



Book Review

Andrew Gillies (2019). *Consecutive interpreting: A short course*. New York: Routledge, +259 pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-12324-3 (PBK).

Reviewed by Alireza Bonyadi
Islamic Azad University, Urmia Branch, Iran
a.bonyadi@iaurmia.ac.ir

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Consecutive interpreting is the most popular type of interpretation work, and its highly cognitively complex nature usually poses challenges for student interpreters (Arumí Ribas, 2012). However, compared with the theoretical issues of translation and interpreting (with which the bulk of the published literature is concerned), the practical aspects of consecutive interpreting have not been paid due attention. As “a response to the almost total lack of published material on consecutive [interpreting] as a whole” (Gillies, 2019, p. 13) and also based on the author’s 20-year experience in reading, practising, and teaching consecutive interpreting, the recently published *Consecutive interpreting: A short course* has broken down consecutive interpreting pedagogically into its basic components. It provides student interpreters and their trainers with “a step-by-step guide towards the acquisition of a sound consecutive interpreting technique” (ibid, p. 13), tackling key interpretation skills such as presentation, analysis, note-taking and reformulation, as well as advanced market-related skills. Written in an accessible and reader-friendly fashion, the book is intended to be used as a complement to formal classroom education in consecutive interpreting.

Consecutive interpreting: A short course has been divided into two main parts. The basic skills of consecutive interpreting – namely listening and analysis, note-taking, short-term memory operations and coordination of these tasks – have been explored in part one, comprised of nine chapters. Part two focuses on practical and real-life assignments, and consists of five chapters that explore note-reading, remembering, and production skills. Each chapter concentrates on a particular skill and offers techniques for its realization. The chapters include various features such as a convenient blue summary box (*In this chapter we will look at: ...*), exercises, notes, further readings and summary. There are also three appendixes, an extended glossary, a six-page bibliography, and a complete index of subjects and scholars.

After initially defining consecutive interpreting, the first chapter, *Introduction*, attempts to elaborate on the following questions: (1) When is consecutive interpreting used? (2) Who can be a consecutive interpreter? (3) Why should one learn consecutive? and (4) Should we learn consecutive before simultaneous? Through addressing such questions, the author aims at establishing the prerequisite attributes to study interpreting. The chapter

proceeds with an argument on assessing the quality of a given segment of interpreting in reference to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) classification.

Based on the premise that public speaking is one of the sub-skills of consecutive interpreting, Chapter 2, *Presentation*, sets about tackling the skills required to deliver an effective speech. The author offers some recommendations on improving this skill: using proper posture, (standing /sitting), techniques in speech delivery (eye-contact, voice-modulation tuning, intonation, controlling nervousness) are all discussed and illustrated with figures. From a career-oriented perspective, Gillies emphasises that observance of the recommended techniques can help student interpreters maintain a professional demeanour.

The third chapter, *Consecutive without notes*, is concerned with information recall – an understandably daunting task for interpreting students. Having clarified the three kinds of memory – namely echoic memory, short-term memory and long-term memory – the chapter suggests a number of information processing techniques that allow interpreters to recall far more than they would otherwise be able to do. It is hoped that through use of the suggested techniques, interpreters would be able to develop their memory into a powerful tool that removes the need for note-taking. The chapter concludes by presenting a speech for which different combined prompts have been used for recalling the embedded information.

Acknowledging that “analysis is a huge part” (p. 52) of consecutive interpreting, Chapter 4 covers techniques for analysing and grafting speech content into its basic structures for schematising on a single page. Corresponding analysis techniques such as structural breakdown, mind-mapping, sections, mini-summaries, section diagrams and recognizing and splitting ideas, are introduced and elaborated upon. Furthermore, each technique is followed by some practical exercises to be done by students in their interpreting classes. The deliberate act of analysing a speech through the aforementioned techniques helps reinforce how interpreters remember a text, and ultimately assists in pursuing the end goal of interpreting a speech from memory competently and with good presentation.

Chapter 5, *Preparation and practice*, initially presents guidelines on preparing topics for interpreting purposes by suggesting strategies that both increase students’ general knowledge on topics and ensure prompt access to terms and expressions in any given topic area. The chapter finishes by discussing ways of structuring practice sessions, and covering various examination guidelines for students to consider when delivering their interpretation.

Chapter 6, *Note-taking*, exclusively discusses the fundamentals of an efficient and effective note-taking system. As tips for saving time and note-pad space, the chapter presents some abbreviation techniques used for getting down the main ideas. Emphasizing the advantages of diagonal and vertical note-taking, the chapter provides interpreting students with different ways of using symbols for key words. Noting down textual links and distinguishing important and less important information are the final note-taking topics addressed in this chapter. Based on the principle that not everything the interpreter hears in the process of consecutive interpreting should be noted down, the subsequent chapter, *Noting less*, is devoted to presenting techniques for achieving this in practice.

Considering the fact that “a one-to-one translation of a given word may not exist” (p. 133) between two languages, and students commonly tend to depend too closely on the source language text, Chapter 8 focuses on the issue of *reformulation* (i.e. not translating word for word) in consecutive interpretation. The chapter presents a hierarchy of reformulation techniques including the word level, idea level, and section level. Furthermore, the twin techniques of

expansion (turning a single word into a phrase or sentence) and *compression* (omitting redundancies) are elaborated upon as ways for making the interpretation sound natural in the target language.

Chapter 9, *Effort management in consecutive*, discusses strategies for easing cognitive load. Defining effort management as the art of completing all the required tasks in consecutive interpretation, the chapter offers strategies for use by students at different phases of the interpretation. The ultimate idea is that by appropriately managing the amount of mental effort required to complete each interpreting task, students will be better able to deliver a natural interpretation.

Based on the presentation skills discussed in the second chapter, in chapter 10 the author explores techniques for coping with the realities of interpreting practice. How to hold note-pads, ways of signalling pauses, and indicating different tones of voice on the note-pad are all discussed and illustrated as the kind of things used or encountered in real-life situations.

Chapter 11, *Advanced analysis*, focuses on two basic speech formats, namely speeches of introduction and speeches of acceptance, that students might encounter in their consecutive interpretations. It has been pointed out that speakers often keep to certain conventions when delivering these kinds of speeches. Knowledge of the respective conventions would give interpreting students a “head start” (p. 182) in analysing such speeches and recognizing their basic components, thereby facilitating their note-taking and, ultimately, enhancing their interpretations.

Acknowledging that too much attention to topic and terminology usually makes one forget about the context of an event, Chapter 12 explores the theme of advance *preparation* and evokes the question of *situation*. Essentially this means obtaining general information about the setting with reference to venue (where), procedure (format) and name (speaker). It takes the view that, given prior information on an interpreting event or situation, interpreters will be able to better anticipate what speakers might say in advance. This, in turn, makes it much easier for an interpreter “to understand, analyse and interpret the speech” (p.207).

Chapter 13, *Protocols and practicalities*, details some practical things to do before venturing out to perform any consecutive interpretation assignment. This includes suggestions on interpreter dress codes and essential equipment. Furthermore, the chapter presents some general guidelines on acquainting oneself with any pre-established institutional protocols such as procedural rules, the names of speakers and other significant attendees.

The possibility of adapting new technologies to interpretation is the subject of the last chapter, titled *Digitally assisted consecutive*. The incorporation of modern voice-recording devices in interpretation has added another branch to the field: known as *simultaneous consecutive* or ‘SimConsec’, this mode involves taking analogue or digital notes while listening to the speakers. The chapter, albeit briefly, overviews the new technology including the use of digital pens, tablets and real-time transcription techniques. After enumerating the associated pros and cons, and noting interpreters’ present lack of confidence in using the new technology, the chapter concludes that it would take a new generation of interpreters to fully incorporate these new aids in consecutive interpretation – that is to say, time will tell.

In summary, *Consecutive interpreting: A short course* is in general a practical and accessible resource on consecutive interpreting for students, teachers, practitioners, and researchers who wish to keep abreast of the latest developments. One of the key characteristics of this user-friendly course book is its step-by-step and detailed practical handling of the key skills in consecutive interpreting; it can be used by students as a complementary stand-alone volume to their formal studies. The inclusion of a variety of related illustrative exercises aiming at helping student interpreters develop the different sub-skills of the

consecutive mode is the other advantage that adds specific value to the book. This is the sort of book that readers could really come to value, simply due to the lack of published works on the topic.

Although a separate chapter has been allocated to digitally-assisted consecutive, a salient drawback of the book is that the author has not provided sufficient extended examples of how the most recent digital devices integrate into the consecutive interpreting process. Accordingly, the volume might have served the target readership even better if it had included specific topics on the ways digital tools are used in consecutive interpreting. All in all though, compared to the author's initial work, *Note-taking for consecutive interpreting* (Gillies, 2017), the present offering provides a more comprehensive and up-to-date treatment that certainly adds to our knowledge of consecutive interpreting techniques. Undoubtedly, Andrew Gillies' *Consecutive interpreting: A short course* is a book that fulfils a clear need, and constitutes an important contribution to the field of interpreting.

References

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