

# The Application Study of Note-taking of Interpreting in College English Course

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**Abstract**—Based on some introductions about the interpretive note-taking, this essay tries to probe into the application study of note-taking to solve some existed problems in the College English Course. The author believes that the college English reform is far from satisfactory when it is only conducted on the reform of textbooks, media appliance improvement or changes of learning periods. The teacher should adopt new effective ways to make the students really involved in the class and actually get improved in their comprehensive English capacity.

**Index Terms**—the College English Course, interpretive note-taking, reform

## I. BACKGROUND

With the rapid development of globalization in every aspect in this modern world, more and more international conferences, meetings and trades are conducted every day. To make them smoother, interpreters of different fields are substantially and urgently wanted. English majors constitute the main body of this troop, while non-English majors are also increasing supplements for the need due to their solid cognitive knowledge about their major. Concerning the fact that more and more non-English major students have championed in Chinese National Interpreting Contest for college students, it is possible to cultivate more non-English majors to be qualified interpreters with special training. While it is not difficult for most interpreters and new hands to understand what they hear, it is not an easy job to remember all the important details. At this time, note-taking is one of the most important approaches to help. And this method is also of great value to listening for an average college English learner. So this essay is intended to probe into the application of note-taking approach of interpreting in college English course.

## II. INTRODUCTION OF NOTE-TAKING OF INTERPRETING

### A. Functions

Heping Liu (2006) states interpretation is the representation of the contents and emotions of one language into a new language intelligently. In this process, the interpreter should be empowered with perfect memory to convert the information from the source language to the target language. According to the interpretive theories, after listening to the linguistic symbols of the source language, the interpreter should analyze, synthesize, reason and connect the information and understand them with related theme knowledge and cognitive knowledge, and then represent them completely and correctly in the target language. However, human's memory is limited, and therefore note-taking is indispensable to fulfill an interpreting job successfully. Even we can say no one can conduct the full interpreting task without note-taking. Here are the three functions of note-taking summarized by Liu Hui(2008).

#### 1. To reduce the burden of memory

The short-term memory is limited, which can only remain for one minute or so. While the average speed of a person's speech is about 150 words per minute, and it usually lasts for several minutes no matter it is a speech for interpreting or a piece of listening material. It is easily lost if not processed in time. And it forms a great burden as well as a big challenge for an interpreter to deal with a large amount of information including figures, names of persons and places and technical terms. Based on these problems, key words and details are needed to be taken down to assist the representation with the target language or to help other task implementing with more spare energy.

#### 2. To lessen the mental pressure

The interpreter always works in a formal and stressing situation. Abnormal behaviors often occur at this time even if a good preparation is made. Even some easy points can escape occasionally. However, with the help of the note, the information of source language can be stored partly so that the interpreter can become a smooth link between the two parties even with great pressure. So note-taking can make a good guarantee for a successful interpretation with stress.

#### 3. Re-organize the language while taking notes

A qualified interpreter should faithfully convey the information, tone, speaking manners and standpoints of a speaker. In order to achieve that, the interpreter should sort out the framework and the logical relation in the piece of speech while listening and taking down notes. Based on that he can organize the thinking and get ready to interpret.

### B. Features

As the assistant aid of long-term and short-term memory, note-taking has the following features.

**Temporality.** The note-taking of interpreting is quite different from the notes in class. The former is the helper in interpreting while the later is used to review for the test or sth. Else in the later days. The note-taking in interpreting is a tool to human's memory when an interpreting is conducting. There is no need for interpreters to review them after the event, and perhaps they might be even illegible. They are valueless once the mission is completed. The new notes proceed with the new mission. From this sense, the note-taking in interpreting is on-the-spot and temporary.

**Logicity.** An ideal note is that the outline and framework of the source language is logically and clearly showed with fewer words but more lines. The words and lines would be meaningless without logical words or symbols. If the words and lines are leaves of a big tree, the logical symbols must be the trunk to link them together.

**Individuality.** An interpretive note is of great individuality. Its significance shows if the interpreter can understand it. And it doesn't matter even if anyone else is blind to it. Thus, there is no formula or mode to show a perfect note. Some prefer to take down notes in the source language to speed up and save time while others like the combination of the source language and the target language better for the reason that in this process part of encoding can be conducted. But more interpreters prefer to have a mixture note with symbols, abbreviations, lines and characters. In short, it is an effective note if it can remind and replenish. Even though there is no fixed standard to take notes, we still learn from the top interpreters to perfect our own.

