WHENEVER THE STUDY of interpreting is discussed in a broader, historical perspective, it is bound to include reference to the concept of deverbalization and to the *théorie du sens*, as conceived and formulated by Danica Seleskovitch (1921–2001). Her 1968 monograph, which captured the essence of the profession, took IS well beyond the language-pair-specific comparative study of lexical and grammatical systems, and laid the foundations for her own doctoral work, and that of her many disciples. Seleskovitch, a practitioner whose distinguished career included the position of Secretary General of AIIC, was among the first to stress that oral translation is never carried out on a word-for-word basis, and that the processing of utterances is never tantamount to the processing of words or sentences in isolation (Seleskovitch 1962). Seleskovitch made the "sense"-based conception of the interpreter's performance the cornerstone of her 1973 doctoral dissertation on consecutive interpreting (Seleskovitch 1975), from which the pages reprinted here (pp. 56–67, 179–181) are taken.

Apart from her research, the dominant position held by Seleskovitch and the "Paris School" in the field of IS in the 1970s and 1980s was primarily due to the launching, in 1974, of a doctoral research program at the Sorbonne Nouvelle School of Interpreters (ESIT) in Paris, where Seleskovitch taught interpreting for more than thirty years until her retirement, in the position of Director, in 1990. Not surprisingly, her work exhibits a close link between theory and training, as reflected in the *Pédagogie raisonnée de l'interprétation* (Seleskovitch and Lederer 1989). The latter was published in 1995 in an English translation by Jacolyn Harmer, who also produced the English version of the excerpt presented here.

Further reading: García-Landa 1981; Seleskovitch 1968, 1976, 1978, 1982, 1999; Seleskovitch and Lederer 1984, 1989.

Danica Seleskovitch

LANGUAGE AND MEMORY

A study of note-taking in consecutive interpreting

Translated by Jacolyn Harmer

Word association, and eliciting words

WHY IS LITERAL translation so much easier than translation involving deeper reflection? The answer is simple: the first requires much less mental effort. Our tendency to want to expend the least possible effort explains why we often resort to stereotypical, or formulaic, language rather than mentally searching for the precise translation of words whose conceptual boundaries are unaffected by context, or endeavoring to interpret the message. In other words, we somewhat automatically string words together by word association. At the end of the eighteenth century two physicians, Baillarger and Jackson, looked at this word-association process and drew a distinction between voluntary language production and reflex language production. According to Alajouanine,[1] this is how Baillarger defined these terms:

> [. . .] some patients manifest an unusual phenomenon: they are unable to produce certain words when they want to, no matter how hard they try. Then, a few minutes later, they utter those very same words involuntarily. It seems they have lost the ability to perform the voluntary, motor act of word production, while their spontaneous word production motor ability remains unimpaired.

This dual voluntary/reflex nature of language is also apparent in the transition from one language to another in what I would call a "literal" translation versus a more reflective one. In the case of a literal rendition from English into French, the French word appears because it resembles the English one; or it comes to mind by word association because it is frequently used as a translation for the English word. A reflective translation results from a search for meaning and intentional eliciting of

the appropriate corresponding term. Literal translation can be likened to stereotypical, or formulaic language, in which one word leads to the next, and reflective translation corresponds to deliberate, or voluntary, word production where the "concept" evoked by the first word elicits another word by intentional effort. The first process is easier and faster than the second but frequently quite imperfect.

I will take an example of voluntary word production from my own experience. The participants at a weather-stripping products conference were discussing the format of an advertising brochure. The Germans proposed a "Ringbuch." I saw what they meant but could not produce the French term for the concept in my mind. For quite some time, while continuing to interpret simultaneously, I said "feuillets détachables" (loose leaf/detachable pages), while subconsciously still searching for the term for what I had in mind. As I imagined the bookstore where I usually buy my stationery, and saw myself talking with the sales assistant, the word "classeur" (ring-binder) finally occurred to me in *verbal* form and I was able to slot it into my interpretation. To borrow from computer terminology, thought functions in analogue mode. Imagining a situation activates a sufficient number of inextricably linked data saved in our mental storage for the missing link to appear in its verbal form. The process of eliciting the right word starts with an awareness that a precise term exists and ends with its verbal appearance. And yet this same analogue way of functioning also explains the infelicitous appearance of literal translations.

