Conference Interpreting: A Student’s Practice Book By Andrew Gillies

This practical book is a welcome addition to discussions on self-directed learning and on-going professional development.

Debra RUSSELL.
Published: October 30, 2013 Last updated: October 26, 2017

Andrew Gillies has assembled a collection of practice exercises that has importance and relevance for educators and interpreters alike. The book includes a series of chapters that offer us a conference interpreter’s perspective on an issue of common concern: the need for practical exercises that students can use to enhance their development, both in and outside of the class or work environment. I appreciated the multi-focus within the book, bringing together material that addresses how to practice, along with exercises to enhance language development, consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting.

The book begins with a discussion of practical tips on how to practice, written in a way that is easy to absorb and implement no matter what stage of learning the student is at. Gillies then goes on to describe where one can find practice texts and materials, and here we see an emphasis on obtaining materials that are discourse based and situated in real-world contexts. The suggested practice activities are designed to be time efficient and there are examples that highlight the strategies that interpreters can use to hone their language analysis skills. All that makes this a very useful chapter for educators planning for training, and for interpreters looking to support their own learning and build a plan for enhancement. There are also suggestions for providing feedback, and ideas about where to focus comments in order to promote growth.

Next comes a chapter devoted to language learning principles. Gillies shares the strategies that draw attention to linguistic features that are crucial in any interaction, while using material that is authentic. The chapter is easy to follow and mentors, study groups and more traditional training programs could easily implement the approaches. While Gillies uses the terms “passive and active languages”, both of which are used in our field, I would suggest that it would be more helpful to model language that encourages students to see that both languages must be (and in effect are) active in the act of interpreting because the interpreter is actively engaged with both given the cognitive demands of the process.
The remaining sections of the book address consecutive interpreting, memory development, reformulation when providing both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, and simultaneous interpreting. There are a wide array of strategies, that if regularly practiced, should lead to increased effectiveness as an interpreter, regardless of whether working in conference or community based settings.

One of the aspects I didn’t find in the book is any explicit mention of some of the models of interpreting that may be useful to interpreters when learning to manage the interpreting processes, by breaking the interpreting tasks into smaller steps. However it may be that the author is assuming that all readers will have been exposed to such cognitive and sociolinguistic models throughout their formal training. Finally I appreciated the additional material on self-monitoring and stress management.

This book offers us both something familiar and something new, by compiling exercises that have been used by educators, and presenting those in a practical, highly readable format for students. The chapters are well edited, easy to read, provide us with tangible ideas to apply as educators, mentors, working interpreters and students. It is more than just another book to place on your library shelf; it is a welcome addition to our discussions on self-directed learning and on-going professional development.

Debra Russell is an ASL-English interpreter and interpreter educator from Canada. She has worked in community and conference interpreting for 30 years. She is currently the President of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters. As the Director of the Western Centre for Deaf Studies at the University of Alberta, she has conducted research and published about mediated education involving interpreters, legal settings and legal discourse, and on Deaf-hearing interpreter teams. Contact: Debra.russell@wvd1wuj.ualberta.ca

Recommended citation format: