

Note-taking Strategies in English- Chinese Consecutive Interpreting: Teaching and Practice

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Abstract

Note-taking is a critical part of the interpreting process, and a particularly much-debated topic in content-heavy conference interpreting practice. The paper aims to identify methods of improving interpreting note-taking strategies, and to inspire the future teaching of note-taking skills. The case is a conference interpreting carried out at the 2014 National Green-ecological Urban Planning Technology Workshop. The paper presents the English-Chinese consecutive interpreting scenarios and conducts pertinent analysis of coping strategies. Examples extracted from the full scripts are analyzed, along with the corresponding notes from the recreated full-length notes. Six strategies are discussed. It argues that a consistent note-taking system helps the interpreter save time and increase efficiency in taking notes; consistent notations, abbreviations and links are the solid foundation.

Key words: Consecutive interpreting; interpreting notes; note-taking strategies; Green-ecological Urban Planning Technology Workshop

Introduction

Note-taking is a critical part of the interpreting process, and a particularly much-debated topic in content-heavy CI practice. Note-taking strategies are skills that need constant practice, and every interpreting assignment will pose new constraints. This paper takes a consecutive interpreting for an English-speaking German speaker on technical content. The interpreting process witnessed quite a few strategies commonly seen in note-taking and those skills establish a unique and solid note-taking system following the guidance of predecessors. The analysis has been a rewarding process for teaching and practice.

I. Note-taking in the Interpreting Process

The function of notes for consecutive interpreting is commonly accepted among interpreters, which is “notes are the keys to consecutive interpreting. Using notes, interpreters can supplement the short-term memory and ensure accurate interpreting, without being impacted by the length of speech.” (Lin 2004:3) It is easy to consecutively interpret one or two sentences at a time. But the longer a speaker talks, the more stressful an interpreter will feel. Before discussing note-taking for consecutive interpreting, it is critical to understand the functions of note-taking.

The first is to reduce the memory burden. Note-taking is not a mechanical process, but a cognitive process that involves various factors. It is not about writing down everything a speaker says. Interpreters must, momentarily, listen, understand and memorize the speaker’s speech, organize the information, and then take the notes. The fact is that a speaker tends to pause after he or she completes a meaningful group, which may be comprised of two or three sentences, even more sentences, which may last several minutes. Wang Tao argued, “in principle, if a speaker speaks for longer time than one minute, an interpreter shall resort to note-taking...” (2012:1) No matter how outstanding one interpreter is, it is very difficult to interpret a lengthy speech without taking notes. The sheer stress on memory and focus will be too tremendous to endure for a longer period of time. By taking notes, interpreters can easily write down the key points of the original messages, rather than memorizing them all. When interpreting, interpreters only need to refer to the notes. This can greatly cut down on the level of information that needs to be memorized and reduce the intensity of memory efforts. For example, in this case, the speaker said, “Our headquarter is in Munich. And in China, we have four offices. The headquarter is in Beijing, we have offices in Shenyang, Shanghai and Guangzhou.” In this short sentence, there are six city/country names. By using notes, the interpreter can easily memorize and accurately interpret these names into the target language. The second is to ensure accuracy and consistency. The speech may contain various types of key information, such as proper names, numbers, places, dates, terms, logical structure and so on. The third is to maintain endurance throughout the interpreting process. The length of interpreting assignment varies. At last but not least, it helps reflow the target language. Simply put, notes are like the skeleton of the source speech and interpreters use their memory to add flesh and blood to accurately and appropriately present the ideas in the target language. It is one of the most powerful tools for interpreters and, if put in use properly, it can bring the consecutive interpreting skills to a whole new level.

1.2 Principles of Note-Taking

“Every interpreter develops his or her own note-taking system on the basis of the same set of common and universal principles.” (Wang 2012:1) When reading the notes of different interpreters, practitioner may notice that they vary greatly in details, because there are rules to follow when taking notes. An interpreter can be personalized as much as possible when it comes to selection of note-taking language, use of notations and characters, or layout of notes, but the same rules or principles always apply. Below are the most important principles. Look at the big picture, rather than the details. Words, expressions and ideas are merely parts of a source speech. They only make sense when there are put together in a particular order. The tendency to focus too much on details, say a particular expression, usually winds up missing the general message of the source speech.

