PREPARING FOR AN INTERPRETING ASSIGNMENT
– AN ELEMENT OF AN INTERPRETER'S EXPERTISE

University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages
and Translation Studies
Translation studies (English)
Pro gradu thesis
20 October 2003
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Kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos

ALA-ANTTI, SAANA: Preparing for an interpreting assignment – an element of an interpreter's expertise
Pro gradu -tutkielma, 69 s., 4 liites., suomenkielinen tiivistelmä 7 s.
Käännöstiede (englanti)
Lokakuu 2003

Tutkielman lähtöoletus on käsitys konferenssitulkista oman alansa eli tulkkauksen asiantuntijana. Tulkin asiantuntijuus kattaa monta eri osa-aluetta, joista yksi tärkeimmistä on tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuminen. Toimeksiantoon valmistautumista tarkastellaan tutkielmassa paitsi osana tulkin asiantuntijuutta, myös osana tulkin ammattietiikkaa.

Tutkielma pyrkii valottamaan tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautumisen eri vaiheita aineiston hankinnasta sen jäsenneltyyn prosessointiin. Tutkielmassa esitellään Tony Buzanin kehittämä organic study method -opiskelumenetelmä ja arvioidaan menetelmän soveltuvuutta tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuvan tulkin tarpeisiin.

Tutkielmassa esitellään myös niinikään Tony Buzanin kehittämä mind mapping -muistiinpanotekniikka, joka nykytutkimuksen valossa vastaa perinteisiä, lineaarisia muistiinpanotekniikoita paremmin ihmisaivojen epälineaarista tapaa prosessoida informaatiota, ja arvioidaan mind mapping -muistiinpanotekniikan käyttökelpoisuutta tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuvan tulkin apuvälineenä.

Lisäksi tutkielmassa kuvataan käytännönläheisesti monia keskeisiä seikkoja, joihin tulkin on toimeksiantoon valmistautuessaan syytä kiinnittää huomiota. Käsittelyssä keskitytään tulkin toimeksiantajalta saamaan ja itse hankkimaan tausta-aineistoon, ja se sisältää hyvinkin käytännönläheisiä strategioita esimerkiksi nimien, lukujen, lyhenteiden ja vaikkapa suorien lainausten tulkkaukseen valmistautumiseen. Tutkielmassa käsitellään lyhyesti myös tiedonhakua Internetistä ja tulkin valmistautumisen aikana tekemää sanastotyötä.

Johtopäätöksenä todetaan, että systemaattisesta valmistautumisesta voi olla tulkille todellista hyötyä, koska se voi tehostaa valmistautumista ja siten auttaa säästämään kallisarvoista aikaa. Lisäksi järjestelmällinen valmistautuminen voi auttaa tulkkia helpommin tunnistamaan varsinaisen tulkkaussuorituksen kannalta keskeiset asiat ja ongelmakohdat. Tutkielmassa todetaan lopuksi, että tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuminen on olennainen osa tulkin työtä, eikä sitä voi sivuuttaa vetoamalla esimerkiksi kokemukseen.

Tutkielma perustuu alan kirjallisuuteen sekä suurelta osin kirjoittajan useiden vuosien ammatilliseen kokemukseen konferenssitulkin työstä.

Avainsanat: asiantuntijuus, konferenssitulkkaus, opiskelumenetelmä valmistautuminen

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1 INTRODUCTION

Finland's membership of the EU since 1st January 1995 made the work of conference interpreters better known to the general public than ever before. In fact, when thinking about simultaneous interpreting, probably the first thing that comes to mind, are conference interpreters working for the European institutions. However, Finland's membership of the EU has had a much broader impact on the demand for conference interpreters working in the Finnish market, too.

EU membership introduced a number of obligatory structures and processes to Finnish industrial and business life as well as administration. For example, any enterprise that has at least 1,000 employees within the member States and at least 150 employees in two or more member States, must set up a so-called European Works Council (EWC), to facilitate communication between corporate management and employees (Council Directive 94/45/EC, article 2). Article 7 of the subsidiary requirements annexed to Council Directive 94/45 further stipulates that "[t]he central management concerned shall provide the member of the European Works Council with such financial and material resources as enable them to perform their duties in an appropriate manner. In particular, the cost of organising meetings and *arranging interpretation facilities* […] shall be met by the central management unless otherwise agreed" [italics by the author].

This naturally means more work for interpreters[1], since although stipulated by an EU directive, EWC meetings are organised by the companies themselves and have nothing to do with EU institutions, which means that the EU does not provide interpreting for the meetings. In addition to EWC meetings, EU membership has brought with it a number of other employment opportunities for freelance conference interpreters, such as meetings related to national implementation of EU structural fund programmes and community initiatives.

Many Finnish conference interpreters work as self-employed freelancers. They provide interpreting services to a variety of employers ranging from conference bureaus and private sector enterprises to government bodies, trade unions and NGOs. The great variety of employers inevitably means that the subject matter of the assignments also varies greatly. Although most interpreters probably have one or two more regular clients, most freelancers are likely to frequently encounter new, unfamiliar topics in their work. (Cf. Jones 1998, 7–9)

This variation has a number of consequences, one of them being that each new job requires at least some preparation and study of the subject matter in advance to guarantee a high standard interpreting performance in the booth. In order to be able to prepare, interpreters need relevant background material. This thesis aims to discuss the way in which freelance conference

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[1] Interpreter here, as throughout this thesis, refers to a freelance interpreter working in the open market. Interpreters working as staff interpreters for the European Union, for example, may work at different meetings every day of the week and their preparation needs and strategies – in all likelihood very different than those of freelancers – are not discussed in this thesis.

interpreters prepare for new interpreting assignments. The discussion is based on the assumption that an interpreter is an expert of her profession and that preparing is one of the components constituting her expertise, or professional competence. The thesis provides a brief overview of the professional ethics of interpreters in relation to preparation, as laid down the professional standards of two interpreters' organisations, the professional standards for liaison interpreters in Finland and the Nordic language convention. Another aim is to investigate whether a more structured and systematic approach to preparation, namely the organic study method devised by Tony Buzan, might be useful for interpreters preparing for an interpreting assignment. Furthermore, the thesis includes a rather detailed discussion of individual points that an interpreter should consider when preparing for an assignment. The observations presented in this thesis are based on the author’s own experience as a professional conference interpreter unless otherwise indicated.

1.1 Interpreter as an expert

Communication is a process in the course of which a sender aims to convey a message to a receiver or a group of receivers, with a particular intention in mind. Consequently, it is the message that the receivers need to understand, however, and not just the words. In the context of Translation[2], the Translator must first understand the actual message before she[3] can render it into the target language. (Gile 1993, 68)

Traditional models on translation and communication view translators and interpreters as mediators in a communication process and their work is seen as a part of communicative activity, or more specifically as part of verbal-communicative activity which involves the sender sending a verbal message to the recipient using "language" as the code. According to this view, the Translator is both a recipient (of the original message) and a sender (of the message coded into another language) at the same time (see Figure 1 below). (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 65)

$$\text{sender}_1 \longrightarrow \underbrace{\text{recipient}_1/\text{sender}_2}_{\text{Translator}} \longrightarrow \text{recipient}_2$$

Figure 1. The traditional communication process model.

The theory of Justa Holz-Mänttäri is based on a different assumption: Translatological acts aim at the production of appropriate message-bearers[4]

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[2] In this thesis, "Translation" spelled with an upper case "T" refers both to the translation of written texts and the interpreting of speech. When spelled with a lower case "t", the word "translation" refers to the translation of written texts alone. The same distinction applies to the concept "Translator".

[3] Since the author of this thesis and generally most Finnish conference interpreters are women, the pronoun "she" is used throughout this thesis to refer to the third person singular.

[4] Due to the original nature of the terminology used by Holz-Mänttäri, the following English equivalents have been used to refer to the different elements constituting Holz-Mänttäri's

(Botschaftsträger) for the purpose of a transcultural message transfer (Botschaftstransfer); the activity requires expertise and pragmatic competence (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 21; 23). Holz-Mänttäri further argues that in a society based on the division of labour, a Translator is an expert and a producer of a message-bearer (Botschaftsträger), which can be purchased from her. She continues to say that a Translator produces a certain product at a certain place at a certain time for a certain purpose based on certain information during a certain period of time according to agreed terms.

For this purpose the Translator enters into a work agreement with those who need the product and is responsible for the success of her actions, which are translatological and not communicative, in nature. Holz-Mänttäri illustrates this by comparing the Translator to a craftsman manufacturing unique pottery upon order: although the bowl manufactured by the skilled craftsman is used to serve fruit, the craftsman is not involved in the serving act. Similarly, although the Translator produces the message-bearer she does not participate in the communication act itself. (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 21; 66)

One might argue, however, that this is not necessarily true. Both in translation and interpreting – perhaps even more explicitly in interpreting – the whole communication process can either succeed or fail utterly as a result of the choices made by the interpreter. Unclear wording, missing a negation in a

---

theory: *message-bearer* for Botschaftsträger; *needer* for Bedarfsträger; and *translatological acts* for Translatologisches Handeln. Further, it should be noted that in the theory of Holz-Mänttäri, the concept Translatologisches Handeln or translatological acts refers to both translation and interpreting. All English translations of Holz-Mänttäri's theoretical concepts used in this thesis are by the author.

speaker's utterance, failure to interpret numbers correctly and other similar "mistakes" made by the interpreter do have a negative impact on communication between the speaker and the listeners. On the other hand, sometimes an interpreter can produce a wonderfully coherent and eloquent interpretation out of a muddled and incoherent original, in which case the interpreter has a positive impact on communication. Thus, one may safely claim that interpreters (and translators) do, in fact, actively take part in the communication act.

Translation refers to the professional production of texts and occurs in situations in which direct communication is rendered impossible. The same applies to interpreting. Translatological acts require expertise and are, by definition, linked to an individual's essential basic skills; on the other hand they require the competence of a specialised individual. Translation does not only mean translating words, or sentences; instead, it always means attempting to achieve functional communication across cultural barriers. (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 6) The message is quite clear: an interpreter is an expert of her profession and, consequently, responsible for the quality of her performance.

In the case of interpreters, expertise naturally refers to their actual interpreting performance or competence, but there are also other elements, which can be thought to constitute an interpreter's expertise. These elements include, for example, language competence (language skills), cultural competence (familiarity with the target culture and its phenomena), professional ethics and booth behaviour. (Cf. Gile 1995, 4–5)

Gile (1995, 45) goes on to define quality in Translation as "ideational clarity, linguistic acceptability, terminological accuracy and acceptability, fidelity and professional behaviour". It is impossible to fulfil any one of Gile's quality criteria without preparation. Based on the above and the arguments presented in the following chapter, it is justified to argue that preparation is, indeed, an important part of the professional ethics of interpreters and, consequently, also their professional expertise.

1.2 Professional ethics of interpreters

Professional ethics are an important element of an interpreter's competence. AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) and SKTL (Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters), for example, have produced their own professional codes or standards for interpreters, which determine the ethical and professional obligations pertaining to the work of interpreters.

