How to apply the method of Discourse Mapping to the introduction of interpretation?

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Presentation: How to apply the method of Discourse Mapping to the introduction of interpretation? By Susanne Niebe and Elisabeth Holm Hansen (DK)

Background

Within the Danish BA Programme in Sign Language and Interpretation, we initially introduce interpretation and the method of Discourse Mapping to the students towards the end of their 2nd term. At this point they have a basic knowledge of Danish Sign Language perception and production as well as some theoretical knowledge of Sign Language and only very little theoretical knowledge of interpretation.

Our pedagogical objective at this point is for the students to gain a fundamental understanding of the importance of
1) A thorough preparation as an essential part of the interpreting process. We provide them with a practical tool, which is the Discourse Mapping. This makes the preparation process visual and enables the students to make use of it in their post assignment evaluation.
2) Comprehending the source text. What does it mean, what is the speakers intent, which linguistic elements are central in the source text and how to translate in an equivalent manner to the target text?
3) Post assignment evaluation in order to revisit and evaluate their own work and process with the purpose of enabling transfer to their continuing studies.

We have adjusted the method to suit our purpose and restriction in time. Elizabeth Winston and Christine Monikowski (in Roy 2002) describe how the method optimally should be used for a long period of time to make the students grow confident with it. Since we only have 30 lessons of introduction in the 2nd term we have compressed it quite a bit and encourage the students to continue practicing and getting familiar with the method on their own outside of the classroom.

We have chosen two materials, which we use for the whole duration of the module. One source text in Danish Sign Language, and the other in spoken Danish. The two materials represent two different genres – one is factual and formal and the other is a narrative. Using two different genres enables us to address the diversity in genres that an interpreter in the field encounters. Now we will present how we do it systematically.

Practical implementation

As we mentioned earlier the first step concerns preparation. For experienced interpreters most of this process may be conducted more or less consciously. With the students, we make this mental preparation visible as we draw a mind map with the subject written in the center and then encourage the students to contribute by sharing their anticipations about the subject. For example: What kind of associations does the title create, do they have any prior knowledge on the topic or about the speaker, who could the intended receiver be, which questions arise from the title, what do they have to look up to answer these questions? All together the goal is to enable the students to reflect on what the Skopos could be in the present situation (Schjoldager 2008).

Within the BA Programme we gradually prepare the students to make use of various models of analysis. For example, “Translation oriented text analysis” (Schjoldager 2008) which includes reflecting on extratextual factors such as speaker, setting etc. Drawing a mind map functions as a starting point.
Then we move on to the second step, which is to comprehend the source text. At this point theory on Danish Sign Language and grammar is the main foundation when the source text is Danish Sign Language. When the source language is spoken Danish which is first language (L1) to most of the students, the foundation of understanding is more practical and we draw upon their experiences with the spoken language. At a later point in their studies, we present them with a theoretical framework on spoken Danish as well. We have chosen this approach due to the time limitations. In order to extract the content in the source text we introduce the students to a model presented by Sandra Gish (1996) that explains the different content levels within a text. From the overall topic to the minor details. The students create a sequential map of the source text, in which they extract the main objectives and larger units of the content. We do this in order to enable them to retell the text in the source language. This intra lingual activity is the first step towards interpreting.

After having done the sequential map and after retelling the text, the students have to consider different linguistic features in both languages. First, the linguistic features in the source language and then finally the equivalent linguistic features in the target language. Afterwards they move on to inter lingual activities that entails retelling the texts in either Danish Sign Language or spoken Danish.

Having completed these initial steps the students are now ready to complete a consecutive interpretation of the text in either Danish Sign Language or spoken Danish.

During the whole process, we emphasize the importance of post assignment evaluation. In between the lessons, we ask the students to reflect on their work and the process and each lesson begins with a follow-up in order to transfer what they have learned to the next steps of the process. After having completed their first consecutive interpretation, we ask the students to consider the different efforts. At this stage, we incorporate Daniel Giles (2009) Effort Model for consecutive interpretation in order to highlight the different efforts used. In regards to the analysis effort and notetaking effort, they are encouraged to revisit their sequential map and consider for example the length of the sequences. In addition, they must consider the memory effort and the constraints they may have met during the interpretation. Finally, they consider the strain they experienced in the production effort. For example considering how the initial mapping of linguistic features in the target language helped to relieve this strain.

As mentioned earlier this process of Discourse Mapping takes place in the end of the 2nd term, but we continue to incorporate/refer to the method in the following terms – in particular the first step concerning preparation, as we have seen how this very important step is often overlooked and taken upon lightly.

We have presented how we use the method when teaching interpreting students and now we will move on to why this might be relevant to professional Sign Language interpreters as well.

What’s in it for me?
Jemina Napier (2006) has stated that the method is relevant to experienced interpreters as well as novice learners and after having worked with it in the BA Programme we have to agree with her. Professional Sign Language interpreters will typically go through the processes presented above however it might be less systematic. Before an assignment, an interpreter most likely creates a mental mind map of some sort.
Discourse Mapping provides a systematic, visible method that makes you more aware of the preparation you do before an interpreting assignment. In addition, it enables you to reflect on the assignment afterwards in order to transfer your new experiences to the next similar assignment, as you can look at the preparation you did beforehand and consider relevance and lacks. We also find it beneficial to incorporate Daniel Giles Effort Model (2009) in the post assignment evaluation in particular the analysis, memory and production efforts. “Discourse maps can be used to both prepare for and reflect on interpreting assignments, in a cycle of continuous learning” (Napier ed. 2006:91). Here Jemina Napier encompasses the hermeneutical process which we have tried to illustrate below:

To sum up the main points: We believe that working more consciously with preparation and post assignment evaluation will be beneficial to the outcome:

- Giving a higher priority to preparation and post assignment evaluation makes the importance of these elements within the interpreting processes become more visible.
- The method allows the interpreter to be specific when analyzing and reflecting on an assignment and thereby it forms the basis of qualified adjustments and relevant decisions.
- It offers a common professional language to discuss topics such as preparation and post assignment evaluation among professionals but also with the students, we encounter in practicum.
In conclusion, we see great potential in incorporating the method not only with interpreting students, but also in the professional field where it might contribute to continued professional development.

References:
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