
Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting: Historical insights and Modern Aspects

تدوين النقاط في الترجمة المتتالية: محطات تاريخية وتطورات عصرية

Khalfi Sarra¹, Bessafi Rachida

University of Oran1, khalfi.sarah@edu.univ-oran1.dz

University of Oran1, rachida.bessafi@yahoo.com

Received:30/03/2024

Accepted: 26/05/2025

Published 01/06/2025

Abstract:

This paper discusses the essence of note-taking and consecutive interpreting by comprehensively analyzing the prominent historical landmarks that have shaped their practice. By delving deeply into the annals of history up to the modern era of the Digital Pen, this study aims to illuminate the evolution and pivotal moments that have contributed to developing these crucial aspects in the field of interpretation.

Through a meticulous examination of key studies and practices, this research offers a thorough analysis of the significance and impact of consecutive interpretation and note-taking techniques.

Keywords: memory, note-taking, consecutive interpreting, smart-pen, speech.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تقديم تحليل ونظرة شاملة حول ماهية الترجمة المتتالية من خلال إبراز أهم المحطات التاريخية في ثنائية الممارسة والتكوين حتى الوصول إلى عصر القلم الرقمي الذكي لتدوين النقاط. كما تهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على التطور والمحطات المحورية التي أسهمت في تطوير هذه الجوانب الحاسمة في هذا المجال. وتسعى من

¹ Corresponding author : **Khalfi Sarra**

خلال استعراض الأبحاث والتجارب السابقة إلى دراسة أهمية وأثر تقنيات الترجمة المتتابعة وتقنيات تدوين رؤوس
الأقلام.

كلمات مفتاحية: ذاكرة، تدوين النقاط، الترجمة المتتابعة، القلم الذكي، خطاب

1. Introduction

Interpreting is a long-standing activity that dates back thousands of years due to the historical necessity for communication between speakers of different languages. For interactions during peace, war, trade, and other situations involving strangers, translation was utilized in both written and oral forms, known today as translation and interpreting.

Given the precedence of speech over writing, interpreting, the oral form of translation, is one of the oldest human activities. The role of the interpreter is debatably one of the most ancient vocations.

This practice has been constant throughout history, with evidence of its use by ancient civilizations such as the pharaohs, Persians, and Romans (Benghebrid, 2016).

The earliest known interpreter in Japan was documented in 607. Interpreters played a crucial role in Japan's efforts to adopt and learn about religion, culture, and legal and administrative institutions from the more developed Chinese. Later, from May 1946 to April 1948, during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo, thirty Japanese-English interpreters were involved. Unlike the Nuremberg Trials, interpreting at this tribunal was primarily consecutive, with occasional simultaneous reading of pre-translated documents such as the final verdict (Someya, 2017).

While the history of consecutive interpreting highlights its longstanding significance, there remains a need to explore contemporary practices and perspectives. This research aims to answer the following questions:

How have modern developments and historical precedents influenced the current methodologies and professional standards in consecutive interpreting, and what are the prevailing opinions on its effectiveness and challenges today?

What are the key factors that have shaped its current methodologies?

What are the prevailing opinions on the effectiveness and challenges of consecutive interpreting today?

2. An Overview of Note-Taking in Consecutive Interpreting

2.1 Consecutive Interpreting: Different Definitions Through History

Conference interpreting prior to World War II was known as consecutive interpreting, which was the standard for all international meetings because simultaneous interpreting, or the technology to enable it, had not yet been developed. Following World War II, simultaneous interpreting became more popular, and by the 1970s, it had become the primary method used for conference interpretation (Gillies, 2017). However, the consecutive mode has never disappeared and remains an important component of training programs in prestigious interpreting institutions worldwide. Students must complete consecutive interpreting courses before advancing to conference interpreting classes.

Pöchhacker (2004) notes that the development of recording equipment in the 1920s, which allowed interpreters to work concurrently, marked the significant distinction between simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. Consecutive interpretation occurs while the source-language text is being presented, whereas simultaneous interpretation happens concurrently with the speech.