Literal translation (i.e. reflex, unthinking translation) and reflective translation are not two different methods used in different cases, depending on the circumstances or the words to be translated. Nor is it true to say that one is always correct and the other always wrong. The correctness of a translation must be judged according to the result and not the process by which the result is obtained. If the word in the translation refers to exactly the same thing as the word in the original, the translation is correct, regardless of the reflective effort expended. During the first day of interpreting at a conference, "Mantel" might be repeatedly translated as "virole" (shell), a term which becomes reflex and just as unthinking as translating the term by the cognate "manteau" (coat, jacket) – which it could well be in other contexts. This does not mean it is incorrect.

Automatic word association can in fact rescue the interpreter who has identified something but is having trouble coming up with the exact corresponding term in the other language. Our students all know that when they cannot find the word they want in their mother tongue, all they have to do is quickly say something aloud in the semantic field of the word they are looking for, and it will then surface spontaneously – in other words, instead of trying to find the word, try to jog it loose with stereotypical utterances. Take the example of a student who could not think of the French equivalent for *Giftgas* (toxic gas) during a German>French consecutive exercise. Although he knew it was wrong, he tried working round the French word *poison* (*poison* = *Gift* in German), all the while looking for the right word: "des gaz . . . des gaz . . ." (". . . gases . . . gases"). I prompted: "les gas d'échappement des voitures sont extrêmement . . ." (vehicle exhaust gases are extremely . . .), and before I was able to finish the sentence, he came up with "toxique" (toxic).

Reflective translation does not demand a constant effort to elicit the right terms (interpreters are not walking dictionaries). Nevertheless, such an effort must be

made a certain number of times for the association of two words to become a reflex, one eliciting the other spontaneously for the remainder of the conference.

"Reflex" translation is so often wrong because no initial mental effort has been made to associate a word in one language with the corresponding word in another. Many literal translations are so purely stereotypical in form that I sometimes say: just as there is thought without speech, there is also speech without thought . . .

Technical terms are among the words always noted and translated in consecutive interpreting. During a conference, the interpreter often initially notes them in the original language. As the speech progresses, and once the interpreter has started to interpret, a subconscious effort elicits the corresponding word in the other language. It is very rare for the right word not to come to mind when needed. As the conference proceeds and the specialized terms come up again and again, their correct translation becomes a reflex – and the interpreter will begin noting down the technical term directly in the target language.

Some examples taken from the corpus

Some examples of translations of polysemic words can be found in two passages from Speech 2 (Part 2, paragraphs 1 and 4). All subjects in the experiment noted these words (whether in English or French) and included them in their interpretation.

The first paragraph says:

> Let's look at PRIMARY PRODUCTS. And I think we should here distinguish between two categories: on the one hand, we'll set TEMPERATE FOODSTUFFS and on the other RAW MATERIALS of various sorts and TROPICAL FOODSTUFFS.

(The emphasized words correspond to the words noted down from this paragraph.)

Let us first look at the term which has been translated most consistently by all subjects: *raw materials*. We find:

> Matières premières (**A**, **E**, **F**, **D**, **M**, **K**, **I**)[2]
> Matières premières proprement dites (**G**)
> Matières premières industrielles (**L**).

H, **N**, **B** and **C** did not interpret Speech 2, which is why we have only nine subjects. All interpreters say "matières premières" (raw materials), except for two (**G** and **L**) who had already used "matières premières" for *primary products* and who clearly want to distinguish between the two terms *primary products* and *raw materials*.

Raw materials typifies the kind of expression which is constructed differently in English and French. The English term marks the state "raw"; the French term marks the stage in the processing process "premières" (first). This expression cannot be translated by simply converting each of its composite terms into the other language. *Raw materials* "elicits" *matières premières*: "translating" first *raw* and then *materials* does not work. Someone familiar with both the English expression and its French

equivalent might find this example rather obvious because when you hear the term *raw materials*, *matières premières* comes just as easily to mind as *cinquante* when you hear *fifty*. However, someone who recognizes the two expressions and the object itself, but who is unfamiliar with certain underlying concepts (an all too frequent occurrence when it comes to translating technical terms), might easily be misled into translating each component separately.