In addition to other, perhaps more widely recognised aspects of the professional ethics of interpreters, such as their obligation of nondisclosure etc, one crucially important ethical aspect is the interpreter's obligation to prepare for each individual interpreting assignment. References to the latter aspect of expertise can be found in professional interpreting standards adopted by various bodies and organisations. According to Article 5 of the standards for professional interpreting laid down by the SKTL (http://www.sktl.net/kotisivu/pdf/tulksaan.pdf), the interpreter is under obligation to prepare for an interpreting assignment, while the professional standards for liaison interpreters created jointly by the SKTL, the Finnish Association of the Deaf, Translators' Trade Union KAJ, Helsinki Region Interpreting Centre, Turku Region Interpreting Centre and Lingua Nordica Oy, define this obligation in a more detailed manner:

> "*The interpreter will prepare for the assignment diligently and in due time.* Preparing means that the interpreter studies the subject matter to be interpreted and related vocabulary in both languages and seeks term equivalents in the other language. Preparation is particularly important when the interpreting assignment deals with a specialist field. […] Interpreters shall not accept assignments if they know that they are not able to prepare for that assignment in the manner required by that particular assignment."
>
> (http://www.sktl.net/kotisivu/pdf/Asioimistulkin.pdf, Article 9. Translation by the author)

The appendix to the Nordic language convention defines the competence of professional interpreters in terms of preparation as follows:

> "Interpreters are not experts in everything, nor are they walking dictionaries. A professional interpreter recognises potentially difficult areas, learns specialist terminology adequately beforehand, asks for clarification for a term if necessary and uses dictionaries when necessary. […] The interpreter studies the terminology and related background material of each individual assignment."
>
> (Pohjoismainen kielisopimus, Appendix (2000). Translation by the author)

Surprisingly enough, preparation for an interpreting assignment is not explicitly mentioned in the AIIC Professional Standards (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page205.htm) or the AIIC Code of Professional Ethics (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page54.htm), although both documents contain very precise definitions regarding other aspects of professional interpreters' rights and responsibilities. Article 3a of the AIIC

Code of Ethics can be interpreted as an indirect reference to preparation, however:

> "Members of the Association shall not accept any assignment for which they are not qualified. Acceptance of an assignment shall imply a moral undertaking on the member's part to work with all due professionalism."
>
> (http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/page54.htm, article 3a)

The above excerpts can be seen as evidence of the fact that preparation is, indeed, an instrumental part of the work of a professional interpreter. In addition, the above excerpts also imply that refusing to accept an assignment for which the interpreter feels she is not qualified, is also proof of the interpreter's professionalism.

2 PREPARARING FOR AN INTEPRETING ASSIGNMENT

2.1 Knowledge and interpreting

Preparation does not only mean identifying new terms and finding equivalents to them in the target language; it is always possible to circumvent or paraphrase individual terms, but total lack of knowledge of the subject matter is impossible to conceal (von Essen 2002).

One of the key prerequisites of interpreting is comprehension; as Holz-Mänttäri (1984, 99) puts it, "a Translator deals with situations, actions, events, concrete and abstract states of affairs and she must understand their meaning correctly before she can textualise them into a message". In other words, in order to be able to interpret, the interpreter must understand what the speaker says – not only the words but, more importantly, the functional and logical infrastructure of the sentences (Gile 1995, 93). Comprehension, in turn, requires knowledge of the subject being discussed.

The fact that the interpreter is an expert in her own special field, interpreting, does not mean that she does, or would have to, possess an expert's knowledge in the subject matter of each conference she works at. Luckily for interpreters, since it would hardly be even possible. Instead, she must have *an adequate knowledge* of the subject under discussion, so that she can intelligently analyse what she hears and interpret the meaning accurately into the target language (Seleskovitch 1978, 61–63. Italics by the author). Furthermore, an interpreter must have sufficient knowledge of the topic at hand so that she is able to discern what is possible within that topic and what is not (von Essen 2002). In fact, it can be said that interpreters artificially raise their level of knowledge for each assignment individually (Varantola 1980, 45). As a result, non-specialised translators and interpreters are able to reach "a significant level of comprehension of specialised discourse, of extracting knowledge from the SL texts and speeches and of adding them to their existing knowledge" (Gile 1993, 73–74).

In order to understand, an interpreter requires two types of knowledge: knowledge of the language and knowledge about the world, or extralinguistic knowledge (Gile 1993, 69. See Figure 2 below). This thesis focuses on the acquisition of the latter kind of knowledge.

KL + ELK = Comprehension

(KL = knowledge of the language; ELK = extralinguistic knowledge)

Figure 2. Gile 1993, 69.

This means that the more extralinguistic knowledge the interpreter has, the less linguistic knowledge she needs to understand the message. Gile makes a further distinction regarding the kind of knowledge an interpreter should possess, between pre-existing knowledge (PEK) and discourse-induced information (DII) provided by the discourse. In terms of interpreting, pre-existing knowledge logically refers to the general knowledge and more specific knowledge of the subject matter that the interpreter has acquired *before* the assignment through experience, reading or detailed study of the topic at hand. Discourse-induced information, such as academic or other titles when introducing speakers at a conference, on the other hand, is likely to be redundant for the delegates but to convey a great deal of new knowledge for the interpreters, who can then use it to make general conclusions, to clarify matters for themselves and to rely on it when interpreting. (Gile 1993, 69–71)

Gile suggests a set of simple questions, with which an interpreter can obtain useful information about the communication situation: Who are the speakers and what is their field of expertise, status, authority, function, status, etc? Who are the listeners? Based on the nature and function of the conference, what kind of a message are the speakers likely to want to convey to their listeners? Are there any pragmatic, psychological, social or cultural factors which may have an impact on communication? Sometimes the answers to these questions are explicitly communicated by the context or background materials given to the interpreter, but sometimes the interpreter has to make assumptions. Whatever the case may be, interpreters need this kind of background information to guide their decision-making in the booth. (Gile 1995, 41–42)

2.2 Sequential model of translation

The figure below is an adaptation of Gile's sequential model of translation (cf. Gile 1995, 102) in relation to the Translator's knowledge about the subject under discussion.

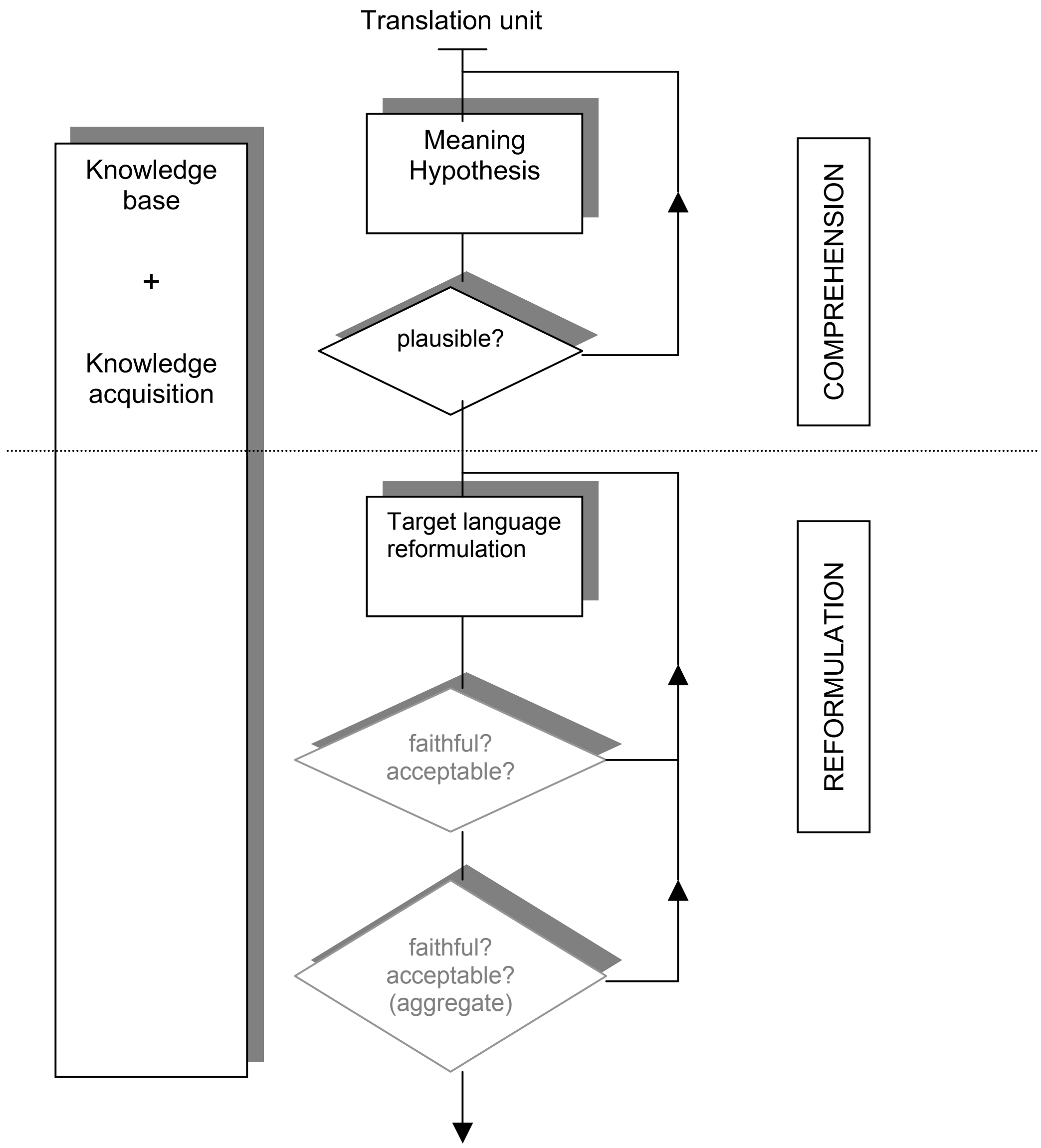

Figure 3. Adaptation of Gile's sequential model of translation.

According to the model, a Translator reads/hears a source-language *Translation Unit*, i.e. a text segment which she treats as a single unit and the length of which can vary from an individual word to a whole sentence or several sentences. The Translator then makes a mental *Meaning Hypothesis* about the Translation Unit, based on her knowledge of the source language but also on her *World Knowledge* or *Extralinguistic Knowledge* which together form her *Knowledge Base*. Sometimes the Knowledge Base does not contain the information on which the Translator can base a Meaning Hypothesis; in such a case, she will have to search for additional information elsewhere. (Gile 1995, 101–103)

The last comment above naturally applies to translation only – unlike translators, interpreter do not have the luxury of stopping their interpretation for a moment and consulting a specialist dictionary or searching the Internet for an unfamiliar term or concept. This fact further illustrates the importance of preparing for an interpreting assignment – the better the interpreter has prepared and, consequently, the more extralinguistic knowledge she has acquired about the subject, the fewer items will be missing from her Knowledge Base. Thus, for the purpose of interpreting, the *Knowledge Acquisition* stage of Gile's model should take place before the actual communication situation and not during it.

According to the next step of the model, the Translator checks the Meaning Hypothesis for *plausibility*, again based on the Knowledge Base and through Knowledge Acquisition which, in the case of interpreting, takes place before the actual communication situation as stated in the previous paragraph. Checking the Meaning Hypothesis simply means that the Translator compares it critically with other knowledge that she possesses for possible contradictions. If the first Meaning Hypothesis proves not to be plausible, the

Translator constructs a new one and runs the same checking process again. When the Meaning Hypothesis passes the plausibility test, the translator can move on to the next stage, reformulation of the plausible Meaning Hypothesis in the target language. Reformulation is also based on the Translator's knowledge of the target language as well as her extralinguistic knowledge. (Gile 1995, 103–104)

After reformulating the Meaning Hypothesis for the Translation Unit in question in the target language, the Translator checks the fidelity for the reformulation; in other words, she makes sure that no essential information has been omitted or no unwarranted information added. (Gile 1995, 103–104)

Again, the fidelity check only applies to translation of written texts and not interpretation: once the interpreter has uttered her target language reformulation, she cannot withdraw it for revision (see the greyed-out box at the bottom of Figure 3). The only option available to the interpreter who too late realises that her reformulation of the original Translation Unit was not, in fact, accurate and faithful, is to correct herself in the next sentence or as soon as she realises that she has made a mistake.

2.3 Gathering background material

In order to acquire the "adequate knowledge" referred to above, the interpreter must gather and study reference material dealing with the subject of the assignment at hand. Thus, gathering reference material is the first step in preparing for an interpreting assignment.

Although the interpreter herself is always ultimately responsible for preparing for an assignment and thus also for gathering background material (cf. Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 97; 148), various documents and contract templates explicitly mention the employer's responsibility to provide interpreters with material related to the topic of the assignment.

Paragraph 15 of the general conditions of work annexed to the SKTL interpreting contract template states the following (see appendix 1):

> "For their technical and terminological preparation, the organizer shall provide the interpreter(s) with all the material (programme, agenda, list of participants, minutes and documents of the previous meeting, if any, lectures and written speeches to be held as well as any literature, dictionaries, glossaries, articles, etc relating to the subject matter) in each of the languages as early as possible, but no later than 2 weeks before the conference. Texts prepared during the conference shall be given to the interpreter in sufficient time; otherwise the interpreter shall be under no obligation to interpret them."
>
> (General conditions of work annexed to the SKTL interpreting contract template, paragraph 15)

Along the same lines, the Nordic language convention also mentions the employer's responsibility to provide interpreters with background material:

> The employer shall see to it that the interpreter receives the background materials she requires in order be able to work to her best ability, in due time."
>
> (Pohjoismainen kielisopimus (2000), appendix. Translation by the author)

Thus, although the responsibility for preparing for assignment is the interpreter's alone, the employer is also responsible for making sure that the interpreter is able to fulfil her part of the obligation as best she can. The requirements stipulated by the contracts are not always fulfilled literally (e.g. the employer's obligation to provide interpreters with background materials at least two weeks before the actual assignment, mentioned the SKTL contract template), but the general idea to guarantee the interpreter at least some time and material to prepare for an assignment is in place.

Due to their professional experience and knowledge of cultural differences, interpreters may notice things that an average person would not necessarily recognise as being important. Such "observations" based on the interpreter's different viewpoint are the reason why interpreters should be guaranteed an opportunity to study the subject matter beforehand. As text producers (interpretation is here seen as a form of "text"), the interpreter should be aware of the background, role factors and environment of the initiator, for her to be able to grasp the original function of the text [or speech]. (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 149)

2.4 Background material

The materials provided by the employer usually include the programme or agenda of the meeting or conference, depending on the nature of the occasion, minutes of previous meetings, a list of participants, Power Point or other presentations, articles, reference books and glossaries related to the topics to be discussed as well as the written speeches or presentations to be read aloud during the conference (cf. paragraph 4 of the General Conditions of Work annexed to the AIIC Individual Contract template; paragraph 15 of the General Conditions of Work annexed to the SKTL contract template). These are all important sources of information, since they deal with the exact topic of the conference.

In most cases, however, the materials provided by the employer are not enough to provide the interpreter with an adequate knowledge of the subject of the assignment at hand. Consequently, she must try and find other background material dealing with the subject of the conference and related topics. Annual reports, stock exchange bulletins, financial statements, Internet sites of companies and organisations, customer magazines, special interest magazines, reference books, scientific articles, EU programming documents, the Official Journal of the European Communities, EU directives and regulations, etc. are all valuable sources of information, depending on the nature of the assignment.

In addition to printed sources, fellow interpreters and experts in the subject matter or the assignment are a valuable source of information. Experts may help in problems related to understanding phenomena and specialised terminology (cf. Gile 1993, 82), while fellow interpreters may provide invaluable assistance in the form of glossaries, notes and advice.

2.5 The Internet as a source of information

Today, the Internet is perhaps the most valuable source of information for interpreters for several reasons. Firstly, most interpreters have access to the Internet either at home or at the office or both. Secondly, searching the Internet for information is quick and easy. Compared to using libraries, the Internet helps save a vast deal of time, effort and even money, since users can search the net for information in their own home or office almost free of charge, without having to take the trouble of going out and travelling to a public or special library. Thirdly, the Web is increasingly multilingual (Dawrant 2000). And fourthly, the Internet is probably the largest existing single storage of information on any area of life (Eager et al. 1995, 1); in fact, it is very difficult to think of a topic that the Internet would not have any information on. A further advantage of the Internet is that it contains information that is authentic and up-to-date (Dawrant 2000).

Users can search the Internet for information of specific topics using search engines, such as Altavista (www.altavista.com) or Google (www.google.com), or web directories like Yahoo (www.yahoo.com). Search engines are websites that allow users to search the engine's own database of websites for pages that match the given parameters (i.e. that contain the keywords entered by the user). They are updated automatically, which means that they cover a lot of the World Wide Web, but their contents are not controlled. Web directories, on the other hand, are websites that contain an index of selected web pages organised into categories by subject. The indices are updated manually, which means that compared with search engines, web directories cover much less of the web but are more discriminating as to the content of the indexed sites. (Dawrant 2000)

Dawrant (2000) suggests that whenever searching the Internet for specific information, an interpreter should use at least three or four different search engines and web directories to perform the same query in order to cover as much of the World Wide Web as possible and, consequently, get as many accurate hits as possible. This may seem somewhat excessive, however. For the average interpreter preparing for an average assignment, one or two good search engines or web directories will surely produce enough good links containing relevant information. If, however, repeated searches using different combinations of keywords do not produce sufficiently good results, then it may be a good idea to run the same searches on other search engines (Halttunen 2003).

There are several search engines available to anyone wishing to seek information on the Internet. Dawrant (2000) lists the following as being the best for interpreters searching for information in different languages:

Alta Vista: http://www.altavista.com
Google: http://www.google.com

Fast Search: http://www.alltheweb.com
Northern Light: http://www.northernlight.com
Excite: http://www.excite.com
Infoseek: http://www.infoseek.go.com
Hotbot: http://www.hotbot.com

Dawrant and Buck (2000) claim Alta Vista Advanced Search to be the most sophisticated search engine to date, but admit that it is not the easiest to use. Based on the limited experience of the author of this thesis, Google is by far the user-friendliest search engine. It claims to conduct searches on a staggering 3,083,324,652 web pages and does nearly always provide a number of "good" hits, provided that the key words are accurate enough. Secondly, Google does not require (or allow, depending on the viewpoint) the use of Boolean operators, such as AND, OR and NOT for specifying or limiting the search; all one needs to do is to enter a natural language key word or several key words in the search entry box (cf. Eager et al. 1995, 151–154).

Search engines enable the user to search information using individual keywords (e.g. <u>lever lock</u>) or phrases (e.g. <u>"lever lock"</u>) by using quotation marks around the key words (cf. Dawrant and Buck 2000). In terms of conference preparation, searching with phrases is particularly useful when doing terminology work, since it allows one to search for term equivalents using several possible alternatives.

There is one problem related to using the Internet as a source of information for any purpose, however, and that is the reliability – or lack thereof – of the information available on the net. The Internet is an open medium, which means that anyone is free to post whatever material they want on it, without anyone really controlling the contents of the information. Furthermore, people can freely post material on the net anonymously, which also undermines the reliability of the information. Consequently, whenever using the Internet to search for information on any subject, one should be very careful in deciding whether the source of the information is reliable or not.

In most cases there is usually no reason to question the reliability of information found on the Internet, especially when the information is posted on "official" websites maintained by companies, organisations or public institutions, such as ministries or universities. When relying on information that is posted on websites maintained by individual people, one should be more cautious; such information may well be accurate and reliable, but it may also merely reflect the personal opinions and beliefs of the owner of the site, instead of the objective truth.

For experienced users of the Internet, reliability of information available on the Net tends not to be a major problem, however. It does not take much common sense to evaluate the reliability of the website and consequently also the information found on the site, based on the appearance of the site alone. In addition, there are further clues, like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph, to help determine the reliability of an Internet site.

3 PROCESSING THE REFERENCE MATERIAL IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ORGANIC STUDY METHOD

3.1 The Buzan organic study method

As mentioned earlier, preparing for an interpreting assignment starts with gathering a sufficient amount of background material related to the subject on the assignment. The next step is to start processing the material and thus to acquire adequate knowledge about the subject to be discussed. For the sake of simplicity, the word "learner" is used here to refer to the person who is studying the material.

The Buzan organic study method (Buzan 1974/1983, 127) introduced is divided into two main stages, preparation and application, which in turn are further divided into four subsections respectively:

Preparation:

- Time
- Amount
- Previous knowledge of the subject
- Questions

Application:

- Overview
- Preview
- Inview

- Review

The order in which the various sub-stages should be performed is not absolute, but can and should, be modified according to need and the time available for preparation. (Buzan 1974/1983, 127)

First stage – preparation

Preparation starts with browsing through the material to be studied to get an overview of all the material. The first actual step is to draft a detailed schedule which clearly indicates the amount of time reserved for each stage of the preparation process. Drafting the schedule can be combined with the next step, dividing the material into chunks, which correspond with the schedule. According to Buzan (1974/1983, 130), determining the time and amount of study gives the studier "immediate chronological and volume terrain" and a clear goal for study. Dividing the material in terms of time and volume improves motivation by providing instant gratification upon completing one "chunk" and rewarding oneself by taking a break before moving on to the next "chunk".

Short pauses are important, since they promote learning in a number of ways. Although understanding may remain continually high, our ability to recall learnt information tends to deteriorate progressively as time goes on, unless the learner takes short breaks. Under normal circumstances, people tend to recall more at the beginning and end of learning periods and less from the middle of learning periods. The reason for this is that during a learning period, there are certain times during which recall and understanding work together better than at other times. Such peaks occur in periods of 20 to 40 minutes. Shorter periods do not allow the brain enough time to understand the rhythm and organisation of the material being studied and longer periods result in the decline of the amount of information recalled. Taking short breaks during the learning process helps to keep the recall curve high and thus promote learning and, eventually, recall of the learnt information. Breaks in the middle of a study period are also useful because they allow the body to rest and relax physically and release tensions, which often build up during intense concentration. In addition, breaks allow the just-absorbed information to relate to previous knowledge. (Buzan 1974/1983, 53–55; 131. See Figure 4 below)

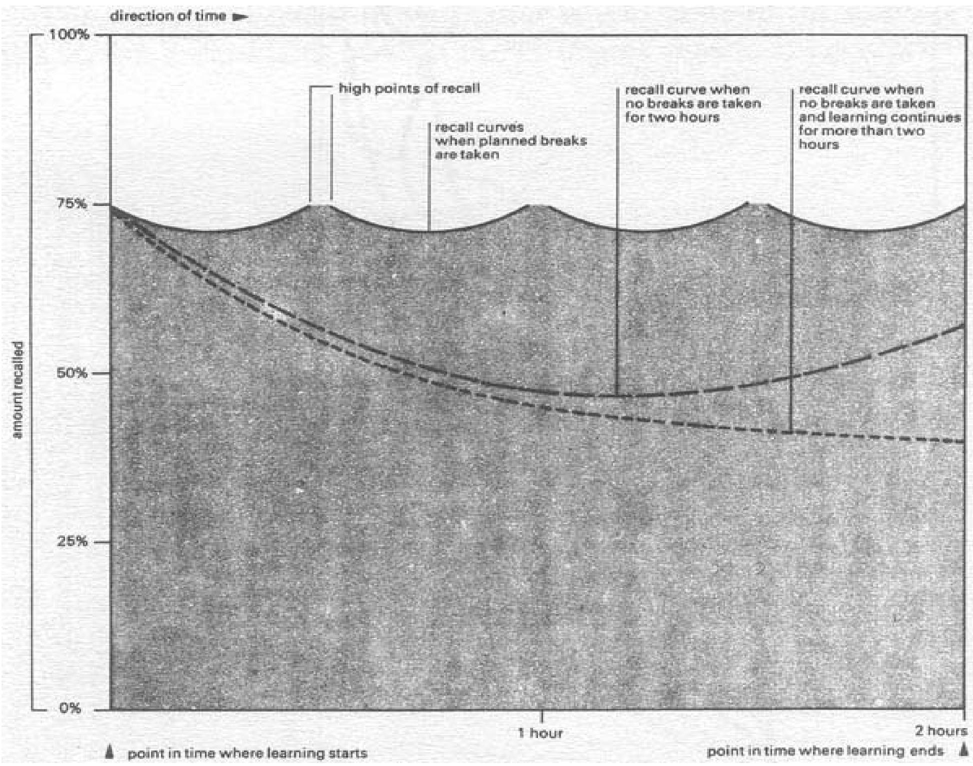

Figure 4. Recall during learning – with and without breaks. Buzan 1974/1983, 55.

