading widely on different topics	new or rare topic in the outside world
2. STRUCTURE (of the story or of the argument)	simple, clear, strong cohesive markers, visible transitions	The structure is there, but flagged less clearly	complex and more implicit than explicit, few links, rambling
3. SPEED/INFORMATION DENSITY	The speaker speaks freely (story telling) at a comfortable rhythm, there are some redundancies	Fewer redundancies, more facts and figures built into the story	High speed even if not read-out, no repetitions, a lot of factual information (names and complex figures)
4. ACCENT/INTONATION	Neutral accent (native or near native speaker), clear articulation, meaningful intonation	Neutral accent, less clearly articulated at times	Strong accent (regional or non-native), monotonous intonation
5.TERMINOLOGY	no specialized knowledge and language used, standard colloquial language	References t well-known institutions and commonly used acronyms Includes terminology that has been researched for a given topic	much specialized knowledge and terminology used, even jargon
6. CULTURAL DIMENSION	Less closely related to a single national culture e.g. EU-context in general terms, global problems, international issues	More national topics, with references to international (and EU topics) Typical expressions	Deeply embedded in the national context: allusions, local references, very idiomatic language

(source: Claude Durand – adapted)

Besides the factors listed above, there are also many other different factors and speech characteristics that can make a speech either more or less difficult; consider for example the following:

- the length

- explicit/implicit

- visualisable/abstract

- descriptive/argumented

- convincing and interesting/monotone and dry

- personal touches or not

Conclusion

Speeches are the back-bone of any class and self-study time. Make the speeches work for you, and fit your aims and objectives. It is at best unfair and at worst totally counter-productive to ask students to do/practice something on a speech which does not lend itself to such practice.

Model the right kind of speech for students and they will quickly learn how to make the right kind of speeches for each other (either for use in class or in group study). Share all this information with them to help them learn how to make speeches themselves for their group self-training sessions.