

University of Sarajevo

Faculty of Philosophy

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Master's thesis

Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting: An Analysis of Notes

Taken by Experienced Interpreters

Vodenje bilješki pri konsekutivnom prevodenju: Analiza bilješki

iskusnih prevodilaca

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May, 2021

Apstrakt

Vođenje bilješki je jedna od mnogih vještina kojima se prevodioci služe da zabilježe najbitnije ideje iz iskaza, te da ih potom rekonstruiraju na jeziku cilju. Vođenje bilješki ne zahtijeva samo mnogo vježbe i iskustva, već i poseban set vještina kao što je napredno poznavanje jezika, vještine aktivnog slušanja i sposobnost da se identificiraju najvažnije ideje u iskazu. Cilj ovog rada jeste analizirati vrstu problema s kojima se prevodioci susreću pri vođenju bilješki, kao i strategije kojima se koriste pri rješavanju tih problema. Da bi se postigao cilj, rad će biti zasnovan na analizi kvalitativnih intervju sa profesionalnim konferencijskim prevodiocima, kao i na detaljnoj analizi njihovih bilješki. Analiza će rasvijetliti proces vođenja bilješki, pa će tako ovaj rad zasigurno doprinijeti boljem razumijevanju procesa vođenja bilješki i obučavanju budućih konferencijskih prevodilaca.

Ključne riječi: konferencijsko prevođenje, konsekutivno prevođenje, prevodioci, bilješke

Abstract

Note-taking is one of many skills interpreters use to write down the most important ideas in a speech, so they could reconstruct them in the target language. Note-taking requires not only lots of practice and experience, but also a special set of skills, such as advanced language understanding, active listening skills, and the ability to identify the most important ideas in a speech. The goal of this paper is to analyze the type of issues with which interpreters are faced when taking notes, and the strategies they use to solve these issues. To reach this goal, the paper will be based on an analysis of qualitative questionnaires with professional conference interpreters, and a detailed analysis of their notes. The analysis will shed light on the note-taking process, so this paper will surely contribute to a better understanding of the process itself and the training of future interpreters.

Keywords: conference interpreting, consecutive interpreting, interpreters, notes

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1 Introduction

Consecutive interpreting is one of the three main modes of conference interpreting – consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, and whispering. With the technological development that has taken place over the past few decades, consecutive interpreting has become the less prominent mode of interpreting. Furthermore, a lot more has been written on the topic of simultaneous interpreting, as the topic is of immediate interest to interpreters, psychologists, and psycholinguists alike. That, however, does not mean that consecutive interpreting has completely ceased to exist – rather, it is still very much used in various contexts, such as ceremonial speeches, visits, guided tours, and escort interpreting, as well as working meetings with no equipment (Gillies, 2017).

Interpreters have long highlighted note-taking as one of the most salient skills in consecutive interpreting and, therefore, it has been a subject of many studies – from Jean-Francois Rozan’s *Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting* published in 1956 to Andrew Gillies’ *Note-taking for Consecutive Interpreting: A Short Course* published in 2017. While the large body of literature points to the importance of note-taking skills, it seems that there is a constant need to further explain why are notes so important, as well as how and when to take them.

In her study on note-taking for consecutive interpreting published in 1973, Danica Seleskovitch described notes taken for consecutive interpreting “... as minimal cues, in whatever form, for retrieving a maximum of conceptual content”; that is, notes are used to relieve some of the stress on interpreter’s memory by functioning both as “external storage devices (e.g. for numbers and names) and as retrieval cues for memorized conceptual structures or patterns of sense” (Pöchhacker, p. 124). That is to say, notes taken for consecutive interpreting are a special kind of text produced by the interpreter with the sole purpose of facilitating the process of interpreting.

Albl-Mikasa (2008, p. 212) lists several arguments in favor of viewing notes as a special kind of text:

- “the notation text is characterized by its highly reduced or even fragmentary and incomplete nature and typically contains pictographic and iconic signs and non-linear structuring principles;
- it is solipsistic in that its purpose is immediate communication between the interpreter and herself;
- it is an extreme case of intertextuality, as it can be understood by the interpreter almost only in conjunction with the previously memorized mental representation of the source text”.

If we are to consider notes as a special form of text, we can then study them the same way we would study a natural language text – we can analyze their external and internal structure, relations between different elements, visualized items, and so on. Although highly individual, interpreters’ notes can illuminate the internal processes interpreters go through while interpreting, as well as offer a valuable insight into the interpreting strategies they use.

1.1 Statement of the problem

As mentioned previously, there is a large body of literature on note-taking for consecutive interpreting. However, it must be noted that this body of literature is mostly concerned with *major* languages that are used worldwide, such as English or French. For speakers of Slavic languages, for example, these works can provide general guidelines or spark inspiration, but the point of departure is always the language pair considered in these works. That being said, there is no literature written on the topic of note-taking for consecutive interpreting in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian to the author's knowledge. Therefore, this paper will be based on the analysis of notes taken by professional interpreters working in the English-Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language pair.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze note-taking strategies that interpreters use when interpreting into the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language. Such an analysis will certainly contribute to a better understanding of note-taking skills in interpreters and, thereby, it will significantly contribute to the training of future interpreters working in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.

1.3 Study overview

This paper is organized as follows. The sections Theoretical framework and Methodology come after Introduction. The following chapter covers the results of the research (including the analysis of the qualitative questionnaires and notes taken by interpreters), and the discussion of the results. In the last chapter, the main points of the research are summarized, and comments on the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research are also included.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 The interpreting process

The earliest description of the interpreting process was offered by Jean Herbert, who argued that the task of interpreting itself is made up of three different parts: (a) *understanding*; (b) *conversion*; (c) *delivery* (Pöchhacker, p. 97). By *understanding*, it is suggested that the job of an interpreter is not to merely translate words; in the words of James Nolan, the job of an interpreter is *conveying understanding* (Nolan, p. 2). That implies not only a deep understanding of two (or more) languages but also of culture, customs, etc.

While Jean Herbert emphasized *understanding* as an integral part of the interpreting process, Danica Seleskovitch advocated for *deverbalization* or complete dissociation from words, and she proposed that interpreting was essentially a triangular process at the heart of which was *sense* (Pöchhacker, p. 97).

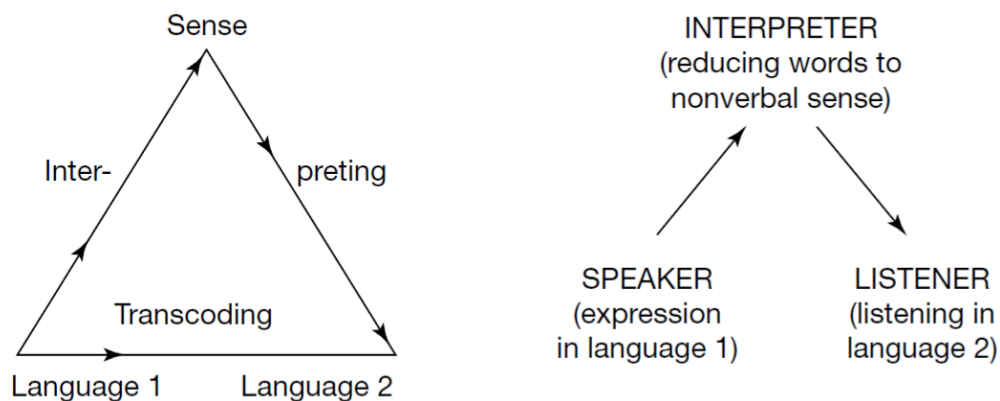


Figure 1. Two versions of Danica Seleskovitch's triangular model (former is from Seleskovitch, latter is from Lederer). Reprinted from *Introducing Interpreting Studies*, by Pöchhacker, F., 2004, p. 97, London: Routledge.