The third step of the preparation stage according to the Buzan organic study method is to take two to five minutes to write down or recollect what *previous knowledge* one has about the subject. This can be done in the form of a mind map or a list of key words, for example (see chapter 3.4 for mind maps). This step improves concentration and readies one mentally to process the subject being studied. (Buzan 1974/1983, 132–133)

The fourth and final step of the preparation stage is to determine the *questions* which the material will provide answers for, i.e. determining one's *expectations* of the material to be studied. The time reserved for this step should be two to five minutes. The questions or expectations can be added to the mind map reflecting the learner's previous knowledge about the subject in a different colour, for example, or one can start a new mind map for them. This fourth and last step of the preparation stage prepares the mind for new information. Analysing the subject to be studied in one's mind renders actual learning easier: the key questions and objectives act as associative centres or "hooks" to which new information can be linked. (Buzan 1974/1983, 133–134).

Already at this stage, an interpreter preparing for an assignment should start highlighting unfamiliar terms and other similar items for compiling a glossary later on.

Second stage – application

The next stage of the Buzan organic study method is *application*. As the name indicates, the purpose of the first step of the application stage – *study overview* – is to get a general idea of the material to be studied and particularly its graphic elements. During this stage, the learner leafs through the material, paying special attention to things not included in the body of text, such as results, summaries, conclusions, indents, glossaries, front and back covers, tables of content, tables and figures, illustrations and photographs, marginal notes, capitalised words, italicised words, footnotes and endnotes, dates, statistics and headings and subheadings. (Buzan 1974/1983, 139)

Buzan underlines the importance of using some form of a visual guide such as a pen, pencil or even a finger. A visual guide will prevent the eye from fixating briefly on some general areas of a graph, for example, and then moving off. This wandering of the eye, according to Buzan, will lead to the learner only having vague visual memories of the piece of information (a graph, illustration etc.) since the eye movement did not register the pattern of the graph. The use of a visual aid will help the eye to follow the flow of the graph more closely, which will strengthen the memory of the graph by the following inputs: the visual memory itself, the eye movement following the shape of the graph, the kinaesthetic or muscle sense memory of the hand or arm tracing the form of the graph and the visual memory of the rhythm and movement of the tracer. (Buzan 1974/1983, 140–141)

The second step of study application is *preview*, which means reading through everything that was not covered in the overview, in other words the actual language content of the material. Special attention should be paid to the beginnings and endings of paragraphs, sections, chapters and even whole texts, as well as summaries and conclusions, which often contain the most essential information, since they alone may suffice to meet the interpreter's need for information. After having read these, it is advisable to check that they really do summarise the main text body. (Buzan 1974/1983, 141–142)

The third step of the application stage is the *inview*, provided that still more information on the subject is required. The inview involves filling in the gaps still left after the study over view and review. Certain sections may still be incompletely covered after the inview, which, according to Buzan, is quite normal. He claims that it is better to skip particularly difficult passages or ideas than to get stuck on them, as they seldom are essential for the understanding of what follows them. There are many benefits to skipping over difficult sections: firstly, the brain is given some time during which it can process the difficult sections subconsciously. Secondly, when returning to the difficult passage or idea later, after having studied what follows it, the learner may see the difficult section in a certain context (the context of what follows it), which may help understand it. In addition, this enables the brain's tendency to fill in gaps to process the problematic section or idea. Thirdly, skipping over a difficult section or idea releases the mental tension associated with struggling with something complex and difficult to understand. Buzan further claims that skipping over sections of the material being studied allows greater freedom for the learner's own creative thinking and understanding. (Buzan 1974/1983, 143–144)

At this stage, at the latest, the interpreter should start compiling a glossary comprising terms, both familiar and unfamiliar. A more detailed discussion of terminology work shall follow in chapter 4.5.

The fourth and last step of the application stage is *review*, if the learner still feels that she needs more information about the subject. Review simply involves going through the gaps that may still be left after the three previous stages and to reconsider all sections or areas marked as important and completing the mind maps that have been created during the study process. Depending on the situation, simply reviewing the mind map or the glossary that the interpreter has produced may suffice as reviewing. (Buzan 1974/1983, 145). The organic study method can and should be modified according to the time available for preparation, the interpreter's own style of studying, the material available to the interpreter and the nature of the interpreting assignment at hand (cf. Buzan 1974/1983, 127).

After the review, the learner should continue reviewing the materials (or mind maps that she has produced). The reason for this is that memory and the ability to recall after learning follow a certain pattern: instantly after learning the recall curve continues to rise for a while, after which it levels off and starts to decline, but never actually touches the bottom of the graph. The brief rise immediately after learning stops is due to the fact that during learning, the brain has not had a chance to integrate the newly learnt information with existing knowledge. The brain needs a few minutes to link the new information with existing knowledge – after which the recall curve stops rising and levels off. The small rise is then followed by a dramatic decline: according to Buzan, within 24 hours of a one-hour learning period, as much as 80% of detailed information is lost. (Buzan 1974/1983, 58)

To make sure that the newly learnt information is retained in the memory, the learner should attempt to review the study materials whenever the recall curve is about to start declining. Consequently, the first continuing review should take place approximately one hour after the learning period and should last approximately 10 minutes. This first continuing review supposedly keeps the recall curve high for about one day, after which the second continuing review should take place. After the second review, recall should remain high for about a week, after which the learner should perform a third continuing review lasting some two minutes, followed by a fourth continuing review within one months of the previous one. After this, the information should be stored in long term memory where it can be retrieved for use later on (see Figure 5 on next page for retaining high recall). (Ibid.)

Interpreters preparing for an assignment may not have two weeks let alone a month to prepare and revise the materials. Consequently they can and should adapt the model to the period of time they have for studying.

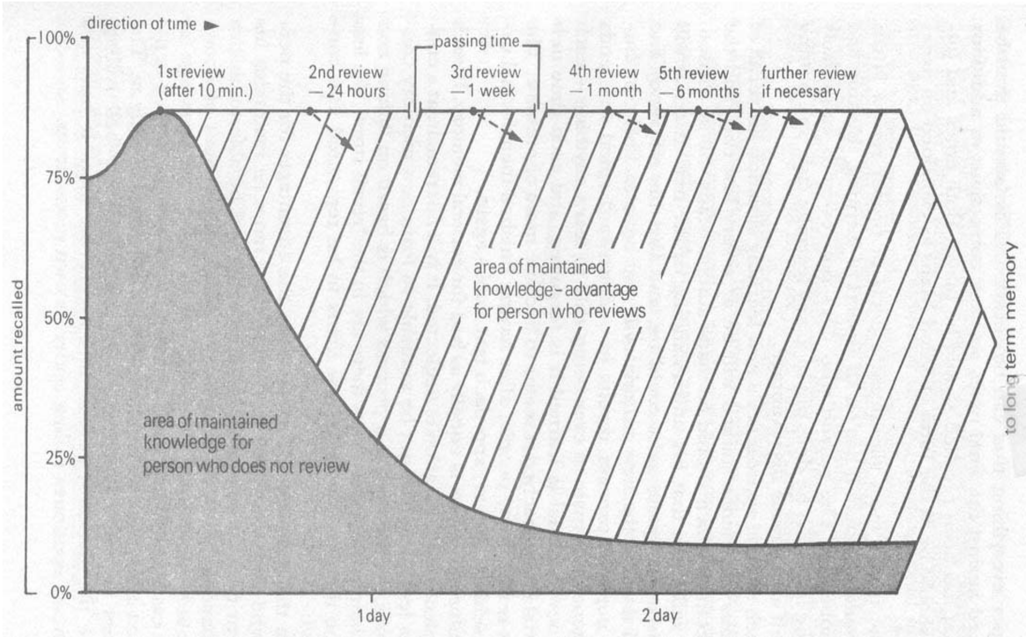

Figure 5. Retaining high recall. Buzan 1974/1983, 59.

3.2 The non-linear brain

Until relatively recently, science believed that the human brain functioned in a linear manner. This belief was based on the seemingly linear nature of speech and written word and it has dominated the way people were and are trained to take notes in sentences and vertically organised lists. Today, modern brain research indicates that the belief of the linear nature of the brain is false and that the brain is, in fact, perfectly capable of processing information, which is not linear in nature and does so every day. One proof of this is the fact that we see and understand non-linear information such as photographs, illustrations, graphs and diagrams, etc. (Buzan 1978/1983, 89–90)

The term ”semantic memory” was first coined by Ross Quillian in 1968 and he was also the first to present a model illustrating the organisation of concepts or propositions in the semantic memory system (Revonsuo 1999, 216). According to the propositional organisation network model, variations of which have been proposed by several researchers in addition to Quillian, propositions are organised into a vast network consisting of the actual propositions, relations and arguments (jointly called *nodes*) and connecting links between them (Anderson 1980/1985, 116). The links connecting propositions fall into two main categories: proposition-subject (e.g. flower-rose) and proposition-relation (e.g. flower-petals). Thus, the network is organised into a hierarchical propositional system (see Figure 6 below) (Revonsuo 1999, 216).

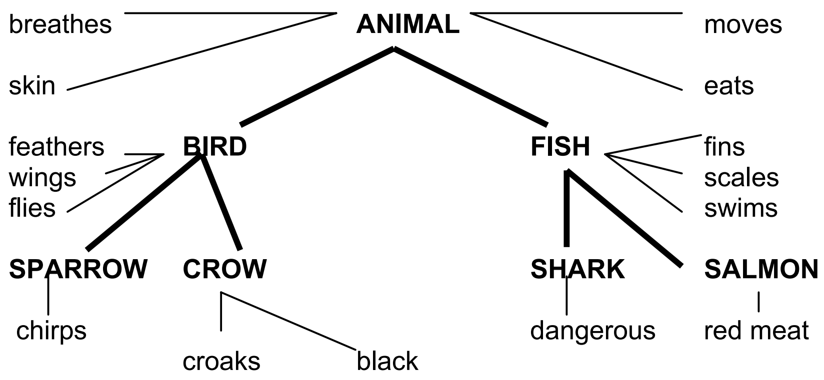

Figure 6. A hierarchical propositional network. Revonsuo 1999, 216.

This model, based on reaction-time tests, was based on the notion that people reacted faster to the proposition ”a sparrow is a bird” compared to the proposition ”a sparrow is an animal”. The model explained this hierarchical effect by saying that the proposition ”sparrow” is directly linked to the proposition ”bird”, but only connected to the proposition ”animal” *via* the proposition ”bird”. The model was soon found to be too simplistic, however, and was replaced by other attempts to illustrate the organisation of semantic information in the brain. (Revonsuo 1999, 216–217)

In 1975, Collins and Loftus presented an improved, less rigid network model, in which ”semantic information is organised according to semantic *similarity*: The more similar semantic features or characteristics two propositions have, the more links there are connecting them”. In this model, information retrieval equals the spread of activation between nodes via the links connecting them. Thus, when we see the words ”sparrow” and ”bird”, the nodes for both words are activated; as the two concepts share many similar features, they can quickly be paralleled with each other (see Figure 7 below). (Revonsuo 1999, 217)

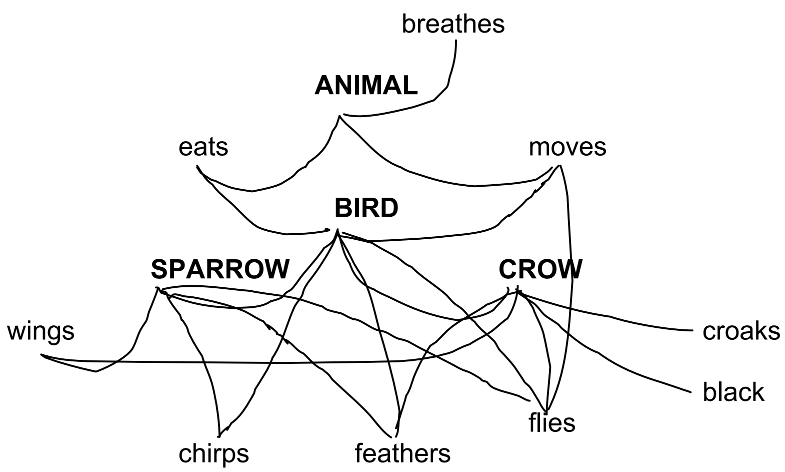

Figure 7. Spreading of activation in a network of semantic propositions. Revonsuo 1999, 217.

More recent cognitive models follow the same principles on the organisation of semantic information. In the connectivity model introduced by Klimesch in

1994, concepts receive their meaning in a dense network of features, where different concepts may share a number of similar features, but each concept is still the sum of a unique combination of features. According to the Klimesch model, visual and verbal information activate the same semantic network, only via different paths (see Figure 8 below). (Revonsuo 1999, 217)

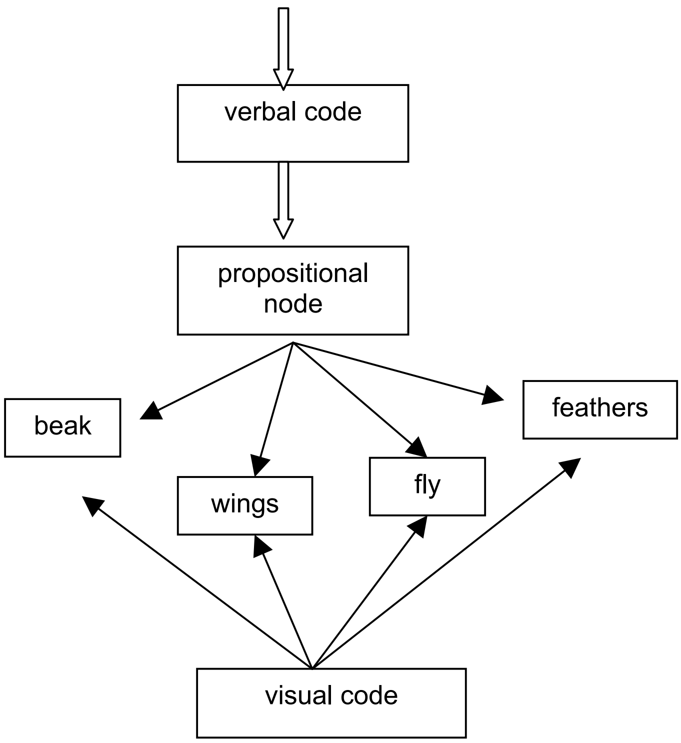

Figure 8. Visual and verbal information activate the same semantic network, but only via different paths. Revonsuo 1999, 217.

The most recent models illustrating the organisation of semantic information in the memory are based on the notion that when we observe objects surrounding us and create concepts representing them, we require information from many different sensory spheres. The conceptual representation of a strawberry, for example, comprises a number of very different characteristics, such as form, colour, taste, scent, possible uses, verbal name and associations linked to a strawberry. All of these characteristics may be activated when we see the word ”strawberry” or observe some of the characteristics defining a strawberry. (Revonsuo 1999, 219)

Research indicates that a significant dimension linked to the organisation of semantic memory is the level of abstraction of concepts. Concepts referring to concrete objects, such as ”car”, ”stone” or ”cat”) are learned earlier and are easier to remember and to process than more abstract concepts, such as ”appreciation”, ”operation margin” or ”gravity”. This phenomenon is called the concreteness effect. The semantic representation of concrete and abstract concepts is qualitatively different: concrete concepts are based on semantic networks of observable characteristics, while the representations of abstract concepts are believed to be based on learnt verbal expressions as well as complex linguistic contexts and relations. (Revonsuo 1999, 221)

3.3 Mind Maps

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the purpose of preparing for an interpreting assignment is to gain an adequate knowledge about the subject matter to be discussed at the conference at hand (Seleskovitch 1978, 61). The Buzan organic study method is a useful tool in extracting that knowledge from the background material available in a structured manner. Reading through the materials is not enough, however; not even if it were done following the organic study method. Learning according to the organic study method is backed up by taking notes of the material and, as briefly mentioned in the paragraphs above, these notes can later be used for the purpose of reviewing the studied material.

If we accept the fact that the brain does not function in a linear manner (cf. chapter 3.2), then it is quite justified to claim that linear note-taking may not be the best way to write down information in order to promote learning and recall. And, if we want our brain to relate to information as efficiently as possible, shouldn't the information be offered to the brain in a way best corresponding to the way the brain functions? Tony Buzan (1978/1983, 91) introduces an alternative mode of note-taking, which allegedly better matches the non-linear way in which our brain functions compared to traditional, linear notes – mind maps.

Instead of progressing vertically from "beginning" to "end", mind maps start with a central idea or concept and branch out organically based on the individual's associations and general form of the main theme. Buzan (1978/1983, 91–92) lists several advantages that mind maps have compared with traditional linear notes:

> 1. The centre or main idea is more clearly defined.
> 2. The relative importance of each idea is clearly indicated. More important ideas will be nearer to the centre and less important will be near the edge.
> 3. The links between the key concepts will be immediately recognisable because of their proximity and connection.
> 4. As a result of the above, recall and review will be both more effective and more rapid.

5. The nature of the structure allows for the easy addition of new information without messy scratching out or squeezing in, etc.
6. Each map made will look and be different from each other map. This will aid recall.
7. In the more creative areas of note making such as essay preparations, etc, the open-ended nature of the map will enable the brain to make new connections far more readily.

In addition to the list above, mind maps are supposed to have several other advantages compared to traditional linear note-taking. Firstly, the brain has a tendency to spontaneously organise all the material that it remembers and the more a learner organises the material in conjunction of making a mind map, for example, the easier it is to remember the piece of information in question. Furthermore, the act of organising the material is helpful to memory and the organic shape of a mind map helps the learner to see the internal connections within the material being processed and thus increases the depth of processing the information. (Russell 1979, 176)

Furthermore, the very visual nature of mind maps helps recall, since visual images are easier to remember than words. Russell lists a number of ways for increasing the visuality of a mind map and, consequently, boosting memory and recall: mind mappers should use of print instead of script and lower-case letters instead of capitals, since they are easier to read and are generally better for shape-recognition. Secondly, key words should be printed on a line and each line should be connected to other lines to give the pattern a clear structure. Thirdly, colours should be used to highlight key concepts. The more colours a mind map has, the better. Fourthly, Russell recommends that mind mappers further enhance the structure of their mind maps by using three-dimensional images and generally use images in addition to mere words. Fifthly, arrows can be used to link and associate ideas in different parts of a mind map. Lastly, groups of words can be outlined or their background can be shaded to make them stand out as a unit. (Russell 1979, 177–178)

One more advantage mind maps have over more traditional note-taking according to Russell (1979, 178–179), is that when making a mind map, the learner is consciously involved in processing the information throughout the process. The more creative the mind map is, the more interesting it is and the better it is remembered. Russell even goes so far as to say that once a mind map has been made, it may never be needed again, the point being that the very act of making a mind map fixes ideas in the memory so efficiently that no revising is required.

This may well be true in some cases, but for the purpose of an interpreter preparing for an assignment, mind maps can certainly be useful tools for absorbing the information for the first time, but also for refreshing the memory at a later stage. Annexed to this thesis are two mind maps (appendices 2 and 3) that the author of this thesis created when preparing for the 60th anniversary seminar of the Association Finnish Peat Industries in January 2003.

Ideally, most of the mind mapping should be done in conjunction with the latter stages of study, since only then does the learner have a clear understanding of what is important and what is less important in the material. Consequently, this helps to avoid unnecessary note-taking. Mind maps created during the study process help the learner to externalise and integrate otherwise unconnected information with other knowledge. Mind maps also allow the learner to refer back to areas that she has already covered, instead of having to start reading the pages or chapters in question all over again. (Buzan 1974/1983, 146–147)

According to Buzan (1978/1983, 112) mind maps can be used in conjunction with practically every activity requiring thinking, recall, planning or creativity. For the purposes of preparing for an interpreting assignment, however, they probably work best as a support for memory during study and later as a source of key terms when the interpreter is compiling a glossary on the specialist terminology related to the subject of the assignment (see chapter 4.5).

4 POINTS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE DURING PREPARATION

The Buzan organic study method explained in the previous chapter provides an interpreter with general knowledge of the subject of the assignment at hand. There are certain things that an interpreter needs to pay extra attention to, however, which are linked to the special nature of the interpreting performance itself and which, quite understandably, are not covered by the organic study method. These include names and titles of people and names of places and organisations and their pronunciation, the titles of speakers and other people that *may* be referred to during the conference, numbers and figures, units of quantity and magnitude, abbreviations and acronyms as well as special terms, concepts and phrases and unfamiliar words. This chapter aims to provide an overview of all the special text elements mentioned above and what the interpreter should do about them.

4.1 Names and titles

The first thing that an interpreter is likely to hear when sitting down in the booth and putting on the headset, are names – of people, companies, organisations, political parties, ministries, EU directorates general, structural funds, community initiatives, local projects, animal and plant species, etc. Since names are very personal and refer directly to the person and the company or organisation she represents, it is crucially important for the interpreter to get them right instantly.

The interpreter should make sure that she is aware of the names of all the speakers, both key note speakers and panellists, the names of the organisations they represent as well as all other names that are in some way linked to the subject of the conference or to the topic of individual presentations or speeches that may come up during the conference. Such names include prominent politicians, philosophers, scientists, authors, artists, athletes, musicians or works of art, works of literature and poetry, scientific and technological inventions, political charters, treaties and other documents etc, depending on the nature and subject of the conference.

The list is endless, which is why the use of common sense is allowed and even called for; it is hardly possible for anyone to be prepared for everything, but there are always names that are more likely to come up in a certain context then others. For example at a conference dealing with the enlargement of the EU into the east, the interpreter should be prepared to know the names of the heads of states of the accession countries, or the key treaties of the EU, such as the Treaty of Rome or the Maastricht Treaty as well as other similar names linked to the historical development of the EU or the accession countries.

The programme of the conference, usually delivered to the interpreter by the employer before the conference, is an invaluable source of information, since it usually contains the names and titles of all speakers and panellists and the names of the organisations that they represent as well as information about their power relations and reporting chains. Sometimes the programme has already been translated into the target language, thus saving the interpreter the trouble of finding translations for titles and names of organisations in the other language. The problem with programmes translated by the employer is that the quality of the translation may vary a great deal. Thus, the interpreter should be cautious with them and assess the quality of the translations provided very carefully before relying on them. If the translations seem suspicious, it is always advisable to check the translation of titles and names of organisations, etc. oneself.

In most cases, however, the programme only exists in one language, in which case the interpreter must find the translations of organisational names, titles, etc., herself. Although it is time consuming work, the Internet has made this very simple. Most organisations, whether non-governmental organisations, government bodies, local administration bodies or business enterprises have Internet sites which contain detailed information of the mission, goals and – most importantly – the organisational chart of the organisation in question, which usually provide all the information regarding names and titles the interpreter needs. If the organisation does not have an Internet site, or the site does not contain the information the interpreter is looking for, another way is to enter the name of the person or organisation into an Internet search engine (e.g. Google, Altavista or Hotbot) and see if that produces results. In addition to finding translations for titles and names of organisation, the Internet very often contains useful background information about the speakers or their organisations, which helps the interpreter to put them in a certain context, which in turn may promote recollection in the actual interpreting situation.

Another valuable source of information regarding the names and titles of delegates and the names of organisations is the list of conference participants, if such a list exists. This is particularly useful when members of the audience, in other words those conference participants who are not key note speakers or panellists and, consequently, whose name is not mentioned in the programme or any other conference document, are given the opportunity to present questions to the speakers; in a situation like this, people tend to introduce themselves very quickly, often swallowing half of the words. If the interpreter has read through the list of participants, she may easier pick up the name and title of the person speaking since she already has at least some sort of a memory trace of that name imprinted on her brain.

Merely finding out translations for titles and names of organisations is not enough, however. The interpreter cannot rely on memory alone, because actual interpreting requires so much capacity and concentration that she simply may not rely on recalling the names or titles when the need arises. To circumvent the problem of unreliable memory, after having found out the titles and names of organisations and their translations, many interpreters simply write them down on the programme or the written speech of individual speakers. Thus, there is no need to "waste" brain capacity on remembering such mechanic, albeit important information.

4.2 Numbers and figures

Another important – and tricky – area to which the interpreter should pay attention to when preparing for an assignment, is numbers and figures, which very often are vitally important and allow no errors (cf. Jones 1998, 130). It is not for nothing that number and figures have been referred to as "simultaneous interpreters' nemesis" (Altman 1994, 32). The numbers and figures of particular interest to the interpreter include dates, percentages, amounts, quantities, volumes etc as well as units of measurement. Numbers are abstract and are often given in the form of a list.

In addition, as Jones (1998, 130) points out, there is more to a number or numbers than meets the eye – in fact, five different elements in total: the first element is the arithmetical value of the number; the second element, according to Jones, is part of the arithmetical value, but should be identified as an element in its own right, namely the order of magnitude (cf. chapter 2.1 on being aware of what is possible within a certain field and what is not). In other words, the interpreter must know that the population of the United Kingdom is in the region of 60 million instead 6 million, or that the average reaction time of male sprinters is around 0.15 seconds instead of 1.5 seconds. The third element related to interpreting numbers is the unit. The fourth element is what the numbers and figures refer to and the fifth element is their relative value; in other words, is the number a fixed value, or does it mark in increase or decrease and if yes, increase or decrease to or from what and by how much or in what proportion? (Jones 1998, 130–131)

If the interpreter does not have a printout of the speech or presentation she is interpreting, all she can do is to try and get the numbers and figures right once they come up during a presentation. Either the interpreter herself can try and write down numbers and figures while interpreting, or she can ask her booth partner to take notes on her behalf (cf. Jones 1998, 133).

If, on the other hand, the interpreter has received a printout of the speech or presentation, managing to list all the figures is not a problem since she can read them from the papers if need be. Locating the appropriate numbers and figures in a sheet of writing or a transparency containing many figures, may be difficult and take too long, however. This problem can be solved by marking the figures in the text or transparency with a highlighter pen or jotting them on the margins by hand either as complete figures or as abbreviations.

Many interpreters use different kinds of abbreviations for figures, such as T for thousands (as in 100 T for 100,000), M for millions (34 M for 34,000,000) , B for billions (4.2 B for 4,200,000,000) or MRD for "miljardi" in Finnish (37.8 MRD for 37,800,000,000). Once the interpreter gets accustomed to using abbreviations such as these, they can be very useful for interpreting even long lists of numbers and figures. Similar abbreviations can be used to express different units such as currencies (TEUR for thousands of euros, M£

for millions of pound sterling or B$ or BUSD for billions of US dollars). It should be noted, however, that when using abbreviations to take notes for one's booth partner, the interpreters should agree on the abbreviations and symbols to be used in advance in order to avoid misunderstanding and, in the worst case, potentially erroneous interpretation.

In addition to numbers and figures, an interpreter working at a technical conference, for example, should know the base units of measurement relevant to the subject under discussion, such as K for Kelvin or C for Celsius when talking about temperature, A for ampere or V for voltage when talking about electricity or Ω for ohm when talking about electric resistance.

Again, in order to avoid forgetting and to save brain capacity for the actual interpreting performance, many interpreters highlight the units (and related figures) in the text and/or "writing out" the units in the margins of the sheet of a thesis where they can be located at a glance. If the text or transparency contains nothing but figures, it is better to just highlight the key figures instead of all the numbers or figures lest the text becomes too messy to read easily.

4.3 Abbreviations and acronyms

A third area requiring special attention when preparing for an interpreting assignment is abbreviations and acronyms. Abbreviations and acronyms occur in conjunction with conferences regardless of the subject and can refer to almost anything (organisations, companies, currencies, technologies, cultural and societal phenomena, concepts, etc.). Again, the interpreter should know what the abbreviations and acronyms stand for and know both the abbreviation or the acronym as well as the explanation in all her working languages.

Most of the abbreviations an interpreter encounters are generally accepted, established ones, such as ERDB for European Regional Development Bank (Euroopan jälleenrakennus- ja kehityspankki, EAKR), ROI for return on investment (sijoitetun pääoman tuotto, ROI) or LEB for life-expectancy at birth (elinajanodote).

Sometimes, however, speakers come up with abbreviations they have clearly invented themselves, or ones that are used within such a narrow speciality niche that it is virtually impossible to know or to find out what the abbreviation or acronym stands for. In such cases, the interpreter should first and foremost try and do everything she possibly can in order to find out what the abbreviation means. Once she has done that without results, she may have no other option than to hope that the speaker will explain the meaning of the abbreviation during the presentation and, if that does not happen, use the cryptic abbreviation as such (cf. Seleskovitch 1978, 132; on incomprehensible speakers).

With more familiar acronyms, such as NATO, YK, WHO and VAT, the use of the abbreviated form is often more informative than explaining what the acronym stands for or saying the official (often very long and complicated) name of the organisation, etc. in question.

As with names of organisations and numbers, there's no need to try and remember all abbreviations and acronyms. A clever interpreter highlights them in the text or writes them out in the margins of text sheets or in graphs or tables so that she can locate them at a glance if need be. Abbreviations and acronyms are often so abstract that it is better to write them out every time they occur in a speech or presentation instead of risking forgetting them and potentially even having to omit them from the interpretation.

However, experience has shown that as interpreters gain experience in their profession, they develop a "sense" for abbreviations – a knack for "writing them out" in their minds based on the context. Moreover, as an interpreter gains more experience of interpreting different subjects, the number of familiar or "automatic" abbreviations increases and the need to write them out decreases.

4.4 Unfamiliar words

In addition to special terminology, which is linked to the specific subject in question and which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the texts (written speeches or presentation, background material) the interpreter encounters while preparing for an assignment often contain words which are not familiar to the interpreter and the meaning of which is not explained by the general context. Not surprisingly, as with special terminology the interpreter should look up unfamiliar words in order to be able to understand and, consequently, to interpret. This promotes the understanding of the text in question, but also helps build up the interpreters vocabulary in the long run (cf. Seleskovitch 1978, 78).

Experience has shown however, that unfamiliar words whose meaning is not revealed by the context occur surprisingly seldom. Consequently, it is not very often that an interpreter needs to spend a lot of time looking up unfamiliar words *other than specialised terms.* (Cf. Seleskovitch 1978, 83–84)

4.5 Terminology work and glossaries

One of the main areas of attention when preparing for an interpreting assignment is specialised terminology. Regardless of the topic of a conference or a meeting, it is hardly possible to avoid running into special terms of phrases. Moreover, in addition to varying from one conference to the next, the topics to be discussed may be so foreign and distant from the interpreters own sphere of life – ranging from organic cattle husbandry to blue tooth technologies and from pedigree cat breeding to elevators and escalators, all of which are real topics that have been discussed at real conferences – that thorough terminology work is an absolute necessity for an interpreter aiming to do her work in accordance with the requirements laid down in the professional standards of SKTL and AIIC (cf. chapter 1.2).

For the purposes of an interpreter preparing for an assignment, terminology work does not mean charting an entire special field and to conduct a complete lexicographical survey; instead, the Translator focuses her attention on certain sub-areas within a special field. Translators [interpreters] are equipped with the skills required by terminology work by virtue of their formal education, but this does not mean that their terminological competence would be comparable to that of professional terminologists. (Holz-Mänttäri 1984, 158)

In other words, the terminological work carried out by an interpreter often simply means the identification of unfamiliar specialist terms and finding equivalents for them in the target language. The glossaries produced by interpreters for specific assignments tend to be intended for instant use and their scope tends to be very narrow. Furthermore, they cannot be regarded as serious terminological glossaries as they contain very little or no information whatsoever about the reliability of the terms, their source etc. Because of the very specialised and narrow scope on one hand and the potential unreliability of the terms themselves, such glossaries cannot necessarily be handed over to other interpreters or reused at a similar conference. (Gile 1993, 81)

When preparing for an assignment, terminology work in fact begins already when skimming through the background material as described in chapter 3.

Already while reading through the background material, the interpreter should highlight unfamiliar terms for future terminology and, if understanding the meaning of the text is impossible without knowing what the terms mean, look up their equivalents in the other language(s).

Terms can be written down in mind maps illustrating the subject in general, or they can be recorded in a mind map solely created for terms. Many interpreters create glossaries in the form of simple two-column tables in Microsoft Word format, for example, which enable the interpreter to keep adding new terms as she reads through more and more background material and to change the direction of the glossary by changing the mutual order of the two columns and reorganising the entries alphabetically according to the language of the first column. Below is a short extract of a glossary on peat and peatlands compiled by Pia von Essen and the author of this thesis for the 60th anniversary seminar of the Association Finnish Peat Industries held in Jyväskylä in January 2003.

puutarhatalous, puutarhaviljely	horticulture
päästökauppa	emission trading
päästökauppasääntö	emission trading regulation
pölyongelmat	dust emissions
pölypoltto	pulverised fuel firing
raejakauma	grain size distribution
raekoko	grain size
raemainen turvekerros	granular layer of peat
rahkaneva	fuscum bog
rahkasuo	bog
rahkasuo	sphagnum bog, sphagnum dominated peatland
rahkaturve	bog peat
rahkaturve	sphagnum peat
railo (syntyy palaturpeen nostokoneen jälkeen)	groove
raivata (pelloksi)	clear peatlands (for agriculture)
raskas polttoöljy	heavy fuel oil

For practical reasons a glossary resembling the above example is probably more useful as a source of reference in the booth compared to a mind map, because in a glossary, entries are listed in alphabetical order, which makes it easier to look up an individual term. In addition, mind maps are likely to reflect the workings of an individual mind, which may make it difficult for others to read and interpret them. Thus, if a glossary is supposed to be helpful to the interpreter who created it but also to her booth partner, conventional alphabetical word lists like the one above may be more useful in the booth. Ideally, a glossary would be based on mind maps created during the study period according to the organic study method and terminology work taking place both during the organic study period and after it.

The background material directly related to the subject is undeniably the best source for finding terms in general and, in some cases, also their counterparts in the other language. Once the interpreter has ploughed through the background material for terms, the easiest way of finding the corresponding terms in the target language is to search the Internet, to consult relevant general or special dictionaries and other available sources.

A valuable source of information regarding terms many interpreters rely on, are conference delegates. They can provide an interpreter with very up-to-date information about terms and current phenomena within their field of speciality. Furthermore, most delegates are very helpful and even flattered to be asked for help. The possibility of consulting delegates for difficult terms does not mean, however, that the interpreter could skip terminology work altogether when preparing for an assignment. It is always the interpreter's responsibility to prepare well for an assignment in advance and she simply cannot rely on getting the information she needs "on the spot" from the delegates. (Cf. Gile 1993, 82)

4.6 Direct quotations, metaphors and sayings

Speakers often like to spice up their speeches or presentations with direct quotations from famous historical persons or otherwise noteworthy persons within their own special field, or sayings, jokes or literary references, for example. Below is a brief discussion of the strategies an interpreter may use to circumvent the difficulties related to the interpreting of quotations, metaphors, sayings, etc.

Quotations

Direct quotations are always tricky, especially if the interpreter has not received the speeches in advance and, consequently, has not been able to look up the "official" translation for the quotation, if such a translation exists. In such cases the interpreter has no choice but to try and interpret the quotation as best she can. Jones (1998, 124–125) suggests alternative methods for interpreting a direct quotation, such as not announcing to the audience that a direct quotation will follow, but rather to try and render the quotation into the target language to the best of one's abilities and only then to tell the listeners that it was a quotation by saying something like "to paraphrase Shakespeare" etc. Another alternative is to decide not to interpret the quotation word-for-word but instead just to say who the quotation is from and what is deals with (ibid.).

