

Graz Assessment Seminar
Conference interpreting assessment
from novice to professional
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Assessment criteria revisited
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There is a gap between the number of students passing final exams and the EU tests

Is language proficiency insufficient?

Is knowledge of EU institutions lacking?

Is it natural selection?

- when the language combination and interpreting technique are solid, what makes the difference?
- is it the different setting?
- or the incapacity to cope with stress?
- is it working experience which students lack?

- What can be done when something in a good student does not yet fit into the frame of professional interpreting
- when there is a good language understanding and production and much improvement has already taken place, but, nevertheless, the student is not yet up to level, up to professional interpreting standards?
- do they have to work longer, harder, is it only a question of time?

To what extent are fatigue, endurance, time pressure, quick reactions to something new and unexpected during interpreting courses tested?

Students must show their proficiency overcoming the stress that an interpreting setting entails

- Language proficiency, oral comprehension and effective production, fluidity of delivery and fast recall of terminology

are best evaluated when the pressure is at its highest

- Interpreting techniques, consecutive and simultaneous, language combination command

are really internalized when, whatever the circumstances, the student/interpreter is able to keep control of the situation and perform at a professional level

Assessment criteria as a means revealing students' position on their way to fully fledged interpreters

- the final aim of interpreting courses is the achievement of professional interpreting standards
- professional interpreting is the guiding principle underlying every assessment
- mastery of any art or profession is achieved only when the output reaches the required level despite any adverse condition arising

stress and cognitive resource management are key elements of professional interpreting

The professional interpreter is able:

- immediately to adapt to different subject matters, quickly switching from one language to another, from one kind of speaker to another
- s/he knows how to reduce the knowledge gap existing between him/herself and the speaker, between him/herself and the audience thanks to their background and general knowledge as well as to their ability to prepare for a specific assignment
- furthermore, s/he has fast reaction times, physical endurance and steady nerves

- every step towards becoming a professional interpreter, from the very beginning, from testing conference interpreting aptitude to interim and final exams, will be ascertained under stress conditions
- students' weaknesses and shortcomings are revealed under pressure

Entrance tests

The pressure is provided by the exam situation itself, switching quickly from one language to the other and being judged by an unfamiliar commission

- Language command - oral production, expression accuracy, clarity of ideas; comprehension of oral information of a given language combination
- Fast reaction times
- Synthesis and concentration ability
- General knowledge, power of deduction
- Flexibility

Class assessment and interim exams

Language and delivery

- suitability of word choices and language structures, interferences and calques
- intonation and accent
- false starts, repetitions
- filled pauses (ehms, ah), long silent pauses

Content and interpreting strategies

- information equivalence and reformulation ability
- substitution of elements, omissions, additions
- anticipation and décalage
- technique
- overall performance

Stress resilience is monitored through delivery, voice control, intonation and reformulation ability

Special class sessions aimed at testing stress resilience and exercising how to control stress could help

to contrast stress phenomena

- lack of concentration
- not finding familiar words
- word for word interpreting
- interrupting sentences
- interferences

to control

- voice and intonation

- To exercise extra pressure, delivery pace may be accelerated, disturbing elements introduced such as speaking away from the microphone, inserting a joke, using colloquial expressions in a formal speech, organizing debates with brief questions and answers, changing language, quoting, inserting the title of books or films, numbers etc.

Final exams

- the aim of final exams is recreating working conditions to assess simultaneous and consecutive interpreting
- final exams are per se a source of stress
- criteria for final exams may be summarized in clarity, good delivery, content equivalence and overall performance

- Is it possible to recognize exactly what is needed and program further steps?
- Is it possible to know how much a student can improve and in what time scale?
- Should they be asked or should we decide for them?

We cannot prescribe everything

- Individual will, individual work makes the difference and works miracles

Are all our good students Euromasters students?
Can they all become Euromasters graduates?

- Should students failing final exams have another opportunity or should they fit into another category?
- Are some students more suitable for private market interpreting, strong B language, ABC combination as opposed to ACCC?
- Could we have Euromasters students together with diploma holders?

We can only acknowledge the present level
of professionalism or
'Euromasterity'