

MANAGEMENT OF STRESS IN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

(LA GESTIONE DELLO STRESS CORTICALE NELL'INTERPRETAZIONE SEGNICA)

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Hello, my name is Angelo Conti, I am a sign language interpreter and trainer of sensorial activity. I am here to present "Cortical Fitness" our brand new project. In my opinion, a remarkable topic that is now lacking in interpreting training is the management of stress during interpretation. For instance: How can interpreters at university recover from a 45 minute lesson translation in a 10 minute break, to be ready to start again for the following class? How can interpreters at a conference recover from a hard day of interpretation, to be ready for their last lap? Everyone has the right to enjoy family life and social events, even after a day of (sign language) interpretation, because, you know it well, it is so tiring specially of sign language interpretation! In every training program, interpretation is taught as a set of rules, as a cultural and linguistic intervention, but no attention is paid to cortical stress. It comes as no surprise that in every institute for interpreting training a wide range of materials, techniques and facilities are provided, such as simulations, video, computer software/CD-roms; someone is now starting to talk about video conferencing and video phoning. This is a general way of teaching, regularly and consciously updated, let's make it clear! but no consideration is given to neuromuscular activity, as the act of interpretation is (both sign and oral language interpretation). We have to assume that no interpreting training programme provides for neuromuscular training or lessons, teaching neuronal function activity. Interpreters that in this moment are signing and speaking will be tired in about fifteen/twenty minutes, then they will give the place to a colleague and so on, until the evening, but the same break that gives them rest at the first change will not be enough after four or five hours of work! Our research took us to an important end: the 40% of cerebral cortex is engaged in managing throat and phonation muscles and we all know how much we use them to translate, to "give voice" and to produce facial expressions.

If you have half an hour to recover, you won't get benefit, because almost of the time you won't have it free or totally for yourself, in total you might have an useful time up to 5 minutes only, because you will be engaged in the feedback to a colleague or

distracted by other people around you. To be able to take full advantage of that short time will it be possible only if you are trained. Notice that brain neurons of our cerebral cortex are directing the muscular function in this manner: the throat and phonation muscles are so specialised that one cortex neuron will control only two muscle fibres of the throat, you can imagine the amount of neuron of the cortex dedicated to speech function! If you consider that another neuron controlling the leg will act for six hundred fibres of the quadricep! We all know that signing as far as speaking or playing piano is a neuromuscular activity; as well we know that making exercises, physical exercises, with a very conscious effort will produce nucleic acid (RNA) and this can be measured in the blood plasma; the most important consequence is that new dendrites are created in our brain, so that new "ways of communication" are built in there, because new neuronal cells are created, making new links among those that already exist; this way a larger number of information will pass through and we will be able to do a larger number of activities spending less energy. Sensorial activity creates cortical storage and it is this storage that enhances cortical function! Evolutionists say that, once it has begun, the process of evolution in man involves a system of growing complexity which permits, through the constant exercise of specific functions, modification of those very structures which make the functions possible, so the intellectual and creative process in Man, based on its corticalization and on the enrichment of the operative systems of the brain, and the process of evolution may be taken to be endless, unforeseeable in its development and aim substantially at modifying those cerebral structures, which are involved in the superior (evolution) functions. Through our exercises, activity leads to corticalization, which means that cerebral cortex will take information from movement and codify it in areas 4, 5 and 7. One of the most important results of this corticalization for sign language interpreters is the capability of producing clearer handshapes, movements, orientations and facial expressions through an optimized effort, that means better service and better working conditions!

This is the reason for which we have set the project named "Cortical Fitness"; it aims at providing interpreters with new knowledgements, rules, training, workshops and support related to their neuromuscular and brain activity carrying ahead the profession. Well, this project is made up of three units: - managing cortical stress; - managing throat and phonation muscles; - dealing with anxiety. In the first unit you'll find how to recover in fewer minutes (up to five minutes!) from fatigue and stress, being able to restart again or, in case you have finished your duty, you will be able to

enjoy social events. The knowledge and management of all muscles, but specially throat muscles demands intensive training, but at the end it allows interpreters to speak freely without needing much rest. If there is fatigue this would be only the result of a normal use of the brain, but not caused by the poor use of body and brain function. Dealing with anxiety is the top of our research: it allows the interpreter to be completely hands down in every situation: he won't be emotionally involved in any circumstances, in his service as well as in every case of need! Let's think about interpreters at a United Nations Convention. To deal with anxiety, we have been studying sleeping phases: we are led to believe that the body itself has ways to recover from daily activities, but it needs to be asleep for hours. So, studying its activity during sleeping time we have been able to set up appropriate exercises! We must pay attention to the Brain Hippocampus, the Amigdala and Hypofisi that produce the hormonal well being and lead us to the necessary emotional detachment, which allows us to instantly obtain concentration anytime we need it. The exercises created for their stimulation will provide benefits also to the Spine nerves. We have come into the new science of posturology which is the relationship between posture and interpreting good result. Our workshops are planned to be held, in addition to Italian, in British and American English, in Spanish and in Polish.

A few examples of our activity: - Alice, a 20 years old girl, had a birth damage, she could not move her left arm, because her cerebral cortex had codified that position: bent double, the hand close to the shoulder; well, in a twenty day workshop, thanks to our exercises "Back to Memory", she could normally stretch it! - R.B., sign language interpreter, about 30 days after my workshop, obtained: more energy all day long and less stress in longer interpretations. - A.C., a 20 years old student of piano had lost ability in deep and superficial flexors of fingers medium and ring finger of the right hand. through corticalization of lumbrical and interosseous muscles and all the muscles of the hand and arm he is now in Paris, pursuing a piano international career!

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