Open letter requesting real-life experiences for use in research project

An invitation to share ideas on and examples of the use of anticipation in simultaneous interpretation.

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Dear fellow interpreters,

I am a Polish student of interpretation and translation currently studying in Vienna. I am writing my MA Thesis about anticipation strategy in simultaneous interpreting and I would be grateful for any interesting examples from active interpreters and theoreticians.

First, let me define what I mean by anticipation. To give you the best possible definition I will quote those theoreticians who made anticipation a major topic of their work. Wolfram Willss (1978:348) and Udo Jörg (MA Dissertation, 1995, University of Bradford) define anticipation as prediction and interpretation of source text units before their actual utterance. They add that it can be explained as a response to previously received and processed linguistic and extra-linguistic stimuli. Willss calls these stimuli "anticipation cues" or "A cues." A cues can be co-textual and extra-linguistic. I will come back to them in the course of my comments.

Roderick Jones gives examples as to what interpreters usually anticipate. At one point he compares anticipation to intuition, which is not the best comparison in my opinion. Anticipation is an on-going process of perception which aims at establishing the interpreter's position in the communicative context. In every act of communication, the participants try to grasp the logic of their interlocutor to be able to follow the flow of conversation. To do this, it is obvious they have to anticipate the eventual reaction of the interlocutor, the flow of thoughts and possible turns in the conversational strategy. Mostly, it is an unconscious process, that is why it so difficult to do practical research on the topic.

In the process of simultaneous interpreting, interpreters will note every smallest bit of information available to them and will use it in their rendition of the source text. I assume that sometimes there is indeed scarce information about a conference or meeting and thus it is necessary to build up the context ad hoc to be able to grasp the general thrust of what is going to come up. Interpreters, thus, anticipate the broad structure of the speech taking advantage of A cues, both extra-linguistic (the place of the meeting, the atmosphere in the conference room, the way the delegates behave etc.) and linguistic (morphemes, idioms, logical coherence of the speech, etc.). They have to have some background knowledge about the event, obviously, which will make it easier for them to form a general idea before they start interpreting.

My question to you: How do you prepare for an assignment? What information do you take in consideration when building up your context of a meeting or conference?
Sergio Viaggio (UN staff interpreter) describes anticipation as a typical top-down strategy, which means building up the context as the first step and then making assumptions about the linguistic content of the source text.

A good example of anticipation comes up in the German-to-English pair. I am sure you all know that in German the verb comes at the end of the sentence, which thus has to be reformulated in English. The interpreter cannot wait for the verb to come, as this would take too much time and would certainly mean losing other important information. Anticipation is in this case indispensable. On the basis of all the A cues the interpreter has at hand, all the logical connections he/she can draw, he/she tries to anticipate the verb. It can end with success or failure, but that is not what I want to deal with. What interests me the most, is the information that constitutes the basis of the interpreter's anticipation.

**My next question to you:** What do you usually take into consideration when you have to anticipate? In what situations have you found anticipation necessary or even indispensable?

It is also possible to anticipate some components of idiomatic speech segments, which are petrified and show almost no variation. When the first element of such a segment occurs, it is probable or even certain that the next one will follow. The interpreter makes this assumption and waits for this element to come. Roderick Jones gives the example of so-called pat phrases, which are typical formulations that occur frequently in international meetings (e.g. words of thanks, welcome, etc.). Could you perhaps send me some examples of such typical phrases that you always have in mind when interpreting, for example, in the European Parliament? Those formulations that are stored in your memory as ready-made chunks of language that you activate when the need arises (when you hear or notice certain A cues)?

Ghelly Chernov has formulated his own definition of anticipation, which he calls Probability Prediction and defines as "prediction of the verbal and semantic structure of the oral message in progress." He goes on by saying that anticipation or prediction is "the most essential psycholinguistic factor explaining the phenomenon of simultaneity in Simultaneous Interpreting." According to Jean-Francois LeNy, there are some "pre-existing" schemata, and during the discourse the listener (here the interpreter) anticipates the words to come as a function of these schemata. This might explain why grammatically incorrect sentences can be easily interpreted - the interpreter makes inferences concerning the missing information during discourse. Here anticipation is understood as a reparation strategy, used when it is necessary to make up for some unavailable data. Have you had a situation like this in your career when a delegate spoke incomprehensibly or the equipment was bad or there were some other obstacles to your understanding of the message? What did you do? How did you fill the blank space? On the basis of what information?

Sylvia Kalina and Kurt Kohn (META, XLI, 1996) write that because of this anticipation potential, the production and comprehension of Discourse 1 and the subsequent production of Discourse 2 are partly overlapping processes. While still attending to Discourse 1, listeners (here interpreters) are able to plan and even start their own production of Discourse 2. Have you ever done this?

Daniel Gile has formulated the notion of processing capacity, which can be roughly defined as some sort of mental energy that is available only in limited supply. For each operation - listening, comprehension and speaking - the interpreter needs some part of his processing capacity. The more he/she anticipates, the less of this energy he/she uses for the comprehension part of interpreting. Thus, anticipation turns out to be very practical and useful when the speech requires more processing capacity than the interpreter has at hand.

As you see, I have managed to gather quite a considerable amount of theoretical information. It would be, however, of great help to me if I had some practical information to analyze with the help
of these theories. I would be more than grateful for opinions and stories from conference life, any information that would help me collect examples of the necessary practical knowledge of the work you are performing. I know that anticipation is a strategy that is often employed unconsciously. But I am sure that it is frequent in your everyday work. Should you remember any specific examples or even general situations when you think you made use of the anticipation strategy, please pass the information on to me. It does not matter what language combinations you are working in. I am interested in all examples of the use of this strategy.

You may write to me in Polish, English or German. Please address your comments to:

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I thank you in advance for any replies.

Recommended citation format: