

INTRODUCTION TO SIMULTANEOUS

Starting simultaneous means starting a new mode of interpreting, so it may seem very different from consecutive but the basic mechanism of interpreting is the same: listening, understanding, analysing and reformulating and stress that interpreting is always about **communication**.

First things first

- **First**, it is a good idea to recap with the students on what they have done so far and what skills they have learned. Ask what they see as the differences between consecutive and simultaneous. Present and explain to them the 5 golden rules of interpreting:

- 1) Always finish your sentences
- 2) Respect grammar and syntax in your target language
- 3) Quality is more important than quantity – simultaneous isn't about repeating as much as possible of the speaker's input, it's about clear, cogent, coherent and well-expressed output.
- 4) Do not try to interpret what you have not heard or understood.
- 5) Keep it short and simple (KISS)

- **Then**, show them a booth and demonstrate how the equipment works. Run through mike technique such as distance to speak from the mike, advice on how to wear headphones, why the volume should be kept low, avoid background noise in the booth and the importance of posture and eye contact with the delegate.

How to start simultaneous

The real difficulty of learning simultaneous is not the famous acoustic problem of talking and listening at the same time, but rather the intellectual problem of not knowing what's coming next, and thus **developing strategies for waiting, anticipating and reformulating**. In order to help students in their early days it is best to provide them with help so that they *do* know what's coming next. This help is then progressively reduced so as to bring the students closer to a realistic situation. This could be done in the following way:

Stage 1) Announce to the students that you are going to do a consecutive to warm up. Get everybody who understands the source language to take notes. Ask a volunteer to interpret in consecutive. Then do a very short debriefing, making sure everyone has understood the speech and that there are no terminological problems. Do not do a full-blown feedback session on the consecutive interpretation. Then send students into the booth and give them the same speech.

Stage 2) Tell the students you're going to repeat the first exercise with a different speech. However, once the original is over, ask the students if they have all understood, if they have any questions, either conceptual or terminological, in relation to the speech. Then – without a consecutive interpretation – send them into the booth and give them the same speech.

Stage 3) Give them a summary of a speech. Make it, however, a fairly lengthy summary, giving all the main points and arguments, missing out just examples and asides. The students need not take notes. Then send them into the booth to interpret the full speech.

Stage 4) Use a speech you know the students have heard previously, or, make a speech on a topic already addressed that week in class, referring to the same arguments (even if it is to contradict them) and using the same terminology and concepts.

Stage 5) Invite the students to go into the booth and tell them just to listen, not to interpret. Speak about a well-known or highly topical issue. Once the speaker is in the swing of the speech and students will have some idea which way the speech is moving (say after about two minutes), ask them to start interpreting.

Stage 6) Announce the subject of a speech. Invite everyone, including students and co-trainers, to brainstorm aloud and throw out names, ideas, arguments and possible terminology (in source and target languages) as to what might come up in the speech.

Stage 7) If all has gone well in these phases, then "normal service" may be resumed, where students are given the title of a speech, maybe a short summary, and certainly proper names, acronyms and key terminology they might not know, and then are invited to interpret in simultaneous.

Comments on the sequence of exercises above.

1) **Speeches should be appropriate**: initially 4-5 minutes, oralised, visual then moving on to more argumentative speeches. Always announce the topic at the outset, giving any terminological difficulties in advance. Tell the students when to start interpreting.

2) **Each student working should always have a listener** : Always stress the importance of interpreting as communication. To make it real, every student should have a listener, a pure customer. All listeners, whether they be students or trainers, should be invited to give feedback.

3) **Provide feedback on the basis of objectives**. Feedback should be relevant and that is only possible if the right training objectives are set in advance. Therefore:

(i) **every** time a student goes into the booth to do simultaneous during this first week, they should be reminded that their prime objective is to abide by the golden rules.

(ii) Feedback should be **clear, constructive and on the basis of objectives** set. Ask listeners specific questions such as: "Did x/y/z manage to finish all his/her sentences?" or: "Was it a clear, understandable message?" etc. Any mistakes mentioned should be substantiated with examples. Offer advice and recommendations for specific difficulties giving the students something to work on.

4) **Do not start simultaneous into a retour language too early**. For introduction to simultaneous, work only into the mother tongue. Retour simultaneous involves different techniques and can be tackled at a later stage once the students have mastered the basics of simultaneous into their mother tongue.