

A test to assess aptitudes in candidates who want to enter interpreting studies at FLEX

Examen de aptitud para candidatos a estudios de interpretación en FLEX

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This article is intended to elucidate why aptitudes are required to accomplish a high performance in interpreting and to support the idea that an aptitude test could be beneficial at FLEX in order to know which students are more likely to become successful interpreters.

Methods: This aim was accomplished through the following steps. First, document analysis was conducted on the available literature on interpreter aptitude testing. Second, an aptitude test was created and applied to a sample in FLEX. Moreover, quantitative data analysis was carried out.

Results: The results of the test showed that not all students possess the necessary aptitudes to succeed in interpreting.

Conclusions: Therefore, this test could allow teachers at FLEX to carry out a fair evaluation in the selection of the students with the highest potentials to perform successfully in this field. Besides, the test could be useful in the context of any interpreter training center.

KEYWORDS: Interpretation; interpretation process; aptitude test; performance

RESUMEN

Introducción: Este artículo pretende explicar por qué se requieren aptitudes para lograr un alto rendimiento en la interpretación y exponer cómo una prueba de aptitud podría ser beneficiosa en el FLEX para saber qué estudiantes tienen más probabilidades de tener éxito.

Métodos: Primero, se realizó un análisis de la literatura disponible sobre las pruebas de aptitud para intérpretes. Segundo, se creó una prueba de aptitud y se aplicó a una muestra en el FLEX. Además, se realizó el análisis de los datos cuantitativos.

Resultados: Los resultados de la prueba mostraron que no todos los estudiantes poseen las aptitudes necesarias para tener éxito en la interpretación.

Conclusiones: Por lo tanto, esta prueba podría permitir a los profesores del FLEX llevar a cabo una evaluación justa en la selección de los estudiantes con mayor potencial para desempeñarse con éxito en este campo. Además, la prueba podría ser útil en el contexto de cualquier centro de formación de intérpretes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: interpretación ; proceso de interpretación; examen de aptitud; rendimiento

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that more than one hundred different languages are spoken in the whole world; however, human beings have managed to interact beyond the differences between one language and the other. Interpreting, one of the oldest professions can be considered a young discipline. The furtherance of interpreting made interpreters increasingly necessary. As a result, universities and other institutions began to train people as professional interpreters.

Programs have been developed to teach the learners what interpreting is and how to reach proficiency in this profession. Moreover, research has been conducted to examine various aspects of the interpreting process and to study its outcome. Questions on the efficiency, quality, and success of interpreting have been asked but not satisfactorily answered. Yet research on interpreting in our country, Cuba, is still at the primary stage; and no systematic theories have been established to show interpreters and those would-be interpreters what kind of aptitudes they should possess.

«Practice makes perfect», as the saying goes, but soon it was clear for institutions that no matter how much all students were trained, some were not able to do this job professionally and that some could not even interpret at all despite being bilinguals» (Domínguez, 2015). These individual differences among interpreting students' potential to succeed in the field became the topic of research. For instance, Herbert (1952) was among the first to highlight the need not only of knowing two languages, but also of having a good memory and a wide general knowledge. He emphasized that these requirements are the basic aptitudes for a student to become a good interpreter. Withal, the connection between these requirements and the quality of future interpreters has boosted the application of aptitude tests in interpreting schools. The tests usually assess students' linguistic knowledge, intelligence, memory, their emotion and stress control, their general knowledge, and their aptitude to translate and to speak in front of an audience (Carroll, 1978; Bowen & Bowen, 1989; Longley, 1989; Lambert, 1991; Moser-Mercer, 1994; Chabasse & S. Kader, 2014).

More recently, Katrin Vanhecke (2008) followed a cognitive perspective for her research on aptitude assessment, which was the topic of her doctoral dissertation: *La interpretación simultánea vista desde una perspectiva cognitiva: Análisis de aptitudes para la interpretación y propuesta metodológica de la enseñanza de la interpretación en España*. Regarding this thesis defended at the University of Malaga, in order to be an eligible candidate for admission to

interpreting courses, all applicants are expected to have remarkable outstanding and specific requisites.

Such a subject has been a matter of further research in many countries; thus, this topic has become of interest here in Cuba, especially with the advent of the recently presented «Curriculum E» at the School of Foreign Languages (FLEX), which intends to open a separate field of Translation and Interpreting. At present, our school is preparing itself to make a huge change. Students will have to choose, in their second year of studies, between the field of Translation and Interpreting and the field of Linguistics. This article considers students taking the English Major at FLEX.

With regard to this, the general problem is that not all students of English Major at FLEX possess the necessary aptitudes to succeed in interpreting. Some students might not attain the expected success in the field; therefore, frustration may arise. On account of the division of the new Curriculum E in Translation- Interpreting and Linguistics, an efficient test for the assessment of aptitudes in those students who are willing to take the field of Translation and Interpreting could be helpful for teachers at FLEX. This article presents the results of an aptitude test aimed at assessing the necessary aptitudes in future students of interpreting.

In our case, the research area focuses on interpreting as an area of Applied Linguistics. The specific domain is the assessment of aptitudes in interpreting candidates of the English Major at the School of Foreign Languages.

This article poses the following research questions: why are certain aptitudes and skills required to accomplish a high performance in interpreting? Why could an aptitude test be beneficial for the selection of future interpreting students? How can we interpret the results of the aptitude test and make decisions from them?

Furthermore, this article analyses the foundational cognitive attributes that influence performance in interpreting regardless of its modalities: either simultaneous or non-simultaneous. The Cuban scenario will be considered, likewise the particular characteristics of our context and of students at the School of Foreign Languages. Without these aptitudes, as shown by Brooke Macnamara (2012) in her article *Interpreter Cognitive Aptitudes*, an individual will be unlikely to succeed as an interpreter.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to elucidate why aptitudes and skills are required to accomplish a high performance in interpreting, to expound on the idea that an assessment tool¹ could be beneficial at the School of Foreign Languages (FLEX) for the selection of students who are more likely to become successful interpreters, to create an assessment tool in order to know the existence of aptitudes for interpreting in students, and to apply this test on the selected sample.

¹ A standardized test designed to measure the aptitude of a person to develop skills or acquire knowledge.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interpreting process and stages

According to Guo Lanying (2007), there are mainly two stages for the process of interpreting: perceiving and decoding. However, the following fragmentation of the process by Domínguez (2015) is simpler and helps us to understand how many things an interpreter should do or take into account at the same time. It comprises only three stages: comprehension, reformulation, and re-expression.

Comprehension

It is the first stage of the interpreting process in which the interpreter must understand the communicative intention of the speaker and the sense of the message. In order to pass through this stage successfully, the interpreter has to dominate perfectly the source language (SL) and the vocabulary items used in the speaker's speech. The knowledge goes further the command of the SL; moreover, the interpreter has to embrace and possess general culture, information about the subject in discussion and about the cultural nature of the speaker, which somehow in certain cases will define and influence the speaker's perspective, perceptiveness, and acumen.

Such a stage *constitutes a fundamental premise in the interpreting process*. It is the starting point, in which interpreters rely to conduct the rest of the procedures and techniques. The setting and the listening skill of interpreters influence the quality of the interpretation and, while they are listening and trying to comprehend, they should take notes because they cannot store everything in their memories.

Reformulation

Once the message is received, the interpreter has to express it again according to the use and grammar rules of the target language. A good comprehension is required since the reformulation depends on how well and exact the interpreter received the message. If the comprehension process is hampered, the reformulation might undergo some profound transformations; therefore, we must fulfill it with the requirements of the first stage and exert an effort to maintain the relation of sense established between the components of the source text and the corresponding elements in the target language and to include the most relevant information of the source text in its re-expression in the target language.

The capacity of analysis and synthesis plays an important role in the reformulation stage. The interpreter must select what is the relevant information and what is the irrelevant data he or she can get rid of. A perfect command of the oral re-expression in the target language is crucial; besides, cultural knowledge, and information about the subject in discussion and about the cultural nature of the speaker.

Re-expression

An interpreter has to be a plausible and convincing speaker, able to express with preciseness; he or she has to be understood and has to rule out all the possibilities of mistakes and ambiguities. Certain qualities must be present in their performance at this stage to enhance the communicative process. Interpreters must achieve a stable tone, must have a correct elocution, their style in speaking in public has to be eloquent. They should eliminate as swift as they can diction errors and their vocal expression, enunciation, and pronunciation ought to be flawless. Withal, they should keep a stable rhythm without much fastness or excessive slowness, just a cadency with an intonation with which the message is properly delivered. This expressive intonation helps to understand the nuances of the speaker (Domínguez, 2015).

The analysis of interpreting unveils a multi-task process that shows high complexity. This kind of activity, generally called «translation» in the sense that there is transference of messages from one language into another, has been regarded as the fifth form of verbal activity: a special form in which the first stage – motivation and need to communicate – is not present. Instead, the interpreters must react, communicate, and express messages that they did not originally produce, with connotations that they do not necessarily agree with. From the cognitive point of view, interpreting is also a complex phenomenon regardless of its type or mode. The interpreter is always doing at least two things at the same time, hence the need for split or divided attention as a requisite to successfully carry out the process. In the case of consecutive interpreting, the first stage: comprehension is in itself complex too. This first stage comprises at least listening and note-taking; during the second stage, the process goes through note-reading, emission strategy, and speaking. All of that is accompanied by feedback while the message is being delivered and by some possible disturbances such as noise and any forms of interruptions. In the case of simultaneous interpreting, listening and speaking occur at the same time. Nevertheless, the difficulty lies in the fact that what is being heard is different from what is being said, which means, while the interpreter is listening to fragment B, he is actually re-expressing fragment A into the target language. Accordingly, this time lapse makes things more difficult (Domínguez, 2015).

Aptitudes for interpreting and Selection Tests

Cronbach & Snow (1977) defined aptitude as any characteristic that predicts a person's probability of success under a given treatment. People who possess certain skills are more likely to learn in a particular situation. This definition connotes that one who has aptitudes possesses an advantage over others.

