

## CONSECUTIVE AND SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION — UNITED IN DIVERSITY

*This article discusses interpretation in its two varieties — consecutive and simultaneous — characterized by obvious differences and inherent similarities. Baseline professional skills and life-long self-education are «must-haves» for any successful interpreter. Practical examples of interpreted texts are analyzed in terms of precision and faithfulness of interpretation in consecutive and simultaneous mode during the court judgment broadcast and an ensuing training seminar for professional judges.*

**Key words:** consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, conference interpretation, legal texts, compression techniques, gaps and losses in interpretation.

*У статті йдеться про усний переклад — послідовний і синхронний, що мають як схожі риси, так і очевидні відмінності. Коротко обговорюються обов'язкові якості успішного усного перекладача — професійні навички і вміння навчатися протягом життя. Проаналізовано реальні тексти, що звучали і перекладалися (послідовно і синхронно) під час трансляції проголошення вердикту Верховним судом Великої Британії і наступного навчального семінару для діючих суддів.*

**Ключові слова:** послідовний переклад, синхронний переклад, юридичні тексти, техніки компресії тексту, прогалини і втрати при перекладі.

*В статье рассматривается устный перевод — последовательный и синхронный, имеющие как очевидные различия, так и несомненную схожесть. Кратко перечисляются обязательные для каждого успешного устного переводчика характеристики — высокий профессионализм и умение обучаться всю жизнь. Проанализированы реальные тексты, озвученные при трансляции вынесения вердикта Верховным судом Великобритании и последовавшего за этим учебного семинара для действующих судей.*

**Ключевые слова:** последовательный перевод, синхронный перевод, юридические тексты, техники компрессии текста, пропуски и потери при устном переводе

Translation and interpretation share some «must-haves» to be considered valid, correct, and accurate. Namely, proper grammar, fitting lexis, and appropriate style ought to be united to render faithfully in the target language (TL) all the thoughts and implications expressed in the source language (SL). On top of that, required operational characteristics in interpretation also include precise pronunciation and enunciation, speech tempo and voice pitch, sentiment and pause analysis, etc.

Layman opinion holds that interpretation is easy, and anyone knowing two languages can offer interpretation services. Consecutive interpretation (CI) is regarded an easy exercise as interpreters can take notes of what they hear, speakers make pauses for interpreters' convenience, and the very fact of sitting at a table together with people of importance is God's blessing. Similarly, simultaneous interpretation (SI) is perceived as a trifle, too: one just reads out the printout of a speech or address delivered in a conference hall, and the only professional requirement for simultaneous interpreters is a beautiful voice. Quite true, a beautiful voice may sometimes give the interpreter the benefit of the doubt. But, as there must

be more to life than living, there must be more to interpretation than knowing the words and being able to speak two languages.

Interpretation can be consecutive or simultaneous (the latter is also called «conference»). Consecutive interpretation (CI) includes a time lag between a speech reception and comprehension phases in the SL, and the consequent delivery of a message in the TL. Another important characteristic of CI is that an interpreter directly participates in a communicative situation. During any communicative exchange, its parties and their interpreters develop interpersonal relations. In fact, speakers and interpreters work as a team to produce and reproduce speech fragments and ensure the uninterrupted flow of information both ways. On the part of the speaker, it is important to mark the most relevant and meaningful fragments with stress and intonation, whereas the interpreter's job is to memorize and faithfully reproduce them in the TL, with or without some supporting tools, namely, interpreter's notes.

In CI, duration of an interpreted fragment must not overly exceed the length of the original. The need to adjust and align, time-wise, the duration of original and interpreted speech chunks presents one of the major challenges for the interpreter.

Simultaneous (conference) interpreting (SI) is generally called for at negotiations and formal meetings, i.e., the UN assemblies, the World Bank and the IMF annual meetings, or at business conferences engaging bilingual or multilingual market participants.

SI may involve: (i) interpreters working in a sound-proof booth, distanced from the speaker's podium but within the range of vision (the best-case scenario), (ii) located in a room next to the conference event and following the event on-screen (a more strenuous working mode), or (iii) whispering (with or without a microphone) to a group of several participants in need of interpretation.

Simultaneous mode means interpreting «here and now», making split-second decisions, reading between the lines of meaning, interpreting body and facial languages of speakers, and engaging in verbal jugglery not to lose any precise information, let alone jokes, puns, and idioms. To this purpose, simultaneous interpreters use various strategies to relay essential information. Also, they know the ways of compensating linguistic limitations.

In SI, interpretation does not start immediately as soon as the speaker begins to speak. There ought to be a short delay of approximately half a sentence (sometimes two thirds of a sentence) for the interpreter to understand the speaker's intention — both thought- and grammar-wise — and then to start interpreting. SI means multitasking — it necessitates careful listening, processing and comprehending (within milliseconds) original speech in the SL, formulating and articulating delivery in the TL while already being engaged in the focused listening to the next speech chunk while still interpreting the preceding one.

