

## **FIRST STEPS IN INTERPRETING**

This document aims to give teachers of interpreting some practical ideas about how best to take students through the first few weeks of a course.

### **Getting started**

- It is a good idea to spend some time asking students what they know about interpreting and what their expectations of the course are.
- You can then tell them what interpreting is all about (communication, after listening and analysis), and what you hope to teach them.
- Be clear about what the course is NOT, i.e.
  - a translation course: interpreting is not about words, but ideas
  - a language enhancement course: whilst they will learn and improve, this is not the main focus of the course
  - an academic course: it will be very different from other university courses they have done. It is a very practical, skills-based course.

### **What skills should they acquire during this first stage?**

By the end of this stage they should be able to:

- listen actively and concentrate
- analyse and follow the logic of a speech
- identify the structure of a speech
- separate main ideas from secondary ideas and details
- visualise the story ('dévèrbalisation – getting away from the words)
- communicate (public speaking skills)

### **How do we help them do this?**

#### **1) exercises/speeches**

During the first few weeks, students will hear short speeches that they should listen to and try to reproduce in another language. They should focus on the main message, not details. No notes will be taken, as they should just hone the skills of listening actively and concentrating without being distracted by note-taking. The speeches that are given should allow students to practise the skills mentioned above, so they should be:

- written by you for this specific purpose

- short: 3-5 minutes
- have an inherent logic
- have a clear and obvious structure
- have both bones (main points) and flesh (secondary points and details)
- be easy to visualise and grasp
- be delivered in an engaging and communicative way – it should be something you are interested in yourself

## **2) Learning through play**

It is important to vary the exercises as much as possible to hold interest and keep them on their toes. Through playing games, you not only make the classes fun (and therefore less stressful), but you can train independently some of the skills, e.g.

- Chinese whispers (a very short story is whispered to one person, then the next and the next around the room, and the last person recounts what they have got): good to see if they retain the main idea
- Taboo (an English board game, where the aim is to get your team-mates to say a certain word, avoiding the use of certain others to describe it): resourcefulness of language use
- Just a Minute (a long-standing radio show game on BBC Radio, where you have to talk on a subject for a minute without repetition, hesitation or digression. You could also combine this with Taboo – talk for a minute on a subject avoiding certain words): as above, plus quick thinking and public speaking skills
- Dragon's Den (a TV show, where people pitch ideas to a panel of investors): communication skills, being convincing and persuasive
- Role-plays and discussions: to practice public speaking skills, and register of language

## **3) Making it real**

In real life interpreting never happens in a vacuum, or just for the sake of it. Make sure this doesn't happen in class either. If there are different language groups put together then you already have a ready-made need for interpreting. If not, then engineer one, by sending someone out to be the 'pure customer'. This helps the interpreter, as they know that this person has not heard the (or understood) the original, so

- anything (s)he hears is a plus (psychologically important), (s)he is not listening out for what is 'missing',
- (s)he is someone to talk to, who needs and depends on the interpreter for the story. This helps the student to communicate.