In the above example, most subjects gave a "semi-automatic" translation of *matières premières* for *raw materials*. This solution disregards the distinction made by the speaker between "primary products" and "raw materials." Only **L**, who always seems to prefer exegesis over transcoding, goes further, specifying that the speaker means "matières premières industrielles."

The English original text says:

> Let's look at primary products. And I think we should here distinguish between two categories: on the one hand, we'll set temperate foodstuffs and on the other, raw materials of various sorts and tropical foodstuffs.

Since the term "primary products" includes both foodstuffs and "matières premières" (raw materials of various sorts), clearly the latter refers to products that require processing.

For *primary products* the subjects note:

matières premières (**G** and **L**)
produits primaires (**A**, **D**, **M**, **I**)
produits de base (**K**)
produits (**E** and **F**).

The subjects carefully distinguish in French between the two English terms "primary products" and "raw materials." However, all except for **L** make that distinction by word choice alone: produits primaires – matières premières; produits de base – matières premières.

Now let's look at *temperate foodstuffs* and *tropical foodstuffs*. For *tropical foodstuffs* the subjects noted:

produits alimentaires tropicaux (**G**, **L**, **F**, **D**, **M**, **K**, **I**)
produits tropicaux (**E**)
produits alimentaires de culture tropicale (**A**).

For *temperate foodstuffs*:

produits alimentaires tempérés (**G** and **M**)
produits alimentaires de régions tempérées (**L**, **F**, **K**, **I**)
produits alimentaires de culture tempérée (**A**)
produits alimentaires naturels aux pays tempérés (**E**)
produits alimentaires des zones tempérées (**D**).

The term *produits tropicaux* exists in French: it is a normal French expression. All subjects, except for one (**A**), therefore do not hesitate to use it for *tropical foodstuffs*. However, for the analogous term *temperate foodstuffs*, we see that the translation is not quite as automatic. Since the subjects are not aware of a direct correspondence in the target language, some (**M** and **G**) translate the term literally ("produits alimentaires tempérés") while others prefer to explain the concept.

What we are seeing here is the interpreting process at work. We already saw the same phenomenon with listed items. However *translatable* a word or expression may be, that does not obviate the need to *interpret* it in context. The more we move away from analyzing the meaning of the words at the level of the language system to focus instead on the speech act in its particular circumstances and much broader context, the more we will be able to interpret instead of transcode.

We see the same kind of alternatives (literal translation or explanation) when we look at *tariff on wheat* (Speech 2, part 2, paragraph 4):

> And the kind of thing we have in mind when we mention temperate foodstuffs is, for example, the chicken war between the U.S. and the Six, and the tariff on wheat, and so on and so forth.

For *tariff on wheat* we find:

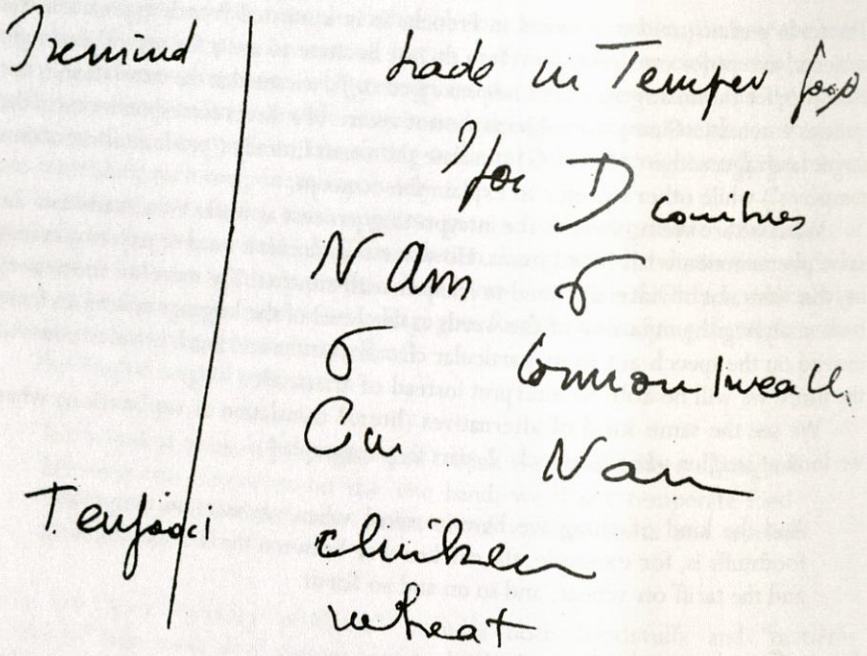
négociations portant sur le blé américain (**G**)
problèmes tarifaires du blé (**L**)
droits de douane sur le blé (**A**)
problèmes tarifaires concernant le blé (**E**)
droits de douane pour le blé (**F**)
accords sur le prix des céréales (**D**)
tarifs sur les blés (**M**)
tarifs ou droits de douane frappant les céréales (**K**)
tarif du blé (**I**).