Sometimes, however, the interpreter has received the text containing the quotation in advance and has the opportunity of looking up the actual translation of the quotation in question. Finnish speakers love to season their words with quotations from the Finnish national epic Kalevala and the poets Lönnrot and Runeberg, for example, while speakers of English and native speakers in particular, very often quote Shakespeare. If and when an established translation of the quotation exists as is the case with the Kalevala, the Bible and Shakespeare, for example, the interpreter should look it up, write it down while preparing and use it in the booth.

Sayings and metaphors

What was said above about direct quotations also applies to sayings, metaphors and jokes. The only difference is that while an established translation may exist for a famous quotation, this is rarely the case with sayings, excluding biblical proverbs. This does not mean to say that sayings could not be interpreted into other languages – they very often have counterparts albeit that the wording and imagery may be different. Again, Jones offers alternative solutions for interpreting or preparing to interpret sayings and metaphors: the interpreter can decide to look up a corresponding expression, i.e. a pragmatically or communicatively equivalent (cf. Koller 1989, 100) saying or metaphor in the target language.

If the saying does not have an equivalent in the target language, the interpreter can and should try and convey the sense regardless of the form of the original. If the interpreter does not understand the meaning of the original and the saying or metaphor is not crucially important to the message as a whole, she may even decide to omit the saying altogether. If, on the other hand, the saying is important and the speaker refers back to it later on in the presentation, the interpreter has no choice but to decide to interpret the saying as literally as possible and to announce to the listeners that it was a traditional Danish saying, for example. (Jones 1998, 125–126)

4.7 Written texts to be read aloud

One more area requiring special attention by an interpreter preparing for an interpreting assignment is written texts meant to be read aloud. Interpreters encounter such texts or speeches again and again, at nearly every conference or meeting they work at and yet they are always just as difficult and straining to interpret. There are various reasons for this.

First of all, a written speech is the result of hours of organisation of thoughts, ideas and the wording in which they are expressed. Consequently, the words used in written language are longer, more abstract and often belong to a "higher" register than the words of spoken language. Secondly, written language dominantly uses nouns, whereas spoken language uses more verbs. Thirdly, the sentences of written language are usually much longer and more complex than the sentences of spoken language and contain considerably less repetition, which for its part makes it so difficult to understand and interpret written speeches read aloud. (Tiittula 1992, 54–55; 65; 78; 85)

In addition to factors related to the structural differences of written and spoken language, there are also differences linked to the verbalisation of written texts and spontaneous speech: When reading aloud a written text, speakers tend not to follow the natural prosodic patterns of speech, i.e. stress, intonation and pauses, which usually help the interpreter to analyse the structures and also meaning of the speech she is hearing through her earphones. Furthermore, when reading aloud a written text, speakers also tend to speak much faster than they do when speaking spontaneously. (Varantola 1980, 23)

However, an interpreter can do plenty in order to prepare to interpret a written speech, assuming that she as received it beforehand – a requirement stipulated by the interpreting contract templates of AIIC and SKTL. If this requirement is not met and the employers fails to deliver written speeches to be read aloud at the conference, technically the interpreter is not obliged to interpret such speeches or presentations, although the author of this thesis has never witnessed an interpreter refusing to interpret a presentation on these or any other grounds.

Firstly, as with all preparation, the interpreter should study the speech and try and understand the ideas behind the complex structures. Once she has grasped the meaning, she can reformulate it in the target language. As Seleskovitch (1978, 97) puts it, the better the interpreter understands not only the speakers' words, but more importantly, their thoughts, the more they become her own thoughts. Secondly, she can highlight the likely key elements of information, such as numbers and figures, special terms and proper names so that she can rely on the text if and when she feels that, for one reason or other, she is unable to interpret based on just listening to the speaker reading out her speech (Jones 1998, 113–114).

Sometimes the speeches or other types of presentation that the interpreter has received in advance for preparation and that are intended to be read aloud at the conference, may contain "difficult passages" – passages which are so complex in terms of structure or vocabulary that the interpreter does not feel confident enough about interpreting them spontaneously in the booth. In such cases, the best option is to simply translate the passage in question either on a separate piece of paper attached to the original text, or on the margin of the original text aside the original, so hat she can read it aloud when the time comes.

This chapter provides an overview of some of the key things an interpreter should focus on when preparing for an assignment. The discussion is not exhaustive and there may be many other equally important points not mentioned here. Experience has shown, however, that the points mentioned above occur again and again regardless of the topic of a conference or a seminar and can present problems in the booth unless the interpreter has prepared properly.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to discuss a more structured and systematic approach to preparing for an interpreting assignment. The method chosen for discussion is the organic study method devised by Tony Buzan, discussed in chapter 3. Another key theme, discussed in chapter 3, was the suitability of mindmapping, a non-traditional, non-linear note taking technique closely linked to the organic study method, for preparing for an interpreting assignment. Furthermore, chapter 4 of the thesis aimed to provide a relatively detailed discussion of specific points and types of knowledge that interpreters should focus on when preparing for an assignment.

The purpose of this thesis was not to present a complete model for preparation. Instead, the intention was to discuss the advantages of a structured approach to preparation, using the Buzan organic study method as one possible alternative. Nor was the aim of this thesis to provide interpreters with a complete checklist of points that an interpreter must know before switching on her microphone.

The philosophy underpinning the discussion is the notion of an interpreter as an expert of her particular profession. Furthermore, another basic assumption is that preparing for each individual assignment is an essential element of an interpreter's expertise as well as professional ethics of interpreters.

Based on the discussion presented in this thesis, it seems that the Buzan organic study method could be successfully used by interpreters preparing for an assignment. First of all, it provides a structured and well-organised model for planning the preparation process, analysing the material to be studied and finally studying the material that the interpreter has received from the employer and accumulated by means of independent research. And secondly, the Buzan model is flexible enough to be adapted according to the need for preparation and study and the period of time available for preparation; some of the stages in the model can be allocated less time than others and some may be omitted altogether. Consequently, it seems that following the Buzan organic study method, interpreters might save time and energy that would otherwise be spent on purposelessly going through all the material, particularly if there is a lot of material available for preparation.

It is quite clear, however, that studying the materials according to the Buzan organic study method alone is not enough. Interpreters need very detailed term-level information about the subject at hand and the organic study method simply doesn't provide the tools for such detailed analysis. Consequently, the Buzan organic study method is a good starting point for acquiring general knowledge about the topic, but for more detailed knowledge, and terminology work, much more needs to be done, as explained in chapter 4.

Mind-mapping is a useful technique for clarifying the key ideas and concepts and their interrelations and it can very well be used by interpreters preparing for an assignment, but it cannot substitute terminology work. Being based on spontaneous association, mind-maps are not organised enough to be used as glossaries in the booth. Straightforward word lists organised in alphabetical order are likely to be more useful in the booth during the actual interpreting performance, since the required terms can be found easily and quickly, also by others, other than the interpreter who had made the word list.

Within the scope of this thesis, neither the Buzan organic study method nor the mind-mapping technique were tested on a large number of interpreters. Instead, the discussion presented in this thesis is based on the experiences of the author of this thesis of using the organic study method as well as mindmapping in conjunction with certain interpreting assignments over winter, spring, summer and early autumn 2003. The next logical step and an interesting research topic would be to test the study method and the mindmapping technique in practice in order to generate more knowledge of their suitability for preparation purposes. Other study methods could also be investigated in terms of their suitability for interpreters preparing for an assignment.

Constraints of reality

The discussion presented in the thesis paints a rather utopian picture of preparing for an interpreting assignment, however. In reality, interpreters seldom have enough time to prepare for an assignment as thoroughly and systematically as described above. Again, there may be several reasons for this, but the most acute one is often, quite simply, lack of time. Working as a freelance conference interpreter is seasonal; there are periods of time in the course of the year when there is very little work available and, consequently, plenty of time available for preparing. At other times, however, an interpreter may work at as many as three different conferences or meetings with three different subjects during one week. During such a period, it is quite evident that the interpreter simply does not have time to prepare for each assignment as thoroughly and systematically as suggested in this thesis.

This being the case, the interpreter should not despair and decide not to prepare at all. Instead, she should prioritise the assignments and/or subjects and devote more time and energy on the subject she is least familiar with and maybe spend a little less time on preparing for assignments or subjects she has more previous knowledge about. It is always possible to do something in the way of preparation, even though she only has very little time at her disposal – an interpreter can extract a lot of valuable information from a speech she has received only a two minutes before the speaker takes the floor (cf. Jones 1998, 114).

When time is short, the interpreter should focus on the documents directly linked to the subject of the conference or meeting, i.e. most often the material provided by the employer, such as speeches and other presentations to be held at the conference. If there is time for more, the interpreter should study the summaries and conclusions of articles as well as tables of contents and headings as suggested in chapter 3 on the Buzan organic study method. This way she may at least get a general idea of the subject of the assignment at hand. As stated above, lack of time is no excuse for preparing poorly or not preparing at all.

Preparation is an essential part of the expertise of a professional conference interpreter and something that "will not go away": no matter how experienced an interpreter is, she will always come across new specialist terminology or new, unfamiliar topics in the course of her career. And although the general knowledge and vocabulary of interpreters undoubtedly increase over time, some degree of preparation will always be required. As Daniel Gile (1993, 85) puts it, "knowledge acquisition is a permanent feature of the Translation process and knowledge can be and indeed is acquired in the course of the [T]ranslator's work". According to Seleskovitch (1978, 92), the same applies to terminology.

After all, the primary goal of interpreting and the main responsibility of a professional interpreter, both ethically and professionally, is to provide the best possible service to customers (i.e. the delegates listening to the interpretation) by producing as accurate and coherent an interpretation as possible in the prevailing circumstances. This cannot be done without a sufficient knowledge of the subject matter acquired by means of thorough preparation.

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Tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuminen

– tulkin asiantuntijuuden osatekijä

Suomen EU-jäsenyyden myötä tulkkien työ on tullut yleisesti tunnetummaksi. EU:n instituutioiden palveluksessa toimivien virkamiestulkkien lisäksi jäsenyys on lisännyt myös itsenäisesti toimivien freelancer-konferenssitulkkien[5] työmahdollisuuksia. Freelancereina toimivat tulkit myyvät ammattitaitoaan useille eri työnantajille, minkä vuoksi he törmäävät työssään jatkuvasti uusiin aihepiireihin. Ammattitaitoinenkaan tulkki ei kuitenkaan voi lähteä tulkkaamaan entuudestaan tuntematonta aihetta kylmiltään, vaan hänen on valmistauduttava kuhunkin toimeksiantoon perehtymällä kulloisenkin aihepiirin taustoihin ja erikoisterminologiaan.

Tässä tutkielmassa valmistautuminen nähdään osana tulkin asiantuntijuutta. Käsitys tulkista oman ammattialansa asiantuntijana perustuu Justa Holz-Mänttärin (1984) translatologiseen teoriaan, jonka mukaan tulkki/kääntäjä on asiantuntija ja myy asiantuntijuuttaan eli käännös- tai tulkkauspalveluja niitä tarvitseville. Asiantuntijuuteen kuuluu myös tulkin vastuu oman työnsä laadusta.

Asiantuntijuuden lisäksi valmistautuminen nähdään myös osana tulkin ammattietiikkaa. Suomen kääntäjien ja tulkkien liitto ry (SKTL) sekä International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) ovat laatineet omat tulkkien ammattisääntönsä, joissa joko suoraan tai epäsuorasti viitataan tulkin velvollisuuteen valmistautua kuhunkin tulkkaustoimeksiantoon. Samansuuntaisia mainintoja löytyy myös Pohjoismaisen kielisopimuksen selitysosasta sekä asioimistulkin ammattisäännöstöstä, jonka laatimiseen ovat osallistuneet SKTL ry, Kääntäjien ammattijärjestö ry, Kuurojen liitto ry,

[5] Jatkossa sanaa "tulkki" käytetään viittaamaan nimenomaan freelancer-konferenssitulkkeihin, joiden työtä tämä tutkielma käsittelee.

Suomen Viittomakielen Tulkit ry, Helsingin seudun asioimistulkkikeskus, Turun seudun tulkkikeskus sekä Lingua Nordica Oy.

