U5_E1_LO3 Transcript

The introduction to this Unit has already explained what respeaking is.

The introduction to this element has already explained

what are the psycho-cognitive skills a respeaker must possess.

This video lecture is aimed at letting you know

the strategies a respeaker applies

if he or she realises the speaker is challenging.

To do so, I will define the challenging speaker.

 to then move to the strategies a respeaker tries to apply

when having to deal with specific challenges

like a fast speech,

incomprehensible speech,

a low-volume speech,

an impromptu speech

and plays on words.

This is the agenda of this presentation.

As you have seen,

a respeaker has to do many things at the same time.

In this Element,

we will deal with the psychocognitive skill

of activating exit strategies while respeaking,

if you realize the speaker is challenging.

In particular,

for a respeaker to be able and become a professional in the field,

he or she has also to apply solutions to problems

he or she may encounter when subtitling,

due to the fact that he or she is no longer capable

of providing the service required.

While you can only develop these competences by the time

and thanks to ad hoc exercises,

you may be interested in understanding the rationale behind it.

To do this, we will see what a challenging speaker is.

For every challenge, I will try to provide concrete solutions.

What does it mean a speaker is challenging?

There are many situations where I found myself

trying to subtitle a speech I found it hard to subtitle.

Here we will see five situations

which may cause troubles to respeakers

when subtitling a speech in real time.

For sure, a speaker is challenging

when he or she speaks above your MARS,

meaning your capacity to produce text as rapidly and accurately as needed,

However, a fast speaker can be less challenging than a speaker

whose utterances are incomprehensible for some reason

or pronounced far from the mic or at a low volume.

These are to me the worst.

Some colleagues also find it difficult

to subtitle speakers who have not planned their speech beforehand,

and speakers who keep using plays on words.

Here are some examples of challenging speakers

and the possible solutions to apply when you are in trouble.

When trying to subtitle people speaking very fast,

there are three types of problems.

One is that you cannot produce accurate text at the same speed.

A second problem is that you cannot memorize or even understand

what quick speakers say.

Last but not least,

even if you were capable of keeping the same pace as the speaker,

your audience would have problems reading your subtitles at the same speed,

especially if they are visible as two-liner subtitles.

So what to do when a speaker speaks too fast?

Let's consider this example,

which is taken from the opening of the famous address

delivered by Martin Luther King in 1963,

at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Let's read it.

I am happy to join with you today

in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom

in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American,

in whose symbolic shadow we stand today,

signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope

to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared

in the flames of withering injustice.

It came as a joyous daybreak

to end the long night of their captivity.

Now let's pretend we are subtitling Dr. King's speech in real time

and that we were not given the text of the speech beforehand.

If we had the script of the speech, we could feed the software with this

or train ourselves with it.

But we cannot.

Let's also pretend he is very stressed and starts speaking very quickly.

What can we do?

One solution may be the Gordian Knot Strategy,

or cut and knit.

It means that you can subtitle

only half of the sentences pronounced by the speaker

while trying to keep coherence.

In this example,

you can avoid pronouncing every other sentence

and still provide understandable subtitles,

with little or no cohesion effort.

Let's read the text as a result of this strategy.

We will see it keeps saying more or less the same thing.

I am happy to join with you today.

Five score years ago,

a great American signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope

to millions of Negro slaves.

It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

Of course this is not always easy.

Sometimes, doing this may cause even more troubles.

Let's consider the same example,

and apply the Gordian Knot strategy in a different manner.

Let's read the text as a result of a badly applied Gordian Knot strategy.

I am happy to join with you today

in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom

in the history of our nation.

This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope

to millions of Negro slaves,

who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free.

As we can see,

the application of the strategy creates some inconsistencies in this case.

We have left out the sentence

with Abraham Lincoln having signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

This creates a huge cohesion problem,

because the following sentences refer to it.

Are we still capable of guessing what the speaker means by "Negro slaves"?

Is he referring to the same people the speaker is addressing to?

Or to the ones he's really referring to?

And what does the "hundred years later" phrase refer to?

When you are not confident going for the Gordian Knot,

prefer the Garwood Strategy.

When in doubt, leave it out.

You leave out an entire chunk.

Then, start from the first sentence

it makes sense to re-start from.

In this case, it is the last sentence

without the reference to that "something",

you were not able to subtitle which happened 100 years before.

The final result is the following.

I am happy to join with you today

in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom

in the history of our nation.

The Negro still is not free.

This is an example of an extreme solution.

The audience realizes that subtitles do not read

what is said by the speaker.

This is not a problem if this is rarely adopted

and if you are capable of explaining the reason why it happened.

Do you remember that famous scene where Charles Chaplin in the Great Dictator

speaks fake German to the people of Tomainia.

who applauds him?

When we respeak, it may happen that we as real-time subtitlers

find ourselves in situations

where we don't understand one or more sentences

that the speaker pronounces.

However, it seems that his or her audience does understand,

as it happens in this famous scene.

In such cases, you can adopt the Generalisation Strategy.