Interestingly, though slightly off the topic, in Europe and Northern America CI is considered a more trying and demanding interpretation mode than SI. Extra strain is believed to be brought by the fact that consecutive interpreters find themselves «at the shoulder of history», sharing the table with high negotiating parties.

Consequently, CI is a much more lucrative business than any other interpretation mode in the Western hemisphere, broadly speaking.

It may be argued that some of the specific conditions of CI — the possibility to listen to a clipped speech fragment, certain time span to process and analyze the focal speech points, and availability of notes to guide the speech production in the TL — end up in a more faithful, correct and precise reproduction of original meaning compared to SI. An opinion both in and out interpretation community states that SI means «gaps and losses galore», when speech fragments containing figures, unknown personal or place names, and some other «precision information» bits are lost. Experienced simultaneous interpreters, predominantly free-lancers, disagree heartily, since professionals such as them (and free-lancers are universally known to be more stress-resilient and versatile than in-house interpreters) deliver all relevant information through any interpretation mode, and omissions of «precision information» are regarded as failure and disgrace, and are avoided at all costs.

Having said that, we believe it is interesting to look into some practical examples of texts interpreted consecutively and simultaneously to conduct analysis of how much potential compression of information actually happens. This can probably assist us in better understating interpretation and its challenges.

Texts below are taken from a recent judgment by the Supreme Court of the UK<sup>1</sup>. Texts **A**, **B**, **C**, and **G** were interpreted simultaneously as the judgment was pronounced by Lady Hale, President of the Supreme Court. Texts **D**, **E**, and **F** were interpreted consecutively when the essence of the judgment was discussed by the judiciary at a training seminar. In both cases, no printouts were available to interpreters.

**A.** <...> The substantive question in this case is whether it is unlawful discrimination, // either on grounds of sexual orientation, or on grounds of religious belief, or political opinion, // for a bakery to refuse to supply a cake iced with the message «support gay marriage» because of the sincere religious belief of its owners that gay marriage is inconsistent with Biblical teaching and therefore unacceptable to God. // If the prima facie answer to either question is «yes», then questions arise as to the rights of the bakery and its owners to freedom of religion and freedom of expression, under articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, // and what difference, if any, those rights might make to that prima facie answer. // <...>

Text A, broadly speaking, does not present much difficulty for SI, despite its overly long sentences. During SI, the first sentence uttered was interpreted as a three-sentence structure<sup>2</sup>, and the second sentence was produced as two sentences in TL. The only compressed bit was dropping the phrase «and therefore unacceptable to God».

**B.** <...> For the reasons given in a judgment prepared by Lord Mance we have concluded that this Court does have jurisdiction to determine an appeal brought by

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<sup>1</sup> Text transcripts from Lee (Respondent v Ashers Baking Company Ltd and others (Appellants) Northern Ireland) Retrieved October 20, 2018, from <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2017-0020.html>.

<sup>2</sup> (//) signals sentence boundaries in interpretation.

the bakery and its owners, // as well as the Attorney General's two references. // Accordingly, we give them the permission to appeal as the substantive questions raised are undoubtedly of general public importance, not only in Northern Ireland but also in the rest of the United Kingdom. // <...>

Text B was interpreted as a three-sentence TL utterance against the two-sentence original, and there were no compressions made.

C. <...> The District Judge did *not* find that the bakery refused to fulfil the order because of Mr Lee's actual or perceived sexual orientation. // She found that they «cancelled this order because they oppose same sex marriage for the reason that they regard it as sinful and contrary to their genuinely held religious beliefs» (para 43). // As the Court of Appeal pointed out, she did not take issue with the submission that the bakery would have supplied Mr Lee with a cake without the message «support gay marriage» // and that they would also have refused to supply a cake with the message requested to a hetero-sexual customer (para 11). // The objection was to the message, not the messenger. // <...>

Text C presents some difficulty, as there are quotes and references to paragraphs, i.e., precision information. Interpretation expanded as additional words were pronounced to replace quotation marks in the written text: (*And I quote // End quote*). Despite the accelerated tempo of interpretation compared to the regular rate of the original speech delivery, paragraph numbers were faithfully retained.

D. <...> It is of some interest, although not a guide to interpretation, that the Explanatory Notes to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 (SI 2007/1263), which applied in Great Britain, go further than the Memorandum to the Northern Ireland SORs. // Para 7.3 states that direct discrimination is «when a person treats another person less favourably on the grounds of his/her sexual orientation, or what is believed to be his/her sexual orientation, or the sexual orientation / perceived sexual orientation of another person with whom they associate». // <...>

In text D, compression was made because of synonymous meanings in the quoted phrase «*or what is believed to be his/her sexual orientation, or the sexual orientation/ perceived sexual orientation of another person with whom they associate*». For the purpose of verbatim precision in interpreting the judgment, the complete wording of the phrase must have been preserved, whereas for the purposes of a training seminar discussing the judgment, the above-mentioned compression is well justified. Also, the reference number of the mentioned document — *the Equality Act Regulations* — was dropped. A replacement strategy was called for, when the interpreter made a decision to replace *SORs* from the original with *the Equality Act Regulations* in the TL, as devising a non-existent abbreviation in the TL was considered an error.

