

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC & ĐÀO TẠO  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ HÀ NỘI  
KHOA TIẾNG ANH**

**PHẠM HỒNG HẠNH**

**LUẬN VĂN TỐT NGHIỆP**  
**KỸ NĂNG GHI NHANH KHI DỊCH ĐUỔI**  
**CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH**

**NGƯỜI HƯỚNG DẪN LUẬN VĂN:  
PHẠM NGỌC THẠCH- B.A.**

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ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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PHAM HONG HANH

# GRADUATION PAPER

NOTE-TAKING IN CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

ENGLISH

SUPERVISOR:

PHAM NGOC THACH- B.A.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background to the Thesis**

Interpreting, like playing chess, is a game of problem solving, evaluation, critical thinking, intuition and forecasting. Every game is different and each game is a challenge, which requires interpreters, to unceasingly develop knowledge and experience. It is disciplined study and repeated practice of many techniques and skills that bring victory to the interpreter. Apart from basic requirements of language mastery and culture sensitivity, there are quite a few skills that need to be acquired for successful interpreting. One of them is note-taking skill.

Taking notes simply means quickly writing down information as a record or reminder. However, note-taking might be compared with a move in chess; to understand how to make the move is quite easy, but to master it in order to create a winning combination of the move and the others is a hard and demanding job.

Note-taking in consecutive interpreting is a skill to be learned. There is no abstract theory about the skill, but there are a wide range of practical principles laid down by succeeding generations of consecutive interpreters over time. These principles have been made of both empirical studies digging deep into nearly every aspect of the skill and research books elaborating main theoretical approaches to it. By no means exhaustive, the ambition of this thesis is only to actively, effectively and directly contribute to the further research, development and implementation of note-taking in consecutive interpreting. The thesis can be seen as an overall picture that helps student interpreters to have a general view of fundamental things about the skill and also to explore “the shape” of the note-taking in other novices’ points of view.

This thesis is a methodical investigation into the subject of note-taking in consecutive interpreting; a focused and systematic request for information that may go beyond generally available knowledge to acquire more in-depth analysis and elucidatory comment on the topic. It is a product of a long searching process with a series of activities unfolding over time. It involves a number of things such as the collection of data, the evaluation of results, and so on.

However, this thesis should not be considered a “millennium project” for the fact that as the writer, I have not been exposed to any practical experience. My awareness of note-taking skill has been mainly gained through printed and electronic reference material as well as the suggestions and recommendations by interpreting teachers at the university.

The intended audience will be students of foreign language universities and colleges who may wish to read a detailed depiction of some background knowledge about note-taking skill and may be eager to understand the viewpoints of other fellow students on the skill. Hence, first of all, this paper will hopefully provide them with an overview of note-taking. Secondly, it can also be of some use to those who wish to become interpreters in the future.

## **1.2. Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized as follows. It is divided into two different sections. The first section is for literature review. The purpose of literature review is to analyze critically a segment of relevant published works through classification and comparison of previous research studies and theoretical articles. It combines both summary and synthesis. And it traces back the academic developments and intellectual progression in the field. For its importance, the literature review deserves the whole chapter 2 for its representation.

The second section is all about an empirical study drawing on the findings from a survey. This section is split into three chapters. Methods and Procedures of the survey will be discussed in chapter 3. Survey Results and Discussions will appear in chapter 4. Suggestions for further study along with Conclusion will be revealed in the last chapter- chapter 5.

The ideas developed in this thesis will not be of purely theoretical interest. They are expected to have practical impact on the way note-taking skill for consecutive interpreting is learnt and practised by interpreting students. For that reason, the thesis will be much of interest to the readers.



## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1. Introduction

Literature review is an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers but not simply a new interpretation of old material. Therefore, this chapter is intended not only to demonstrate relevant information on note-taking in consecutive interpreting but also to provide informed evaluation of the literature. This chapter explains various aspects related to the topic of note-taking in succession ranging from panorama view to close-up view. It is started with a brief description of interpreting, interpreting classification, then a focus on consecutive interpreting and the rest of the chapter completely zooms in note-taking skill.

### 2.2. Interpreting

In order to give a clear definition of interpreting, it is useful to relate it to another activity for which interpreting is often mistaken- translation. A straightforward explanation of translation given by Catford (1965, p.11) can help even non-professionals have an overall picture of what translation is. He simply described translation as an “*operation performed on languages, a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another*”. Another definition of translation put forward by Edmond Cary (1985, p. 85), as cited in Lederer, 2003, on page 7, has received the approval from many linguistic theorists.

*Translation is a process which attempts to establish equivalents between two texts expressed in two different languages. These equivalents are, by definition, always dependent on the nature of the two texts, on their objectives, on the relationship between the two cultures involved and their moral, intellectual and emotional conditions.*

*What is Interpreting?* To arrive at a convincing answer to this question, Roderick Jones, a European Union senior conference interpreter, did not set up a “standard” definition of

interpreting. He only stated that interpreting is “*immediate oral translation*” (2002, p.3). Interpreting, just like translation, is fundamentally the art of re-expressing. The interpreter listens to a speaker in one language, gets the content of what is being said, and then immediately verbally re-expresses his or her understanding of the meaning in another language.

From other angle, Cynthia Roy (2000, p.3) applied the linguistic approaches of discourse analysis to the analytical study of interpreting in her book entitled *Interpreting as a discourse process*. She said, “*Interpreting for people who do not speak a common language is a linguistic and social act of communication*”. That means interpreting is a process of conversational exchanges between two primary speakers and through a person called interpreter who has knowledge and understanding of the entire communicative situation, including fluency in languages, competence in appropriate usage within each language, and in managing the cross-cultural flow of talk.

It is obvious that both interpreting and translation “...*consist of understanding an original text, deverbalizing its linguistic form and then expressing in another language [with] the ideas grasped and emotion felt...*” (Marianne Lederer, 2003, p.8), however, while translation refers to converting a written text from one language into another, interpreting refers to orally converting one spoken language into another.

Both interpreters and translators are required to have a good command of the native language and at least a foreign language, analytical ability, high concentration, subject matter knowledge and sensitivity to cultural issues. However, there are different sets of indispensable skills for each. While a translator must also be sharp writer and skilled editor, it is important for an interpreter to have extraordinary listening abilities, exceptionally good memory aided by good note-taking techniques and excellent public speaking skills. In addition, interpreters must have intellectual capacity to immediately transform idioms, colloquialisms and other culturally specific references into similar

statements that the target audience can understand without the using dictionaries and supplemental reference materials. Above all, unlike translators, interpreters have to deal with oral message under time constraints without the opportunity of revising, improving or polishing their interpretation. For these reasons, many people who see interpreters at work think that being an interpreter is extremely demanding and challenging.

### **2.3. Consecutive Interpreting**

As far as the classification of interpreting is concerned, most people who get involved into linguistic study, would give their attention to what is meant by consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting. In fact, consecutive and simultaneous are the two sub-types of interpreting, based on the interpreting mode used by the interpreter: simultaneous, which occurs nearly at the same time as the original utterance of a speech; consecutive, which follows a chunk of speech varying in length from very few sentences to an entire speech lasting several minutes.

A more detailed picture of differences between the two main modes of interpreting can be seen clearly with the definition given by Jones (2002, p.5- 6). He stated that a consecutive interpreter *“listens to the totality of a speaker’s comments, or at least a significant passage, and then reconstitutes the speech with the help of notes taken while listening; the interpreter is thus speaking consecutively to the original speaker, hence the name”*. And he explained the second mode as follows: *“Here the interpreter listens to the beginning of the speaker’s comments then begins interpreting while the speech continues, carrying on throughout the speech, to finish almost at the same time as the original. The interpreter is thus speaking simultaneously to the original, hence again the name”*.

From the above brief description, it is clear that the primary and significant difference between consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting is the time gap between the delivery of the speaker’s message and the beginning of the interpretation. However,

whether working consecutively or simultaneously, the interpreter first has to actively listen to the speaker, properly understand and logically analyze what is being said and then restructure the speech in an appropriate equivalent in a different language.

Wei HeZhong cited on page 1, in the article- *Memory Training in Interpreting* that Daniel Gile (1992, 1995) views consecutive interpreting as a process consisting of two separable phases. The first phase is listening during which the interpreter listens to the source-language speech and takes notes; the second phase is reformulating, during which the interpreter reproduce a target- language speech from memory and from notes.

*Phase One- Listening Phase:*

$$CI = L \text{ (listening)} + M \text{ (short-term memory)} + N \text{ (note-taking)}$$

In this phase, the interpreter is required to listen attentively, selectively and actively to the original speech, then the interpreter's short-term memory is used to store the messages that have been heard to put them either in memory or in notes or both. It is easy to recognize that note-taking is an undivided part of the first phase.

*Phase Two- Reformulation Phase:*

$$CI = R \text{ (remember)} + R \text{ (read the notes)} + P \text{ (produce the speech in the target language)}$$

In the second phase, the interpreter retrieves messages from their memory as well as from the notes, and produces the speech in the target language.