Tulkkaustoimeksiantoon valmistautuminen ei tarkoita vain outojen sanojen ja termien tunnistamista ja niiden toisenkielisten vastineiden etsimistä. Tulkkauksessa on ensisijaisesti kyse ymmärtämisestä. Jotta tulkki voi tulkata kuulemansa, hänen on ymmärrettävä mistä puhuja puhuu. Ymmärtäminen ei tässä yhteydessä tarkoita ainoastaan yksittäisten sanojen ymmärtämistä, vaan tulkin on ymmärrettävä, mitä puhuja sanomallaan tarkoittaa. Tämä edellyttää tietoa käsiteltävästä aiheesta.

Se, että tulkki on oman alansa eli tulkkauksen asiantuntija, ei suinkaan tarkoita sitä, että hän olisi asiantuntija kaikilla aloilla. Tulkilla täytyy kuitenkin olla *riittävästi tietoa* käsiteltävästä aiheesta, jotta hän voi tulkata kuulemansa asiantuntevasti ja viestin sisällön vääristymättä (Seleskovitch 1978). Daniel Gilen (1993) mukaan ymmärtäminen edellyttää kahdenlaista tietoa tai osaamista: kielitaitoa (knowledge of the language) ja maailmantietoa tai ekstralingvististä tietoa (extralinguistic knowledge). Mitä enemmän ekstralingvististä tietoa tulkilla on sitä vähemmän viestin ymmärtäminen vaatii kielitaitoa. Gile jaottelee ekstralingvistisen tiedon vielä ennalta hankittuun tietoon (pre-existing knowledge), joka voi tarkoittaa esimerkiksi kunkin toimeksiannon aiheeseen liittyvää etukäteen omaksuttua tietoa, ja diskurssin välittämään tietoon (discourse-induced information), kuten puhujien titteleihin tai heidän asemaansa organisaatiossa, jonka tulkki kuulee ehkä vasta tulkatessaan.

Tutkielmassa esitetään myös mukaelma Gilen vaiheittaisesta käännösmallista (sequential model of translation). Malli kuvaa tapaa, jolla kääntäjä/tulkki tekee lähtökielisestä käännösyksiköstä merkityshypoteesin (meaning hypothesis), jonka uskottavuutta hän sitten arvioi kielitaitonsa ja ekstralingvistisen tietämyksensä perusteella. Mikäli hypoteesi osoittautuu vääräksi, kääntäjä/tulkki etsii lisätietoa aiheesta, laatii uuden merkityshypoteesin ja arvioi jälleen sen uskottavuutta. Kun hypoteesi osoittautuu paikkansapitäväksi ja luotettavaksi, kääntäjä/tulkki muotoilee sen kohdekieliseen asuun. Lopuksi kääntäjä/tulkki vielä vertaa käännöstään/tulkettaan alkuperäiseen ilmaukseen ja varmistaa, ettei hän ole jättänyt pois tai lisännyt informaatiota.

Gilen malli ei suoraan sovellu kuvaamaan tulkkausta, koska toisin kuin kääntäjä, tulkki ei voi keskeyttää tulkkaustaan ja ryhtyä etsimään tietoa lähdeteoksista tai esimerkiksi Internetistä. Niinpä tulkin on jo ennen toimeksiantoa pyrittävä valmistautumalla hankkimaan riittävä tietoperusta. Samaan tapaan tulkki ei pysty vetämään tulkettaan takaisin kerran sen puhuttuaan. Niinpä mikäli tulkki huomaa tehneensä virheen, hänelle ei jää muuta vaihtoehtoa kuin korjata virhe myöhemmin tulkkauksen kuluessa.

Jotta tulkki voisi valmistautumalla hankkia riittävät tiedot tulkattavasta aiheesta, hän tarvitsee avukseen aiheeseen liittyvää materiaalia. Vaikka tulkki itse onkin viimekädessä vastuussa tausta-aineiston hankkimisesta, esimerkiksi Pohjoismaisen kielisopimuksen selitysosassa ja SKTL ry:n tulkkaussopimuksen kohdassa 15 (ks. liite 1) mainitaan toimeksiantajan velvollisuus toimittaa tulkille ajoissa taustamateriaalia valmistautumista varten. Toimeksiantajan toimittama tausta-aineisto käsittää usein esimerkiksi tilaisuuden ohjelman tai esityslistan, osanottajaluettelon, kirjoitettuja puheita tai kalvoja sekä tilaisuuden aiheeseen liittyviä artikkeleita tms. Toimeksiantajalta saatu aineisto ei kuitenkaan useinkaan riitä, vaan sen lisäksi tulkin on itse hankittava tilaisuuden aiheeseen liittyvää materiaalia.

Painettujen lähteiden ohella Internet on nykyään yksi ehkä tärkeimpiä tiedon lähteitä. Tämä johtuu mm. siitä, että useimmilla tulkeilla on nykyään käytössään kohtuuhintainen Internet-yhteys; lisäksi Internetin käyttö on nopeaa ja vaivatonta, sillä tiedonetsijän ei tarvitse poistua tietokoneen ääreltä. Internetin etuja ovat myös sen monikielisyys ja ajantasaisuus sekä sen sisältämän tiedon valtava määrä. Toisaalta Internetissä julkaistavan tiedon luotettavuus voi joskus olla kyseenalaista, minkä vuoksi Internetiä tietolähteenä käyttävän tulkin on syytä suhtautua siihen varauksellisesti. Kokeneelle käyttäjälle Internetin sisältämän tiedon luotettavuuden arvioiminen ei kuitenkaan juurikaan aiheuta ongelmia, sillä eri tekijöiden avulla on mahdollista melko pitävästi päätellä kuinka luotettava tai epäluotettava lähde jokin yksittäinen Internet-sivusto on.

Seuraava askel valmistautumisessa materiaalin hankinnan jälkeen on hankitun materiaalin käsittely. Tutkielmassa esitellään Tony Buzanin (1974/1983) kehittämä organic study method -opiskelumenetelmä, jonka avulla tulkki voi systemaattisesti käydä läpi hankkimaansa aineistoa. Organic study method jakaantuu valmisteluvaiheeseen, jonka aikana oppija selaa koko aineiston läpi saadakseen siitä yleiskuvan, laatii alustavan aikataulun aineiston läpikäymistä varten ja jakaa aineiston sopiviin kokonaisuuksiin. Lisäksi valmisteluvaiheeseen kuuluu aihetta koskevan aiemman tiedon kartoittaminen sekä aineiston opiskeluun kohdistuvien odotusten määrittäminen.

Valmisteluvaihetta seuraa varsinainen opiskeluvaihe, jossa oppija silmäilee aineistoa ja kiinnittää erityistä huomiota muuhun kuin varsinaiseen tekstiin (otsikot, taulukot, piirrokset, tiivistelmät, kursiivilla merkityt tekstikappaleet, jne.) saadakseen perusteellisen kokonaiskuvan aineiston sisällöstä. Seuraavaksi hän lukee läpi kaiken sen, joka silmäilyvaiheessa jäi lukematta. Tässä vaiheessa erityistä huomiota tulisi kiinnittää mm. kappaleiden, lukujen ja jopa kokonaisten tekstien alkuihin ja loppuihin. Seuraavaksi oppija käy läpi ne aukkokohdat, joita kahden edeltävän vaiheen jäljiltä ehkä vielä jäi. Lopuksi Buzan suosittelee keskeisten kohtien kertaamista, mikäli siihen on tarvetta. Ensimmäisen kertauksen jälkeen oppijan on hyvä kertailla aineistoa ajoittain, jotta opittu asia tallentuu mahdollisimman tehokkaasti pitkäkestoiseen muistiin.

Viimeaikainen aivotutkimus osoittaa, että aivot eivät toimi lineaarisesti vaan epälineaarisesti ja verkostomaisesti. Tutkijat ovat esittäneet erilaisia näkemyksiä siitä, miten tieto on aivoihin tallentunut ja miten eri käsitteet ja niiden piirteet liittyvät toisiinsa, mutta yhteistä eri malleille on niiden epälineaarinen rakenne. Jos kerran aivot todellakin toimivat epälineaarisesti, on loogista olettaa, että esimerkiksi epälineaariset muistiinpanotekniikat toimivat perinteisiä, lineaarisia paremmin.

Tutkielmassa esitellään niinikään Tony Buzanin kehittämä epälineaarinen mind mapping –muistiinpanotekniikka (käsitekartta). Siinä muistiinpanot eivät etene lineaarisesti ylhäältä alaspäin tai oikealta vasemmalle, vaan ja suuntautuvat säteittäisesti keskeisestä käsitteestä tai ideasta ulospäin käsitekartan laatijan assosiaatioiden varassa. Käsitekartoilla väitetään olevan mm. seuraavia etuja perinteisiin, lineaarisiin muistiinpanoihin verrattuna: niissä keskeinen idea ja sille alisteiset ideat tai käsitteet erottuvat selkeästi; niiden säteittäinen rakenne mahdollistaa käsitekartan laajentamisen myöhemmin; kaikki käsitekartat ovat erilaisia, mikä edistää niiden sisällön muistamista; niiden orgaaninen rakenne auttaa aivoja luomaan uusia assosiaatioyhteyksiä. Myös käsitekarttojen visuaalisuus edistää muistamista.

Tulkille käsitekartta on hyvä apuväline hänen hankkiessaan yleistä taustatietoa tulkattavasta aiheesta. Käsitekartta ei kuitenkaan voi täysin korvata perinteisiä aakkosellisia sanastoja, joista yksittäisten termien löytäminen on helppoa ja nopeaa, ja joista myös muut tulkit löytävät helposti etsimänsä.

Yllä kuvatun opiskelumenetelmä ja muistiinpanotekniikka sopivat mainiosti apuvälineiksi toimeksiantoon valmistautuvalle tulkille silloin, kun tarkoituksena on perehtyä toimeksiannon aihepiiriin yleensä. Pystyäkseen tulkkaamaan hyvin, tulkin on kuitenkin kiinnitettävä huomiota myös moniin sellaisiin seikkoihin, joita Buzanin opiskelumenetelmä ei välttämättä ota huomioon. Tällaisia erityisiä mahdollisia kompastuskiviä ovat esimerkiksi henkilöiden, yritysten, organisaatioiden ja vaikkapa asiakirjojen nimet, kaikki luvut ja numerot, erilaiset lyhenteet, oudot sanat, erikoisalojen termit sekä suorat lainaukset, metaforat ja sanonnat. Lisäksi ongelmia saattavat kopissa aiheuttaa myös kirjoitetut puheet, joita puhujat lukevat ääneen suoraan paperista. Tutkielmassa kuvataan käytännönläheisesti yllämainittuja mahdollisia ongelmakohtia sekä strategioita, joiden avulla tulkki voi valmistautua niitä tulkkaamaan.

Johtopäätöksenä todetaan, että systemaattisesta valmistautumisesta voi olla tulkeille todellista hyötyä, sillä se voi auttaa paremmin tunnistamaan mahdolliset ongelmakohdat. Lisäksi systemaattinen valmistautuminen voi auttaa tulkkeja tehostamaan ajankäyttöään. Aika onkin usein keskeinen ongelma toimeksiantoon valmistautuvalle tulkille, ja itse asiassa vain harvoin tulkilla on aikaa valmistautua niin perusteellisesti kuin mitä tutkielmassa esitetään. Ajanpuute korostaa entisestään systemaattisen valmistautumisen tärkeyttä sekä kykyä poimia käytettävissä olevasta aineistosta olennaisimmat osat ja keskittyä niissä keskeisimpään sisältöön.

Tästä huolimatta valmistautuminen on olennainen osa tulkin työtä, eikä sitä voi sivuuttaa vetoamalla esimerkiksi ajanpuutteeseen tai pitkään ammatilliseen kokemukseen. Viimekädessä ammattitulkin tärkein tehtävä on palvella asiakkaita eli tulkkauksen kuuntelijoita mahdollisimman hyvin, eikä se ole mahdollista ilman perusteellista valmistautumista.