For Danica Seleskovitch, sense “is (1) *conscious*, (2) *made up of the linguistic meaning aroused by speech sounds and of a cognitive addition to it* and (3) *nonverbal* – that is, dissociated from any linguistic form in cognitive memory” (Pöchhacker, p. 97). James Nolan (2005, p. 39) describes this sense as *a mental image* and it is this mental image, rather than the words, that is being *transcoded* or converted from the source language into the target language. This understanding of the interpreting process became the foundation of the interpreting theory of the so-called Paris School, as well as the influential model for the development of the IT (interpretive theory of translation) paradigm (Pöchhacker, 2004).

When describing the interpreting process, some other interpreters have departed from the triangular model proposed by Danica Seleskovitch. This led to the development of several other paradigms in the interpreting studies – such as the NL paradigm (neurophysiological/neurolinguistic paradigm), the CP (cognitive processing) paradigm, the TT (target-text-oriented translation-theoretical) paradigm, and the DI (dialogic discourse-based interaction) paradigm (Pöchhacker, 2004). Each of the abovementioned paradigms highlighted different aspects of the interpreting process. For the purposes of this paper, the IT and CP paradigms are the most important ones as they are directly concerned with conference interpreting – that is, with both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting (Pöchhacker, 2004).

Just as Danica Seleskovitch was one of the most prominent authors in the IT paradigm, so was Daniel Gile a notable author in the CP paradigm. He formulated the so-called effort model for simultaneous interpreting that (with slight variations) has been adjusted for consecutive interpreting as well. In his model, Daniel Gile argued that there are three basic efforts of the interpreting process and they are labeled as *listening and analysis* (L), *production* (P) and *memory* (M) (Pöchhacker, p. 99).

According to Gile, “there is only a limited amount of mental *energy* (or processing capacity) available for the interpreter’s processing effort, and that the sum of the three efforts must not exceed the interpreter’s processing capacity” (Pöchhacker, p. 99). To put it simply, “consecutive interpreting involves a number of different tasks that have to be completed at the same time with finite and competing intellectual capacities” (Gillies, p. 9).

With his slightly adjusted effort model, Daniel Gile suggests that there are two phases in consecutive interpreting during which different tasks are completed. The first phase takes place while the speaker is speaking, and it involves different tasks, such as “listening and analysis, note-taking, short-term memory operations and coordination of these tasks” (Gillies, p. 9). The second phase takes place while the interpreter is speaking and it involves *note-reading, remembering, and production* (Gillies, p. 9). The way in which these tasks have been listed is significant as it points to the fact that all these tasks are interconnected. To exemplify, if we do not listen attentively, we cannot analyze the source material properly which takes a toll on our notes; furthermore, poorly taken notes seriously hinder our ability to interpret the source material, etc.

With so many different tasks taking place simultaneously, it can be said that note-taking for consecutive interpreting is a matter of *attentional resource management* (Pöchhacker, p. 124). Even Danica Seleskovitch argued that interpreters have to “divide their attention between the conceptual processing of input and the taking of notes” (Pöchhacker, p. 124) and she warned against note-taking interfering with the process of understanding. However, a study by Dörte Andres (2002) showed that note-taking in student interpreters was “was often insufficiently automatic and made substantial demands on attention” (Pöchhacker, p. 124). This implied that if note-taking is not made automatic, then it becomes a distraction rather than a helping tool.

As note-taking is *a mechanical activity*, it can be made automatic not by “an intellectual understanding of how to complete a task but from repeated practice” (Gillies, p. 10).

Orcit.eu resource (Orcit.eu, n.d.) also suggests that the mechanics of note-taking can get in the way of the core interpreting skills that include: listening actively, analyzing key ideas, visualizing structures, deducing and anticipating logic, inferring from context, and empathizing with speakers and listeners in the communications process.

Before attempting to take notes, we should firstly hone the abovementioned core skills in isolation. Only then we should start taking notes, while taking into consideration the most common issues with which the interpreters are faced, including: in what language to note, how to note ideas, the structure of notes, links and the left margin, abbreviations, and symbols.

2.2 In what language to note?

The issue of language has been considered by many authors such as Rozan, Gillies, Nolan, etc. All these interpreters tried to answer the question of what language to use while taking notes.

Rozan noted that notes should be taken "... clearly and simply (preferably in the target language, although this is not essential)" (Rozan & Gillies, p. 15). Nolan also suggested to "... write your notes as much as possible in the target language" (2005, p. 295). In line with the two abovementioned authors, Danica Seleskovitch advised noting "in the target language, to break the link between the source and target language and to ensure that you think about what you are noting" (Gillies, p. 270). Andrew Gillies quoted a German interpreter Heinz Matssyek who, based on his long experience, has suggested: "note-taking in or into the mother tongue" (2017, p. 272).

The underlying reason for such a recommendation could be the fact that the process of translation has already begun when the interpreter starts to take notes. With that in mind, it makes sense why novice interpreters would be advised to note in the target language.

However, Andrew Gillies also noted that "it's also perfectly plausible to note in a third language" (2019, p. 117); that is usually the case when your target language uses long words, or when your third language has many pictograms. At the same time, this does not mean that notes will be fully taken in the third language; rather, only some parts of notes can be taken in the third language. After all, as Albl-Mikasa (2008) argued, notes themselves are a special kind of text.

Although there is no agreement on this question, it can be said that the best way is to follow one's intuition as, much like anything else, it is a matter of preference and the most important thing is that it suits the needs of an interpreter. This usually means that the choice of language will come down to the language with which you feel more comfortable.

2.3 What are ideas and how to note them?

As mentioned in the beginning, the IT paradigm places *sense* in the middle of the interpreting process. It was also mentioned that the interpreting process is not so much concerned with transcoding, as it is with the reaching of *sense* or *understanding* of the message. This idea is also reflected in the note-taking process.

All notable interpreters recommended noting ideas. Rozan said to note an idea and not a word (Rozan & Gillies, 2002); Seleskovitch also suggested noting *the idea*, *the essence* or “single symbol or word [that] can represent an entire idea” (Gillies, p. 269); Matyssek advised to “note the essence of meaning, not the words, and pass that on to your audience” (Gillies, p. 271).

Other authors – such as Ilg and Lambert and Jones– all suggested noting ideas or essences, rather than mere words (Gillies, 2017).

One must admit, however, that *idea* or *essence* is somewhat of an abstract notion, and it can be difficult to note it down. With that in mind, it is useful to consider all the things an *idea* can represent.

Andrew Gillies (2017) recognized that the notion of *idea* might refer to three distinct things, which he had kept separate in order not to cause additional confusion. Firstly, interpreter Thiery described the most common understanding of *ideas* as *parts of the message* (Gillies, p. 37), which tell “who did what to whom” (Gillies, p. 37). Secondly, ideas can, according to Rozan, refer to the *underlying meaning of a word or expression* which are “more important than the actual word(s) chosen to represent that meaning” (Gillies, p. 37). Gillies referred to these underlying meanings as *concepts*. Lastly, Gillies stated that many interpreters consider ideas to be *sections of a speech* (2017, p. 38). According to Gillies, these sections of a speech referred to the SVO unit or the subject-verb-object group.

Though it may be somewhat clearer what an idea is, it can still be confusing as to how to note the idea down. Along with Gillies, other authors – such as Ilg and Lambert, Jones and Matyssek – all suggested that it is important “to capture the main grammatical constituents of speech – SVO or other preferred sequences, according to the language pair involved” (Gillies, p. 275).

Lastly, Orcit.eu resource (Orcit.eu, n.d.) suggests that the time lag between hearing the source and delivering the target can be used to come out with some eloquent target language. In essence, interpreters use the time lag to analyze key ideas, deduce logic, and infer from the context, so that they can deliver the target without it being *contaminated* with the source language.