Consecutive interpreters are said to produce a more accurate and equivalent interpretation than simultaneous colleagues because "*the interpreter does not need to split their attention between receiving the message, and monitoring their output, as is required in simultaneous, they can devote more of their processing to analysis and reformulation of the text*" (Santiago, 2004, p.5). Moreover, because consecutive interpreters have time to take notes which serves as a very effective tool of the interpreters. As introduced in the

first chapter, the main focus of the thesis is on the skill of note-taking in consecutive interpreting.

#### **2.4. Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting**

During the interpretation process, both memory and notes should be cultivated. While memory is of crucial to interpreters, notes can be of certain support.

The importance of note-taking in consecutive interpreting had not been well recognized until Rozan laid down fundamental principles of note-taking in 1956 and Seleskovitch solidified the benefits of the skill in 1975. Experience has shown that the consecutive interpretation of speeches that are longer than two or three minutes requires at least some form of note-taking, of course, this also depends on the interpreter's personal need, expertise and familiarity with the subject.

Note taking has been proved to be very useful for the interpreter working consecutively. Firstly, notes improve concentration; prevent distraction, thus facilitating the reception and analysis of the speech. Secondly, notes help the interpreter relieve the memory. Although the interpreter may have understood the ideas of a speech, he or she cannot remember every point in the speech because one characteristic of short-term memory is that it only keeps information for a limited amount of time, cognitive scientists also show that for nearly all speakers of all languages, list retention peaks at around seven items, plus or minus two. By recording the specific details and data such as proper names, numbers, figures, lists of things, or specialized terms, technical expressions, etc, notes release the interpreter from bearing the whole thing in mind. Thirdly, as mnemonic, notes activate the memory of the interpreter with cues or signals that call up the information in the speech. With notes, the main ideas, the secondary elements and the links among them become clear and easier for the interpreter to visualize. Finally, notes can also be used to highlight missing details, inconsistencies within the speech and anything implausible that

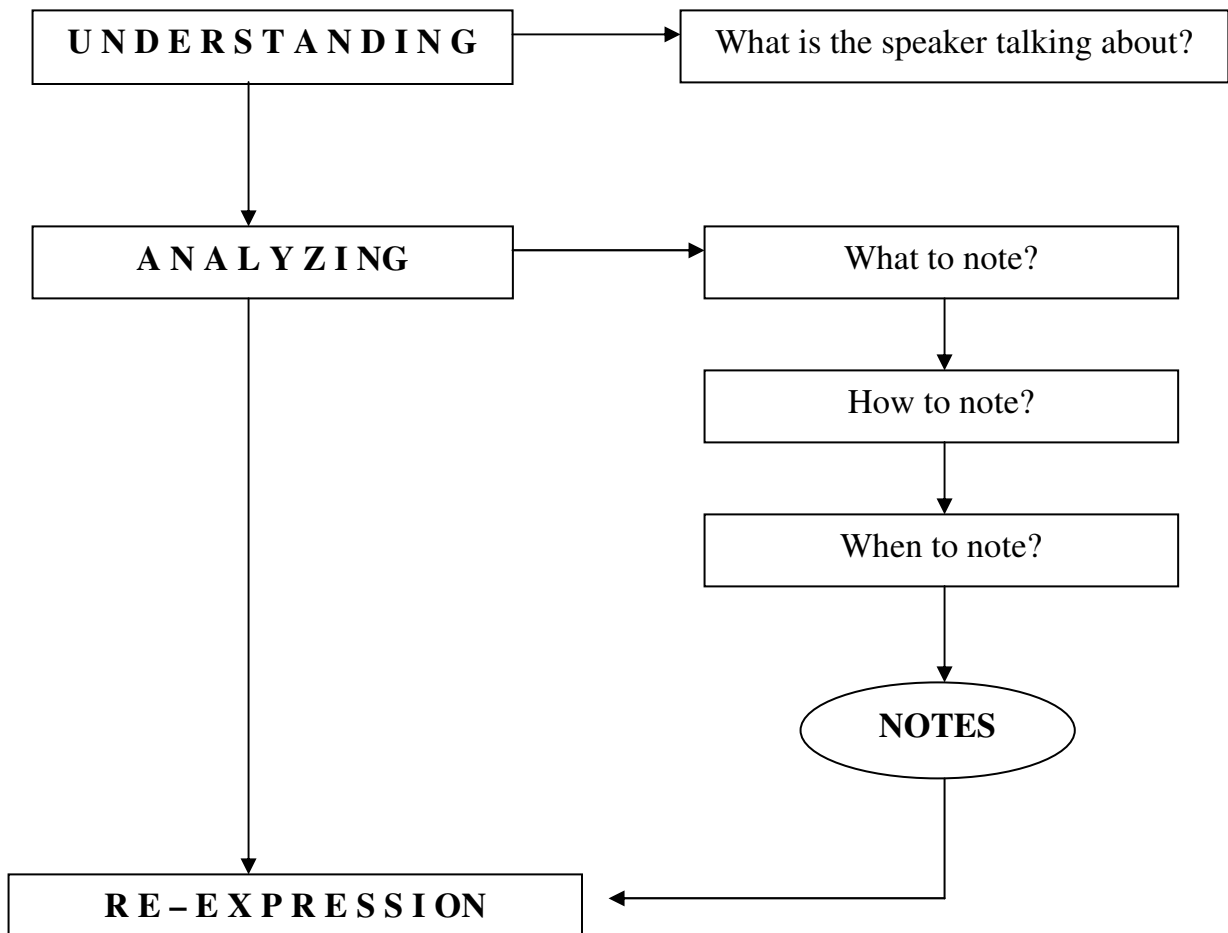
needs attention latter. Conspicuously, the skill of note-taking is very helpful to interpreters, the content and structure of a speech are reflected in notes, and the notes in turn are used as a path to verbalize the speech.

Thus notes play an important part in consecutive interpreting. However, taking proper notes needs a lot of practice, and the gap between the “theory of note-taking” and “actual notes” can be very large. In order to bridge the gap, first, an understanding of note-taking process is required.

### **2.5. Note-taking Process in Consecutive Interpreting**

According to Jones (2002, p.39), note-taking is part of the whole process of consecutive interpreting including: understanding, analysis and re-expression, and if these activities “*are not done correctly, the best notes in the world will not make a good interpreter*”. It can be seen from the diagram below (figure 1) that if the speech has not been fully understood, all efforts to take notes are just in vain. In this case, the interpreter may only write down individual words which are put together forming a meaningless chunk of information. And if note-taking is separated from the activity of analyzing the speech, the interpreter may be lost in the information overload. The interpreter cannot identify what are the main ideas, what are the secondary elements, and what are the connections between them in order to decide what should be noted and what should not. Inevitably the notes become nothing more than a mess, which will definitely push the interpreter in a very difficult situation later. When looking back notes, the interpreter cannot have a clear review of the speech content. And this obviously goes against one of the basic functions of notes.

The process of note-taking is not a simple one. In order to make notes become an aid to enhance consecutive interpreting, the interpreter must answer the three basic questions as follows: (i) what to note; (ii) how to note; and (iii) when to note.



**Figure 1.** Connection between the process of consecutive interpreting and that of note-taking

### 2.6. What to Note

Notes taken by students have shown that they tend to stick to words. They hesitate to free themselves to concentrate on meaning by throwing away the lexical form like words and structures etc. They try to retain each word of the source utterance, consequently, their short-term memory will be quickly overloaded with individual lexical items, which may not even form a meaningful sentence. Moreover, their attention will be wasted on finding

equivalent lexical items in the target language rather than the meaning of incoming message. Clearly, these students may not have recognized that things to be noted are logically related to “the mental analysis of the speech”. Notes are not expected to be complete or organized exactly the same way as in the original speech. Instead they are expected to provide the cues necessary to remember the information in the speech. Notes can be compared to the skeleton outline of the speech shaped with main ideas and the links between them.

### **2.6.1. Main Ideas**

The first thing to be noted should be **main ideas**. For the fact that the writing speed is always slower than speaking speed, it is impossible for the interpreter to write down everything spoken by the speaker. The interpreter is required to have the ability to identify, select and retain important ideas but omit anything which is not relevant to the understanding of the original speech. Furthermore, by recording the main ideas in notes, the interpreter easily traces back the structure of the speech; hardly misses out important ideas; and always keeps fidelity to the original content.

### **2.6.2. The Links**

The second thing the interpreter should consider to take notes is **the links between ideas**. The connections between individual ideas determine the overall meaning of the speech. Thus it is necessary for the interpreter to realize and render the such links. The ways in which ideas may be linked together are (i) the logical consequence which is expressed clearly with words such as *consequently*, *as a result*, *accordingly* or *therefore*; (ii) the logical cause which can be recognized with the words *because*, *due to*, *as*, or *since*; and (iii) opposition which often goes with *but*, *yet*, *however* or *nevertheless* (Jones, 2002, p.28-29). Hardly does the interpreter get confused, if he or she notes links systematically. It is just liken to the act of marking road for each turn. Thanks to logical connections, the



interpreter can follow every movement and direction change made by the speaker without any difficulty.

