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The question of directionality in conference interpreting, i.e. whether interpreters should interpret only into their mother tongues or also into a 'B' language, namely practise what some now call *retour* interpreting, is one which has been hotly debated by both professionals and trainers since interpreting has been recognized as a profession. In the past, views were polarised into the Western European camp, which favoured interpreting exclusively into the mother tongue from several different foreign languages (in simultaneous, at least) and the Eastern European camp led by the Soviet Union, where interpreters would interpret in both directions and where interpreting from the A language into the B language in both consecutive and simultaneous was commonplace. *Directionality in Interpreting. The 'Retour' or the Native?* edited by Rita Godijns and Michael Hinderdael, presents ten articles written by academics working in the field of conference interpreting, which explore the reasons for this polarization and which, broadly speaking, seek to challenge one or other of the models. While all the contributors are from universities in Western Europe and thus might be expected to challenge the Soviet model and uphold the Western European model this, most interestingly, is not the case. It is certainly interesting for me, as although I was trained according to the Western model and therefore deeply mistrustful of interpreters who claim to be able to inhabit more than one language booth with ease, I found many of the articles were able to challenge my views in a convincing way.

They are convincing because the arguments are based on solid research and they are cogently argued. The authors, broadly speaking, are well known for their research in the field. Daniel Gile, the author of the first article entitled "Directionality in Conference Interpreting: A cognitive view" is a professional conference interpreter and Professor at Lyon II University who has written seminal texts on interpreting. Indeed, so eminent is he that every single contributor makes reference to his work. His argument is that "interpreting directionality preferences are contradictory and based on traditions rather than research", a point which is made by almost all the contributors. The fact that the Soviet school and the Western European school evolved with such differing views as to the right direction would seem to support this claim. So on what did the two "schools" base their views?

Olaf-Immanuel Seel explains that the pro *retour* camp are concerned primarily with "cultural competence": an interpreter is more culturally competent in his mother culture and therefore more competent to interpret out of his mother tongue, as understanding is at the root of interpreting (Seel's article is concerned with non verbal discourse

patterns). Anne Martin explains that the Soviet model was based on the premise that "no one is exempt from comprehension problems and as one cannot interpret what one has not understood, the comprehension phase must be given priority over production". Emilia Iglesias Fernandez explains that Soviet thinking was based on the view that as the most important phase in interpreting is understanding, its success depends on a range of cognitive processes which are more easily completed in the mother tongue. Moreover, it is argued that it is "cognitively more economical" for the interpreter to have fewer options to choose from in the expression phase, thus interpreting **into** a foreign language, paradoxically, facilitates the interpreting process. Fernandez also claims that "at the very beginning, simultaneous interpreting was invariably carried out into the interpreter's foreign language" and that it is only since interpreters have been employed by international organizations that this process has been reversed. Gile points out that many authors who are opposed to interpreting into the B language in simultaneous nonetheless do so routinely in consecutive while maintaining that consecutive has a higher status than simultaneous. For Gile, they are thus guilty of flawed logic.

Despite these arguments, AIIC, the professional association of conference interpreters, maintains that interpreters should interpret into their mother tongue. The theory behind this, known as the *théorie du sens*, was developed by Seleskovitch and Lederer of the Paris school ESIT. Seleskovitch maintained that interpretation into the interpreter's A language is always of higher quality. As Clare Donovan points out "a B language is by definition less versatile and flexible than an A language" and interpreters working out of their mother tongue find the process more tiring and stressful than into their mother tongue as they do not have the same intuition and confidence of expression. Her research demonstrates that recordings of interpretations into B show a "greater tendency to break down or become unusable". Déjean Le Féal refers to the "intrinsic weaknesses" of *retour* and cites her own research which shows that it is "more subject to destabilization than interpretation into the mother tongue".

Whichever camp you belong to, the fact remains that interpreters have to adapt to changes in global markets and take a pragmatic approach to such factors as supply and demand. Although interpretation into the mother tongue remains the norm in the international organizations (with the exception of the Chinese booth), interpreting out of the mother tongue is common on the private market, although it should be pointed out that it seems much more common and accepted in some countries than in others (the Spanish find interpreting into B wholly acceptable but the French do not and it would be a brave interpreter indeed who dared encroach on the territory of the French booth). But offering an interpreting service is a costly exercise and private sector organizers can reduce their costs by insisting interpreters work in two directions. Furthermore, the accession of

new member states to the EU with minority languages has meant that interpreters with minority languages as mother tongue are now required to perform *retour* even within an international organization.

The editors of the book point out that their "goal was to present readers with some interesting and fresh viewpoints, which will [...] stimulate debate on this very controversial issue and lead to further research". I believe readers of *Directionality in Interpreting* will indeed be encouraged to carry out further research, as entrenched as interpreters seem to be in favouring either the *retour* or the native, it is a book which will make them keener than ever to prove their view is the right one. And any book aimed at academics which sparks an enthusiasm for pursuing more research must surely be a good thing.

Jacqueline Page
Roehampton University, London