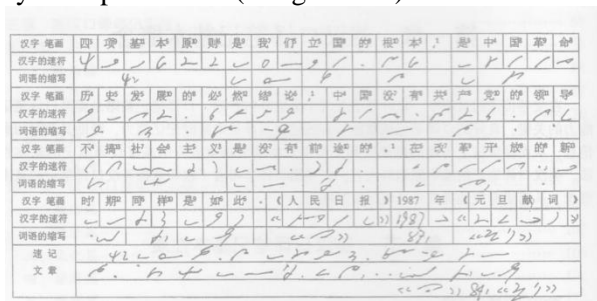
Focusing too much on “beads”, one may never realize what the “necklace” looks like. In other words, an interpreter may focus too much on noting the details, and does not spare enough capacity to get a hold of the general message. To properly take notes and interpret consecutively, an interpreter has to make sure to understand the overall idea of the source speech.

It serves as a framework that holds the relations, structures and links of key points and helps interpreters logically reconstruct in the target language.

1.1.3 Misunderstandings about Note-Taking

Among interpreting learners, there are some myths about note-taking. Some commonly seen misunderstandings merit a mention to set things straight.

a. Note-taking is not stenography. Many people mistake note-taking for shorthand or stenography. However, the two are quite different. Stenography is an abbreviated symbolic writing method that enables writing at the speed of speaking. The goal of stenography is to record as much as possible, if not completely. In the past when digital recorder and dictation machines were not invented, it was widely used in many professions. For example, keeping meeting minutes or courtroom transcripts. The notations used in stenography are complicated and need deciphering. The purpose of taking notes in the context of consecutive interpreting is to facilitate interpreters to memorize information and reduce their memory burden. The notes taken are usually easy to read and require no deciphering. See the stenography examples below (Jiang 2015:2) :



b. Note-taking is a personal thing. Rozan said, “More often than not, the ‘greats’ will tell you that consecutive interpretation cannot be learnt and that note-taking depends upon the personality of the interpreter. I am afraid my own experience show otherwise. If the fundamentals [...] are in place then note-taking can easily be learnt.” (Gillies 2005:1) Note-taking is like handwriting. Every interpreter has his or her own way of note-taking and his or her notes may look a lot different from notes of others. But it does not mean that note-taking is personal and there are no rules to follow. As a matter of fact, all interpreters are taking notes under the same framework, or following the same set of principles as mentioned in Section III.

c. Note-taking is the magic bullet. The author heard it more than once that somebody said, “my English is good enough to be an interpreter, I just do not know how to take notes”. It sounds like that note-taking is the ultimate skill for any interpreter-to-be and mastery of note-taking will solve all the other problems. The truth is, note-taking is supplementary. It is just as important as memory, comprehension and verbal communication. It has a role to play in consecutive interpreting but is not the only role in the process.

II. The Description of the Green-ecological Urban Planning Technology Workshop and Note-taking Preparation

2.1 Description of the case

The “12th Five-Year Plan for Green Building and Green-ecological Urban Planning Development” released by China’s Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) in 2014, marked the beginning of a new green-ecological planning initiative in China that led to a wave of green efforts. Around eight speakers were scheduled to deliver speeches at the workshop on development of green building technologies and ecological urban planning. Three of them were German experts from GIZ, including Dr. Volkmar Hasse, Mr. Samy David Schneider and Mr. Christopher Knabe, who also worked for OBERMEYER, one of the largest engineering consultant in Germany. Dr. Hasse delivered the opening remarks (about 10 minutes), and two other experts gave speeches in the morning and afternoon, respectively (about 1 hour each). At the request of Wuhai Municipal Housing and Urban-Rural Development Department, the author (hereinafter referred to as the interpreter) was commissioned to provide interpreting services at the workshop for the three speakers mentioned above.

To make it easier to understand the complete interpreting process, the author divided the assignment into different stages, i.e. preparation, pre-meeting interaction, execution and review. The four stages were carried out one after another with no overlapping.

2.2 The time length and other features

The assignment lasted 1 hour and 4 minutes. The speaker began with a self-introduction in Chinese and then delivered the speech entirely in English. The scripts of the interpreting process added up to 12,000 words. Despite the unexpected schedule change and the conference hall setup, the interpreting went smoothly. Although the speaker had a German accent and was a bit disorganized in the presentation, the interpreter basically conveyed the complete source speech to the audience and accurately interpreted the technical content that came up in the speech.

2.3 Preparation

The interpreter was notified about the assignment one week in advance, but the reference materials, i.e. the PPT files, weren’t available until the day before the actual workshop was held. Although time was limited, the usual steps of preparation for any interpreting assignment were still carried out. Before the following stages were initiated, the first thing the interpreter did upon accepting the assignment was print out the presentation document.

While going through the pages, the interpreter used a pen to highlight the terms, concepts, key words, information the needed clarification and so on, to facilitate the preparation stage. The hard copy was the base work of everything described in this section.

2.3.1 Background Information

“Successful note-taking is greatly facilitated by detailed knowledge of the subject matter in question.” (Kohn 2002:10) In this assignment, various organizations and certification systems were mentioned, such as GIZ, OBERMEYER, LEED, DGNB and China Green Star. A basic understanding of these subject matters can help the interpreter quickly identify the key words in the speech, even when the speaker is talking fast or with an accent. For example, when the speaker began to talk about “to measure this approach... measurable”, the knowledge about the specific certification systems that appeared in the PPT file emerged in the interpreter’s mind. So when the speaker said “LEED”, the interpreter’s first reaction will be “a certification body”, rather than the verb “lead”. The background information entries are numbered and organized into a table that lists their English spellings, Chinese translations and definition.

2.3.2 Glossary and FUNs

Another important part of preparation is to prepare a glossary, which is basically an excel worksheet that consolidates all terms and expressions that the interpreter can extract from the reference materials. For this task, the subject matter was green building and urban planning, and there were quite a few technical or specialised terms that the interpreter needs to check out and familiarize himself with. It is crucial that, when the speaker talks about a certain term, the interpreter must immediately and accurately note down and later interpret it into the proper term in the target language. If the interpreter does not know or is not familiar with a certain term, it will be impossible to pick it up in the speech and then be missed out, which may lead to incomplete interpreting, or even misunderstanding. One example is the term “entropy”. The speaker used this term to depict the characteristics of energy, by saying “energy always flow from the higher state to the lower state, which follows the concept of entropy” The term “entropy” can be used in many contexts, such as economics, information technology and so on. But for this particular subject, i.e. energy, it means the size and extent of thermodynamics, which involves conversion of energy. Another example is, the speaker said “the travel efficiency is the coefficient of the...”. Here if “coefficient” is directly translated as “系数”, it would be a mistake, because on Page 15, it says “Urban travel efficiency = Vehicle Efficiency x Travel Efficiency x System Efficiency”. It should be translated as “乘积”.

Another important part of the glossary is frequently used notes (FUNs), which assigns notes or notations to terms that may be frequently or repeatedly mentioned by the speaker. For example, the speaker works for Obeymeyer. It is only natural that the company name will be used in many cases. Therefore, it makes sense to assign a notation to it. So when the speaker talks about the company name, instead of writing the long word either in Chinese or English, the interpreter can simply use the assigned abbreviation “obm” to indicate this term.

2.3.3 Pre-Meeting Interaction

Before actually conducting an interpreting assignment, it was always nice to have a chance talking to the speaker, so that an interpreter can get a sense about the speaker’s language fluency, accent and so on. Also, the interpreter can use this opportunity to ask the speakers about the questions about the presentation identified during the preparation stage. The speaker may have requirements on the way the interpreting is done, e.g. how long the speaker will speak, where to pause, and so on. In this assignment, the interpreter was able to dine with the speakers.