### **2.6.3. Noncontextualized Information**

**Numbers, proper names, lists of things and terminologies** are some in the group of the elements that cannot be recalled on the basis of analytical and logical thinking in a given context. If the interpreter wants to remember these elements, he or she has no choice but keeps repeating them over and over again. Clearly this is not a preferable manner because if the interpreter's mind is too preoccupied with rehearsing such "noncontextualized information", in all likelihood, the interpreter will be distracted from listening comprehension and target language production. In addition, unlike "main ideas" which have strongly impressed themselves on the interpreter's mind in the form of either specific images or general concepts and tightly linked with each other, most of these elements are not tagged with any kind of mental images and they independently stand on their own. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that numbers, proper names, lists of things and terminologies most deserve to be the priority of the interpreter's note-taking.

### **2.6.4. Verb Tenses**

According to Jones, it is also important to note down **tenses of verbs**. That means "*when noting verbs, interpreters should thus take care to note the tense correctly, and if appropriate the mode, in particular conditional*" (p.42). The modes and tenses of verbs have decisive influence on the meaning of a sentence.

To sum up, in the notes of consecutive interpreter, at least main ideas and the links between them must appear in order to help the interpreter visualize the structure of the speech. Besides, to relieve the memory, the interpreter should also note down "noncontextualized elements" including numbers, proper names, lists of things and terminologies, etc. Other things like tenses of verbs and points of view of the speaker may

be or may not be noted down, depending on the decision made by each individual interpreter under certain circumstances. Some interpreters prefer the notes with very little detail while others prefer taking advantage of the notes with as much detail as possible. Both attitudes are justifiable provided that notes are not allowed to be counterproductive, harming the interpreter's listening comprehension and target language production.

## **2.7. How to Note**

In order to take notes effectively, the most important thing the interpreter must do is to decide what to note. However, according to experienced interpreters, how to note is also very important. Conspicuously, notes that are clearly separated and logically organized help the interpreter avoid all confusion when reading back notes. And notes using abbreviations and symbols are very helpful in activating the most information with the least effort.

### **2.7.1. Abbreviations and Symbols**

First and foremost, notes should be as economical as possible in order to save the interpreter's effort on writing. In this case, abbreviations and symbols appear to be efficient tools. So far, several attempts have been made to create complete system of abbreviations and symbols used in notes for consecutive interpreting. The first of these is Becker system. Becker was a conference interpreter and interpreter trainer and he created special cues for note-taking. His *Notizenschrift and Symbolschrift* offers many tips for inventing symbols and abbreviations. The other note-taking system was created by Matyssek who devised the similar system with sophisticated rules so that complex symbols could be derived from basic one in his *Sprachunabhängige Notation*. However both note-taking systems can never be as effective as the one intended to supplement the memory of consecutive interpreter for the reason that they are used to encode all information in systematic way for wider use not just for interpreters only (Láng, n.d).

The use of symbols and abbreviations should be automatic because any new one created in the process of interpreting may require so much attention. It is not advisable for the interpreter to be distracted from his work by whatever causes. Only by developing his own system of abbreviations and symbols beforehand, can the interpreter make them come to his pen automatically.

### **2.7.1.1. Abbreviations**

Abbreviations help the interpreter take notes quickly, saving time spent on other activities in the process of interpreting. The abbreviations used in the notes for consecutive interpreting are not wholly identical to those used in the student's notes or secretary's reminders. These abbreviations must be unequivocal and unambiguous enough for the interpreter to understand immediately when reading back notes because under time pressure the interpreter has no chance to reconsider the meaning of abbreviations. An abbreviation may be meaningless to others, but must be meaningful to the interpreter using it.

There are many principles and rules for the use of abbreviations. However the most important one is that abbreviations must be consistent, if an interpreter has chosen "*pop*" standing for "*popular*" then he should find another abbreviation for "*population*", for example, "*pop<sup>on</sup>*". The following suggestions about creating abbreviations are based on the truth that the fewer strokes are written; the more time can be saved.

- *Write what is heard:* The interpreter can write a word by recording its sound only.

For example: high- *hi*; know- *no*; free- *fre*; fee- *fe*; night- *nite*; etc.

- *Drop medial vowels:*

For example: build- *bld*; legal- *lgl*; bulletin- *bltn*; save- *sv*; budget- *bjt*; etc.

- *Write initial and final vowels:*

For example: office- *ofs*; easy- *ez*; follow- *flo*; value- *vlu*; open- *opn*; etc.

The rules of abbreviations set up by Rozan are classified into three categories: (i) abbreviation of words; (ii) abbreviation to indicate verb tenses and (iii) abbreviating the register.

- According to the first rule, *“unless a word is short (4-5 letters), the interpreter should note it in an abbreviated form”* and *“write some of the first and last letters rather than trying to write as many letters as possible from the start onwards”* (Rozan, n.d). For example, **Prod.** could be read as “production”, “producer”, “product” or “productivity” while **Pr<sup>on</sup>**, **Pr<sup>er</sup>**, **Pr<sup>ct</sup>**, **Pr<sup>vity</sup>** are unambiguous.

- The second rule reads that *“to indicate tense we add <sup>ll</sup> for the future and <sup>d</sup> for the past”* (Rozan, n.d.)

- The third one is applied to abbreviate expressions which are too long, for example, “In order to arrive at some conclusion” can be noted **“to end”**; or “Taking into account the situation at the present time” can be noted **“as sit<sup>on</sup> now”**; “with the intention of/ with the purpose of” can be noted **“to”**. The rule here is *“wherever possible we must abbreviate by using a word which conveys the same meaning but is much shorter”* (Rozan, n.d.)

The presentation of the table below is not aimed at systematically displaying an ambitious collection of abbreviations. In the table, there are only some abbreviations which have been amassed through both personal experience and practical observation.

1. kilometre	<i>km</i>	1. labour	<i>lbr</i>	1. especially	<i>esp.</i>
2. kilowatt	<i>kw</i>	2. people	<i>pp</i>	2. approximately	<i>appr.</i>
3. kilowatt hour	<i>kwh</i>	3. society	<i>soc.</i>	3. according	<i>acc.</i>
4. centimetre	<i>cm</i>	4. economy	<i>eco.</i>	4. abbreviation	<i>abbr.</i>
5. millimetre	<i>mm</i>	5. monetary	<i>mon</i>	5. example	<i>eg</i>
6. number	<i>no</i>	6. politics	<i>pol</i>	6. television	<i>tv</i>
7. figure	<i>fig.</i>	7. popular	<i>pop</i>	7. dictionary	<i>dic</i>
8. maximum	<i>max</i>	8. export	<i>exp</i>	8. computer	<i>pc</i>
9. minimum	<i>mini</i>	9. import	<i>imp</i>	9. technology	<i>tech</i>
10. hundred	<i>h</i>	10. professional	<i>pro</i>	10. electricity	<i>elec</i>
11. million	<i>mil</i>	11. production	<i>prod</i>	11. definition	<i>def.</i>
12. thousand	<i>thou</i>	12. department	<i>dep</i>	12. laboratory	<i>lab</i>
13. mathematic	<i>math</i>	13. bureau	<i>bu.</i>	13. recreation	<i>rec</i>
14. literature	<i>lit.</i>	14. agriculture	<i>agr</i>	14. university	<i>uni.</i>
15. chemistry	<i>chem</i>	15. industry	<i>indus</i>	15. individual	<i>indiv</i>
16. physics	<i>phys</i>	16. corporation	<i>corp.</i>	16. calculation	<i>cal</i>
17. hour	<i>hr</i>	17. company	<i>com</i>	17. problem	<i>prob</i>
18. Tuesday	<i>Tue.</i>	18. commerce	<i>comm</i>	18. influenza	<i>flu</i>
19. week	<i>wk</i>	19. information	<i>info</i>	19. system	<i>sys</i>
20. year	<i>yr</i>	20. telecommunication	<i>telecom</i>	20. president	<i>pres</i>
21. century	<i>cen</i>	21. elevated railroad	<i>el</i>	21. professor	<i>prof.</i>

**Table 1.** List of Abbreviations in Common Use

Abbreviation of common international organization should be remembered by the interpreter. The working environment of the interpreter is varied, and he or she mostly often finds himself or herself at conferences on a wide range of topics with many representatives coming from different international and/ or local organizations, agencies and corporations, etc. It is possible to say that the interpreter must have some background knowledge about those groups. It is the duty of the interpreter to remember their names in abbreviation as part of the required knowledge. The following table contains some common names in abbreviation.