In the early 90's, Lambert (1991) analyzed a number of articles written by professional interpreters and some interviews with interpreters. These articles and interviews were

mostly about what aptitudes they considered important elements to pursue a successful interpreting career. The results show the following aspects:

Profound knowledge of active and passive languages and cultures, ability to grasp rapidly and convey the essential meaning of what has been said, ability to project information with confidence, coupled with a good voice, wide general knowledge and interests, and a willingness to acquire new information, ability to work as part of a team. (Lambert, 1991)

An overview of the ideal interpreter profile has been presented in the paper *Aptitude testing over the years* by Mariachiara Russo (2011), with an account of a number of skills as remarked by several authors:

Herbert (1952):

- Professional experience
- Command of two foreign languages
- Lexical fluency
- Good memory
- Broad general culture
- Interpreting attitude

1965 AIIC Colloque (Russo, 2011):

- Professional and training experience
- Foreign language command (B+C)
- Strong mother tongue (A)
- Love for language
- Ability to comprehend
- Language transfer skills

1974 Paris Symposium (Russo, 2011):

- Professional and training experience
- Ability to comprehend and mental rapidity
- Expressive skills
- General culture
- Personal qualities (capacity to adapt to subject, speakers, etc.; public speaking, tact, and diplomacy)
- Physical and psychological stamina

Lambert (1991):

- Professional experience
- Profound knowledge of active and passive languages and cultures
- Ability to grasp rapidly and to convey the essential meaning of what is being said
- Ability to project information with confidence, coupled with good voice

- Wide general knowledge and interests, and a willingness to acquire new information
- Ability to work as a team member

Longley (1989):

- Training experience and scholarly perspective
- Excellent knowledge of A, B, C languages and cultures
- Ability to grasp rapidly and to convey the essential meaning of discourse, irrespective of the language spoken
- A memory which recalls the links between logical sequences of discourse
- Ability to convey information with confidence, coupled with a pleasant delivery
- Broad general knowledge and interests, a curiosity and willingness to acquire new information
- Ability to work as a team member
- Ability to work under stress for long periods

Compared to other fields in interpreting studies, there has been little empirical research on the aptitudes for interpreting until very recently. As Timarová & Ungoed-Thomas (2008) stated, what might constitute interpreter aptitudes are often based on intuition of interpreters and the experience of trainers. Nevertheless, investigating interpreter skills empirically without resorting to the aforementioned strategies would be methodologically difficult. For instance, exploring the intuition of interpreters and inquiring the experience of trainers, because aptitudes cannot be conjured up by pure imagination.

In a nutshell, an interpreter requires a complex set of cognitive aptitudes to operate in a daily basis, including a fluid and crystallized intelligence, self-efficacy, the ability to analyze and infer meaning, reasoning skills, long-term working memory, cultural background, deep power of comprehension and re-expression (vocal dynamics and diversity of expressive styles), intuition, tact, poise, and emotion-stress control (Pöchhacker, 2011; Pöchhacker & M. Liu, 2014). Albeit some people claim some of these aptitudes can be trained, it has been demonstrated that not all the professionals in the field have the same level of competence and efficiency at their work (Lanying, 2007; Russo, 2014). Furthermore, Simoné G. and Harold M. L. (2021) devised a very interesting model for aptitude testing for simultaneous interpreters.

Selection Tests in Some Foreign Institutions

The idea that aptitudes and some general personality traits are very important when selecting students for interpreting courses led the path to the implementation of evaluation procedures since the 1990's.

During the last 30 years, many institutions have been using assessment or aptitude tests in order to admit candidates to their courses. In chronological order, these are some of them (Pippa & Russo, 2002):

- *Georgetown University's School of Language and Linguistics* in Washington DC. The test included (in 1989) a multiple choice standard vocabulary test and an oral exam, both with the objective of assessing language proficiency; written translation and sight translation. The results were expressed by «acceptable», «unacceptable» and «probation».
- *University of Ottawa*. Lambert (1991) outlined the methods, which had been in use since 1984 at this university, for the selection of candidates through shadowing, cloze, sight translation, memory test, and interview. The objectives were to identify certain characteristics such as general knowledge, command of A and B languages, the ability to transfer meaning, specific interpreting-related skills and personality traits. Lambert (1991) stated that the tests were able to identify those candidates with remote chance of success in the field of interpretation.
- *SSLMIT, University of Trieste*. From 1979 until the late 80's, an aptitude test was given to students at the beginning of their third year. This included a written summary, a sight translation, an improvised speech, and the assessment of general knowledge and grammatical aspects of the B language. Another project was started in the early 90's on a new test. Students were asked to paraphrase in Italian a speech delivered in that language, with the objective of assessing cognitive and linguistic aptitudes such as comprehension, analysis, anticipation, reformulation and synthesis. Such study showed that this test had a greater predictive value in identifying candidates with better possibilities of success.
- *The University of Stockholm*. The postgraduate interpreting courses began in 1993 with an admission of approximately 12-15 students. The test is exclusively oral. The candidates should do a 5-minute presentation in the A language, an interpretation into Swedish of a speech delivered in each of the known foreign languages, oral questions on the cultures of the foreign countries where those languages are spoken, and an interview.
- *Interpreter and Translator Training Center (ITTC)*, Budapest. The ITTC at the University of Budapest offers a postgraduate course. The admission exam includes a written and an oral test. The written exam consists of two translations, one into the A language and one into the B language, a summary into the B language and an essay in the A language. The oral exam involves interviews with the purpose of assessing knowledge of current affairs and general culture, tests of liaison interpreting and sight translation.
- *Copenhagen Business School (CBS), Center for Conference Interpretation (CIC)*. These are 6-month postgraduate courses. For admission, candidates are expected to prove their command of their two foreign languages. The first part of the test consists in paraphrasing two brief presentations in language A, and the assessment is based on

comprehension errors and omissions in the paraphrased delivery. The second part includes an interview in the B language. A sight translation from languages B and C is also used.

- *ETI, Université de Genève*. The admission exam is designed to assess aptitudes for conference interpreting, language competence (listening and writing skills) in the A language and passive language competence. The candidates must pass a translation test before they take the oral exam. The oral part includes a comprehension exercise for each of the candidates' languages and an oral presentation test for each of his/her active languages.
- *Universidad de Antioquia*, in Medellín, Colombia. The exam is designed to choose official translators and interpreters and it is divided into two parts. The interpreting part includes sight translation and bilateral interpreting. The written part concentrates on direct and inverse translation. Each test has a value of 100 points, and the would-be interpreter should get at least 85 points to pass it. The texts for sight translation are generally technical or scientific, and official interviews are used for bilateral interpreting. The written section requires the translation of a scientific or/and technical text and an official one. Each section should be completed in 60 minutes.

The previous examples from a group of universities show that the assessment criteria changes depending on the individual institution and on the fact that there are not uniform procedures in the set of exercises applied for admission to interpreting courses. There is a need for standardization of the criteria and types of tasks in the exams. Validation of the tests is another pending issue; it has been perceived that there has not been a follow up of most of the candidates who passed the tests. A methodology for testing aptitude for interpreting should be developed and standardized.

METHODOLOGY

These tasks were possible thanks to the following theoretical methods:

- Document analysis: to gather essential information from specialized sources in order to provide a scientific foundation to the study.
- Analysis and synthesis: to interpret and process the information which was extracted from the specialized bibliography, and come to conclusions resulting from the study.
- Deduction and induction: to evaluate the information from the sources and to make generalizations about the phenomenon that is being analyzed.
- Referential method: to assume a critical position with respect to the bibliography.
- Historical-logical method: to understand the historical development of the research topic.

- Quantitative data analysis / Statistic analysis: to analyze data in form of numbers and carry out a statistic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Aptitude Assessment and Interpreting courses at FLEX

An assessment tool based on the theoretical aspects and principles of interpreting could allow teachers to carry out a fair evaluation in the selection of the students with the highest potentials. It should measure the presence of aptitudes and personality traits necessary to become a successful interpreter, which could be useful in the context of any interpreter training center. The assessment could be used to guide those students who are not likely to succeed in the field of interpreting, even when they may pass their examinations in other language-related and linguistics subjects. Consequently, they could reorient their course of studies.

The test in question was intended to assess mastery of the mother tongue and the foreign language, general culture and knowledge, and the capacity to transfer from one language into another. The activities included language exercises, speed of reaction, multiple choices, sight translation, and an interview in the mother tongue and the B language.

Guidelines for the application of the test

1. In preparation for the test, all smartphones and computers should be put aside and should be in plane mode or silent mode to avoid interruptions during the application of the tests. Besides, these measures prevent students from using dictionaries or encyclopedias, or connect with other students, that could become undesirable sources of information.
2. The test should be applied by at least two evaluators. The first activity should be an introduction by the evaluators. Information regarding interpreting and the interpreter's work should be provided, even when this type of motivation should be presented in previous moments; that is, during preparatory year as well as in first and second years.
3. The students should be informed about the objective of the test (to assess the existence of aptitudes for interpreting and translating), what is expected from them and the fact that they will be using both languages and are expected to be able to shift from one into the other and back to the first language at any time.
4. It should be conducted in two sessions, one for the written and one for the oral test, preferably with the written first.
5. The level of difficulty should be gradually increased through the test.

6. For the oral test, two evaluators are required, and each will shift from English into Spanish and vice versa at any time.
7. Each test will have a maximum score of 100 points. The final result will be the average resulting from the evaluation points of each of them.
8. Once the test has been evaluated, a ranking list will be done. The candidates to enter the translation-interpretation specialty will be selected considering the ranking and the quantity of positions for this specialty.

Aptitude test

Written Test

The written test will be given to all the students simultaneously during the first session of examination. An example of the answers is provided in parenthesis.

I. Write what each phrase or name refers to (30 points, three points each item):

La Gran Manzana (*Nueva York*)

El magnicidio de Dallas (*Asesinato de Kennedy*)

10 Downing Street (*Londres, residencia del Primer Ministro*)

El maestro del suspenso (*Alfred Hitchcock*)

La Atenas de Cuba (*Matanzas*)

La industria sin chimeneas (*El turismo*)

El holocausto (*Segunda Guerra Mundial, matanza de judíos por los nazis*)

Pearl Harbor (*Ataque de los japoneses a la base de Pearl Harbor, detonante que conllevó a la entrada de los estadounidenses a la II Guerra Mundial*)

NATO (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*)

Brexit (*Salida del Reino Unido de la Unión Europea*)

II. What historical event is related to each of the following names? Explain (30 points, five each item).

Graham Bell (Invention of the telephone)

The Wright brothers (Built and flew the first plane)

Pierre de Coubertin (Founder of the Olympic Games)

Alexander Fleming (Scientist who discovered penicillin, a substance used as antibiotic in Medicine to destroy bacteria)

Yuri Gagarin (Soviet astronaut, who became the first man to go to outer space)

Carlos J. Finlay (Cuban scientist and doctor, who discovered that the aedes aegypti is the transmission agent of the yellow fever)

III. Write two texts, one in English and the other one in Spanish, using the following phrases. Each should have at least 250 words. (20 points, 10 each text).

An outstanding US writer
The Old Man and the Sea
Living in the outskirts of Havana
Nobel Prize
The fishermen in Cojimar
El Pilar
For Whom the Bell Tolls
A Farewell to Arms
Ambos Mundos
Calentamiento global
Gases de efecto invernadero
Capa de ozono
Rayos ultravioletas
Efectos en la tierra y el mar
Pequeños estados insulares
Equipos de refrigeración

IV. Write a brief Spanish speech (no less than 150 words) for the opening session of the international congress in Cuba. You may select the topic (20 points).

Oral Test

The oral activities that are done individually will be recorded. The use of an external microphone is suggested. This brings in stress load and allows the evaluators to assess the candidates' ability to deal with stress.

I. Interview in both languages. The interview should be carried out by two evaluators. It will start with an introduction during which the evaluators will shift from one language into another back and forth. The students will be informed that they are expected to speak the language that the evaluator is using. The objective is to evaluate the students' command of both the mother tongue and the first foreign language, and to assess the students' ability to cope with stress. General knowledge and culture will also be considered. The following topics may be used as a guide to strike up the conversation (20 points).

Talk your aspirations as a future university graduate
Talk about current events in Cuba
Talk about your favorite hobby
Comment on some recent international events

II. Expressive reading in both languages. The exercise should be done individually in front of the two evaluators. The student will be given two fragments of speeches, one

written in their mother tongue and one in their first foreign language. The fragment in the students' mother tongue will be presented first and once the task has been completed, the same will be done with the second fragment. One minute will be allowed for the candidate to have a look at the text. The presence of two evaluators is suggested for this activity. The students' delivery will be recorded for later evaluation. There should be an introduction by the evaluator who will refer to the communicative situation in each of the speeches; that is, the speaker's name and position, the place and the moment when the speech was delivered. The texts should have some expressive elements and these should be used to assess the students' expressiveness and ability to convey expressive loads in discourse. Pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, expressiveness and fluency will be assessed (20 points).

Fragmento del discurso pronunciado por Bruno Rodríguez en la sesión plenaria de la VIII Cumbre de las Américas, Lima, Perú, el 14 de abril de 2018:

[...] En las campañas electorales no hay límites éticos, se promueve el odio, la división, el egoísmo, la calumnia, el racismo, la xenofobia y la mentira; proliferan tendencias neofascistas y se prometen muros, militarización de fronteras, deportaciones masivas, incluso de niños nacidos en el propio territorio norteño.

¿De qué democracia y valores se habla aquí?, ¿de los del presidente Lincoln o del «sueño» de Martin Luther King, que enaltecerían al pueblo estadounidense, al que nos unen vínculos indisolubles?, ¿o de los de Cutting, los que provocaron la guerra con México y la extirpación de su territorio, o de los del supuesto «antisistema» extremista conservador que gobierna hoy en los Estados Unidos de América?

Cuba no aceptará amenazas ni chantaje del gobierno de los Estados Unidos. No desea la confrontación, pero no negociará nada de sus asuntos internos, ni cederá un milímetro en sus principios.

President J. F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address in 1961 (excerpts):

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom —symbolizing an end as well as a beginning— signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek

their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich [...]

III. Short term memory. This exercise can be done with all the students simultaneously. The evaluator will read a long sentence only once. The students should write it down as soon as the speaker has finished. The candidates will listen to sentences in their mother tongue first and later in their first foreign language. The objective is to assess short-term memory. In addition, the reproduction of the exact words and phrases read by the evaluator is not the only satisfactory solution to this task. Synonyms, generalizations and the use of cohesion elements are accepted as well as other solutions that evidence understanding and memory retention of the contents and the sense of the communicative fragment for a later reproduction. Five sentences will be used for the exercise (10 points, 2 each).

1. En defensa de la independencia, la Revolución y el socialismo, el pueblo cubano ha derramado su sangre, asumido extraordinarios sacrificios y los mayores riesgos.
2. La salida de Reino Unido de la Unión Europea constituye un duro golpe para el proyecto europeo, en cuyos orígenes estuvo la idea de evitar otra gran guerra en el continente.
3. In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger.
4. For the last decade, acid rain has caused destruction to hundreds of lakes and streams in many parts of the world including USA, Canada and Europe.
5. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work; and the only way to do great work is to love what you do.