2.4 The structure of notes

Just like any other natural language text, notes too have their own structure. Well-structured notes make it easier for the interpreter to reproduce the source material. Dörte Andres stressed that “the segmentation and arrangement of the notes on the page can facilitate assignation (of the meaning) and have a positive effect on oral reproduction” (Gillies, p. 277). Danica Seleskovitch suggested that “the structure of your notes should remind you at a glance of the parts of the speech and how they fit together” (Gillies, p. 270). She also underscored the importance of noting *the first sentence of each new idea* and *the last sentence of the speech* with special care, as that can help us reproduce the speech fully and accurately. Lastly, she also suggested noting “minimally, so that the notes can be read more easily” (Gillies, p. 270).

Rozan, Matyssek, and Gillies all advise against noting horizontally because, as Matyssek had explained, that does not enable us to “organize ideas logically and give the correct weight to each part” (Gillies, p. 271). Rather, Andrew Gillies (2017, p. 44) suggested taking notes diagonally across the page, as such an approach has multiple advantages to it for the following reasons:

- “easier to read back: because there is less writing on a page, the ideas stand out [...]”;
- eyes move from left to right in a natural movement;
- the beginning of each idea [...] is noted farthest to the left on the page, so we see it first;
- visible structure: the structure of the speech is visible at a glance;
- no syntactic interference, i.e. using the wrong word order in the target language because you noted something in the source language word order;
- space for verticality additions.”

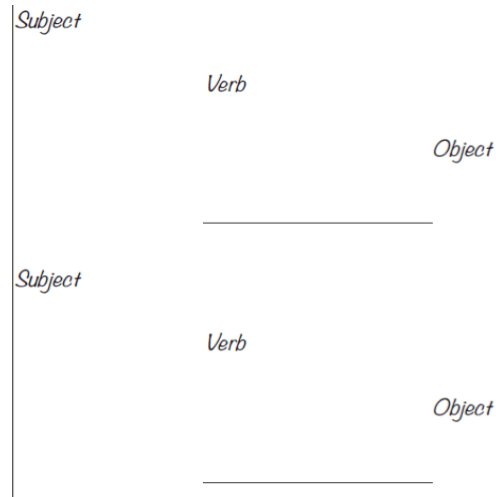


Figure 2. Example of diagonal notes. Reprinted from *Note-taking for Consecutive Interpreting: A Short Course*, Gillies, A., 2002., p. 44, London: Routledge

Another essential part of notes is verticality. Verticality means, as Rozan had explained, “taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right” (Gillies, p. 268). In comparison to taking notes diagonally, verticality is important as it allows us to place related ideas next to one another. For instance, when dealing with two or more items of the same value (e.g. a list of noun phrases, etc.) verticality allows for *stacking*, as Rozan had referred to it. That means that the items of the same value can be placed “above or below one another” (Gillies, p. 268), which also makes it clearer on the page, therefore making the retrieval easier for the interpreter.

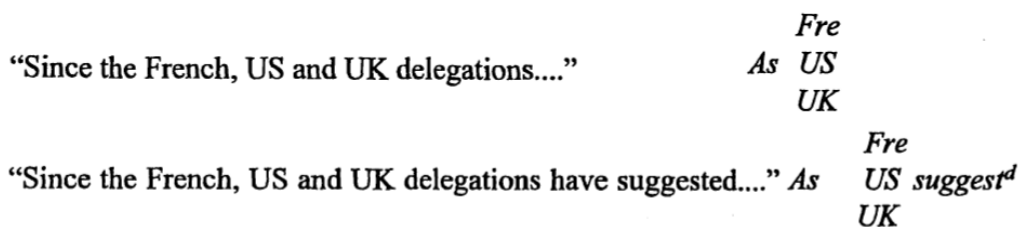


Figure 3. Examples of stacking. Reprinted from *Note-taking in consecutive interpreting*, Rozan, J.-F., & Gillies, A., 2002., p. 20, Krakow: Tertium

Rozan also suggested using brackets for certain elements which are used “to clarify an idea or to highlight a particular point but are not integral to the speaker’s train of thought” (Gillies, p. 268).

“...which leads to new investments, particularly
in the transport sector” → + inv^{ts}
(T^{ort})

Figure 4. Examples of abbreviations. Reprinted from *Note-taking in consecutive interpreting*, Rozan, J.-F., & Gillies, A., 2002., p. 21, Krakow: Tertium

Lastly, as far as the structure of notes is concerned, it is advised to separate messages from another by using a horizontal line. According to Matyssek, “this horizontal line between parts of the message (*Sinnschritte*) prevents these parts from merging (unintentionally). It also makes it possible to jump to other parts of the message if you are asked to summarize a speech” (Gillies, p. 271).

To conclude, the structure of notes taken for consecutive interpreting is not an arbitrary one. As with any other type of text, its structure is important as it, according to Ilg and Lambert, “conveys some additional meaning (parallelism, precedence, subordination, anteriority–posteriority, cause-effect, origin-destination, active-passive)” (Gillies, p. 275).

2.5 Links and the left margin

In the section concerned with the structure of notes, it was mentioned how important it is to recognize the ideas in the source material and to note these ideas, rather than words. However, as Gillies noted, “a speech without links is a meaningless list of ideas” (2017, p. 64). That being said, it is important not only to identify ideas in a speech but also how these ideas are linked together. A speaker will connect two or more ideas by using *links* – words or expressions – which are “often conjunctions but not always” (Gillies, p. 60).

Such words or expressions include: “but, however, so, therefore, and, because, but any expression synonymous with these may also act as links” (Gillies, p. 60).

Some interpreters, such as Matyssek among many others, suggested noting “links in the margin on the left of the page,” as that makes “... *hierarchization* of elements ... visible on the page” (Gillies, p. 106), therefore enabling the interpreter to reproduce the source material more accurately.

Gillies (2017, p. 68) listed two main reasons to use the margin for noting links:

- “Visibility: Things in the margin stand out. Links are important, so we want them to stand out. This will help us later when we give back the speech. It is also an idea to note links slightly larger than your other notes for the same reason.
- Readability: The SVO groups, together with the margin, help the eyes to come back to the left-hand side of the page to start each new idea with its link to the previous one (like the motion of an old-fashioned typewriter). This makes fluent production easier.”

Orcit.eu (Orcit.eu, n.d.) resource also lists the use of the left margin for attribution of ideas. To exemplify, interpreters could include a name in the left margin. In such a case, everything on the right side of the margin is then attributed to that person.

Furthermore, quoting Jones, Gillies suggested that it might be useful to come up with so-called *families of links* (Gillies, p. 64). Family of links refers to “words and expressions that represent the same type of link” (Gillies, p. 64). That means that there is no need to note all the different kinds of links that exist – rather, it is useful to recognize groups of links and to note those in one way. To exemplify this, Gillies used three links – *however*, *but*, *on the other hand* – which are all used to introduce contradictions.

But is the easiest one to note while having the same meaning as the other two; by doing this, “your notes will be clear, and, when you interpret the speech, you will be able to choose from the many expressions in the target language that can express *contradiction* without being tied down by the speaker’s version” (Gillies, p. 69).

2.6 Abbreviations: what to abbreviate and how?

When interpreting consecutively, we will inevitably have to abbreviate some words. There are, however, some exceptions to that rule. For instance, some speeches will include names or numbers, and we will have to note them down accurately because, as Matyssek (Gillies, p. 271) says, “names, dates, and numbers are an essential part of notes”. Furthermore, some speeches will contain the so-called *transcodable terms* or “words that must be repeated rather than deverbilized”, while some other speeches will contain some “technical terms, specific to the context of the speech” (Gillies, p. 269). All of these items are integral parts of speech and they cannot be easily omitted or abbreviated.