World Bank	WB
European Union	EU
Asian Development Bank	ADB
World Trade Organization	WTO
World Health Organization	WHO
International Monetary Fund	IMF
United Nations Children's Fund	UNICEF
North Atlantic Treaty Organization	NATO
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation	APEC
International Atomic Energy Agency	IAEA
Association of Southeast Asia Nations	ASEAN
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP
International Criminal Police Organization	INTERPOL
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO

**Table 2.** Lists of Names of International Organizations and Agencies in Abrrivation









Ministry of Trade	MOTD
Ministry of Justice	MOJ
Ministry of Finance	MOF
Ministry of Industry	MOI
Ministry of Fisheries	MOF
Ministry of Construction	MOC
Ministry of Home Affairs	MOHA
Ministry of Public Health	MOPH
Ministry of Transportation	MOT
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MOFA
Ministry of National Defense	MOND
Ministry of National Security	MONS
Ministry of Information and Culture	MOIC
Ministry of Education and Training	MOET
Ministry of Science and Technology	MOST
Ministry of Investment and Planning	MOIP
Ministry of Post and Telecommunication	MOPT
Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs	MOLISA
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	MOARD
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	MONRE

**Table 3.** List of Names of Vietnamese Agencies in Abbreviation









### 2.7.1.2. Symbols









Although the abbreviation is commonly used in notes, its most prominent drawback is that it tends to entice the interpreter to stick to the word level instead of meaning level. In other words, it easily leads the interpreter to think in terms of words rather than ideas, which could harm the interpretation. Therefore symbols are more preferable for their capacity of representing ideas and eliminating source language interference.

A "symbol" is anything, a mark, sign or letter used to represent a thing or a concept. Symbols are quicker and easier to write than words. Similar to abbreviations, firstly symbols need to be prepared in advance. Any symbol improvised in the middle of interpretation could drive the interpreter into a difficult and intense situation. One basic rule for the interpreter: only use the symbols which are already stuck in the mind. Secondly, symbols must be consistent. That means symbols are instantly associated for the interpreter himself with the meaning he gives them. Attending to this point, the interpreter can avoid mistakenly "deciphering" the meaning of the symbols he or she uses. Followings are some symbol examples retrieved from electronic source at *Interpreter Training Resource*.

consequences		development	
relations		agriculture	
agreement		environment	
role		energy	





success   
 problem   
 repression   
 impact   
 country   
 meeting   
 industry   
 deficit 

trade   
 politics   
 democracy   
 work   
 money   
 inflation   
 continue   
 surplus 


look forward to 


change 

want to 


increase 

know 


decrease 

decide 


join 


propose 

listen/hear 


lead to, cause 

say 

promise 

attack 

agree 

thanks 

on the one hand	/	now	↓
...on the other hand	/.	until	→
on behalf of	b/2	from that time on	→ b4
as opposed to	vs.	before	b4
recently	↙	more than/less than	<
all	⊕	any	△
similar/ equal	=	end	—
different/ not equal		see note	*

**≠** *Table 4. Symbols*

Some could say that symbols clearly help the interpreter take notes more quickly and effectively, and then it is wise to use as many symbols as possible. However, it would not seem rational to set up a rigidly unchanged rule for a degree of symbolization, each

interpreter through practice would find their own balance. For some, symbolizing as much information as possible is good. For others, it is not necessary to do so.

To sum up, abbreviations and symbols are, like other elements in notes, “*a means to an end, not an end in themselves*” (Jones, 2002, p. 39). What is the use of abbreviations and symbols, if they do not help the interpreter to do his work better? For the interpreter to fully get benefits from note-taking, a system of abbreviations and symbols that is logical, connected and unequivocal should be developed on his or her own.

## **2.7.2. Note Arrangement**

### **2.7.2.1. Diagonal Layout**

It would seem that whenever the question of how to take notes arises, a technique named “diagonal presentation” would come up. Diagonal presentation was introduced by Rozan in 1956. Also regarded as vertical arrangement, diagonal has been widely used by professional interpreters. The creation of diagonal layout is based on the fact that subject, verb and object are the most important elements of a sentence which contain nearly all information or meaning of the sentence, then they should be clearly represented in notes. Applying this technique, the subject, verb and object are arranged diagonally, from left to right and from top to bottom of a page. However it does not mean that the interpreter only note the subject, verb and object elements. Based on the structure, the interpreter can add other details in the notes if he or she wants. Diagonal layout is highly recommended because of its clear presentation of notes. Notes in diagonal arrangement are concise and succinct; focusing on ideas rather than words, unlike notes in horizontal form which often tempt the interpreter to write as many words as possible. Diagonal layout is described by Jones (2002, p. 44) as:

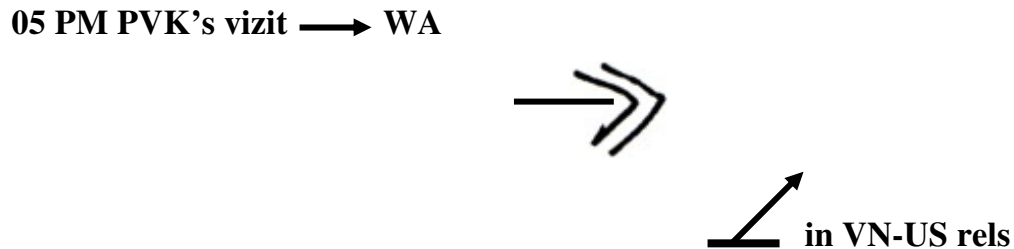
**Subject**

**Verb**

## Object

Let's take an example; "*Prime Minister Pham Van Khai's 2005 visit to Washington reflected the significant improvement in bilateral relations*".

Based on the diagonal layout, this could be noted:



Diagonal layout is also called- "*décalage*" which is translated into English as "*shifting*", figuratively referring to "*gap*" or "*discrepancy*". According to Rozan, "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". How shift works is well explained by Rozan through many examples in his book entitled *La prise de notes en interprétation consécutive*.

The following example is one of them. "*Over the course of 1954, prices rose, although not to the same extent as income, thus the population's net income increased*" is noted as follows.

- (1) 54, prices ↗  
(2) but ——— no = ↗ income  
(3) so ——— Pop<sup>on</sup> ↗

Word for word on the first line: *Over the course of 1954, prices rose,*

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

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

With diagonal presentation or shift, notes are arranged vertically, running from the left to the right of a paper in a slanting way, which come along with the natural movement of human eyes from left to right and from top to bottom (Jones, 2002, p. 45). Moreover, information is also organized logically and clearly in diagonal form. The interpreter seems to be able to immediately see the connections between the ideas. All those things together show that diagonal layout can accelerate the interpreter's review of notes.

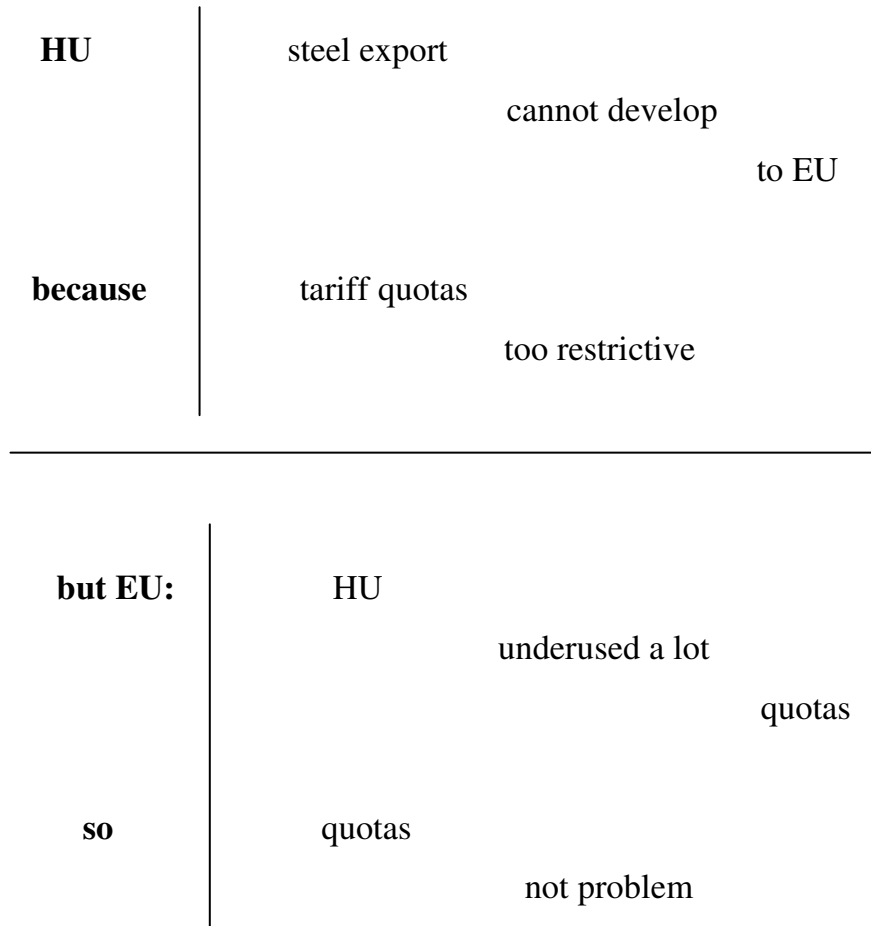
#### **2.7.2.2. Left-hand Margin**

The way in which ideas are connected to each other is as important as the ideas themselves. In terms of meaning, idea is a single unit. It is only when they are linked together that a complete message is formed. Thus the crucial role of the links between ideas is never denied. As mentioned above, one of the most major elements that must be reflected in notes is the link. In other words, the interpreter when taking notes cannot afford to ignore “link words”, for instance: *therefore, consequently, nevertheless, as a result, on the other hand, however, but, or, and, yet etc.*

There is already diagonal layout for ideas to be put in logical order, then there should be some spaces “dedicated to” the links only. It is best to leave a left-hand margin of one or two centimetres for links to make sure that they are not confused with the other parts in notes. Obviously left-hand margin will make links stand out and easy to identify. That is the reason why a left-hand margin is frequently found in the notes of professional consecutive interpreters. Furthermore, a left-hand column is ideal for marking missing ideas or denoting any change in the flow of speech. The following example extracted from *Conference Interpreting Explained* written by Jones (2002, p.47) shows how successfully left-hand margin works.