III. Analysis of Note-Taking Strategies Used in the Assignment

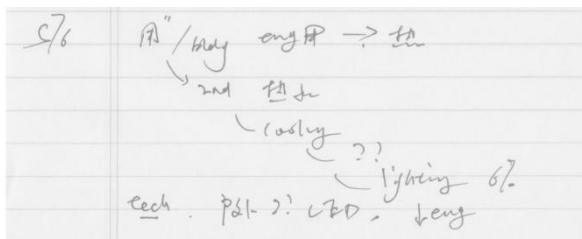
This section discusses the note-taking strategies used in this assignment. The strategies discussed here are a combination of knowledge learned from the courses the author took in the past and the author’s personal experience. To make sure that the strategies are sufficiently explained and demonstrated and pertinent to this article, examples are taken from the assignment scripts. The workshop was held a long time ago, back in 2014, so the original notes were nowhere to find. The notes here are recreated by the author using his own note-taking strategies same as the live assignment. Although each section has its own samples, they may also show pertinence to other sections. Therefore, the author will not only discuss the aspects of a sample that are related to the current section, but also touch upon the aspects pertinent to other sections.

3.1 Ladder Structure

Ladder Structure is a layout frequently used by interpreters. With this approach, the first row of a meaning group is set flush, with indentation getting larger as the notes continue to next rows, e.g. two-space indentation in the second row, four-space indentation in the third row, etc. When the current meaning group is finished, draw a straight line below the last row across the page to indicate conclusion of the current meaning group. Then the first row of the next meaning group is set flush, and so on and so forth. Notes organized in such a structure have the following benefits: easy to read; clear in logic relationship; quick to capture and triangle space below the rows of text can be used to add more details when necessary.

Sample 1**Scripts:**

0:39:13	Speaker	The biggest consumers in building energy use are, energy for heating. Second we have is energies for water heating. And then those for space cooling, areas of [indiscernible] energy usages. Lightening, lighting is also 6% of interest. With current technologies, we have outside seen [indiscernible]. Outside we have good samples of LED applications. This part can also be easily reduced.
0:39:47	Interpreter	右边这张图向大家展示了城市区间里面的各种行业、各种用途对电、对能源的消耗。我们可以看到取暖是最大的能耗用户，接下来是水的加热，接下来还有制冷。这是消耗能源最多的三个领域。接下来还有照明，比如说我们在外面的大广告牌，LED 广告牌。它也会消耗很多的能源。

Notes:

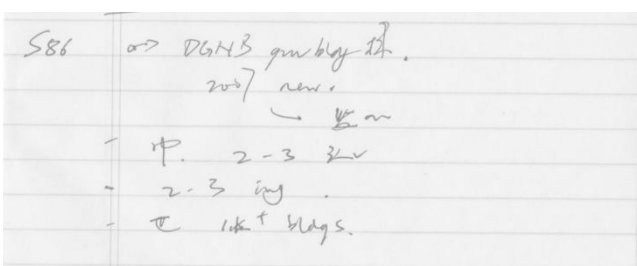
S76 is an example of Ladder Structure. The first sentence “右边这张图.....的消耗” was a remark made in accordance with the layout of the slide. The speaker was talking about the diagram on the right. Considering that the speaker was not a native speaker, the interpreter decided to add some explanatory comments and help the audience keep up with the speaker’s pace, rather than running the risk to strictly follow the structure of the source speech. There was an absence notation at the bottom, indicating that a few words were indiscernible. Therefore, the interpreter skipped the point and went straight to the next key point “lighting”, without pondering or asking the speaker to clarify, for two reasons: a. by reading the diagram on P21 of the PPT file, the top four energy consumers have been included, so the indiscernible part was not key information; b. repeatedly asking the speaker to clarify minor issues will seriously interrupt the speaker’s pace of presentation.

3.2 SVO

SVO, i.e. subject, verb and object, represents the most important elements in a sentence. Without them, the rest of a sentence becomes meaningless. Treating SVO as the top priority when taking notes of a sentence. It is an intuitive approach that outlines the structure of a sentence by identifying key elements, so that interpreters can easily read and understand meaning of notes. Typically, S (subject), V (verb) and O (object) can be written on different rows as in a Ladder Structure, or in one row if any of S, V or O is quite evident and can be omitted. SVO is like the trunk of a tree. Other key information, e.g. conditional clauses, should also be picked up and added to the trunk like branches. “Leaves”, or the other information, should be recalled by the interpreter during the interpreting process. That makes a “tree” complete. SVO allows interpreters to focus on the most important parts of a sentence first and get a sense of the “Big Picture” before interpreting. It is also flexible enough to allow interpreters add additional information as necessary while still revolving around the crux of source speech.

Sample 2**Scripts:**

0:45:20	Speaker	The next, I would like to briefly introduce the green building standards of DGNB. This is actually a quite new standard established in 2007. It still advances. In China, we have already two or three pre-certified buildings, and as far as I know, two or three more buildings in the process. Worldwide, we have more than 1,000 buildings, which are certified.
0:45:51	Interpreter	下面我们来看一下 DGNB 的这样一个认证。这个认证是我们在 2007 年建立的一套认证体系。它现在也在发展之中。在中国已经有两三个建筑获得了认证，还有两三个在认证过程当中。世界范围内呢，我们有超过 1,000 座建筑获得了 DGNB 认证。

Notes:

In this sample, “S” is “I”, “V” is “introduce”, both of which are quite evident and easy to memorize and hence omitted, and “O” is “DGNB”. The rest are “branches” that touch upon key points of the source speech. The bullet point indicates a new sentence in the same meaning group. The rest three sentences were also typical SVO notes.

For example, in the second sentence, “S” and “V”, i.e. “we have already...” are simple enough to be omitted. “中”, “2-3” (O) and “认√” are key information and sufficient enough to reconstruct the source speech.

3.3 Less and More

“Less and more” is short for “less words and more notations and abbreviations”. Interpreters are multitasking while taking notes. One can utter 2 to 3 words per second, but only can write down 0.2 to 0.3 word per second. (JIANG Xiaomei 2015:1) Using words in notes requires more capacity and time allocated for writing. “Detailed note-taking often runs the risk of closely following the source text structures and, thus, of interfering with target text production.” (Kohn 2002:10) That takes away the capacity and time that could have been put to better use, e.g. restructuring the source speech or capturing more information. So the best use of capacity and time will be capturing as much information as possible and in the shortest timeframe. Notations and abbreviations are the most suitable instruments to meet this end.

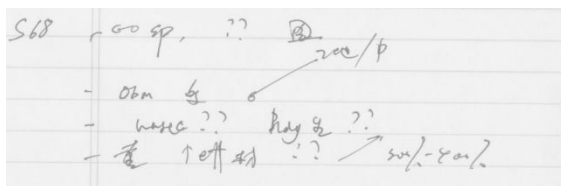
Notations can be lines, curves, arrows, punctuation marks, mathematical signs, characters, drawings, or a combination of the aforementioned notations. For example, an arrow pointing left can mean “in the past” or “before a certain date”, and an arrow pointing right can mean “in the future” or “from now on”. Another example is “L*”, a combination of characters and punctuation marks, which means “larger”. Add another asterisk can change the meaning to “largest”. There are a lot more tactics that can be employed in inventing and using notations, as long as they make sense to the user. Abbreviations are shortened words and usually no longer than three or four characters. It is the most direct and expressive way in note-taking. In most cases, abbreviations are used to indicate nouns. For example, “government” can be written as “gov” and “Chinese” can be written as “chn”.

Sample 3

Scripts:

0:35:46	Speaker	From my speaker before, I have seen also [indiscernible] pictures of current construction sites in China. We OBERMEYER... we have very... how to say... frequently on construction sites. I think waste production already [indiscernible] in production of buildings and production of [indiscernible] infrastructure. It's very important that, in this area, increase of the efficiency of used materials, [indiscernible], can be increased easily by 300% to 400% [indiscernible] impression.
0:36:18	Interpreter	之前我在看前面这位领导展示的时候呢，也看到了中国建筑工地的一些图片。也就是，实际上来说在建设这种基础设施的过程中就是已经产生垃圾了，如果说我们能够向我们刚才所说的采取这种建筑业.....建筑工业化或建筑产业化的这样一种方式，实际上可以很大的提高所用材料的效率，甚至达到 300%到 400%的这样一个提高。