For those words which can be abbreviated, most of the interpreters – such as Seleskovitch, Matssyek, Jones, Gillies, etc. – recognized Rozan’s rules of abbreviation as a rule of thumb. Rozan wrote that “if you have time, write a word as completely as possible, however, if a word must be abbreviated, then write some of the first and last letters rather than trying to write as many letters as possible from the start onwards” (Rozan & Gillies, p. 17).

That being said, our abbreviations must be unambiguous, so we do not confuse them with other similar abbreviations:

***Stat.* could be read as “statute” or “statistics” whilst *St^{ute}* and *St^{ics}* are unambiguous.**

***Prod.* could be read as “production,” “producer,” “product” or “productivity” while *Pr^{on}*, *Pr^{er}*, *Pr^{ct}*, *Pr^{vity}* are unambiguous.**

***Com.* could be read as “Commission” or “committee” while *C^{on}* and *C^{tee}* are unambiguous.**

Figure 5. Examples of abbreviations. Reprinted from *Note-taking in consecutive interpreting*, Rozan, J.-F., & Gillies, A., 2002., p. 17, Krakow: Tertium

Having abbreviated a word or an idea, it is also useful to indicate verb conjugations, verb tenses, gender, and number, as they are essential to the understanding of the source material.

If we structure our notes diagonally, it will be obvious which, for example, verb endings or auxiliary verbs to use as the subject will be noted so there is no need to note verb conjugations. Verb tenses, on the other hand, are another component that is essential to the understanding of the speech. As verb tenses come up quite often in any given speech, it might be useful to consider noting these down in a specific way. According to Rozan, “to indicate tense we add ^{ll} for the future and ^d for the past” (2002, p. 17). Much like tenses, modal verbs are crucial to understanding the message. However, in some languages, modal verbs can be quite long and they can, therefore, take up a lot of valuable time to note. Andrew Gillies (2017, p. 140) suggested using English modal verbs where possible, as they are quite short and can be written down quickly. He also warned that modal verbs might have slight differences in meaning, which may not be reflected in the target language. Lastly, Gillies (2017, p. 141) noted that “it’s also important to note them horizontally adjacent to the verb they qualify”, which can be easily achieved if one takes notes diagonally across the page.

As Matyssek (Gillies, p. 272) stated, “number (singular or plural) and, if necessary, gender are meaning-critical and should be noted”. Rozan suggested to “indicate gender and number we add ^e or ^s to the symbol or abbreviation” (2002, p. 17). In the translator’s note, Andrew Gillies noted that ^e is “the French feminine ending. Any letter can be used and this will depend on the languages involved” (Rozan & Gillies, p. 17).

Furthermore, Heinz Matyssek said that “refuting or confirming, emphasis or downplaying are meaning-critical elements and must be carefully recorded in staggered notation” (Gillies, p. 272).

That being said, it might be useful to consider ways in which we can abbreviate noting critical elements, such as negation or emphasis. Rozan suggested that “negation might be noted by means of a line running through a word or symbol” or by writing “the word *no* before the word to be negated” (2002, p. 19); for example, *disagree* can be noted as *no OK*. When emphasizing a word, Rozan suggests to “underline it (twice if we are dealing with a superlative or absolute)” (2002, p. 19). To exemplify:

“(The study) is interesting” : *int^g*
“(The study) is very interesting” : *int^g*
“(The study) is extremely interesting” : *int^g*

Figure 6. Examples of emphasis. Reprinted from *Note-taking in consecutive interpreting*, Rozan, J.-F., & Gillies, A., 2002., p. 19, Krakow: Tertium

2.7 Symbols

Andrew Gillies noted that “a symbol represents a concept, not a word” (2017, p. 100). The use of symbols, thus, is the easiest way to abbreviate a word or an expression. Gillies (2017, p. 101) listed several advantages to using symbols:

- “[symbols] are quicker and easier to write than words;
- they are quicker and easier to read on the page than words;
- represent concepts, not words;
- they are not one-to-one translations, so they help us avoid source language interference when we interpret;
- can save space on the page, leaving the structure of your notes clearer.”

Although it might be tempting to use a symbol for every idea in a given speech, both Rozan (2002) and Gillies (2017) warned against excessive use of symbols. Rozan wrote that, if we were to use symbols all the time, we would “end up with a page full of signs that have to be deciphered” (2002, p. 25).

However, when interpreting consecutively, it is not our job to decipher symbols, but to convey understanding, as Nolan (2005) wrote. Because of this, Rozan argued that our use of symbols should be limited and that it should correspond to “four major stages of reasoning and thought” which are the following: “a thing is expressed, then this thing is given motion, a direction, and then it is placed, by establishing its relationship with something else” (2002, p. 25).

This has led him to divide symbols into three major families:

- symbols of expression (some of which are - “ (speech), : (thought), etc.);
- symbols of motion (\rightarrow (direction, transfer), \nearrow (rise), \searrow (decrease), etc.) and
- symbols of correspondence (some of which include - / (relation), = (equivalence), etc.).

Overall, Rozan suggested using around 20 symbols, ten of which are indispensable. On the other hand, Heinz Matyssek is known for his elaborate system of symbols. Andrew Gillies himself suggested, for example, using a circle to denote a person and, by extension, emotions and thoughts:

☺	pleased
☹	annoyed, unhappy, unimpressed, etc.
☹	very unhappy, disgusted, etc.
⊖	to think
⊖	to know (For me, the straight line denotes certainty, in comparison to the squiggly line for “to think”.)

Figure 7. Examples of symbols. Reprinted from *Note-taking for consecutive interpreting: a short course (2nd ed.)*, Gillies, A., 2017, p.106. London: Routledge

While it might be tempting to look up symbols other interpreters use and use them ourselves, there are several things to keep in mind before doing so, as symbols must be (Gillies, p. 105):

- “clear and unambiguous;
- quick and simple to draw;
- prepared in advance and instantly familiar to you;
- consistent;
- organic;
- mean something to you.”

Lastly, Orcit.eu resource lists another advantage to using symbols that Gillies has not mentioned. Namely, Orcit.eu resource (Orcit.eu, n.d.) suggests that the use of symbols that are easy to visualize aids interpreters in their effort to move away from the source language. This implies, then, that interpreters use symbols not only as a shorthand, but also as a way of not letting the source contaminate the target. That is, using symbols allows them to interpret more freely and express themselves more fluently in the target language.

3 Analysis

3.1 Qualitative questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to identify issues and analyze note-taking strategies which interpreters use when interpreting into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. Such an analysis will certainly contribute to a better understanding of note-taking skills in interpreters and the training of future interpreters working in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. The issue, however, is that there is no literature written on the topic of note-taking for consecutive interpreting in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian to the author's knowledge.

To address this issue, all the relevant data was collected in two ways:

- qualitative questionnaires with three interpreters;
- notes taken by three interpreters while listening to a short speech.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the relevant data was collected online via e-mail.

As mentioned previously, the issue was addressed through qualitative questionnaires that were conducted with three interpreters working in the English-Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language pair. The questionnaire was conversational in style, and there were several reasons why such an approach was taken:

- a qualitative questionnaire offers a unique insight into the way interpreters think about the interpreting process;
- the research aimed to compare the interpreters' answers with some of the guidelines that were outlined in the section Theoretical framework.

The qualitative questionnaire consisted of nine open-ended questions that offered the interpreters an opportunity to express their thoughts in their own words, include additional explanations, pieces of advice, etc.

All of the questions were based around the issues and note-taking strategies that were outlined in the section Theoretical Framework. That being said, the interpreters were asked to answer questions on noting ideas, symbols, the language of notes, etc.