E. <...> Three questions therefore arise on this aspect of the claim:

- (i) Did the bakery discriminate against Mr Lee on the grounds of his political opinions by refusing to supply him with a cake iced with this particular message?

- (ii) If it did, is the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (SI 1998/3162 (NI21)) («FETO») invalid, or should it be read down under section 3(1) of the Human Rights Act 1998, as incompatible with the rights of freedom of religion and freedom of expression protected by articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention?
- (iii) If the answer to (i) is «yes» and the answer to (ii) is «no», is FETO invalid under section 17(1) of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1974 to the extent that it imposes civil liability for refusing to express a political opinion contrary to the religious belief of the person refusing to express that view?//

As already mentioned, the Court of Appeal did not find it necessary to answer these questions. The District Judge held that support for gay marriage was a political opinion for this purpose (para 54). Political opinion is not defined in the legislation, but in *McKay v Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance* [1994] NI 103, it was defined as «an opinion relating to policy of government and matters touching the government of the state» (Kelly LJ at p 117) and in *Ryder v Northern Ireland Policing Board* [2007] NICA 43, it was said that «the type of political opinion must be one relating to the conduct of the government of the state or matters of public policy» (Kerr LCJ, at para 15). // There is no need for an association with a particular political party or ideology, although no doubt that would also count. I see no reason to doubt that support for gay marriage is indeed a political opinion for this purpose. // <...>

In text E, the only omissions were made (underlined) of specific references to cases, as in the training discussion (CI) these particulars were of lesser importance. Also, definitions of «political opinion» given as quotes were interpreted as reported speech, and the choice of words in the TL was pretty much synonymous in both cases.

**F.** <...> It may well be that the answer to this question is the same as the answer to the claim based on sexual orientation. There was no less favourable treatment on this ground because anyone else would have been treated in the same way. // The objection was not to Mr Lee because he, or anyone with whom he is associated, held a political opinion supporting gay marriage. The objection was to being required to promote the message on the cake. The less favourable treatment was afforded to the message not to the man. // It was not as if he were being refused a job, or accommodation, or baked goods in general, because of his political opinion, as for example, was alleged to have happened in *Ryder v Northern Ireland Policing Board*. // The evidence was that they were quite prepared to serve him in other ways. The situation is not comparable to people being refused jobs, accommodation or business simply because of their religious faith. It is more akin to a Christian printing business being required to print leaflets promoting an atheist message. // <...>

Text F in CI was edited so that repetitive parts were dropped (underlined).

**G.** <...> The Convention rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression are clearly engaged by this case. // Article 9(1) provides that «Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or

in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.» // Article 9(2) permits limitations on the freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs but not on the freedom to hold them. // In its first case dealing with Article 9, *Kokkinakis v Greece* (1993) 17 EHRR 397, para 31, the European Court of Human Rights expressed the importance of the right in a passage which has been much-cited since: //

«As enshrined in Article 9, freedom of thought, conscience and religion is one of the foundations of a 'democratic society' within the meaning of the Convention. // It is, in its religious dimension, one of the most vital elements that go to make up the identity of believers and their conception of life, but it is also a precious asset for atheists, agnostics, skeptics and the unconcerned. // The pluralism indissociable from a democratic society, which has been dearly won over the centuries, depends on it.» // One is free both to believe and not to believe. // <...>

Text G is rather loaded with precision information and lengthy quotations. Still, only two compression strategies were used: (i) precision but non-essential information (underlined) was dropped, and (ii) the European Court of Human Rights was abbreviated to the ECHR in the TL.

As can be seen from the above texts analysis, interpreters did their job well in both interpretation modes — CI and SI, transmitting all relevant information, even despite the obvious load of legalese in these written texts, and NOT having printouts of texts for their convenience. Actually, this is yet another proof to a common knowledge statement that engaging professional interpreters in any communicative situation results in unfailing performance.

To conclude, it is possible to stress that typical qualities interpreters ought to have, first and foremost, are: high adaptivity to diverse interpretation environments. Apart from the required fluency in languages, interpreters also need to keep track of politics, news, specialized fields, and culture. To the bargain, they must be technically and technologically advanced so that to work with a microphone, take notes, build-up technical glossaries and background notes before any new mission. All of the above result in sterling performance for the benefit of customers, and ensure high-quality interpretation, be it consecutive or simultaneous.

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