*“Hungary has complained that its steel exports to the European Union are not able to develop because of excessively restrictive tariff quotas. But the Union representative pointed out that quotas are still underused by*

*Hungary by a large margin, so the tariff quotas themselves didn't appear to be creating the difficulties"* could be noted:



The example is purely given to show the function of left-hand margin; hence it has not been abbreviated and symbolized. However, as a matter of fact, because of frequent appearance of link words in notes, it is prudent to have a system of symbols for them. The following table shows some symbols for link words.

1. because/ the main reason for/ on account of/ due to/ thanks to/ owing to/ since/as	<b>coz</b>
2. therefore/ consequently/ as a result/ that's why/ for that reason/ hence/ thus	<b>so/</b> →

3. so as to/ in order to/ with the aim of/ with the intention of/ with the purpose	<b>to</b>
4. however/ nevertheless/ on the other hand/ although/ despite/ conversly	<b>but/▶◀</b>
5. in addition/ futhermore/ moreover/ besides/ also/ too/ and	<b>+ / &amp;</b>

*Table 5.* Symbols for Link Words

### **2.8. Which Language Used in Notes**

The question of consecutive interpreters' choice of language for their notes is still open for debate. A large volume of literature and research papers have been written on the issue. There are diverse opinions about which language should be used in notes by the interpreter: the source language or the target language. The source language means the language in which a speech is made in the original, and from which an interpretation is to be made. The target language is the language into which a speech spoken in another language is to be interpreted.

An ideal “language-independent system” for note-taking was proposed by Matyssek. However, up to now, this suggestion has not come into reality for the reason that such “complicated system of ciphers” would definitely place a big burden on the interpreter’s memory. Except for Matyssek, most writers about note-taking in consecutive interpreting tend to adopt one of two contrasting positions: some advocate the use of the target language, e.g. Herbert 1952; Rozan 1956; Seleskovitch 1957; Déjean Le Féal 1981; Laplace 1990 while others like Ilg 1988; Alexieva 1993; Gile 1995 argue that the source language may be a better choice (as cited in Dam, n.d, p.4). Those who recommend using the target language basically have two reasons: first, the target language logically forces the interpreter to put aside the surface form of the incoming speech, instead, to concentrate on the meaning layer, that means the interpreter can avoid “intellectual laziness”, following the speaker and noting their words passively; second, taking notes in



the target language is thought to effectively facilitate the re-expression phase. For others who doubt the benefits of using the target language for taking notes defend their point of view that writing notes in the target language, the interpreter has more activities to deal with during listening, understanding and analyzing phase. The activity of language transformation from the source into the target makes the interpreter's concentration divided. Moreover, taking notes in the target language, the interpreter cannot have "a full set of notes at the end of a speech" as he takes notes in the source language (Jones, 2002, p.60).

However, some recent findings from a research paper conducted by Hellen V. Dam (n.d) have showed that "the choice of language in note-taking is governed by mainly the status of the language in the interpreters' language combination, i.e. whether it is an A-language or B-language (A-language is also called mother tongue and B-language is the language of which the interpreter has perfect mastery), and much less than by its status in the interpreting task, i.e. whether it functions as the source language or the target language". This would seem to be true because in an attempt to save processing capacity for other requirements throughout the whole process of note-taking, the interpreter is likely to take notes in whichever language is easier. Obviously, writing in the first language (A-language) is always faster and easier than writing in another language (B-language) which is not mother tongue.

## **2.9. When to Note**

In the process of note-taking, the interpreter is burden with making decisions all the time. When to take notes is a very important and also tough decision that requires the interpreter to arrive at properly and wisely. Interpreters should start the notes as soon as possible without having to wait for a complete "unit of meaning". If he or she waits too long, there is danger of not being able to jot down sufficiently what has come earlier. Therefore, when the interpreter can sense the meaning of a sentence which might has not

been completed, he or she should note it down. Here the interpreter has the ability to “forecast” or “feel” upcoming things. Besides the interpreter is not required to take everything exactly the same way as the speaker, his or her notes are not presented in exact order as they were said by the speaker, so there is no need for the interpreter to wait until the speaker finishes an utterance to take note.

It is also worth mentioning that as soon as speakers finish their utterance(s), the interpreter should stop taking notes instantly and start reproducing ideas. If the interpreter is too preoccupied with notes, he or she will delay the interpretation, which is not wanted. The interpreter cannot afford to take longer than the speaker. He or she is expected to react immediately after the speaker has finished.

In conclusion, through the review of literature in this chapter, firstly it can be seen that interpreters’ notes are different from the notes taken by students for study, secretaries for drafting memoranda and minutes or by shorthand typists who record everything almost word for word, without critically analyzing the meaning. For interpreters, they need notes that can help them reproduce the full message content with the speaker’ intention or point of view as faithfully as possible. Interpreters’ notes are for short-term use only, unlike students’ notes for later review or long-term use. A good note should give the main ideas of a speech, the links between those ideas, tenses of verbs figures, and numbers, lists of things, proper names, if mentioned, so as to relieve interpreters’ memory. A good note should also be as economical as possible with abbreviations and graphic symbols; then should be unequivocal and logical with diagonal layout, separating lines between ideas, and an useful left-hand margin. Which language used in notes and when to note are also important issues that should be taken into consideration by interpreters.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS and PROCEDURES**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The chapter in the previous section of the thesis provides an overview of note-taking in consecutive interpreting, drawing on pertinent theories, examples and illustrations from linguistics research literature, which have been conjoined with personal analyses, assessments, suggestions and deductions. In the forthcoming section, an empirical report is presented based on the findings from a survey. The section starts with a brief description of the survey purpose, subjects, method and procedures.

### **3.2. The Objective of the Survey**

The aim of the quantitative survey is to explore how interpreting students think about the skill of note-taking in consecutive interpreting. From their own points of view and through their practical experience, how important note-taking skill might be, what may be the basic requirements for a good note and also what they would do in some specific situations during the process of taking notes, etc. The survey is not an ambitious plan to examine the students' acquisition of note-taking skill or to study how they actually take notes in reality.

### **3.3. Subjects**

For the fact that English Department at Hanoi University of Foreign Studies mainly offers consecutive interpreting courses to final-year students, the survey is conducted with one group of 120 final-year students of the year 2002-2006. The subjects are chosen for the following reasons: (i) they have finished two terms of studying and practicing consecutive interpreting; (ii) many of them have practical experience in interpreting consecutively. Therefore, to some extent, they are already aware of the role of note-taking in consecutive interpreting. However, final-year students are not professional interpreters, so obviously they do not have a wide knowledge about note-taking skill. Their responses are mainly based on the experiences that they have accumulated through the past two terms of studying interpreting at the school.

### **3.4. Methodology and Method of the Survey**

#### **3.4.1. Methodology**

White (2002, p. 24) notes that: “*Quantitative research is scientific and objective approach*” As mentioned above, the main aim of the study is to impartially record the findings about interpreting students’ personal opinions on note-taking. It is obvious that the methodology of quantitative best suits the aim. With this type of research, the results are given numerical values and evaluated through some mathematical treatment and then put in form of a report of quantitative data analyses.

#### **3.4.2. Method**

A survey is designed with the types of “Group Administered Questionnaire” that allows to get the survey results in one space of time and also ensures a very high responses rate. The fact is that 150 copies of the survey were handed out and the number of returns is 120. There are 10 questions, nine of which are made in form of scaled items where the subjects choose only one point on a scale that best represents his or her view. The tenth question is written in form of dichotomous item, which offers the subjects different alternatives.

