SKILLS ENHANCING EXERCISES FOR INTERPRETERS OF ALL LANGUAGES

With limited interpreter training or skills-building classes available, it is often difficult to obtain feedback on interpreting performance. The exercises described below will provide both the novice and experienced interpreter with methods to improve skills in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting and sight translation.

Effective Listening

1. Observe conversations conducted outside of earshot (across a room, with the volume turned down on the television, in a crowded area such as a shopping center or an airport). Note how facial expressions, gestures, body movements, posture, eye contact (or lack of it) reveal what the speakers may be saying. What are they talking about? Which nonverbal cues suggested the conversation to you? What language are they speaking? How do you know? Do this exercise in all your working languages. How do the cues differ in each language?

2. Listen closely to someone you cannot see, i.e. on the telephone or the radio and analyze their manner of speaking: voice pitch, tone and volume as well as other sounds, such as sighs, hesitations, stutters and tongue clickings. Do this exercise in all your working languages and compare the difference.

3. Go to a store with a friend (and a small cassette recorder) and ask the clerk about a product. Five minutes later, try to repeat exactly what the clerk said. Play back the tape recording to see how close you came to the original message.

4. Analyze words and their meanings by asking others what they mean when they use a particular word or a phrase. How does their word usage differ from yours?

5. Ask someone for directions to a place you know how to get to, then ask for directions to an unfamiliar place. What happens in your mind in these situations? Do you lose your train of thought or do you jump ahead?

6. The next time you have a conversation with someone and miss part of what was said, analyze what went wrong. How did you lose your concentration? Were you daydreaming? Were you distracted by an unfamiliar word or a physical interference? Did a previous, unresolved conversation or thought intervene?

7. While listening to a speaker, try to conclude what the speaker's point is early in the presentation. At the conclusion of the speech make another evaluation. Were your evaluations the same? Why or why not?

8. How and why are "linkage words" (however, but, unless, therefore, etc.) used? How do they establish the relationships of ideas? Make a list of these words and listen to how they are used. Do this in all your working languages.