

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

The use of a technique is always dependent upon the application of a certain number of principles. This is what we call the instructions. One need not follow the rules recommended in such instructions. Indeed the product, device or system for which they were devised may well work even if they are not observed, but will do so less efficiently. Furthermore, the simpler the instructions, the more likely the user is to follow them. The same applies to note-taking. A few very simple principles give this system its sound base and precision, and make using it straightforward. There are seven of these principles; in order they are:

- 1 Noting the idea and not the word
- 2 The rules of abbreviation
- 3 Links
- 4 Negation
- 5 Adding emphasis
- 6 Verticality
- 7 Shift

Some of these principles have already been explained by Jean Herbert in his *Interpreter's Handbook*¹.

1. Noting the idea rather than the word

Take any French text and give it to 10 excellent English translators. The result will be ten very well translated texts, but ten very different texts in as far as the actual words used are concerned. The fact that we have ten good translations, but ten different texts, shows that what is important is the translation of the idea and not the word. This is even truer of interpretation since the interpreter must produce a version of the text in another language immediately. He must be free of the often misleading constraints that words represent.

¹ Georg & Cie, Geneva, 1956.

It is through the analysis and notation of the ideas that the interpreter will avoid mistakes and a laboured delivery.

Example: Let us take the following, from French into English: „Il y a des fortes chances pour que...../ There is a very good chance that...” If we base our notation of this expression on the words, the key word is *chance*. If we base it on the idea, it is *probable*.

The notes will have to be read 20 minutes – even an hour² – after the idea was originally expressed. In the first example it would be very easy to make a mistake. Having noted *chance* the interpreter might, if the context allowed, render it „there is a chance that” or „by chance”. If on the other hand he noted *probable* the mistake cannot be made. The issue of style is also dealt with in the second example where one would automatically say (interpreting into English), „It is probable that”, or „it is likely that”, or „in all likelihood” whereas in the first example even if the interpreter had correctly recalled the idea that the word *chance* represented he/she will be a prisoner to that word and might easily produce a gallicism³.

Example: „We should try to live up to....”. It would be absurd to note the word „live” and it would greatly increase the risk of making a mistake. Although it would seem to be very different from the original it would be more appropriate to note in French, for example, „à la hauteur” (in English ‘to be up to’). This is the result of analysing the idea behind what is said and noting it idiomatically in the target language. It would be just as useful to note *be =*, representing *being equal to*, which could very easily be read back idiomatically in interpretation (ie. „à la hauteur in French”, „to be up to in English”).

Whenever taking notes the interpreter must concentrate on the major idea and how this can be noted clearly and simply (preferably in the target language, although this is not essential).

In the practical exercises in Part 3 of this book you will find a number of examples of noting the idea rather than the word. It is recommended that you examine these with particular care.

² this was indeed the case when Rozan wrote. Although nowadays 20 minutes is considered a long consecutive speech, his comments still apply.

³ being unduly influenced by the source language is, of course, not only a problem in French-English interpretation but in all interpretation.

2. The Rules of Abbreviation

A. ABBREVIATION OF WORDS

The rule of thumb is that unless a word is short (4-5 letters) the interpreter should note it in an abbreviated form.

If we have to note „specialized” it is more meaningful and reliable to note *sp^{ed}* than to write *spec.*

Other examples:

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.

Rule: *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.*

B. INDICATING GENDER AND TENSE

Having abbreviated a word or an idea (be it by the use of a symbol or a contraction of its component letters) it can also be very helpful to give an indication of gender⁴ and tense).

Thus in the expression: „I will come back to this a little later”, noting the future tense will render the words „*a little later*” superfluous. We will see below that „I speak” can be noted : *I* ”. Therefore we note : *I^{ll}* ”

⁴ Rozan was working from and into French. Gender is meaningless for those noting in English, however, the idea could be usefully adapted for use in, for example, the Slavic languages where nouns have gender.

The expression: „those mentioned”, must be noted : *rf^d*; because *rf* alone could be read back as „those which mention”.

Rule: To indicate gender⁵ and number we add ^e or ^s to the symbol or abbreviation. To indicate tense we add ^{ll} for the future and ^d for the past.

See also the examples in Part 3.

C. ABBREVIATING THE REGISTER

The expression „which have contributed to” is long. The word *help* is short. Wherever possible we must abbreviate by using a word which conveys the same meaning but is shorter.

Similarly, „...which are worth looking at” can be noted *int^g* (interesting).

„In order to arrive at some conclusions” can be noted *to end*.

„Taking into account the situation at the present time” can be noted *as sit^{on} now*.

Examine closely the abbreviations in Part 3.

3. Links

The part of any speech that is both the most important and the most difficult to note is the sequence of ideas and the links between them. (Jean Herbert)

An idea can be distorted completely if its relation to the previous idea is not clearly indicated. When taking notes then, we should never miss out the links. Indeed what we actually see is that if the links are noted well the rest of the idea can be summarised in just a few strokes of the pen.

A. Noting links becomes very simple if we use the key words that follow. (Over time this will become automatic.)

⁵ Again the ‘e’ represents the French feminine ending. Any letter can be used and this will depend on the languages involved.

- as, why* and that is because, this is the reason why, since, given the fact that, (in some instances) given that; to convey explanation.
- tho* although, despite the fact that; to convey opposition
- but* on the other hand, but, nevertheless, however; to convey limitations
- if* it is possible that, assuming that; to convey supposition.
- as to* as far as x is concerned, on the matter of; to convey reference
- tfe* therefore, one can then conclude; to convey conclusion.

The three symbols below (which can also be found in Part 2) are also extremely useful.

- = the same goes for, one might say the same of; to convey the idea of equality or correspondance
- ≠ on the other hand, contrary to; to convey the idea of difference or lack of correspondance
- in +* in addition, furthermore, if we also take account of; to convey the idea of additional precision.

B. Linking is not just about representing the idea; it will often impact on the very content of the speech. It is a question of noting quickly and without repetition the group of subject words and the group of complement words to which the idea relates. This problem can be solved quickly and easily by using the the recall arrow (Jean Herbert)

Examine carefully the examples of links in Part 3.

4. and 5. Negation and emphasis

Negation and emphasis are two essential elements of any speech and as such should be noted unambiguously (See Jean Herbert pp46-47).

1. NEGATION

Negation might be noted by means of a line running through a word or symbol.

Example:

If we use *OK* to signify „agree”, then „disagree” will be ~~*OK*~~. It is also possible to write the word *no* before the word to be negated (thus in our example we would note *no OK*). This second method is clearer and since „no” is a very short word using it is not a problem.

2. EMPHASIS

To emphasize a word we can underline it (twice if we are dealing with a superlative or absolute).

Example:

„(The study) is interesting” : *int^g*

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

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

In some cases the line may be replaced by a circumflex to avoid confusion arising from the use of verticality.

Alternatively emphasis can be noted with a dotted line.

Example:

„This report might be useful” : *useful*

The use of underlining to denote nuance allows us to qualify the word (or idea) underlined without noting the qualifier.

Example:

„important question” becomes : ?

„we should look at this very carefully” becomes : *look at*

„I would like to say in the strongest possible terms” becomes : *I*
say
„...an imperfect solution” becomes : *sol^m*.

6. VERTICALITY

It is the principles of Verticality and Shift (described in the next section) which form the backbone of the note-taking system described in this book.

Verticality means taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right. This method makes it possible to:

- a) group ideas logically, allowing a complete and immediate synthesis when we come to read back our notes,
- b) to do away with many links which would otherwise be essential to the clarity of the text.

A. STACKING

„Stacking⁶” consists of placing different elements of the text above or below one another.

„the report on western europe”

R^{ort}
W Eur.

„the report on western europe is an interesting document”

R^{ort} *int^s*
W Eur.

„Since the French, US and UK delegations....”

⁶ „Superposition” in French

„Since the French, US and UK delegations have suggested....”

Fre
As *US*
UK

Fre
As *US suggest^d*
UK

„The chapters of the report which deal with economic situation in Europe offer additional information and new statistics”

Ch^{rs} *info*
————— *give new*
Ec.Eur *stat^{ics}*

If (as we will see in part 2) the sign → is used to denote „offer” and the sign + to denote „additional” and „new” then our notes will look like this:

Ch^{rs} *info*
————— → +
Ec.Eur *stat^{ics}*

See the examples in the practical exercises in part 3 and study them carefully.

B. USING BRACKETS

Brackets are an important part of the verticality system. In every speech there will be certain elements, which are mentioned to clarify an idea or to highlight a particular point, but which are not integral to the speaker’s train of thought.

These parts of a speech should be noted in brackets, below the main element to which they refer.

Examples:

„...which leads to new investment, particularly in the transport sector”

→ + *inv^{ts}*
(*T^{ort}*)

„(We hear that our exports will suffer as a result of increases in factor costs), which will make them less competitive.”

(*so - comp^{ive}*)

See also the examples of the use of parentheses given in the practical exercises at the back.

To encourage a natural use of the verticality technique it is recommended that you use relatively large but narrow pieces of paper. This will allow you to note the maximum amount of text on one page whilst automatically bringing your notes back to the left hand side of the page.

7. SHIFT

Shift and Verticality are the fundamental principles underlying this note-taking system.

To explain Shift let us take an example: „Over the course of 1954, prices rose, although not to the same extent as income, thus the population’s net income increased.” Our notes will be as follows (the symbol \nearrow denotes increase):

54, prices \nearrow
*but ————— *no* = \nearrow *income**
*so ————— *Pop^{on}* \nearrow*

Word for word on the first line :
rose,

Over the course of 1954, prices

Word for word on the second line : although not to the same extent
as income,

Word for word on the third line : thus the population's net
income increased.

Having used Shift to give our notes a vertical layout on the page,
noting the links is almost enough to give us an accurate and full
version of the text.

*Shift means writing notes in the place on a lower line where they
would have appeared had the text on the line above been repeated.*

The examples below show how notes would be positioned
during interpretation, but have not been abbreviated.

„The report on the economic situation in Europe is a fine
document which discusses some interesting topics”:

R^{ort} *good*
Ec.Eur
discusses interesting topics

„to understand the program, one must”
to understand the program
one must

„The effectiveness of the Social and Economic Council's efforts
at solving.....”

effectiveness efforts Ecosoc
at solving.....

„Thus in the Report and the Study we find a theoretical and
practical analysis which will help in the adoption of.....”

tfe

(in R^{ort})
Study

theoretical

there is analysis practical

which will help in the adoption

of

See also examples of Shift in part 3.