### **3.5. Procedures**

At the end of the first lesson on in-depth review of consecutive interpreting, about 150 students were asked to complete the survey. They were given 30 minutes to consider and answer 10 questions. On each copy of the survey, there is a clear introduction to the purpose and a simple instruction about how to respond to questions, therefore, no other verbal explanation was given out. The sample questionnaire is available in the appendix at the end of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter is the interpretation of quantitative data and detailed consideration of survey results in relation to relevant published work as well as my personal calculations and estimations. The aim of all following in-depth analyses is no more than to provide a closer look at individual viewpoints on note-taking in consecutive interpreting of the students taking part in the survey.

All the ten questions are analyzed in the categorization of specific issues of note-taking including: the role of note-taking skill in consecutive interpreting, what to note, how to note and when to note.

## 4.2. Findings and Discussion

### 4.2.1. The Role of Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting

In the survey, there are two questions designed to find out the awareness of the students about the role of note-taking skill in consecutive interpreting: How do the students assess the level of importance of note-taking? and How can note-taking help them in consecutive interpreting?

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>1. Note-taking is the most important element in consecutive interpreting</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>2%</b>

According to the figures, 12% strongly agreed and 37% moderately agreed that note-taking is the most important element in consecutive interpreting. On the contrary, only 2% of the students strongly disagreed and 35% fairly disagreed with the statement about

note-taking skill as the most essential part in consecutive interpreting; and 14% of the students had no opinion.

It can be seen from the survey results that nearly 50% of the students interviewed do not realize the fact that “*notes are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end*” (Jones, 2002, p.39). In consecutive interpreting, only when the speaker has completed the message does the interpreter begin his or her interpretation, the interpreter must have the ability to fully recall what has been said. Therefore, good memory is a prerequisite of good interpreting. Memory in consecutive interpreting refers to the capacity for storing and retrieving information of the interpreter. Many student interpreters say that although they can understand the message the speaker is delivering, they find it difficult to commit the content of the message to their memory. As a result, it is impossible for them to interpret what has no longer been retained in their mind into a different language. Then the major problem here is how to supplement the memory for consecutive interpreting. And the solution to the problem is to acquire note-taking skill. Notes can serve as an effective aid to the memory of the interpreter but they can never replace the role of memory. According to senior interpreters, a basic principle for successful consecutive interpreting is that memory comes first and notes function to support it. Target language reproduction should not be based on notes only but on the combination of memory and notes.

Note-taking is not the most important element in consecutive interpreting. Without notes, the interpreter is still able to perform well. This has been proved possible. In the early days of consecutive interpreting, speeches were up to one hour long, and had to be interpreted consecutively (Láng, n.d). Notes were considered a sign of weakness. Prominent interpreters at that time were admired for their amazing memory capacity, for being able to recall nearly every single word, and if there was lacking in accuracy, they could make up for it with the help of their wide range of background knowledge.

On the other side, 37% the students surveyed did not regard note-taking as mostly indispensable. It seems irrational to read from the result that these students do their interpretation without the help of notes. In fact, as fledgling beginners, interpreting students cannot afford to heavily rely on their memory capacity, they need notes for a wide range of reasons, including the capacity of notes to relieve and activate memory. Therefore, very probably, these students, through practical experience, may realize that consecutive interpreting is a complex process composed of various activities. Each one has important impact on the whole process, then it is impossible to leap to the conclusion that “note-taking is the most important element in consecutive interpreting”. Besides, these students might be aware of the fact that only depending on notes would seriously harm their processing capacity of interpreting. Their interpretation only gets benefits fully from the close interaction between memory and notes, not the imbalance between them.

Interpreters differ greatly in their ability to remember and their ways to take notes. For some, notes play very important role. For others, notes are no more than a means to an end, in both cases of with or without the help of notes, they amply fulfill their interpreting. Finally, it should be noticed that none of ideal notes could save an interpreter who is unable to listen actively to the message and unable to analyze the message for meaning logically.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>2. Notes help me visualize</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>



## the outline of the speech

---

This question is aimed at finding out: after notes have been produced as a result how helpful they are for the interpreter. The above figures demonstrate that the majority of the students surveyed said notes could help them to envision the outline of the speech in their mind. The exact percentage is 85%, of which 18% completely agreed and 67% fairly agreed with the statement. In contrast, only 2% out of 120 students said that notes could not help them imagine the speech outline. The percentage of the students having no opinion is 13%. As mentioned in chapter 2, good notes can serve as a skeleton outline of a speech. They reflect the structure of the speech, make it clear to the interpreter what is important, what is secondary and what can be omitted without affecting the meaning of the original speech. Notes show the interpreter the connections between ideas, how they are related to each other or how they are separated from one another, for instance, link words that determine the association between ideas are put in left-hand margin while important information stands out in diagonal or vertical layout. A good note with such elements that appear on notepaper is already a sharp outline in itself. Besides, the outline written down in notes is the product of analytical process therefore it must deeply impress itself on the mind of the interpreter. Accordingly, it is possible to assume that the students who cannot visualize the outline of the speech after taking notes, have not taken notes properly and correctly. However, the number of these students is only 2, equivalent to 2% in contrast to 85% of the students who may get a lot of benefits from their visualization of the speech structure.

Taking notes, the interpreter is creating memory triggers for themselves. There is no exaggeration to say that any element written in notes is intended to express some certain meaning. When reading back notes, the interpreter relies on such elements to visualize all speech content. Here, notes not only give the interpreter the overall structure of the speech, but also stimulate the interpreter to visualize a picture of every detail in the

speech. Notes can be likened to a mind map which shows the location of main ideas as well as minor ideas, and the association routes from one idea to another. A mind map with colorful images and vivid connections between them works under two principles: the first one is that images can help to evoke information more effectively than words, and the second one is that the links between ideas help mind to access the information it contains easier and quicker.

However, in fact, on notepaper, the interpreter cannot afford to write down more than little “cues or triggers”. Therefore such meticulous “mind map”, as just described, only exists in mental picture through the interpreter’s visualization. For the fact that the more the interpreter depends on memory, the fewer notes he or she will need and vice versa. “Mind maps” not only enhance memory but also simplify and support note-taking process through visualization. The following speech about the President Hu Jintao’s visit to the United States could be better recalled and hence interpreted if the interpreter sees the map of ideas in their mind.

*“Chinese President Hu Jintao has arrived in the United States for talks with President Bush and key business leaders.*

*Mr. Hu's first stop on his four-day American visit was to the northwestern state of Washington, where he held talks with Bill Gates, the chairman of computer software giant Microsoft. The Chinese president's visit with Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates comes after years of battling widespread software piracy in the lucrative Chinese market. The software developer and representatives of one of the world's largest computer companies, Chinese-based Lenovo, agreed on Monday to pre-install Microsoft's Windows operating system on its computers.*

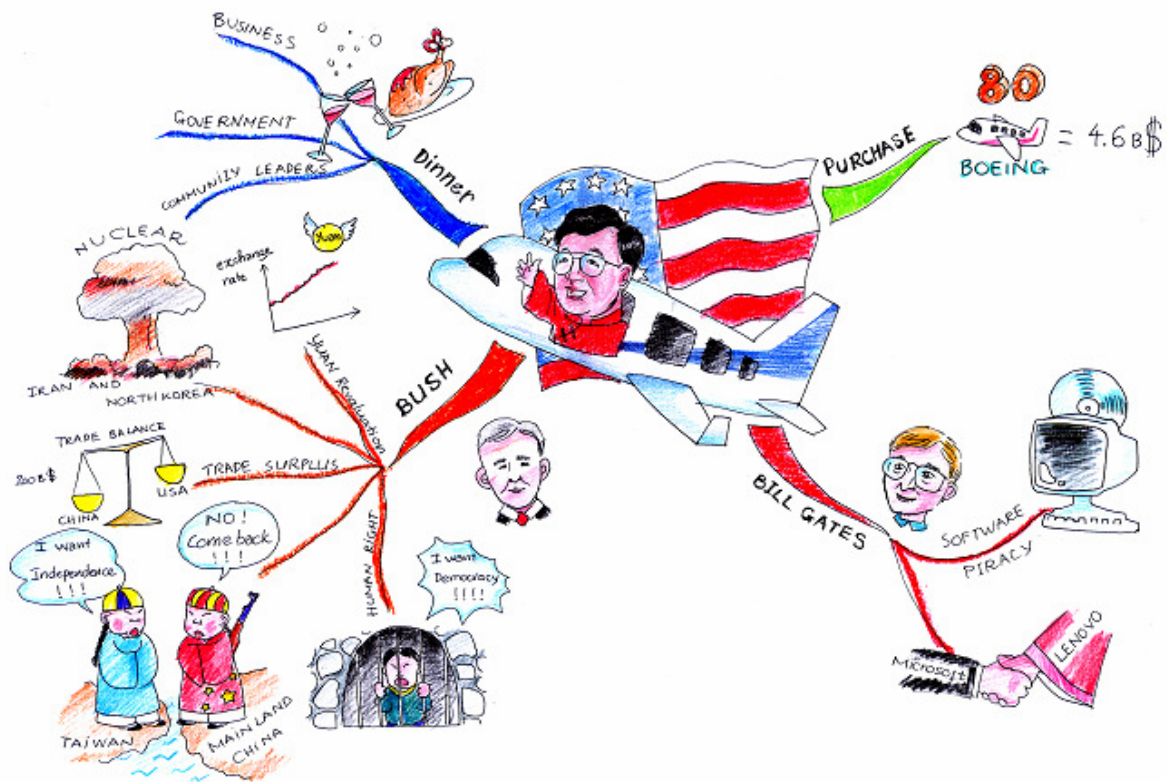
*Later Tuesday he is to attend a dinner with 100 business, government and community leaders to be hosted by Washington State Governor Christine Gregoire.*

*On Wednesday, he is scheduled to tour a Boeing commercial aircraft plant before heading to Washington, D.C., for a meeting with President Bush. Mr. Hu's tour of the aircraft factory comes following this month's agreement for Beijing to purchase 80 Boeing aircraft, a deal worth \$4.6 billion.*

The Chinese president is to meet with Mr. Bush at the White House Thursday. Officials say the two leaders will discuss a variety of issues, including U.S. demands that China reform its currency and the Asian country's \$200 billion trade surplus with the United States.