Consecutive interpreting (CI) can be defined as the mode in which the interpreter actively listens to the speaker's message in the source language (SL), analyzes the content, and notes the most important figures and specific details to reproduce them in the target language (TL).

Gillies (2017) describes consecutive interpreting as a mode of conference interpreting that branches into two types: short consecutive, which does not require note-taking because the speaker stops after each sentence, and classic consecutive, which involves listening to a speech lasting from one to twenty minutes and reproducing it in the target language using a combination of memory, notes, and general knowledge. The duration of speeches in CI has significantly reduced in modern times. In the mid-20th century, speeches could last from twenty minutes up

to an hour (Rozan, 1956).

Mead (2011) offers a definition of CI from a contrasting perspective, highlighting the difference between simultaneous and consecutive interpreting in terms of assimilation. In CI, the interpreter goes through distinct phases of assimilation and reproduction, often using note-taking to aid in reconstructing the source speech during the reformulation process. Conversely, in simultaneous interpreting, these phases overlap to the extent that they appear to coincide, necessitating rapid and immediate interpretation without the opportunity for note-taking. This distinction highlights the nuanced techniques and strategies employed by interpreters in the two modes to ensure accurate and effective communication.

2.2 Consecutive Interpreting and Modern Aspects:

Technology continues to provide new tools for the fields of translation and interpreting. It is thanks to technological advancements that the world was introduced to simultaneous interpreting.

In 1999 Michele Ferrari further innovated the field by employing audio playback serving as an external memory in place of traditional note-taking in consecutive interpreting during a press conference given by a commissioner, he decided to record and interpret simultaneously. When asked about this choice, he explained that the main reason was his dissatisfaction with consecutive interpreting, a mode that, in his view, implies accepting the inability to convey the entirety of the original speech, especially when the content is dense and spoken or read too quickly. (Orlando, 2021).

This new technique introduced a hybrid mode known as consecutive-simultaneous interpreting, also referred to as SimConsec, Consec Simul, and digital recorder-assisted consecutive interpreting.

This new mode allows interpreters to listen, record, and take notes during the speech, then replay the recording to interpret simultaneously, providing a clear advantage of knowing the content in advance.

Consecutive-simultaneous interpreting has sparked interest among researchers, trainers, and professional interpreters due to its unique approach and potential benefits. Over the past two decades, several research studies have been conducted to assess its feasibility and effectiveness in practice. More scientific data would be needed to better understand the full potential of this hybrid mode, but it remains

that in view of the increasing use of technological tools in many communication situations, it could prove to be a very useful asset in the panel of interpreters – provided that adequate training for its use and its characteristics is systematically offered to them, which has not been the case until now (Orlando, 2021).

A variety of approaches and technologies have been developed to help trainees take and review notes during the consecutive interpreting process.

Several companies are notable for their contributions to language teaching software and solutions, including Sanako Laboratories (Finland), Robotel Language Lab Solution (Canada), and Tandberg Education (Norway). These companies provide language labs, virtual classrooms, video conferencing systems, and interactive learning tools.

Among their many innovations, these companies have introduced tools like Digital Pens or Smartpens (**See Appendix 1**) that offer advanced processing power, audio and visual feedback, as well as memory for handwriting capture, audio recording, and additional applications that belong to the category of mobile computing platforms.