Most subjects "translate" the expression, while **D** ("accords sur le prix des céréales") and **G** ("négociations portant sur le blé américain") truly interpret it.

The relevant passage is in Speech 2 (part 2, paragraphs 16 and 17):

> In fact, I think I should remind you that the whole business of the international trade in temperate foods, is a problem for developed countries; that is to say, it's become a problem between North America and the Six, between the Six and the Commonwealth, between the Commonwealth and North America, and so on and so forth.
>
> And the kind of thing we have in mind when we mention temperate foodstuffs is, for example, the chicken war between the U.S. and the Six, and the tariff on wheat, and so on and so forth. Now this is not of much importance to the great majority of the less developed countries.

D's notes for this passage look like this:



I remind

trade in Temper food

? for D countries

N Am 6

6 Commonwealth

CM N am

T enfood

chicken

wheat

D says:

Je dois en effet vous rappeler que le problème des échanges commerciaux portant sur les produits alimentaires tempérés se pose surtout aux pays industrialisés: ce sont les problèmes qui se posent à propos des échanges entre les six pays du Marché Commun et les États d'Amérique du Nord, ou bien entre le Marché Commun et le Commonwealth, ou bien encore entre le Commonwealth et l'Amérique du Nord. Et ici il faut se souvenir de la guerre du poulet, des ACCORDS SUR LE PRIX DES CÉRÉALES, etc. mais ces problèmes d'exportation de produits alimentaires de zone tempérée ne sont pas très importants pour les pays en voie de développement.

[Back translation:

> Indeed, I must remind you that the problem relating to trade in temperate foodstuffs arises particularly for industrialized countries; these are the problems that arise in connection with trade between the six countries of the Common Market and the states of North America, or between the Common Market and the Commonwealth, or even between the Commonwealth and North America. And here we must recall the chicken war, the AGREEMENTS ON THE PRICE OF CEREALS, etc., but these problems concerning the export of foodstuffs from temperate zones are not very important for the developing countries.]

A closer look at **D**'s notes reveals something rather amusing: between "T enfood" and "chicken," the color of the ink changes. **D** had to switch pens just at that point and stopped taking notes for an instant. My guess is that this explains why **D** has no note for "tariff." Distracted for just a second, the interpreter missed the term; this is confirmed when the term is omitted in the interpretation. The word "war" was not noted either, although it is in the interpretation, indicating that the interpreter had caught it.

D has only "wheat" in his notes. A distraction lasting a fraction of a second prevented him from analyzing the message while taking notes. As a result, his sole prompt is a single scribbled note, a word that went straight from ear to hand, with no analysis in between. When the time comes to interpret, **D** has just his notes to help him understand this word. What is striking here is not really the pen change, nor the omission of one word in the notes; it is the way **D** copes with a gap in meaning. The word *wheat* by itself could of course be translated literally, yet clearly **D** cannot say: "il faut se souvenir ici de la guerre du poulet, des céréales . . ." (here we must remember the chicken and cereals war . . .). Since he missed the word *tariff*, **D** did not grasp the context: "échanges entre la Communauté et le reste du monde" (trade between the Community and the rest of the world). However, in a flash, a line of logic runs through his mind: he must attach meaning to this isolated word in his notes. Setting "wheat" in the general context of trade between industrialized countries, and (though I am only guessing) probably thinking of the International Wheat Council negotiations on the "Wheat Agreement", the wheat-importing and -exporting countries' charter, **D** interprets the word *wheat* so that it takes on meaning. He says:

> *accord sur le* PRIX *des céréales* (agreement on cereal PRICES).