Mr. Hu is likely to call on the United States to reaffirm its stance that Taiwan is part of mainland China, while President Bush is expected to bring up China's human rights record. The two sides are also slated to discuss nuclear negotiations with North Korea and Iran."

(Source: VOA News 18 April 2006)



**Figure 2.** Mind Map Supports Note-taking

#### 4.2.2. What to Note

What to note is even more important than how to note and when to note. It requires the interpreter to go through numerous “cognitive processing activities” before taking notes.

Although the issue is very much of personal affair, i.e. each interpreter has his or her own decision on what to note, some general principles presented in chapter 2 should be observed.

In the view of what to note, two questions in the survey are intended to ask the students, apart from basic elements of main ideas and the links between those ideas, for them, what are also important to be noted?

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>3. Noting verb tenses</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>is not important.</b>					

In order to locate main ideas, the interpreter needs to answer basic questions: who, what and when. By giving answer to “what” question, the interpreter has put his or her focus on “verbs”. Conspicuously, verbs are very important elements that must be found in the interpreter’s notes. The point here is that whether it is necessary for the interpreter to note down tenses of verbs. The above question is designed to find out how many students agree and how many students disagree with the suggestion on the need for noting verb tenses.

As seen from the table, the percentage between the number of students who think the tenses of verbs should appear in the notes and the number of students who do not have the same opinion is nearly 50/50, in detail 41% and 46% respectively. Out of 41% the students who agreed that it would be important to note down verb tenses, there are 34% “fairly agree” and 7% “strongly agree” while out of 46% the students who did not see the

necessity of noting verb tenses, there are 28% “fairly disagree” and 18% “strongly disagree”. And 13% of the students did not express their own opinion.

The results show that quite a few students have not paid due attention to the tenses of verbs in their notes. In some cases, this neglect does not badly affect their interpretation; however, in others, it can totally make the interpreter “get lost in action”. Here are two examples of how big the mistake an interpreter can make if he or she does not pay attention to recording verb tenses.

- “*We are not here for one year, we are here for 50 years. I am happy that we have not made any mistakes yet”* was interpreted into Vietnamese as “*Chúng tôi đã không ở đây trong vòng một năm rồi, nhưng chúng tôi sẽ ở đây trong vòng 50 năm tới. Tôi mừng là chúng tôi không mắc sai lầm nào cả”*. It is obvious that in this case, having neglected the tenses of verbs, the student in charge of interpreting the message from English into Vietnamese did completely distort the meaning of the original. The statement “*we are not here for one year*” refers to a fact that is true in the present, not in the past as the interpreter expressed through her interpretation. Actually, the speaker here means “*Thời gian đầu tư của chúng tôi không phải một năm mà chúng tôi sẽ trụ lại đây 50 năm*”. By using the main verb “to make” in the tense of present perfect, the speaker wants to emphasize that the action happened before now, clearly the speaker does not intend to confirm “we never make any mistakes” as the interpreter mistakenly interpreted. The message should be interpreted as “*Tôi mừng là chúng tôi chưa mắc phải sai lầm nào cả”*.”
- Similarly, in the message “*Maybe we could have made faster progress”*, the speaker uses conditional sentence to indicate a thing contrary to fact in the past, therefore the message should be interpreted as “*Có lẽ chúng tôi đã có thể đạt được tiến bộ nhanh hơn nữa”* instead of “*Có thể chúng tôi sẽ có những tiến bộ sâu xa hơn”* which is not in line with what the speaker tries to convey. According to senior international interpreters, when noting verbs, it is advisable for the

interpreter to carefully jot down the correct tense, the appropriate mode and the conditional. Besides modal verbs have impact on the function of other verbs, it is a good idea to save some spaces in notes for modal verbs.

To sum up, from the viewpoint of 41% of the students surveyed, noting down verb tenses is synonymous with avoiding unexpected mishaps as described in the examples above. However, the rest including 46% the students who did not consider writing down verb tenses important and 13% who had no opinion may regard verb tenses and modal verbs as specific and minor details, and the more detail they have to pay attention to, the easier they are diverted from analyzing and remembering the meaning of the original message.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>4. I would immediately stop</b>					
whatever I am noting					
in order to note numbers,	<b>14%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>3%</b>
proper names, lists of things					
and technical terms.					

This question is aimed at finding out whether the students consider noting down “noncontextualized information” important. The table above shows the percentages of the students expressing their opinion on how to cope with numbers, proper names, lists of things and technical terms in the process of taking notes. According to the figures, 48% and 14% of 120 students interviewed moderately agreed and completely agreed respectively that if they sense the upcoming arrival of such elements, they would stop writing everything else in order to be sure note them correctly and completely. However, 15% of the students fairly disagreed with the statement and 3% even did not think of the

slightest possibility of their reaction that would be the same as mentioned situation. There may be some explanation for these percentages. Very probably, these students as novices in consecutive interpreting are easily obsessed with the things they are noting down, and they are not alert enough to notice that the speaker is about to give a list or a number. As a result, before they stop noting a previous point, the number or the list has already been missed out, and of course, they cannot catch it in time. The need for noting down numbers, proper names, lists of things and terminologies has been recommended by almost all experienced interpreters. It is worthwhile for novice interpreters to follow the advice. From the findings it can be seen that the large majority of the students surveyed are aware that “noncontextualized information” is hardly recalled without notes.

### 4.2.3. How to Note

In terms of how to note, three questions are designed to obtain information on practical experiences gained by the students taking part in the survey. One question is focused on studying the students’ attitude towards the need for a system of abbreviations and symbols developed by interpreter themselves. Another question is to explore their viewpoint about the importance of clear separation between ideas. And the third question is to find out their opinion about the language used in notes. Followings are the result analyses of each.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>5.</b> It is <b>not</b> necessary for interpreters to develop their own symbols and abbreviations.	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>39%</b>

The use of symbols and abbreviations should be automatic because any new one created in the process of interpreting may require so much attention. It is unacceptable for the

interpreter to be distracted from his work for any reasons at all. Only by developing his own system of abbreviations and symbols beforehand can the interpreter make them come to his pen automatically. The findings clearly show that almost 90% of the students surveyed either fairly agreed or strongly agreed that it is necessary for the interpreter to develop his own system of abbreviations and symbols, while the percentage of the students who disagreed is only 9% out of 120. And 4% did have no opinion. A vast majority of the students are aware of the fact that as the interpreter is the only person who needs to read and understand the meaning of abbreviations and symbols in his notes, he must be the creator of his own system, which then has a logical meaning. They may also understand that the interpreter should not compel himself to learn by heart an artificial complicated system of abbreviations and symbols built by others in the same way as one may learn mathematical formula or dramatic poems because such abbreviations and symbols require too much space in the memory. Unavoidably, this would make it harder for the interpreter to focus on listening, understanding and analyzing the original.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>6. Clear separation of main ideas in notes is important.</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Although the need for the line separating ideas has not been agreed on by everyone, in some books, it is strongly recommended that the interpreter draw a line in order to separate ideas from one another. With the aim of investigating how the students see the importance of separating ideas by drawing lines within them, this question was raised up. And it has received the response of 120 students, of which 71 students equivalent to 58% of the students surveyed moderately agreed that “Clear separation of main ideas in notes is important” and 39 students or 33% strongly agreed with the statement, while only 2 students or 2% completely opposed, and 8 students or 7% found themselves in the middle



of the two thoughts. The findings indicate that nearly every student finds separating lines helpful, probably for the reason that these lines signal the beginning and the end of each idea, which helps the interpreter avoid all confusion of this idea with another idea. Indeed through observation, many students of the year 2002- 2006 prefer drawing lines in order to separate ideas in their notes.