The user of this pen can play back the speech from the written notes on paper. It only requires to click on a word on the notebook to hear the part of the speech related to that same word or a phrase played directly from the pen. The pen can be connected to any laptop through a standard USB port, so that data can be uploaded and played. This allows users to backup, search, and replay notes from their computer. Users can also upload and convert notes to interactive Flash movies or PDF files. (Orlando, 2015)

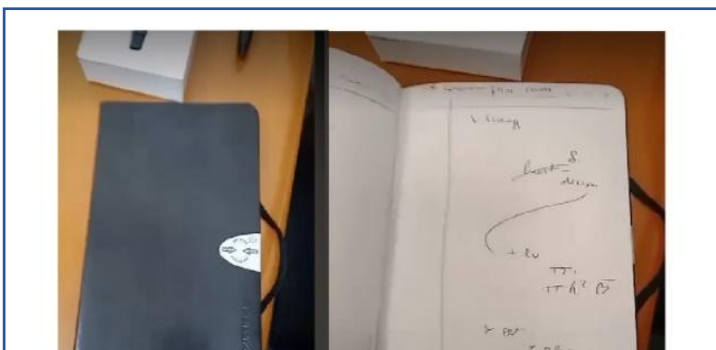


Appendix1: Digital Pen (Photograph taken by author)

This device includes a microphone, a built-in speaker, 3D recording headsets (**See Appendix 2**), and an infrared camera to capture and digitally record handwritten notes or drawings on special microchipped paper (**See Appendix 2**). The audio recording is synchronized with the handwritten notes using a dedicated application, providing interpreters with advanced tools to enhance their work.



Appendix2: 3D recording headset
(Photograph taken by author)



Appendix3: Notepad with microchipped paper
(Photograph taken by author)

3. Note-Taking Techniques

3.1 Rozan's Seven Principles and Other Trends

Notes are highly recommended as a tool to assist interpreters in remembering and retrieving material, as the interpreting process places significant strain on their memory. During interpreting, the interpreters' short-term memory retains a vast amount of information. Without adequate notes, much of this information can eventually vanish or become easily lost.

Notes serve two primary functions. Firstly, they help ease the memory burden. Interpreters cannot remember everything, particularly names, numbers, lists, and certain details that resist analysis and reasoning.

Jean-François Rozan's book *La Prise de Notes dans l'Interprétation Consécutive* has significantly influenced the note-taking style of conference interpreters, regardless of the languages they work with. His techniques remain the foundation of consecutive note-taking. Rozan's compilation of ideas, inspired by interpreters' notes, continues to be influential in the field.

a. Noting the Idea and Not the Word

Rozan emphasizes the importance of noting major ideas clearly and simply. He argues that giving ten texts to ten translators will result in ten excellent but different translations, highlighting that the most significant aspect in translation is the meaning or ideas, rather than the literal words.

Similarly, Schweda-Nicholson stresses that students who focus on noting copious words from a speech rather than capturing its ideas often find themselves immersed in writing dense amounts of text instead of concentrating on the speech's purpose. Consequently, they end up reading long expressions from their notepads rather than reconstructing ideas from short abbreviations (Schweda-Nicholson, 1985).

Additionally, Gillies (2017) aligns with Rozan's and Schweda-Nicholson's perspectives, emphasizing that devoting excessive mental energy to noting down every word may compromise the interpreter's ability to actively engage in listening and accurately interpret the speaker's intended meaning.

b. The Rules of Abbreviation

It is divided into three categories:

1) Abbreviation of words: The general rule for abbreviating words is to abbreviate only longer words (4-5 letters) and to use meaningful abbreviations.

Examples of ambiguous abbreviations include "Stat." which could be interpreted as "statute" or "statistics", and "Prod." which could refer to "production", "producer", "product", or "productivity".

2) Indicating gender and tense: When abbreviating, it is helpful to indicate gender and tense, using an indication of gender and tense within the abbreviation itself.

Rozan's rule: To indicate gender and number, add "e" or "s" to the symbol or abbreviation. To indicate tense, add "ll" for the future and "d" for the past.

3) Abbreviating the register: Using abbreviations to convey the same meaning in a shorter way, such as using "help" instead of "which have contributed to" and "intg" instead of "which are worth looking at." Additionally, "In order to arrive at some conclusions" can be abbreviated as "to end" and "Taking into account the situation at the present time" can be abbreviated as "sit on now."

c. Links

Linking serves not only to represent ideas but also to impact the content of the speech. The recall arrow is a useful tool for quickly noting groups of subject words and complement words related to an idea.

d. Negation

Negation can be indicated by crossing out a word or symbol, or by adding the word "no" before the word to be negated. The latter method is clearer and preferable. Negation can be indicated by crossing out a word or symbol, or by adding the word "no" before the word to be negated. The latter method is clearer and preferable due to the brevity of the word "no."

e. Adding Emphasis

To emphasize words, underlining can be used, with double underlining reserved for superlatives or absolutes. Alternatively, a circumflex or dotted line can be employed as alternatives, allowing for qualification without explicitly noting the qualifier.

f. Verticality

The principles of Verticality and Shift serve as the foundation of the note-taking system outlined in Rozan's book, facilitating the logical grouping of ideas

and reducing the need for excessive linking within the text. These principles are implemented through two main strategies:

Stacking: This technique involves placing different elements of the text above or below each other to organize information systematically.

Brackets: Brackets are employed to note elements that clarify or highlight a point but are not integral to the speaker's train of thought.

To encourage the natural use of the verticality technique, it is recommended to use relatively large but narrow pieces of paper.

g. Shift

Shift involves writing notes on a lower line as if the text on the line above was repeated. This technique ensures accurate interpretation, as demonstrated by the examples provided.

A common issue among elementary consecutive interpretation students is the misconception that taking extensive notes will guarantee an accurate and complete interpretation. However, veteran interpreters have introduced diverse perspectives and techniques to address this challenge.

According to Seleskovitch's What/How model for note-taking (Lederer & Seleskovitch, 1989):

•**What to note:** The essence of ideas should be noted, represented by a single word or symbol, followed by figures such as numbers and proper nouns, technical terms, and finally, the first sentence of each new idea.

•**How to note:** Notes should be clear, minimal, and written in the target language, without necessarily respecting the order of the ideas in the speech.

While Seleskovitch's model resembles Rozan's note-taking model, it emphasizes the importance of noting every sentence of each new idea, effectively dividing the speech into main ideas.

However, placing excessive emphasis on note-taking often leads to challenges, as students become overly focused on writing down every word, losing sight of the overall meaning. Consequently, they struggle to interpret their notes effectively.

Christopher Thiéry (1995) following the principle that "les notes se consultent, ne se lisent pas" emphasizes the importance of using notes as a reference rather than reading them word-for-word. He suggests that interpreters should quickly glance at specific sections of their notes before delivering the corresponding part of the speech, ensuring accuracy and maintaining a smooth flow of interpretation.

Similarly, Schweda-Nicholson highlights that successful delivery of consecutive interpretation (CI) requires interpreters to quickly consult their notes for meaning and then express that meaning while maintaining eye contact with the audience, rather than reading directly from the notes.

3.2 Reconsidering the Significance of Note-Taking in Consecutive Interpreting

The act of note-taking, often regarded as a unique attribute of consecutive interpreting (CI), has traditionally been lauded for its contribution to the quality of interpreted speeches. However, recent trends have sparked serious reflection on the potentially adverse effects of note-taking on interpreter accuracy and performance. Gillies (2017) reminisces about the extraordinary memory prowess of interpreters in the 1950s and 1960s, who could flawlessly reproduce lengthy speeches from memory alone. In contrast, modern interpreters, including ourselves, rely on a combination of memory, general knowledge, and notes to achieve similar feats. This shift underscores the evolving reliance on note-taking as a primary tool, potentially overshadowing its true necessity or even impeding interpreter proficiency.

Schweda-Nicholson (1985) aptly warns against the overemphasis on note-taking, cautioning that it may detract from active listening and analytical processing during interpretation. Similarly, Nick Roche's lecture in Brussels emphasizes that note-taking isn't about bolstering memory but rather ensuring full concentration on the speaker's discourse. He likens note-taking to training wheels on a bicycle, which, instead of enhancing learning, may foster dependency and hinder true skill development.

Roche's metaphor (1999) underscores the notion that note-taking, far from aiding memory, can inadvertently diminish interpreter abilities. It suggests that interpreters should focus on honing their listening skills and cognitive processes rather than relying excessively on external aids.

In essence, while note-taking remains a valuable tool in the interpreter's arsenal, it's imperative to reassess its role and potential drawbacks in light of evolving interpretations of interpreter practice. Striking a balance between note-taking and active listening is crucial for optimizing interpreter performance and ensuring the fidelity of interpreted communication.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, note-taking in consecutive interpreting is a dynamic process that transcends mere transcription, emphasizing the capture of ideas over verbatim words and the use of efficient notation techniques. As interpreters encode information from the source text into their notes, it's paramount that these notes are not only legible but also visually intuitive, employing symbols and visual cues to enhance comprehension.

While note-taking is indispensable for consolidating knowledge and aiding recall, it's imperative to strike a balance between its utility and its potential to hinder active listening and interpretation. Mastery of effective notation methods is a cornerstone of consecutive interpreting proficiency, motivating students to pursue excellence in their craft.

To safeguard against the encroachment of note-taking on interpretation quality, students must prioritize active engagement with the source material, ensuring that the note-taking process remains a facilitator rather than a crutch. By nurturing their cognitive faculties and memory, interpreters can elevate their performance beyond mere transcription.

Furthermore, the integration of cutting-edge technologies such as Smartpens into interpreter training programs holds immense promise for enhancing technical proficiency and preparing students for the demands of modern interpretation practice. By embracing these innovations and offering dedicated training, educational institutions can empower interpreters to navigate the evolving landscape of their profession with confidence and adaptability.

In essence, note-taking serves as a bridge between source text and interpretation, but its efficacy lies in its integration with active listening, cognitive engagement, and technological fluency. Through a holistic approach to interpreter training, students can harness the full potential of note-taking while remaining steadfast in their commitment to excellence in interpretation.

5. Bibliography List :

Benghebrid, Y. (2016). Mahatat fi Tarikh AL-tadjama AL-shafahiya. In: *Cahier de Traduction* 19 (01), 05-17.

Gillies, A. (2017). *Note-taking for consecutive interpreting; A short course*. New York: Routledge.

Mead, P. (2011). Co-ordinating delivery in consecutive interpreting. In: *InTRAlinea*, 13(01), (n.p).

Orlando, M. (2015). Digital pen technology and interpreter training, practice and Research: Status and trends. In S. Ehrlich, & J. Napier (Eds.), *Interpreter education in the digital age: Innovation, access, and change* (pp. 125-152). Gallaudet University Press.

Orlando, M. (2021). L'interprétation consécutive-simultanée. À la découverte d'un mode hybride. *Traduire, Revue Française de la Traduction*, 245(01) 76-85.

Pöchhacker, F. (2004). *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Roche, N. (1999, november). Note-Taking for Consecutive Interpretation. (Roche on Notes). Centre de Conférences Albert Borschette, CCAB, European Commission, Brussels. Récupéré sur <https://youtu.be/1Z-AmvDMDN8?si=xRWeH3Zh7Y7pxPeY>

Rozan, J.-F. (1956). *Note-taking in consecutive interpreting*. Tertium Society for the Promotion of Languages Studies, Poland.

Schweda-Nicholson, Nancy (1985) "English consecutive interpretation training: Videotapes in the classroom". [In:] *Meta* 30(2), 148–154.

Seleskovitch, D., & Lederer, M. (2002). *Pédagogie raisonnée de l'interprétation*, Didier Érudition, Paris.

Someya, Y. (2017). *Consecutive notetaking and interpreter training*. New York: Routledge.

Thiéry, C. (1995). The Role of Notes in Consecutive Interpreting. In l. G. H.Solli (Eds.), *The Turn: Interpreting traditions in the crossroad of cultures* (pp. 103-115). John Benjamins Publishing.

