Rozan and Matyssek: Are they really that different?

A comparative synopsis of two classic note-taking schools

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Abstract/ Résumé

Cet article porte sur la technique de prise de notes lors de l’interprétation consécutive tout en abordant les objectifs du cours de prise de notes, qui ne se limite pas simplement à faire connaître des symboles et des abréviations. Cette discussion est suivie d’une présentation et d’une comparaison des systèmes de prise de notes de Rozan (1956) et de Matyssek (1989) et de leurs principes généraux, afin de démontrer que ces deux écoles « classiques » ont nombre de points communs bien qu’elles soient fréquemment considérées comme étant très différentes.

Keywords
Consecutive interpreting, note-taking, note-taking principles, symbols, teaching note-taking

Notes in consecutive interpreting (CI) are often regarded as the interpreter’s secret in mastering his/her task of rendering a source text (ST) message in another language. But any interpreter knows that “[n]otes will aid memory but in the final analysis it is the remembering that will produce re-expression.” (Taylor 1989: 183) This is important because it is not sufficient to put down the words of the ST but its content and intention:

It [CI – the author] is not a word for word rendition of the original, which may make no sense whatsoever in translation [...] It should be a discourse saying the same thing as the original, possibly using variations of language in an effort to clarify the message and make it understood by others, who did not understand the original. (Bowen & Bowen 1984: 1)

In the following paper, two major note-taking schemes, namely Rozan’s (1956) and Matyssek’s (1989), will be compared. Starting with a discussion of the objectives of note-taking classes which should go beyond mere teaching of symbols or abbreviations, the general principles of these two traditional note-taking schools will be presented in order to reflect similarities and differences. The final synopsis deals with the pros and cons of each system, thus leading to concluding recommendations for note-taking classes in general.
I. Objectives of note-taking classes

Note-taking classes are a valuable component of interpreters’ training at university, although there are institutions which do not include specific note-taking classes in their interpreting curriculum. However, since all systems postulate certain basic principles and procedures, these should be taught because they do help students develop their own individual system according to their own needs, capacities and preferences.

But it must be clearly stressed that notes in CI are not more than a supportive device for the interpreter’s memory. That is why courses should also focus on exercises to analyse and memorize the content and the messages of different texts to be conveyed without notes. These exercises serve as accompanying and introductory means of training. Experience over the years has shown that beginners always tend to forget about their memory the moment they are allowed to use their notepad for the first time, writing down as much as they can without thinking about the text’s message.¹

Thus, any note-taking course should clearly aim at the following objectives (Ahrens 2001: 239):

- focus on content, not words,
- increase the students’ memorizing abilities and trust in their own memory,
- increase the students’ ability to analyse and to abstract,
- introduce different note-taking systems and their basic principles as a starting point for developing an individual system,
- raise students’ awareness that note-taking is not an end in itself,
- improve linguistic expression and flexibility,
- extend general knowledge (since it is indispensable for text comprehension),
- improve the students’ ability to concentrate on texts (in particular text structure, logical links, proper names, figures, etc.),
- train operations that can become automatic,
- increase analysing speed,
- get used to orally presented texts that are presented only once,
- improve the students’ speaking and rhetorical skills.

¹ The author has taught note-taking for interpreters at Heidelberg University from October 1996 to July 2002. The above mentioned phenomenon occurred regularly in all courses.

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