IV. Production of an oral text. The exercise should be done individually in the presence of two evaluators. The students' production will be recorded. The students will have two minutes to prepare a short oral presentation on each topic, first in the students' mother tongue and later in the English language. Aspects such as the contents of the text, the use of terms, connectors, cohesion elements, and pronunciation will be assessed. The students will select two topics from a list, one in the students' mother tongue and the other one in the students' first foreign language (20 points).

- Combustibles fósiles, consumo energético, riesgos, fuentes alternativas de energía,
- Fuentes de ingreso para Cuba, acciones de los Estados Unidos para dañarlas,
- Eventos meteorológicos en Cuba, tipos, temporada, daños, defensa civil cubana,
- The third world, education and health care,
- Women in society, two Jobs,
- The United States and Cuba after 1959, Bay of Pigs, terrorism and blockade.

V. Critical comprehension of an oral text in the foreign language. The text should be one intended for a general audience about a topic known to the students (20 points).

People have always been fascinated with death. Most of the mysteries that you see on television, the films that you see, involve murder in one kind or another. Crocodiles are one of the last remaining dinosaurs and the idea of a crocodile coming out of the water and grabbing somebody is absolutely riveting.

I read about the death of the German tourist who was taken by a crocodile. It didn't put me off coming to the Northern Territory, quite the opposite in fact.

I think the NT is famous for its crocodiles and probably quite famous for its crocodile attacks and that tourists who come here would like to be, or feel as though they were, involved in that danger.

Tourists want to have a story to take home and if they can say that they were in the Northern Territory where the German tourist was taken by the croc, then it adds to their own adventure.

This transcription of the oral test will not be given to students. (australianetwork.com)

1. What is the main idea of the text?
2. Why is the Northern Territory famous?
3. Why would tourists go there?

VI. Sight translation. The objective is to assess the students' aptitudes to transfer information from a source language into a target language, from a foreign language into their mother tongue, in the mode of sight translation, before they have taken any translation courses. This skill is usually regarded as indicative of cognitive aptitudes accounting for better performance in the field of translation and interpretation (10 points).

Age invaders

In the 20th century the planet's population doubled twice. It will not double even once in the current century, because birth rates in much of the world have declined steeply. But the number of people over 65 is set to double within just 25 years. This shift in the structure of the population is not as momentous as the expansion that came before. But it is more than enough to reshape the world economy.

According to the UN's population projections, the standard source for demographic estimates, there are around 600m people aged 65 or older alive today. That is in itself remarkable; the author Fred Pearce claims it is possible that half of all the humans who have ever been over 65 are alive today. But as a share of the total population, at 8%, it is not that different to what it was a few decades ago.

Analyzing the results of the aptitude test

In order to attain the objectives, set in previous chapters, we selected a sample from third year students from the English major at FLEX. The population in the sample took the aptitude test presented in Chapter III. We selected these students because they fit into this category: from all students at school that have not taken the courses of Translation and Interpretation yet, they are the ones that have spent more time receiving English lessons. We studied a sample of 23 students; although we intended to study the whole group of 27. This was impossible due to the students' fear to failure and insecurities when it comes to proving knowledge and demonstrating skills and aptitudes. Only 18 out of the 23 in the sample took the written test, and 20, the oral test. Therefore, some students took either the written or the oral test.

Results of the written test

From the 18 students who sat the written test, 11 passed and 7 failed. The highest mark was 78, the lowest 36.5 and the average was 58.5.

The results from the test made us ask ourselves the following: is the test too difficult? Do they have the required knowledge to succeed? Were the students willing to do it?

Firstly, they claimed that the exam was hard, especially the first two exercises related to general knowledge. However, others found them interesting and challenging. Thus, the difficulty of these exercises is relative because it depends on students' individual knowledge and attitude towards new information.

Secondly, the most common difficulty was wordiness; too many words to express practically the same idea poorly; consequently, the students' texts were marked by the lack of creativity, expressiveness, and knowledge. Besides, they struggled with word choice, collocation, and the use of the Spanish *gerundio*. Many also used a lot of English words in texts written in Spanish and Spanish structures in texts written in English (overuse of subordinate sentences). Other mistakes were related to punctuation marks, spelling and the overuse of very informal phrases.

Thirdly, five students did not understand the last exercise because they wrote an announcement or a description of a congress instead of the speech for the opening session. Moreover, four students left questions unanswered; each of them did not do one of the writing exercises because they claimed to be tired or in a rush. That is one of the reasons why three of them had the lowest grades. However, the remaining student has one of the highest grades, and it could have been better if he/she had not left an exercise unanswered (See student J, Annex 2). This shows their lack of interest and willingness to sit the exam; they had nothing to lose. Clearly, we can draw a conclusion from what has happened; the aptitude test should be optional; they have to be motivated by the results, otherwise their performance will be careless.

In Annex 2, we assigned letters to each student to protect their identities because they asked their names not to be revealed. Nevertheless, teachers at the School of Foreign Languages will have access to this information for further research.