Notes:



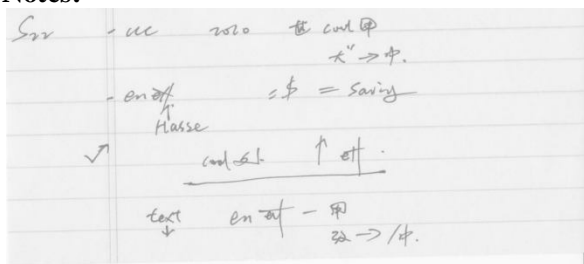
This is a meaning group with four sentences. The first sentence mentioned “construction sites”. The same expression was repeated in the second sentence. The interpreter directly drew a line from the expression in the first sentence and linked it to the spot where the expression was reused in the second sentence. This strategy is very useful when a particular word or expression was reused in various places.

3.4 Use of Margin

Always leave a margin on the left side of the page for linking or logical notations that represent logical structure of the source speech. The reason to save this space especially for this purpose is linking words and logical notations are so important to be mixed up with other elements of the same meaning group. They control the logics of the source speech and directly impact the quality of interpreting. Another purpose margin can be used for is to count the sequence of key points that span across several meaning groups or segments. For example, a speaker may want to say, “I would like to stress on four points. First... Another one is... The next one is... At last”, but it would be too long if he or she finishes it in one time. Instead, the speaker pause three times after the first point, second point and the third point respectively, to make sure that each point gets across. In this case, number the points in the margin will help interpreters correctly separate and number the key points.

Sample 4**Scripts:**

- 0:07:30 Speaker So... as you also see, in 2010, a major... how to say... consumption of coal worldwide happened in China. And to look into this energy efficiency, means on the one side as Mr. Hassad said, the cheapest way of doing it is saving it. But on the other side, it means also... the process of ... the coal to the earth... and processing it can receive higher efficiency. As you see what the lower text states that... err... that the energy transfer efficiency come to the resource to the general users in China is still to be improved.
- 0:08:11 Interpreter 我们可以看到呢，根据我们 2010 年的数据来看，我们中国也是一个用煤大户，哈萨先生之前也提到过，就是说我们在使用能源最有效的方法呢就是说节约能源，但是从另一个方面来讲呢，我们把煤或者其它的资源开采出来之后，我们如果能够进行进一步的深加工，提高它的能源效率，也是可以起到同样的效果的。比如说，我们可以看下边的文字，就是说我们现在呢能源开采出来到最终用户的时候，实际上来说我们所获得的使用效率非常低，在这一方面，我们还是改进的余地。

Notes:

In the segment's notes, the interpreter used dash to indicate independent sentences within the current meaning group. There were two sentences in this segment. Also, as the lower part of the margin, a linking word, "but", was used to indicate a transition.

3.5 Choice of Note-Taking Language

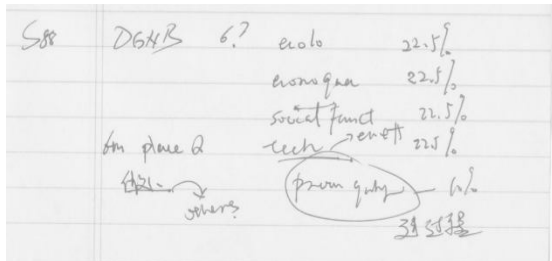
There have been different opinions about which language, A language (or first language) or B language (or second language) interpreters should use to take notes. Although Szabó believes that, "it is beyond doubt that most interpreters have a better mastery of their A language or first language, and when a speech is of great lexical difficulty, it may be quicker and safer to rely on the mother tongue" (2006:144), the view does not take into consideration the complex construction of Chinese characters. Preference may vary from interpreter to interpreter. Based on the author's personal experience, combination of both A and B languages may be the most effective solution. To be more specific, balance Chinese and English when doing Chinese to English consecutive interpreting and primarily use English when doing English to Chinese consecutive interpreting. The rationale behind that theory is:

- Notes in Chinese usually consume more time, because of the strokes and complex construction of Chinese characters;
- English characters are easier and quicker to write, hence it is the most economical solution for note-taking when possible;
- Taking notes in the source language saves the process of conversion between the two languages, particularly at the presence of words and expressions unique to the culture of the source language;

Sample 5**Scripts:**

- 0:46:13 Speaker You see that DGNB covers six areas of... how to say... credits. That's ecological quality. That has a weighting of 22.5%. We have economical quality, which has the same weighting of 22.5%. We have social and functional quality, also 22.5%. We have technical quality, which relates, for example, to energy efficiency, where we have a 22.5%. And we have a process quality. That means making the process of building from the beginning to the end, of 10%. And we have also the quality of the place, where the building is actually set up, which influences the other factors.
- 0:47:06 Interpreter 我们可以看到在上边的中间部分则显示了，我们在进行认证的时候考虑到的五个方面，其中包括生态质量、经济质量、社会质量和技术质量，这四个方面所占的百分值都是 22.5%。过程质量占的是 10%。我们所说的过程质量主要是指在整个建筑端到端的流程中的效率.....能源效率是怎样的。另外还有一个影响其他打分的因素叫做场地质量。也就是说，当前的建筑所处的区位或者位置在什么地方，也会影响认证的时候所得的分值。

Notes:



In this segment, the interpreter mainly used English as the language of choice for note-taking, because it is faster to capture the terms with abbreviations, particularly when most of them were already included in the notation list prepared prior to the meeting. In some places, when there were no readily available English abbreviations or notations for note-taking, the interpreter’s intuition was to use Chinese to supplement the notes (“建过程” at the bottom). Another point is, the speaker said “six areas”, but the interpreter said “五个方面” while the notes clearly indicated “6?”. Because the interpreter realized that only five metrics were given weights and their weights added up to 100%. The last one “场地质量” was an additional rating factor, so it was singled out as another factor that impacted the rating.

3.6 Absence Notation

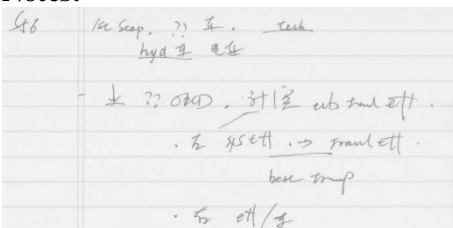
The last strategy is absence notation, which represents the part that the interpreter cannot interpret at the moment. It can be that the interpreter does not understand the speaker’s expression, the speaker’s voice is inaudible, or the speaker’s expression makes no sense to the interpreter. When such a notation appears, it usually means the interpreter does not understand the expression and decides to omit it; the speaker’s voice is indiscernible or too low to be distinguished, the interpreter decides to omit it; the speaker’s expression makes no sense, the interpreter decides to put the absence notation as a placeholder and see if the upcoming context can help understand the absent segment. The absence notations used in this assignment were mostly caused by words or expressions that were indiscernible to the interpreter. It greatly impacted the logics of the source speech and took a toll on the interpreting quality where such issues emerged.

Sample 6

Scripts:

0:28:21	Speaker	And the first step is... how to say... the [indiscernible] inside of vehicles [indiscernible], which is a technological approach. I think we now have hybrid cars, electric cars... And the lower part that shows actually a picture from the [indiscernible] OECD study, showing how you actually calculate and achieve urban travel efficiency. You see, on the left side... umm.. system efficiency then you have travel efficiency itself, which allows which says it allows you to use the best transportation mode and then, on the right side, you have the efficiency of the vehicles.
0:29:03	Interpreter	在我们实现这一点的时候呢，我们首先第一个需要解决的问题呢就是，来解决车辆本身，比如说我们现在有混合动力车、电动汽车。那么下面这张图，实际上来说是 OECD 这样一个机构它来计算我们在城市中如何来实现最高的交通效率。它包括全市系统交通，包括交通的效率。然后在右边还具体列出了如何来计算这种城市交通效率。

Notes:



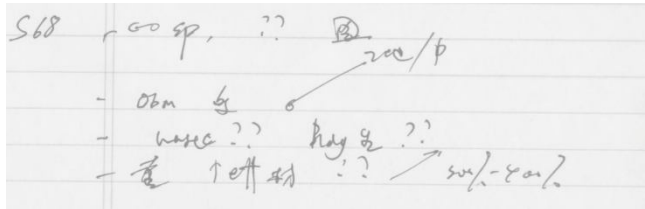
3.7 Reuse of notations and abbreviations

When taking notes on one page, it happens quite often that one word or expression is used more than once. In this case, some notations and abbreviations can be reused by drawing a line to “pull” such notations or abbreviations from the spot of first use to the spot of second use. This economical tactic is proven to be effective in many settings, particularly when there are words or expressions that are used highly frequent and complex to represent with notation or abbreviation. When a combination of words or expressions reappear in another meaning group soon after they are mentioned for the first time, just circle the notations or abbreviations for the combination and use a line to “pull” it to the spot of quotation.

It comes quite handy when interpreters are using the Ladder Structure, because the oblique layout tiers the notes in an angel and creates a triangle space that will not interrupt or confuse the linking line with other notations.

Sample 7**Scripts:**

- 0:35:46 Speaker From my speaker before, I have seen also [indiscernible] pictures of current construction sites in China. We OBERMEYER... we have very... how to say... frequently on construction sites. I think waste production already [indiscernible] in production of buildings and production of [indiscernible] infrastructure. It's very important that, in this area, increase of the efficiency of used materials, [indiscernible], can be increased easily by 300% to 400% [indiscernible] impression.
- 0:36:18 Interpreter 之前我在看前面这位领导展示的时候呢,也看到了中国建筑工地的一些图片。也就是,实际上来说在建设这种基础设施的过程中就是已经产生垃圾了,如果说我们能够向我们刚才所说的采取这种建筑业.....建筑工业化或建筑产业化的这样一种方式,实际上可以很大的提高所用材料的效率,甚至达到300%到400%的这样一个提高。

Notes:

This is a meaning group with four sentences. The first sentence mentioned “construction sites”. The same expression was repeated in the second sentence. The interpreter directly drew a line from the expression in the first sentence and linked it to the spot where the expression was reused in the second sentence. This strategy is very useful when a particular word or expression was reused in various places.

IV. Discussion and Conclusion

After the workshop was concluded, the client met with the interpreter and expressed their appreciation for the hard work. They were satisfied that most of the technical terms were properly translated and the presentation went on smoothly without being interrupted by any interpreting issue.

More importantly, the interpreting was mostly in line with the Chinese version of the presentation and there was no major deviation. Analysis of notes from the assignment brought great inspirations, because it was the first time the author actually sat down to read his own notes and evaluates them against the note-taking systems developed by scholars. There were areas in alignment with these proven systems, but there were also opportunities to introduce new thoughts and improve note-taking skills. The author listed a few opportunities to improve note-taking.

Although the notes taken during the assignment captured most of the key information, the scribbles were too illegible to read afterwards. It is quite typical for rookie interpreters that the notes are too illegible to recognize. But for interpreters with certain experience, it is also important, to note in a readable manner. Because when there are unexpected factors that interrupt the interpreter’s thought, in this case the German accent and pronunciation of English words, and the constant reminder sent by the moderator, the interpreter may be under great pressure to maintain focus. Illegible notes will not help at this moment. On the contrary, clearly-taken readable notes may help the interpreter gradually regain composure and minimize the impact of interruption.

Some key points and relationship or logics were not properly captured, mainly because of insufficient preparation. If the interpreter invested more time to peruse the presentation and gain more insight, the interpreting process can be more smooth and structured. It also help boost the interpreter’s ability to protect himself from interruptions or disrupting factors. Therefore, never underestimate the importance of preparation. Consistency in using notations and abbreviations is also an important factor in good consecutive interpreting. In the notes for this assignment, the interpreter deviated from the established notations in several cases. For example, “water” should have been noted as “w.”, but the interpreter wrote “water” directly in a hurry. There are other similar cases in the notes. A consistent note-taking system helps the interpreter save time and increase efficiency in taking notes. Consistent notations, abbreviations and links are the solid foundation of good note-taking. Therefore, more training is needed to ensure consistency.

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