All the answers received were analyzed in the following way:

- the answer to each question was considered in relation to the guidelines provided in the section Theoretical framework;
- if there were any significant departures from the above-mentioned guidelines, they were analyzed to understand the underlying reason for the said departure, and the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.

The findings were analyzed in such a way to highlight the interpreters' internal process when interpreting, as well as the peculiar nature of notes. Such an analysis will contribute to a better understanding of note-taking skills and the training of future interpreters.

See Appendix A for a full questionnaire.

3.1.1 Analysis of qualitative questionnaires

The first question dealt with the role of note-taking in consecutive interpreting. The interpreters were asked to share their thoughts on note-taking, and some of its advantages or disadvantages. While taking notes can be seen as a bit distracting, all the interpreters underscored how essential note-taking skills are to the interpreting process. Moreover, one of them argued that “one cannot be considered a professional interpreter without the ability to take meaningful notes.”

Given their obvious importance, some of the advantages to the note-taking process that were listed include:

- the ability to properly formulate the message to be translated;
- memory aid;
- help better focus in situations of high stress.

When studying the note-taking process, individuality and creativity are always highlighted as the cornerstones of developing one’s system of notes. The second question was, thus, concerned with the note-taking techniques and whether studying them in a formal setting is beneficial for future interpreters. Although one of the interpreters admitted to never actually studying note-taking techniques in a formal setting, such as university courses, all of the interpreters agreed that studying note-taking techniques can serve as a starting point for developing one’s approach to the note-taking process.

The third question was concerned with the issue of the language in which the notes are taken. This question was also a point of departure for some interpreters. Out of three interpreters, only one said that they take notes in the target language, as was recommended by some notable interpreters. For this interpreter, note-taking is already a starting point of the translation process.

For them, thus, it makes sense to take notes in the target language. They do, however, admit that it was difficult to adapt to such an approach in the beginning. The other two interpreters take their notes in the source language. For one interpreter, this is a matter of convenience, as it is easier to focus solely on what is being said. The other interpreter listed a bit more complex reasons for their approach:

- focus is solely on what is being said;
- avoid getting stumped and forgetting a word;
- avoid confusion from continuously switching between two codes when interpreting two ways – from English to Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and vice versa.

Because of this, their interpreting process resembles sight translation.

Getting started is often the most difficult part, so the fourth question was concerned with the way interpreters start their notes. All of the interpreters agreed that it is crucial to listen to the speaker carefully and try to get the most important idea. One interpreter suggested starting noting even before something important comes up, to get into the mode for note-taking. This means that noting down pleasantries – such as *Good morning, ladies and gentlemen* – is a great way to just get started with note-taking.

Students often find it particularly confusing when they are instructed to note ideas rather than words. To answer the fifth question, the interpreters had to explain their internal interpreting process and how they note ideas. As one interpreter pointed out, there is simply no time to fret whether you write down information or ideas when interpreting. There is surely no time to wait for the *main idea* to come up as that might never happen. To interpreters, it does not matter whether you note down words or ideas, as long as you manage to get the gist of what is being said.

All of the interpreters agreed that knowing what to note is a matter of experience. They have pointed out that, as you get more experienced, you will notice some repeating ideas and common concepts in speeches and you will come up with ways to note these concepts down. Lastly, one interpreter pointed out that they tend to note more at the very beginning of a meeting. As they get more familiar with the participants and subject matter, they tend to be more economical with how they note.

The sixth question was concerned with how the organization of notes aids memory. As expected, all the interpreters highlighted the importance of taking notes clearly and legibly. Furthermore, they stressed that the notes should reflect the hierarchy of ideas or clauses. While all of these things are examples of good practice, one interpreter admitted that their notes are not always as organized as they would like them to be.

Symbols are immensely helpful when taking notes, so the seventh question was concerned with systems of symbols. As was established earlier, symbols are highly individual and the interpreters' answers solidified this. All of them agreed that some symbols can be uniformly applicable, such as arrows or certain mathematical symbols. They usually create other symbols on the spot. These symbols are reflections of their individuality and creativity, and that means that these symbols cannot be easily understood by others. As one interpreter pointed out that, while the ways to note ideas and concepts might vary, the way you note links between ideas and concepts is less variable. This means that coming up with a system of symbols for less variable elements – such as links – might be a useful way to make the note-taking process quicker and easier.

As it was previously established, how notes end is rather important. To answer the eighth question, the interpreters were asked about how they end their notes. All of them agreed that it is crucial to take time when noting down the last thing that was said, as it is highly likely that we will forget it.

They also suggested that you should draw lines at the end of each statement, to make a clear and visible indication of how thoughts and ideas progress.

Lastly, the interpreters were asked to share bits of advice for novice interpreters. Some pieces of their advice include:

- be patient and realistic, learning to take notes is a never-ending process;
- use a notepad and a pen religiously;
- learn from the experience of others, but adapt the system to yourself;
- do not panic.

3.2 Notes taken by interpreters

All the relevant data to address the above-mentioned issue was collected through the analysis of notes taken by three interpreters working in the English-Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language pair.

The interpreters were sent a video recording, and they were asked to take notes. They were then asked to submit their notes back to the author in the form of photographs or scanned copies. The video recording in question was a speech delivered by the US Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eric Nelson. The speech was concerned with the new program launched by the US Embassy in Sarajevo.

Such a video was chosen to simulate a situation in which a conference interpreter might be needed, as well as for several other reasons, including:

- length;
- clear and precise language;
- both simple and complex ways of expressing ideas;
- information-density.

The notes were then analyzed in relation to the guidelines for taking notes that were provided in the section Theoretical framework.

To future interpreters working in the English-Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language pair, such an analysis will help improve their understanding of the note-taking process, and it will serve as a source of inspiration for developing their systems of notes.

See Appendix B for the full transcript of the video.

3.2.1 How do interpreters note ideas?

At this point, the concept of noting ideas is already familiar. To recap, some of the most notable interpreters insisted on noting ideas rather than words. In the section Theoretical framework, some of the guidelines provided by the most prominent interpreters were considered. For example, Gillies suggested noting down basic parts of a sentence such as subject, verb, and object (Gillies, 2017). Other authors – such as Ilg and Lambert, Jones, and Matyssek – all underscored the importance of capturing the main grammatical constituents. As for the insights received from the qualitative questionnaires, the analysis showed that the interpreters were far more concerned with noting down the gist of what is being said, rather than words or information.

As for the guideline to note down the main grammatical constituents, the analysis of notes taken by professional interpreters showed that they do adhere to this suggestion to some extent. To exemplify this, let us look at one of the parts of the speech delivered by the US Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eric Nelson, “I commend your hard work, your vision, and your dedication in turning your business and your ideas into reality.”

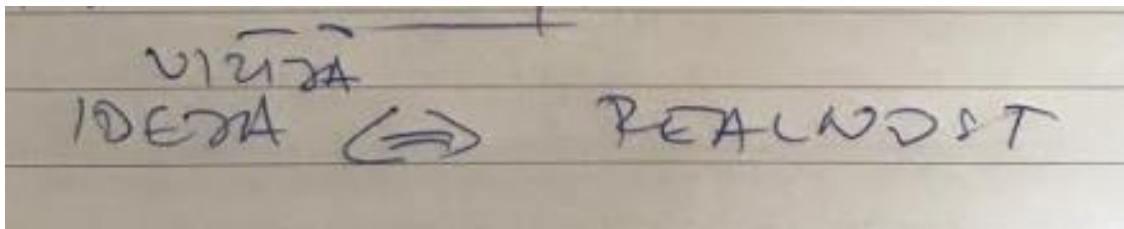


Figure 8. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

As can be seen, the interpreter omitted noting down the subject. They noted down the main verb of the main clause, *commend*, without indicating its tense or aspect. The arrows point from the main verb to noun phrases that act as direct objects, *hard work*, *vision*, and *dedication*. Furthermore, the remainder of the sentence is noted in the same line horizontally. The interpreter noted down the verb *turn*, again without indicating tense or aspect or any kind of relation to what was previously noted, and noun phrases that are connected to it, *vision*, and *ideas*.

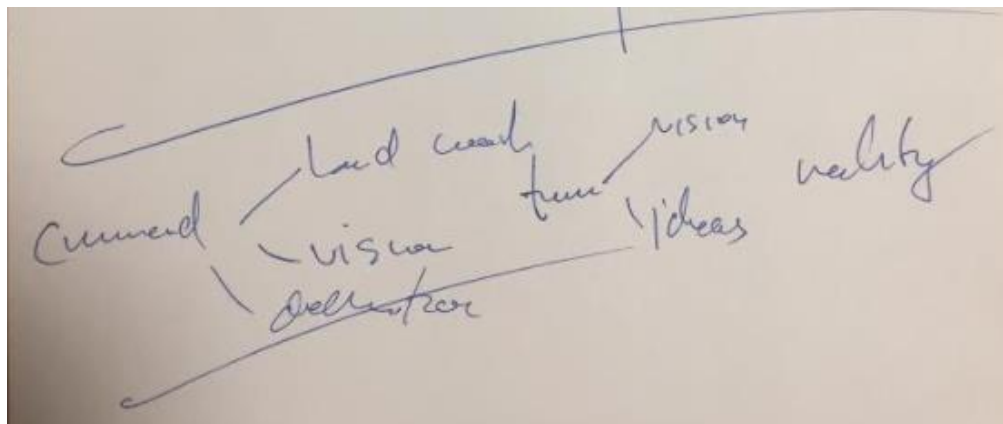


Figure 9. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

While taking notes for the same section of the speech, this interpreter omitted to note any kind of grammatical constituents by simply noting down nouns and using a double-ended arrow to point to the reciprocity of ideas.

These two examples perfectly exemplify what it means to note down ideas. As the interpreters suggested in the qualitative questionnaires, it is best to note down the gist of what is being said. This means that every interpreter will note down the same part differently. However, the common theme in both these instances is the same. Both interpreters deemed the turning of ideas and visions into reality as the most important part of the speech – or the gist of it.

3.2.2 How interpreters structure their notes?

In the section Theoretical framework, the structure of notes was also discussed. These are the main takeaways listed in that section:

- note diagonally;
- note vertically to put related ideas next to each other;
- separate different messages from one another by using a horizontal line.

The analysis of the qualitative questionnaires showed that the interpreters also highlighted the importance of well-organized notes, as such an approach allows us to see the structure of the speech and the hierarchy of ideas at a glance.

In practice, these ideas are reflected in the following way.

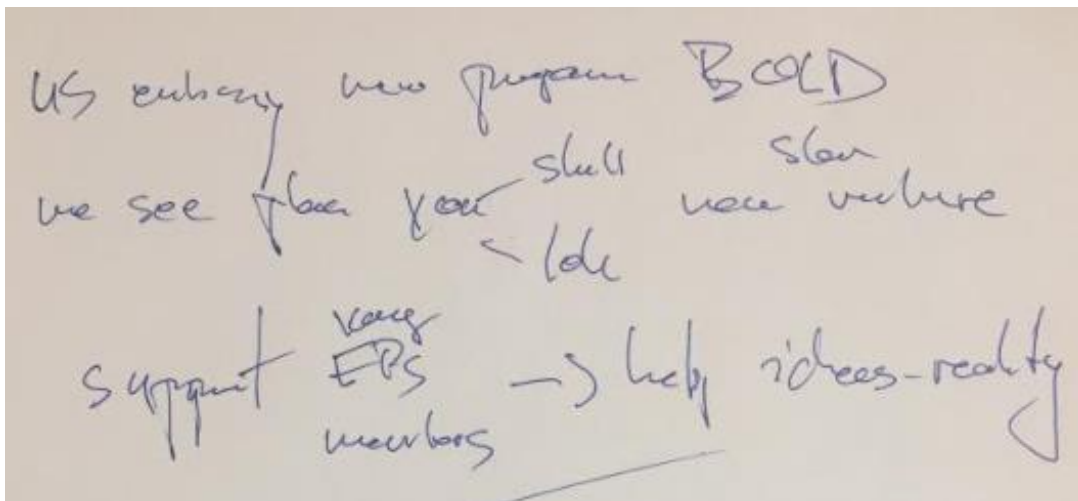


Figure 10. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

This interpreter did not take his notes diagonally. This can be seen in the second line, where the interpreter noted the subject, verb, and object all in the same line, instead of diagonally, as it is recommended. However, the interpreter did put related ideas and notions next to each other.

For example, the interpreter noted horizontally all the other ideas that are linked to the program BOLD. This includes phrases, such as *US Embassy* and *new program*. On the other side, the interpreter noted some other related notions vertically. For example, the word *mentors* is noted under *EP*, which stands for *entrepreneur*. The word above *EP* is most likely *young*, and it ought to refer to entrepreneurs. Lastly, this part of the notes is separated from the rest of the notes by a horizontal line.

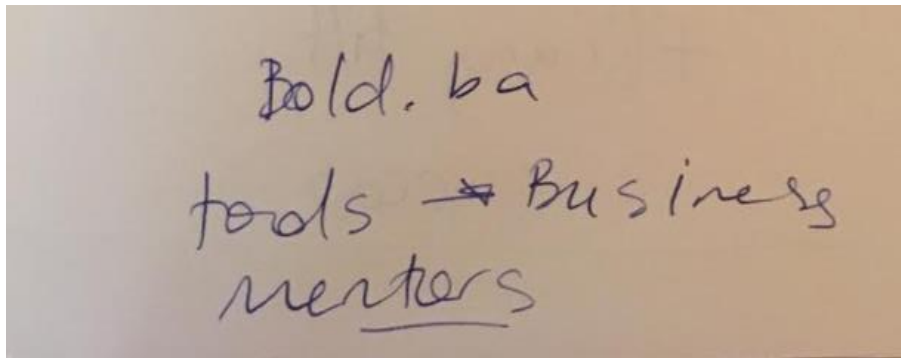


Figure 11. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

Another interpreter noted the same section of the speech in a completely different way. In this instance, there are no clear indications of grammatical constituents or links between them. Rather, the interpreter noted the most important pieces of information that will help them retrieve the message. That being said, it is clear that these notes were not taken diagonally nor were related ideas put next to each other. The interpreter did, however, use a horizontal line to separate this part of the message from the rest of the notes.

These instances only further underscore the fact that professional interpreters develop their note-taking systems through years of practice and experience. While their note-taking systems differ from what is usually recommended, they can take notes in such a way as note-taking has become sufficiently automatic for them.

3.2.3 Do interpreters use the left margin?

As it was noted in the section Theoretical framework, it is important to identify how the ideas in a speech are connected. Without those links, speech is no more than a list of ideas. Interpreters, such as Matyssek and Gillies, called for using the margin on the left side of the page for several reasons. Matyssek, for example, argued that it makes the hierarchy of elements visible on the page. Gillies argued that noting links in the left margin makes them stand out and that it is an easy way of showing links between a new idea and a previous one.

However, when analyzing notes taken by interpreters, it was established that not one of the interpreters made use of the left margin. The underlying reason could be the speech itself, as the speaker used linking elements sparingly. In the places where there were linking elements, however, some interpreters omitted them, but the other ones used an arrow to point to the connection between different ideas.