Results of the oral test

From the 20 students who took the oral test, 19 passed and 1 failed. The highest mark was 96, the lowest 59.5 and the average was 82.25.

In general, the most common mistakes were related to the command of either the foreign language or the mother tongue. Most students displayed poor linguistic competence, since they made many grammar mistakes (not according to their level) such as the conjugation of verbs in third person singular and the use of adjectives in plural. Some students showed their lack of knowledge of their mother tongue in the exercise VI (sight translation) because they used phrases such as «*pero sin embargo*»² and «*más mayores*». These kinds of constructions have nothing to do with the activity of translating but with their weak command of their mother tongue and their limited skill to control stress. In addition, some oral presentations were characterized by a mispronunciation of English verbs in past tense, a lack of fluency and a marked use of pet words in both languages but mostly in English.

With regard to the quality of many students' ideas, the test elucidated that their poor background knowledge hindered their oral presentations; thereby, wordiness, lack of vocabulary and outdated information were present in their speech. For example, student Q during the interview took for granted that Cristina Kirchner was the current president of Argentina instead of Mauricio Macri, proving that she/he is not well-informed.

Moreover, in exercise III, over half of the sample was able to retain the most relevant ideas in the sentences. On the contrary, the others could not even say two information units and let alone understand the sentence general sense. Apropos of listening skills, most of the students could successfully grasp all the pivotal information from the recording; however, a few of them could not cope with the stress produced by the exam situation as well as the noisy environment (common feature in real life interpreting situation).

FINAL REMARKS

As demonstrated previously, these tests could allow teachers at FLEX to carry out a fair evaluation in the selection of the students with the highest potentials to perform successfully in this field. Besides, they could be useful in the context of any interpreter training center and could be used to guide those students who are not likely to succeed in the field of interpreting, even when the students may pass their examinations in other

² Even though it is redundant, the structure as emphatic form is not stylishly elegant. (*fundeu.es.*)

language-related and linguistics subjects. Consequently, they could reorient their course of studies.

Furthermore, these tests could also be a predictor of possible difficulties in those students who did enter the interpreting courses. Accordingly, they could become aware of their weaknesses and make bigger efforts to work on specific areas. It could also be beneficial for the teachers, as they would be more aware of the individual needs in the class.

Professional interpreters exhibit special aptitudes and personality traits that are the foundations for the success in the field of professional bilingual mediation. Besides, there is extensive use of tests for assessing aptitudes in candidates to interpreting courses worldwide. Although there is not a standardization of criteria in the contents of the tests and the exams and the activities vary from one institution to another, some elements are found in all cases, namely, knowledge of the languages and general culture.

Furthermore, it is proven that the individual success in the aptitude test depends to a great extent on the motivation and willingness shown by the candidates and the objectives of the aptitude test are best achieved when the test is taken only by those candidates with the intention to enter the field of Translation and Interpretation.

Therefore, the results of the test can help students and teachers become aware of specific strengths and weaknesses, both as a group and individually.

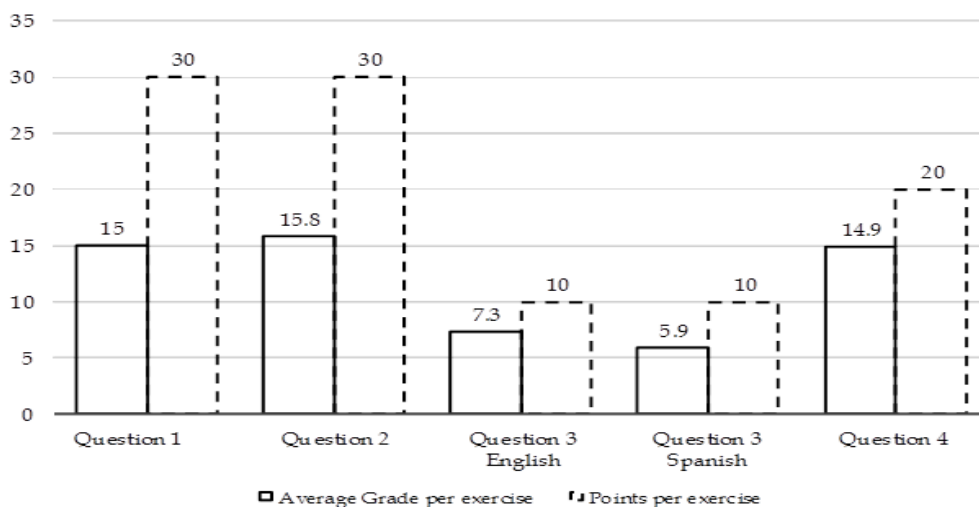
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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. Average grade per exercise. Written Test