The line between two different ideas playing the role of separation is similar to a brief pause between two chunks of information that works to refresh the interpreter’s mind after the processing of a piece of information and then to prepare it for the incoming one. Hence separating lines help the interpreter avoid much confusion.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>7. I note in either the target language or the source language which I feel comfortable with.</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>4%</b>

For the fact that in the context of practicing interpreting, the choice of language in notes is still mainly around the question of using the target language or the source language, and one item in the survey is meant for getting the students’ answer to the question. According to the survey results, only 10% of the students did not think that they would take notes in the language that they favor, instead, they may fix themselves to using either the target language or the source language. While nearly 80% of the students, of which 21% strongly agreed and 55% moderately agreed that it would not matter to them that the source language or the target language may be chosen to be used in notes, what would matter is which language they find easier and then faster to take notes. And 14% had no opinion. It can be seen from the findings: a majority of students are aware of the fact that on the one hand as beginners, they haven’t got enough experience to take notes only in

the target language because noting in the target language first requires the interpreter to have a marvelous mastery of both languages, secondly it obviously forces the interpreter to work under more pressure and perform more functions throughout the phase of understanding and analyzing the original message. But on the other hand, they are strongly advised not to totally depend on the source language to take notes, which could easily put them in the position of passively listening to and writing down words spoken by the speaker, not in the position of getting ready to reconstruct the message. Therefore in an attempt to save processing capacity for other requirements throughout interpreting, as fledging interpreters, these students decide to take notes in whichever language is easier. For them, the matter of the language used in notes does not lie in the choice of the target language or the source language, but it lies in which language they may feel more comfortable with.

#### 4.2.4. When to Note

In order to find out, from the viewpoint of the students surveyed, what is the right moment to take notes, two following questions were raised up. The first one is “Do you prefer starting your notes as soon as possible to avoid being left behind by the speaker?” and the second one is “When you hardly understand what the speaker is saying, would you keep noting down any word that you can catch?” Below is the analysis of each result.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>8.</b> I start noting as <b>quickly</b> as possible to avoid being left behind by the speaker.	<b>10%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>4%</b>

As far as the issue of when to note is concerned, the interpreter seems to be faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, in order to keep pace with the speaker, the interpreter wants to

start noting as quickly as possible. On the other hand, it is impractical for the interpreter to note what he or she has not understood yet, hence logically, the interpreter should wait until he or she has grasped a complete idea before noting it down.

The survey results show that nearly 60% of the students surveyed agreed that they would start taking notes as quickly as possible to avoid being left behind by the speaker, while 27% of the students did not agree, of which 23% relatively disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. The fear of not catching up with the speaker is quite common within novices as student interpreters. That's why the number of the students who did not agree with the statement mentioned in question is 32% lower than that of the students who agreed.

However, taking notes as quickly as possible does not mean that the interpreter should note every notion as soon as it is said. In this case, being hasty could easily put the interpreter on the wrong track. If the interpreter tried to note down words not ideas, he or she would always “stay far behind” the speaker because writing speed is much slower than speaking one. Grasping the idea, then jotting it down is one of the basic principles for note-taking.

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
<b>9.</b> When I can hardly understand what the speaker is saying, I still keep noting down any words that I can hear.	<b>5%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>6%</b>

Comprehensively understanding is the prerequisite for good interpretation. Attentively, actively and selectively listening to the speech is the first thing the interpreter must do in

the whole process of interpreting. Taking notes without comprehension is destructive. All efforts by the interpreter to take notes when he or she cannot understand what the speaker is saying eventually turn out to be in vain because the interpreter cannot produce a meaningful message from entirely unrelated words having no connection with each other.

It can be seen from the survey result that the percentage between the number of students who keep taking notes even when they cannot understand the meaning of the message and the number of students who do not do the same way is nearly 50/50. The exact percentages are 40% and 39% respectively. One fifth of the students did not know what they would do under that circumstance. On the word of many expert interpreters and conference interpreting trainers, when an interpreter suddenly cannot make sense of what the speaker is delivering, it is essential for him or her to stop taking notes and carefully listen to the speech. Note is a mean to an end, so the interpreter should never allow it to become “the center of attention” or to go against its main function- an aid to the interpreter’s memory.

Note-taking sometimes is described as “necessary evil” because on one hand, interpreters can hardly rely on their memory only, on the other hand, note-taking if improperly used could distract interpreters’ attention, so practice is essential. Survey results show that only 7% of the students say they “nearly always” practice taking notes, 37% “often”, however 47% “seldom” and 9% “hardly ever” have the habit of practising taking notes. That means more than half of the students do not attach much importance to note-taking practice. Although the frequency of practicing varies according to interpreters’ expertise, the best note-taking is the one the interpreter develops by himself or herself through disciplined and regular practice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUGGESTIONS and CONCLUSION**

## **5.1. Suggestions**

### **5.1.1. Limitations**

The survey subjects are interpreting students who have only been studying interpreting for two terms. They have not been exposed to wide range of practical experience in consecutive interpreting apart from regular interpreting classes at the university. Therefore it is hard to require them to have deep knowledge about the skill, which is mainly gained through practice not theory.

The major limitation lies in the fact that the quantitative survey cannot reveal how the students' notes actually look like. The survey result analyses are based on the writer's personal assessments of figures. And these figures only indicate the students' subjective viewpoints, not their real practice of note-taking. It is impossible to reach an exact conclusion about the level of note-taking acquisition of the students.

### **5.1.2. Suggestions for Further Study**

With the aim of overcoming such limitations, there should be a qualitative research for further study. The qualitative could provide stronger evidence by drawing on the notes produced by interpreting students. The research might be conducted under following procedure.

In the context of an ordinary classroom, two interpreting tasks will be assigned to a number of students. These students interpret one English source speech consecutively into Vietnamese for task 1 and the same students interpret one Vietnamese source speech consecutively into English for task 2. The topic of both source speeches is familiar to the students. And good time to conduct the experiment may be scheduled right before or after interpreting exam when students tend to perform best. Besides the whole process should

be supervised by professional interpreters who have the ability to give specialized evaluations and recommendations.

It is obvious that the results of the qualitative survey can contribute to the growing body of research studies in the field of consecutive interpreting in general and note-taking skill in particular.

## **5.2. Conclusion**

The thesis is an attempt to puzzle out the concept of note-taking in consecutive interpreting and to present the process of taking notes in a structured and digestible way. It is intended for students of interpreting who may have interest in understanding more about note-taking as a vital skill for consecutive interpreters.

The review of literature presented in chapter 2 is a coherent combination of summary and synthesis of published works which are related to the topic of note-taking, have been written from the viewpoints of both interpreting practitioners and linguistic theorists. In chapter 2, basic requirements of note-taking are classified into following categories: what to note, how to note, when to note and which language used in notes. The main purpose of the literature review is no more than to provide detailed illustrations of note-taking and to show practical approaches to acquiring the skill.

In chapter 3 and 4, the thesis reports on an empirical study which is developed from the results of a quantitative survey. The survey is aimed at exploring student interpreters' awareness of note-taking as well as their personal points of view on specific aspects of the skill. Its findings can be very helpful in conducting a qualitative survey for further study.

In conclusion, taking notes in consecutive interpreting involves various techniques that are quite easily grasped if well learnt and regularly practiced. However it is important to

notice that although note-taking is one of the most required skills of consecutive interpreters, as Jones (2002, p.39) states, “*the essential part of a consecutive interpreter’s work is done in the activities [of] understanding, analysis, re-expression. If these are not done correctly, the best notes in the world will not make you a good interpreter*”

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## APPENDIXES

I am a student in my final year of university. This survey is forming part of my dissertation on **Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting**. Every question in this survey is supposed to find out your attitude towards note-taking in consecutive interpreting and your experiences in acquiring note-taking skill in consecutive interpreting.

I would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete this survey.

Please **circle** the number for each response that best corresponds to your view.

Example 1:

	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>undecided</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>
I will get a job as an interpreter after I graduate.	1	2	3	4	5

Please **tick** the appropriate box:

Example 2:

The most important element in consecutive interpreting is

- short- term memory
- note-taking
- public speaking
- good background knowledge

**Thank you very much for your help!**

	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Note-taking is the most important element in consecutive interpreting.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I start noting as quickly as possible to avoid being left behind by the speaker.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Clear separation of main ideas in notes is important.	1	2	3	4	5
4. When I hardly can understand what the speaker is saying, I still keep noting down any word that I can hear.	1	2	3	4	5
5. It is <b>not</b> necessary for interpreters to develop their own systems of symbols, signs, abbreviations, etc ...	1	2	3	4	5
6. I note in either the target language or the source language, which I feel comfortable with.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Noting verb tenses is <b>not</b> important.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I would <b>immediately</b> stop whatever I am noting in order to note numbers, proper names, lists of things or technical terms.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Notes help me visualize the outline of the speech.	1	2	3	4	5
10. How frequently do you exercise taking notes?					
<input type="checkbox"/> hardly ever					
<input type="checkbox"/> seldom					
<input type="checkbox"/> often					
<input type="checkbox"/> nearly always					