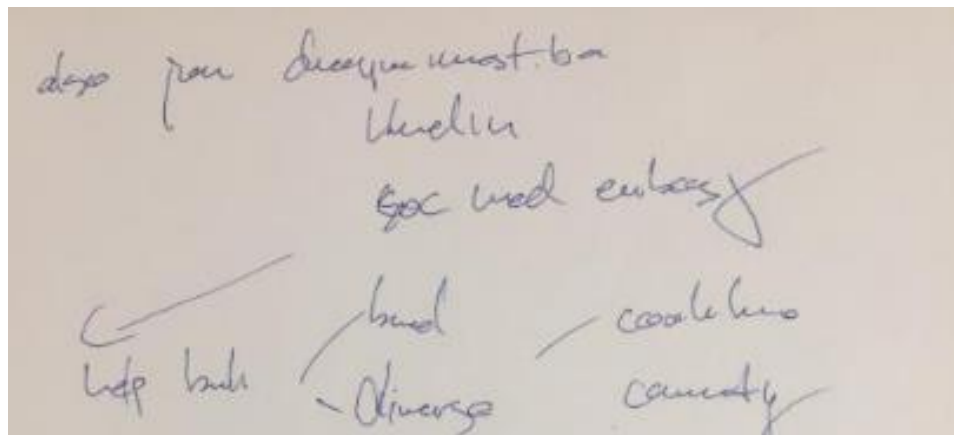


Figure 12. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

Lastly, despite not using the left margin, the interpreters did note links between different phrases by using arrows (\Leftrightarrow) or slashes (/). In one of the previous paragraphs, it was established that the double-ended arrow was used to establish reciprocity of ideas. In the following instance, the interpreter used a slash (/) to indicate coordination of ideas in the speech (“... hear what you are working on and support you...”):

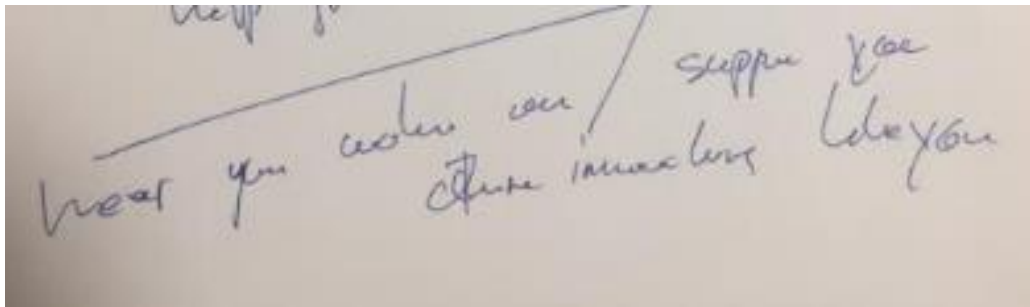


Figure 13. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

3.2.4 What do interpreters abbreviate?

To recap, note-taking is a time-consuming process. It is, thus, useful to abbreviate some elements of the speech. While elements – such as names or numbers – are crucial pieces of information and should not be abbreviated, other elements can be freely abbreviated. Other than some unambiguous words or ideas, it is useful to use abbreviations to indicate verb conjugations and tenses, gender, and number. Furthermore, it was also noted how important it is to find ways to abbreviate other crucial elements, such as negation or emphasis. The most obvious way to abbreviate a word is to omit some letters if that means it would still be possible to retrieve the message completely.

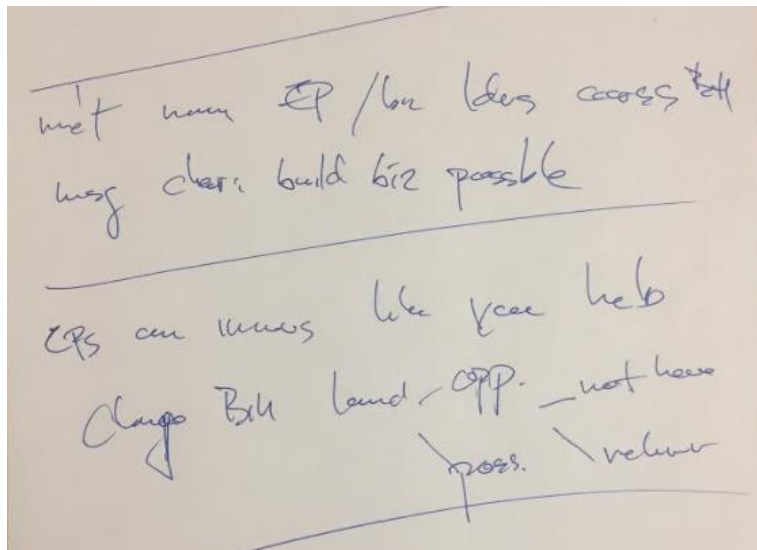


Figure 14. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

In practice, abbreviating words would look similar to this. In the first line of these notes, the word *entrepreneur* is abbreviated to *EP*, the word *business* to *biz*, the word *opportunity* to *opp*, and the word *possibility* to *poss*. While some abbreviations, such as *EP*, might not be as straightforward, all the other ones are rather clear and easy to retrieve.

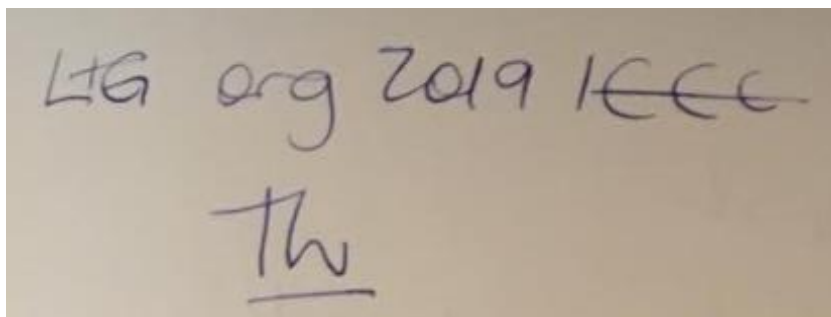


Figure 15. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

Using abbreviations might come in handy when noting down repeating ideas, such as pleasantries. This interpreter, for example, abbreviated the phrase *ladies and gentleman* to *L+G*. Furthermore, as the speaker expresses his thanks for being invited to an event, the interpreter simply noted Th. The reason why this is possible is expressing such pleasantries is rather common, so there might be no need for the speaker to note every single part of it down.

As for noting elements such as verb conjugation, tense, or aspect, the excerpts that were analyzed previously show that interpreters did not note such elements. Furthermore, plural forms were always indicated by adding a simple *s* at the end of noun constituents.

3.2.5 How do interpreters use symbols?

In the section Theoretical framework, symbols were discussed as the easiest way to abbreviate a word or an expression. While it might be tempting to note down the whole speech in symbols, Andrew Gillies listed several things to keep in mind before doing such a thing. He noted that symbols should be (Gillies, p. 105):

- “clear and unambiguous;
- quick and simple to draw;
- prepared in advance and instantly familiar to you;
- consistent;
- organic, and mean something to you.”

Let us consider what it means to use symbols in practice.

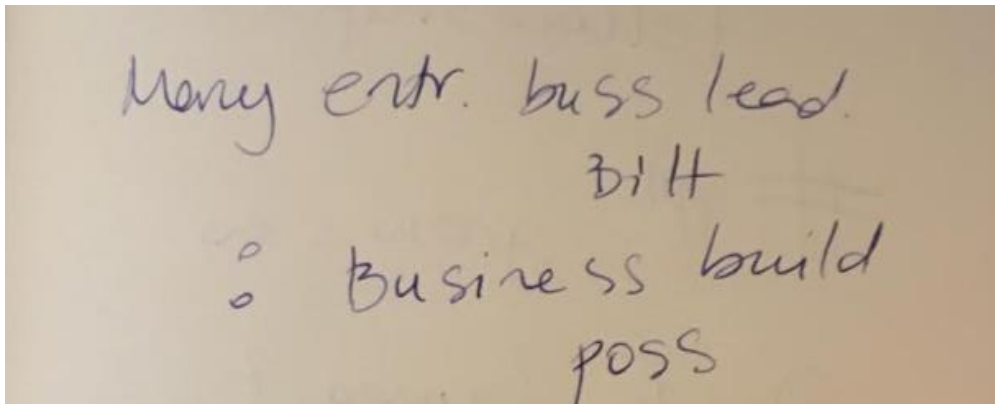


Figure 16. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

These notes refer to the following part of the speech, “I have met many entrepreneurs and business leaders across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their message is clear: *Building your own business is possible here.*”

With the provided context, one could say that the symbol the interpreter used –a column (:)- could stand as a symbol for the verbs *is*, *say*, or *tell*. The underlying reason for using such a symbol might be the fact that columns (and apostrophes) are used for quoting reported speech in Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian.