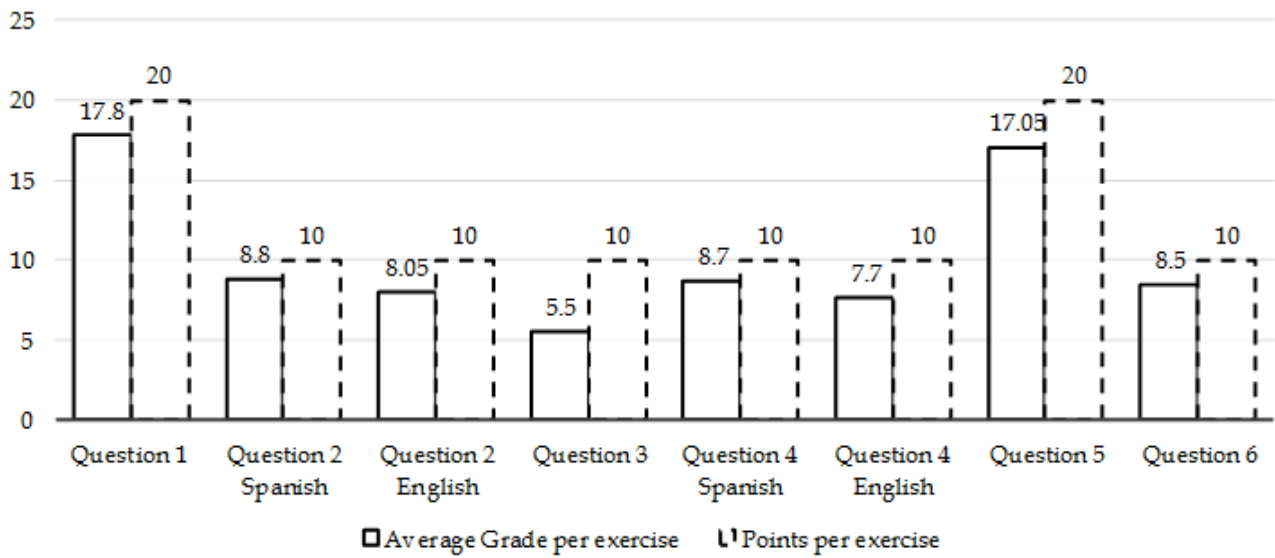
Source: Author's elaboration

ANNEX 2. Grades per student. Written Test

Students	Question 1 30 points	Question 2 30 points	Question 3 English 10 points	Question 3 Spanish 10 points	Question 4 20 points	Total
A	13	23	5	4	17	62
B	16	17.5	9	6	17	65.5
C	22	20	9	8	19	78
D	20	25	5	4	10.5	64.5
E	15	13	8.5	8.5	19	62
F	13	23	5.5	6	17	64.5
G	14	22	5.5	6.5	0	48
H	10	14	6	8	17	55
I	19	10	9.5	7	20	66.5
J	17	25	9.5	0	19.5	71
K	3	10	5	0	18.5	36.5
L	16.5	5	9	8	0	38.5
M	23	17.5	7.5	6.5	18	65
N	16	18	7	6.5	15	62.5
O	10	10.5	8	6.5	14	49
P	15	6	5.5	6	14	46.5
Q	16.5	17.5	9.5	7.5	18	69
R	12	6	8	8	14.5	48.5
S	-	-	-	-	-	-
T	-	-	-	-	-	-
U	-	-	-	-	-	-
V	-	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Author's elaboration

ANNEX 3. Average grade per exercise. Oral Test



Source: Author's elaboration

ANNEX 4. Grades per student. Oral Test

Students	Question 1 20 points	Question 2 Spanish 10 points	Question 2 English 10 points	Question 3 10 points	Question 4 Spanish 10 points	Question 4 English 10 points	Question 5 20 points	Question 6 10 points	Total
A	17	8	8	8	9	8	20	7	85
B	20	9	9	7	9	8	20	9	91
C	20	9	9	9	9	10	20	10	96
D	20	8	8	7	9	8	20	8	88
E	20	10	9	6	10	9	17	10	91
F	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
H	20	10	9	8	9	8	14	9	87
I	17	10	9	5	10	7	17	10	85
J	20	9	9	6	8	10	20	10	92
K	18	9	8	2	7	8	20	8	80
L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
M	20	8	8	7	10	7	20	9	89
N	15	8	6	1	8.5	5	9	7	59.5
O	14	7	6	3	6	6	11	7	60
P	16	8	6	5	7	4	17	5	68
Q	16	9	7	3.5	10	7.5	17	9	79
R	16	8	9	8	9	8	20	9	87
S	18	10	8	5	10	8	14	7	80
T	18	9	10	7	10	10	20	9	93
U	17	9	8	2	8	6	17	7	74
V	17	9	7	6	9	7.5	11	10	82.5
W	16	8	8	4	7	8	17	10	78

Source: Author's elaboration

ANNEX 5. Summary of marks

Students	Written Test	Oral Test	Total
C	78	96	87
J	71	92	81.5
B	65.5	91	78.3
M	65	89	77
E	62	91	76.5
D	64.5	88	76.3
I	66.5	85	75.8
Q	69	79	74
A	62	85	73.5
H	55	87	71
R	48.5	87	67.8
N	62.5	59.5	61
K	36.5	80	58.3
P	46.5	68	57.3
O	49	60	54.5
T	-	93	-
V	-	82.5	-
S	-	80	-
W	-	78	-
U	-	74	-
F	64.5	-	-
G	48.5	-	-
L	38.5	-	-
			Average mark: 71.3

Source: Author's elaboration

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