### C. Distinctions

Shorthand is a means of rapid writing. Its main use was in business offices around the world. Shorthand writers or secretaries take dictation from the boss and type up the dictation into the letter format. This is a fast process between symbols and words. But in interpreting, time is limited for an interpreter to put what he or she has listened into symbols in written form and then turn them into another language orally. That means two more processes. So shorthand can not make a good note-taking form in interpreting occasions. The specific distinctions can be listed as follows.

1. Words and different kinds of symbols are employed in interpretive note-taking in order to lay the emphasis and it is easy to go through fast. When a speech is delivered, an interpreter should get the logic idea in shape even if it is not clearly stated. Sometimes summarizing interpreting is allowed according to the analysis based of the notes.

2. During the speech, the shorthand can not change easily simultaneously if the speaker makes some conversions about what he says previously. But an interpretive note can adjust on the contradictory places anytime to keep in accordance with the speaker's idea.

3. The principle of shorthand is the same no matter what kind of language it is or what methods are employed. Actually shorthand is taken according to the pronunciation and it is reread in the same original language but not a new one. While an interpretive note is endowed with clear and simple indication with great distinctions among different people, which is convenient for an interpreter to translate.

On the other hand, an interpretive note-taking is also quite different with a class note-taking in that the key points, contents which is not clearly stated in textbooks, even examples are required to be taken down in a class note for the future review. Whereas, interpretive notes are abstract symbols and words processed actively in the interpreter's mind with prominent emphases and clear logic. And it is a great help for the note-makers to review immediately and temporarily.

### D. Principle

If an interpretive student gets excessive training on note-taking at the beginning of their interpreting practice, it is likely for them to spend and depend too much on notes. However, the ultimate function of an interpretive note is always the beneficial supplement to the brain memory even if it is indispensable in a successful interpretation. Therefore, an interpreter should make it clear that the memory training should be prior to the note-taking training. In that case, they can always spare more energy on brain memory but not note-taking, and commit it to memory that notes are the remainders of key points but not the representation of the source language.

Chaolun Lin (2011), the filed interpreting expert, put forward the principles of interpreting notes as follows.

1. More verticals but fewer horizontals. The layout of interpreting notes should be vertical from the top to the bottom with a meaning group in one line on a A4 paper. And the width is about 1/3 or 1/4 of the sheet for the convenience of writing as opposed to usual habit of a full line horizontally.

2. More drawing but less writing. According to this principle, the notes should appear with more lines but fewer words or characters for the reason that it takes more time to note down symbols than the latter ones. Any word taking will influence the overall speed and efficiency of listening and producing. So simple and familiar symbols are greatly recommended. In this way can time be saved and more contents are ensured.

3. More lines for logical relations. Lines of different directions and shapes are employed to show contextual logic. For instance (---) is for "smooth development" "and (<math>\angle</math>) for "above all".

4. More meaning with fewer characters or letters. Key words are to be picked up here while listening and taken down in abbreviation. For example, "中" "北" can stand for "中国" and "北京" respectively. And it is the same in English, such as "poli" and "gov" are for "politics" and "government". With these fewer characters and letters and logical words mentioned above, the general meaning can be figured out.

5. Fast writing. It involves a fast starting and a fast recording. The former refers to the immediate action with the

appearance of the speaker's voice. The latter one means continuous writing once it starts unless the speaker pauses to make sure of no missing information.

6. Definite ending. A set symbol (such as o or #) is clearly marked at the end of each part of speech for the reason that notes are usually taken down for consecutive pages with a speech of several minutes. With this ending mark, the interpreter can find the starting point easily and exactly to avoid the mistake of the skipping or repeating translation.

### III. APPLICATION STUDY

#### A. *The Current Situation of College English Course*

College English Course is one of the indispensable parts of the higher education, and a compulsory course for non-English majors. The ultimate goal of this course is to equip the college students with more and more English capacity for their future working fields with the fast development of globalization. The Ministry of Education has performed several reforms to cultivate students' comprehensive mastery of English language. Some achievements have attained, among which the most prominent one is the "*The Curriculum Requirements for College English Course*" issued in July, 2007. The Curriculum Requirements clearly claims that college students should have training of three levels in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. The results of this reform, according to Xie Qingli.(2009), are incomparable to the former ones even though with some minor flaws such as too much reliance on multimedia teaching, stubborn teaching methods, or passive teaching modes. However, all these reforms are from the top to the bottom, and the writer of this essay finds as an average college English teacher, something can be conducted in everyday class to improve students' overall English capacity. And it is effective to change the passive class into a real student-oriented class. Therefore, the following attempt is the application of interpretive note-taking in the college English course.

#### B. *The Training of Note-taking in the College English Course*

##### 1. What to take

Interpretive notes are memory aid with key words in the form of simple words or symbols to incite memories. The basic meaning and logic of a speaker can be also recalled by an interpreter with the its help. Figures, proper nouns and technical terms are to be taken down.

The expression mode of figures almost the same no matter what kind of language it is. These words seem easy to memorize yet also forgettable, so they must be written down immediately. There is usually no need to translate proper nouns even with slight changes in pronunciation. The practice of taking down technical terms should be conducted when an interpreter is quite acquainted with the skill of note-taking. These terms includes directions, art works or medical terms. Besides, examples of the same category are also to be written down for the reduction of memory load.

The recording of the speaker's thought is the toughest task with great personal characteristics, according to Heping Liu (2011). The principle of notes, no matter what form it is either symbols, chart or words, is merely to activate the passive memory in the interpreter in order to have a better understanding.

##### 2. Systematical training steps

According to what discussed above, the training process can be conducted as the following steps.

##### a. Concept leading-in

A trainer should repeatedly lay emphasis on the assistant function of the notes and direct the learners to spare more energy on mind memory but not note-taking. It must take great amount of time to take down the full Chinese characters because of the composition and writing features. So are English words. That's why simplified symbols and lines of logic are introduced. Thus, time of decoding what the interpreter hears and encoding what he will interpret would be substantially saved. In this case a good habit of taking down notes with simple symbols can be formed at the beginning of the training.

##### b. Symbol infusion

It is not easy for a beginner to convert the way of taking he or she is already familiar with to a series of symbols and lines in a short term. So some commonly used and widely accepted symbols can be introduced at the very beginning. These symbols will not interfere in the individuality because of their scientificity and universality. These symbols usually include the following categories.

Abbreviation. This method is commonly used in English, such as ASAP (as soon as possible), Info (information), and e.g. (for example). It is of great benefit to be familiar with these abbreviations in note-taking.

Letter. "P" is for "politics, political". Q is "inflation" for it's like a rising balloon. "A" is for "agriculture" because this one is frequently used.

Mathematical symbols. "+" means "lots of, many, a good many of, a great deal of," etc.; (+2)(+3) means comparative degree or more and superlative degree or most respectively. Whereas, "—" stands for "few, little, lack, be in shortage of/ in short of" etc.

Punctuation. ":" shows different actions of "speaking" as "talk, say, announce, declare, marks" etc. "?" indicates "question, issue, problem". For example, "台湾问题": tw?. "☆" is for "important, best, brilliant, outstanding, exemplary", etc.

c. Bilingual recording. Which is better to take down notes in, the source language or the target language? This is a

question discussed among experts for a long time. Both of them have their own advantages. Much time can be saved if the source language is taken. However, more time will be spent in processing and reproducing. For this reason the use of the target language seems more favorable for it can save more time in interpreting to ensure a successful job. But this method is more applicable for the two languages of the same language family. As for Chinese and English, bilingual recording is suggested for the reason that Chinese is a parataxis language which the feature of one character with several meanings. But Chinese characters are difficult to write and it takes longer to be taken down. So English abbreviations are much better at this point. For example, UN is used instead of “联合国” and “.com” for “网络”. To conclude, it should be clearly stated that bilingual recording is encouraged at the beginning of learning for a learner.

#### d. Three-step repeating

The method of three-step repeating can be adopted in the class training. The first step is to play the recording continuously for students to take down according to their own habit and then try to interpret as complete and fluent as possible. The next step is to play the recording one sentence after another. The director is to analyze the key sentences, exchanges and perfects notes with students together. The last step is to re-listen to the recording once more and take down notes non-stop and interpret again. Students can have a deep impression on what they have practiced and have a quick reaction to the passage of the similar theme after repeated analysis and comparison training on notes. And they can form their own note-taking system and style by the frequent utilization of common symbols and logic lines.

#### e. Practice makes perfect

It's better to conduct note-training practice on a fixed time every day, such as from 17:00 to 17:30. An efficient note with quality can not be achieved in one day. The teacher should emphasize the significance of training for a long term. The students can compare their notes with what they have done every other month. Persistent training for consecutive three months can make a good note style, six months a skilled one. Only the enough accumulation at the beginning phrase can a quantitative leap achieve.

#### f. Comparison research

The teacher can compare students' notes with more skillful ones by some experts such as that of Chaolun Lin. By comparison students can improve their ability of identifying key words and phrases, and making out what information is necessary from the unnecessary time-consuming ones. The activity can be performed every half or a month, via which the distinction with an expert can be clear as well as the improvement is also evident step by step.