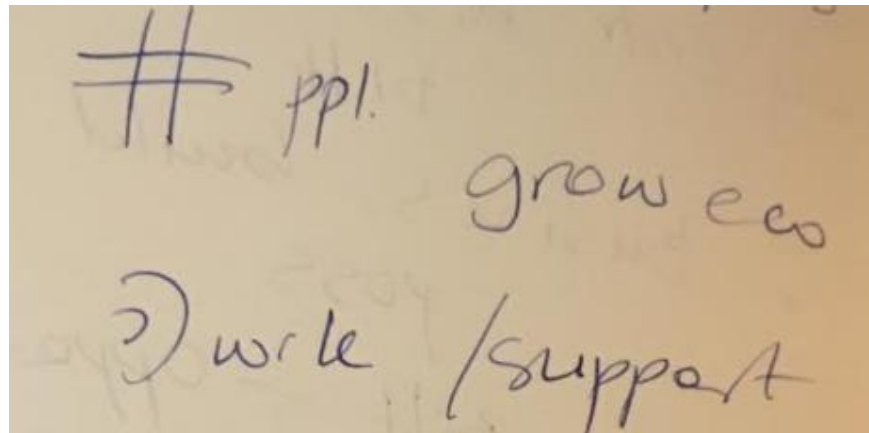


Figure 17. Examples of notes taken by a professional conference interpreter.

Other interesting symbols this interpreter used are the following ones. A hashtag (#) in this instance refers to the word *network*, as it resembles a sort of a net. The following one is a bit vaguer.

The second line begins with what seems to be two inverted letters *C*. However, when one considers the broader context, it can be concluded that this part of the notes refers to the following section of the speech, “We want to hear what you’re working on and support you and other innovators like you.” So, the two inverted letters *C* actually represent an ear which, in turn, stands for the verb *to hear*.

While some of these symbols might not be clear and straightforward to everyone, they are quite obvious to these interpreters. As the analysis of some excerpts showed, the interpreters also use more common and straightforward symbols, such as arrows, to indicate relations between two different ideas, or two or more related notions.

4 Conclusion

As was established in the section Introduction, there is a large body of literature on note-taking for consecutive interpreting. The literature is mostly concerned with taking notes in one of the major languages – such as English, French, or German. Despite that, these works can provide valuable guidelines for the note-taking process in consecutive interpreting. However, as there is no literature written on the topic of note-taking for consecutive interpreting in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, the purpose of this paper was to identify and analyze note-taking strategies that interpreters use when interpreting into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language.

Firstly, out of three interpreters, only one took notes in the target language. The others took notes in the source language. Taking notes in the source language might be seen as a way of allocating attention during the interpreting process. If too much attention is spent on translating the speech into target language, then it can take away from the process of active and attentive listening. Furthermore, the absence of literature on note-taking for consecutive interpreting in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian could be seen as a major contributor as well.

Secondly, despite all interpreters highlighting the importance of studying note-taking techniques, the analysis of qualitative questionnaires showed that their approach strays away from the prescribed guidelines and that it is highly individual. More than studying note-taking techniques, the interpreters underscored the role that practice and experience play in developing one's note-taking system.

These findings were further reflected in the analysis of notes taken by interpreters. Despite being individual and thus different, there was a common thread in all the instances considered. That

common thread was the notion of *the gist of the speech* or how to note down ideas. While all interpreters took a different approach to note the gist of what was being said, they all recognized similar ideas as being important parts of the speech.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the interpreters seemed to stray away from the prescribed guidelines for note-taking. They all seem to be following their own set of rules. At first, this seems to be in opposition to the earlier-expressed insistence on studying note-taking techniques. Upon further reflection, however, it is clear that their approach to the note-taking process is a consequence of a deep understanding of the process itself. For these interpreters, note-taking has become an automatic activity and, as such, it does not take up much of their mental capacity. Due to this process being automatic, they are able to focus solely on the speaker, and their notes look rather economical.

That being said, the aim of this paper was never to judge anyone's approach to the note-taking process or to prescribe any sort of guidelines. Rather, the purpose of this paper was only to identify and analyze different approaches to the note-taking process. Such an analysis ought to serve as a starting point for further considerations of the note-taking process, especially for novice interpreters.

In that vein, the most obvious limitation of the study in question is the sample size, as the notes of only three interpreters were analyzed. That being said, further research ought to include a larger sample size. Furthermore, further research could also be concerned with the notes taken by novice interpreters. Such an analysis would offer a valuable insight into the interpreting process through which novice interpreters go. These findings could be used to make improvements in the ways interpreting and note-taking skills are taught in the formal setting.

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Appendix A

1. Whereas some see note-taking in consecutive interpreting as a helping tool, others see it as a distraction. In your own words, what is the role of note-taking in consecutive interpreting? What are the advantages of note-taking?
2. Although the note-taking process is highly individual, beginner interpreters still have to study the note-taking process and standardized techniques. Do you find studying note-taking techniques helpful and, if so, in what way? How should beginner interpreters approach the process of taking notes?
3. In what language do you take your notes? What are the advantages of such an approach?
4. How to start taking notes? What is the most important thing to note at the very beginning?
5. In literature, one can often read that it is worth writing down ideas rather than actual words. What is your take on this? Could you describe the internal process of listening to the speaker and choosing what to note?
6. Notes also serve as a memory aid. How important is how your notes are organized for the retrieval of the source material? How would you describe how you organize your notes?
7. Although they can be distracting for beginner interpreters, symbols are immensely helpful. How important are symbols for you and how did you come up with your system of symbols? Do you always use the same symbols or do you come up with some new symbols for a given situation?
8. How do you end your notes? What is the most important thing to note down at the very end?
9. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to a beginner interpreter?

Appendix B

Dragi prijatelji, ladies and gentlemen, and organizers of the 2019 IEEE Student and Young Professional Congress thank you for inviting me to be a part of this great event. I have met many entrepreneurs and business leaders across Bosnia and Herzegovina, and their message is clear: “Building your own business is possible here.” Entrepreneurs and innovators like you are helping to change Bosnia and Herzegovina into a land of opportunity, a land of possibilities, a country that people will not want to leave and will happily return to. I commend your hard work, your vision, and your dedication in turning your business and your ideas into reality. At the U.S. Embassy, we’ve just launched a new program called BOLD – bh. omladinski lideri – that we see as a place for you to get the tools and skills you need to start a new venture and to be supported by other young entrepreneurs and mentors helping you turn your ideas into reality. Go to the website at bold.bh and find opportunities for workshops here in the country and fellowships in the United States under the economic development theme. Join BOLD today to be a part of a network of other people like you who want to help grow the economy in this country. We want to hear what you’re working on and support you and other innovators like you. In addition to BOLD, I also invite you to join us on Diaspora Invest, LinkedIn, and Embassy’s other social media platforms to help us build a broad and diverse coalition and community that facilitates investments and brings positive change to Bosnia and Herzegovina. I wish you all great success, beginning with this Congress.

Hvala svima.