



Lynn Visson. *From Russian into English, An Introduction to Simultaneous Interpretation*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, Ardis Publishers, 1991, 266 p.

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into and from the mother tongue, but that these are of degree, and not of kind (p. 264).

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Lynn Visson. *From Russian into English, An Introduction to Simultaneous Interpretation.* Ann Arbor, Michigan, Ardis Publishers, 1991, 266 pp.

This book is addressed to advanced Russian students wishing to interpret into English and also to people who study or work with Russian; nevertheless, the level of linguistic and translational competence it assumes on the part of its readership is — justifiably, it would seem — very low indeed. The work has its merits, let alone the sheer fact that it exists, there being such a dearth of useful didactic material. It is indeed very entertaining and, to the uninitiated, quite informative. Its main virtue, to my mind, is that through most illuminating examples it shows how inane — or downright damaging — literal translation really is.

It is organised in a preface, an introduction and two parts, one on "Practical Problems," and a second one devoted to "Selected Practice Texts and Vocabulary." In the introduction the author starts by berating — justly, I think — the theory that it is better to interpret from one's native language (which its Soviet proponents systematically apply to interpretation *from* Russian, but never *into* it) and then provides a raw analysis of the differences between translating and interpreting.

Part I starts with a chapter titled "The Simultaneous Interpreter: Who He Is and What He Does." After a short historical introduction leading to a discussion of the logistics of interpretation at the UN and in the Soviet Union, comes the first of a series of practical advice: "Special attention is paid to the very beginning and the very end of the speech, for here errors will be in the spotlight" (p. 18). A lot of variegated ground is skimmed over in a few pages; equally touched upon, among a myriad other momentous things and minutiae, are the need to go beyond words, the elementary rules of booth behaviour, the psychology of the interpreter, the typical amounts of syllables per minute uttered in different languages in different settings, and probability prediction, as well as the problem of singular and plural case endings. Finally, it is rightly stated that "interpreta-

tion should be a rethinking and reexpression of a message rather than a mechanical translation of individual words" (p. 27). Valuable as all these insights are, I miss a consistent attempt at giving the reader an idea of what interpretation is really about, i.e. of how it is exactly that one must and can rethink and reexpress a message rather than its words. They are, moreover, randomly dropped, without any semblance of systematic progression.

The second chapter, "The Tricks of the Trade," succinctly discusses several tactics: condensation, deliberate omission and addition, synecdoche and metonymy, antonymic constructions, grammatical inversion and the use of semantic equivalents.

Chapter three is on "Interpreting Cultures"; it starts with the much disputed assertion that "the specific nature and structure of a language determine the way its speakers view the world" (p. 38), which is not the same as stating with Barik that "the grammatical pattern of a language... determines those aspects of each experience that must be expressed in the given language" (*ibid.*). The assumption conspires against conceptual clarity, insomuch as the structural differences of English and Russian become mingled with the cultural dissimilarities between Russian and (American) English speakers. The absence of the grammatical article in Russian, for instance, is treated on pretty much the same level as the gastronomical difference between 'objed' and 'lunch.' Then come more practical hints, culminating in a list of "words which can — and do — regularly entrap interpreters: 'aktualjny,' 'argumjent,' 'artist,'..." They are problematic indeed for most novices (and would that only novices!) except that most of them pose not cultural but "linguistic" problems: they are invariably *faux amis*. Still, the interpreter's role as cultural mediator is rightly highlighted, which is the main point.

The following chapters deal with strictly linguistic difficulties: "Political terminology," "Verbs and Their Problems," "Time Expressions," "Conjunctions, Prepositions and Particles," etc. The pieces of advice are sound and apt indeed, but, again, I miss a systematic orientation as to how to come up with one's own equivalents (i.e. forfeiting language and sticking to sense). The case is nevertheless again made for having the speaker's "communicative intent" in mind. Then come two chapters on style and intonation, respectively; the former ends up dealing well nigh exclusively with idioms and proverbs, while the latter treats the semantics of Russian intonation and advises the student against aping it. The last chapter is

devoted to "Conference Terminology," with a glossary on proceedings, congratulations and condolences.

Part II consists of a series of texts with short glossaries on subjects ranging from the Soviet political system to hunting, and from fishing to disarmament, with a selected vocabulary for escort interpreters, complete with sample toasts. Interesting as this material is, much of it is hardly what a simultaneous interpreter is likely to encounter in the booth.

The bibliography is quite complete, but has a few major gaps (notably Gile's series of pieces on the competing efforts model, García Landa's on the orality of interpretation, and Thiéry's on the importance of the situation). Also, although Lederer and Seleskovitch figure prominently, most of the seminal notions developed in their writings are not used or mentioned at all: the dialectics between short-term and long-term memory, the evanescence of words, deverbalisation, the principle of synecdoche, the primacy of the knowledge of the world over the knowledge of languages, and so many others. Another shortcoming is the insufficient stress on the appraisal of the specific communicative situation and the importance of shared knowledge between speaker and audience.

Shirjajev's claim that interpreters do not use the speaker's pauses to catch up is taken at face value, despite Gile's exactly opposite conclusion. Authors such as Chernov, Barik, Shirjajev and Goldman-Eisler are more or less sweepingly taken to task for not catering to the practical needs of students and practitioners, but students are not recommended the many works written specifically with students and practicing interpreters in mind (by, among others, Seleskovitch, Lederer, Gile, García Landa, Déjean LeFéal, Thiéry, etc.).

Although subtitled "An Introduction to Simultaneous Interpretation," the book is more of an elementary "Stylistique comparée du russe et de l'anglais"; and it reads as if it were a series of improvised chats rather than a "through-processed" manual. That being said, there is much nutritious, juicy and savory meat in these pages that would make a better dish if it were systematically organised, with a more structured and thorough analysis of what interpretation, as a specific form of mediated interlingual communication, is really about.

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