#### g. Breakthrough of difficult points

Interpreting is an extreme combined activity mentally and physically as well as a supreme skill acquired via thousands of testing. To overcome the difficult points for different people, the key is nothing but practice and practice. Here are two examples. The first difficulty is the proper names, such as “David Johnson”. The method is to combine memory with the note of key syllables or capitalized letter groups as “Dav Jo sn”. Another difficulty is the number. The common practice is to write according to the division of the source language, while at the same time mark the segregation in the target language. Take “9123456789” in English listening as example. It is written “9b123m45k789” (b: billion; m: million; th or k: thousand) while listening, and marked quickly meanwhile as “9b1'23m45'6k789” in a Chinese way from the end. And translation is “九十一亿，两千三百四十五万，六千七百八十九”. Of course, the only way to tackle these difficulties is only the repeated practice.

#### h. mock challenges

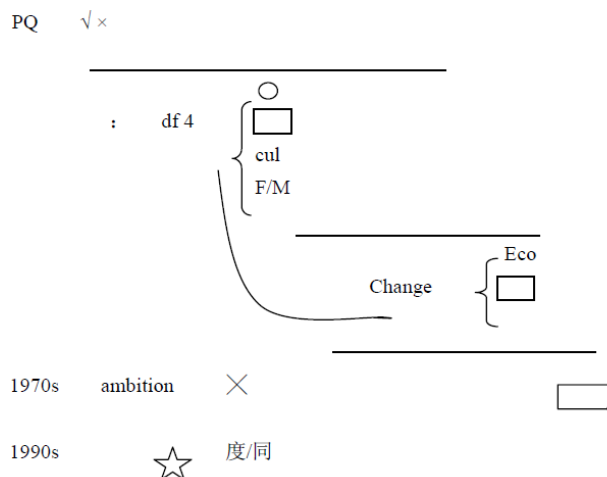
The improvement on the note-taking is greatly determined by the personal diligence. Yet, the stressing atmosphere in the classroom, although not that formal, also counts. It poses great challenges to students' bilingual knowledge and psychological bearing capacity. The pretended press conference or academic forum can be created in a classroom. In these mock conferences, students may not behave as well as they practice privately. However, they can become more familiar with the stress and challenges, through which they can develop a better psychological state for their future jobs. In the meanwhile students can easily assess their own performance in these situations. In this sense, the mock practice in the classroom can be the most challenging task to test a student's interpreting.

### 3. An sample

Here is an example of the first paragraph in unit one of “*College English Course for beginners (Book IV)*”

The original text: Personal qualities generally have either positive or negative connotations. Our attitudes toward such personal qualities are partly personal, partly social, and partly cultural. Some people also feel that gender plays a role, with some qualities being more positively valued by women than by men and vice versa. Such attitudes are not always static. They may be different with the change of economic and social circumstances. In some places, during the 1970s, ambition was seen to be bad, and then, during the harsh economic times of the early 1990s, a high value was placed on generosity and compassion.

After listening the students can have the note like this:



Common symbols	meaning	Common symbols	meaning	Common symbols	meaning
:	say, think, consider, attitude	☆	important; emphasis	df.	different; distinction
√	positive; favor; support	♀/F	lady; female; woman; girl	eco	economy; economic
×	negative; dislike; oppose	♂/M	man; male; boy	cul	culture
°ζ	many people	□	country;	□	area

The following retelling can be easily achieved by students according to the above notes: Personal qualities have positive and negative meanings. People’s opinions towards them are different in personal, social, cultural and gender aspects. And these opinions always change with economic and social situations. In the 1970s, ambition was seen to be bad in some places. And in the 1990s, people valued generosity and compassion highly.

By this kind of retelling, students can have a full understanding of the paragraph and reproduce it in their own words, which is a complete process of language input and output.

The practice can also be applied in oral lecture, in which one student addresses his own presentation, the rest take down notes, retell and interpret after a while. During this process, the efficiency of listening and oral capacity can be fully exercised.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The author finds the current teaching mode of teachers’ lecturing and students’ listening in most college English course can not achieve the goal set by “The Curriculum Requirements for College English Course” after years’ of teaching observation. So this essay discusses the theoretical basis and the specific application practice of interpretive note-taking into college English class. The new approach has worked to some degree. However, all the teaching methods and skills do not exist separately. They can accelerate each other. The note-taking must be of some benefit to make the students really participate in the class by involving their minds, mouths and pens to substantially enhance their overall English capacity.

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