G also has only "*blé*" (wheat) in his notes and says: "*négociations portant sur le blé américain*" (American wheat negotiations). In this case, the interpreter probably chose not to note *tariff*. Familiar with the context, he knows that customs duties imposed on wheat imports into the Community are being negotiated with the United States and that the Kennedy Round is about to start and so did not need to note *tariff*. The word *blé* (wheat) alone is enough to enable him to recall what was said and to interpret.

Appendix: the experiment

Description

Our priority was to ensure that this experiment was conducted under the same conditions that would be found in practice. We also wanted to avoid the glaring mistakes sometimes made by observers who have a poor understanding of what they are going to observe.[3]

Consequently, all Paris-based members of AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) currently with the following language combinations were invited to volunteer as subjects: French as mother tongue (A language), English as a professionally active language (B language).[4]

Of the 51 AIIC members who were potential subjects, 13 participated in the experiment. All subjects' identities were protected.

For obvious reasons, French and English were selected as appropriate languages for the experiment.

There are two modes of interpreting: simultaneous and consecutive. As we were starting practically from scratch, I thought it best to focus on the mode first used in practice, i.e. consecutive. This mode must be taught before simultaneous interpreting can be taught;[5] our experience indicates that someone who excels at consecutive interpreting is able to do simultaneous interpreting.

My greatest concern was to ensure that the experiment faithfully reflected reality wherever possible. The experiment was therefore designed around certain fundamental parameters: oral extemporaneous style, length of discourse, natural rhythm of delivery, current topic, single delivery of each speech.

Some conditions could not be met:

- in meetings, the context always frames the discussion – this factor will inevitably be missing in the case of an interpretation performed in the laboratory;
- it was not possible to obtain interpretations with both *the live speaker* and *the intended target audience* present. Recorded speeches were used instead of live speakers;
- it was not possible to arrange for the original speech to be *delivered and interpreted at the same time*;
- lastly, some subjects did something that interpreters do not normally do: in this case it was because *they knew their interpretation would be recorded*. They tried to stick close to the text to keep the words of the original and the interpretation parallel.

Now I will describe the procedure. Each interpreter listened to the first part of the speech while taking notes; he was told when the section to be interpreted began; he continued to take notes and then interpreted as soon as the speech was over. His interpretation was recorded. *He did not hear his own interpretation again, nor the original speech*. The subject was thus interpreting under conditions that reflected common practice.

Next, the interpreter was asked about his notes and was free, of course, to make some personal comments. The interview was also recorded and then transcribed.

In order to guarantee objectivity, the experiment was conducted by Ms. C. Gravier who is not an interpreter. I would like to thank her for her insightful work during the interviews and for her meticulous records.

[. . .]

Notes

1 *L'Aphasie et le langage pathologique*, pp. 243–51.

2 The interpreters who participated in the experiment are identified by letters only.

3 Oléron and Nanpon (Laboratoire de Psychologie Génétique, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Paris) [Genetic Psychology Laboratory, Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences, Paris] in "Recherches sur la Traduction Simultanée" (1963 and 1965) had a series of errors in their experimental conditions: use of written texts, translations of translations, speakers not speaking extemporaneously, reading speed instead of discourse speed, isolated utterances and words, etc.

4 AIIC classifies Members' working languages [A] and [B] as follows;

- "Active languages: those into which the interpreter works"
- "[A] language: the interpreter's native language (or another language strictly equivalent to a native language), the member's main active languages . . ."
- "[B] language: active languages other than the interpreter's native language, of which she or he has a perfect command" (NB: "in interpretation").

5 Cf. "Colloque sur l'enseignement de l'Interprétation" [Symposium on the Teaching of Interpreting], International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), 1965.