If you know the topic and the context,

and you more or less know what he or she is saying,

you can relate to the last concept you have understood.

You can either reformulate it,

or say something that does not commit yourselves too much,

like something general or logical.

Let's consider some examples.

Let's consider the same example as above.

You stop understanding the speaker when he says:

"This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope

to millions of Negro slaves,

who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice".

What can you do?

You can try to keep providing the subtitling service,

by reformulating the last concept you have understood,

meaning: "Five score years ago,

a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today,

signed the Emancipation Proclamation".

Here is the result.

The sentence is replaced

by the reformulation of the last subtitled sentence,

meaning: "The Emancipation proclamation signed 100 years ago,

by such a Great American, is the symbol of us all today".

It may sound a bit redundant with the previous sentence,

but this is an inspirational speech with an important use of rhetoric.

Moreover, subtitles appear in two lines.

So, the previous sentence has already gone.

This strategy is not to be confused with cheating.

Here you don't lie.

On the contrary, you keep providing correct information.

Consequently, the audience keeps relying on the subtitles

because they keep seeing them under the speaker's mouth.

Let's consider another case.

Let's pretend you understand the overall message

the speaker wants to deliver

thanks to context, body language or from slides he or she may use.

You can replace the missing bits

with logical consequences or general statements,

without jeopardising understanding of the source text,

or cheating with fake information,

or repeating the same information, as in the previous example.

The final result is the following.

"This was a fundamental step in our history

that made this gathering possible".

Here you have replaced

the incomprehensible sentence with a general statement,

which is also a logical continuation of the previous sentence.

When you are no confident going for the Generalisation Strategy, again,

prefer the Garwood Strategy: when in doubt, leave it out.

Remember that this is an extreme solution

and that the audience realizes that subtitles do not read

what is said by the speaker.

Some speakers, like Marlon Brando's Don Corleone in The Godfather

who mumble or speak with a low volume.

The problem is not that you don't understand them.

With a little effort you do.

The problem is when you try to respeak them.

You no longer manage to listen and speak at the same time,

because your voice covers that of the speaker.

Moreover, the extra effort involved in understanding the speaker,

reduces your capacity to respeak.

So, what can we do in such cases?

If the speaker speaks out of the mike or with a low volume,

there is little we can do.

You can ask the speaker to speak closer to the mic or louder,

if you are physically close to him or her.

However, sometimes it happens

that a speaker used to do this, speaking with a low volume

or not caring about the microphone,

well, he or she will not manage to behave for long.

In such cases, you can only adopt

the Gordian Knot strategy, or cut and knit strategy.

As seen previously,

the Gordian Knot consists in hearing a sentence

and repeating it as fast as possible once it is over,

by compressing it if you can.

Then, you skip the following sentence.

Concentrate on the third sentence of the row.

You are going to repeat it as quickly as possible once it is over,

by paying attention to cohesion and coherence with the first sentence.

As in the case of a fast speaker,

this is something that you cannot do for long.

There is a huge debate, among scholars and among professionals,

about whether one can subtitle all features of orality in a speech.

Somebody says yes,

because one must be faithful to what the speaker actually says.

Somebody says no,

because readability and understandability is more important.

Especially when it comes to a politician,

the question of reproducing one's bad grammar or mistakes

is all the more important.

It has to do with being fair with the opposition,

or diplomatic with the speaker.

Though an answer is difficult to provide

because, to me, both parties have their point,

Let me now concentrate on how to deal with features of orality.

They jeopardise both your understanding as a real-time subtitler

and that of the audience reading verbatim subtitles.

So, what can we do?

Though we always have to understand which strategy is better to use,

verbatim or sensatim,

an impromptu speech is an obstacle to the subtitling process,

especially in case respeaking is used as a subtitle tool.

Respeaking is not that fit

to reproduce non-existing words,

like those speakers, especially foreigners

may produce as a result of calques from their native language

or as a result of mispronunciation.

So, how to cope with impromptu speech?

If it is a challenge to the subtitling process,

you can go for correcting one's bad grammar

and go straight to the point.

If it is not relevant that the speaker makes mistakes

because he is a non-native, speaking English as a communication tool,

no matter if he or she doesn't pronounce words properly,

selects wrong words, mumbles,

hesitates, self-reformulates, produces extra sounds and so on.

What is important in a conference speech is the main message.

If you manage to understand what the speaker says,

and recognize pronunciation, grammar and lexical mistakes,

due to the speaker's native language,

you can go and correct the speaker's output.

Preferably, with short sentences.

Since foreigners tend to speak slowly if compared to native speakers,

the strategy is to wait for a complete sentence and then respeak.

The delay should be enough to let you produce correct sentences.

Don't try to follow the pace of the speakers

Because of non-natural pauses, the software may cause recognition errors

which are best avoided by pronouncing sentences as naturally as possible.

Concretely, let's consider this real-life example

taken from the transcription of a speech made by an Italian politician

famous for not being an excellent speaker of English.

[reads the slide]

This speaker is challenging.

especially if you don't guess the message the speaker wants to deliver.

or if you don't understand the way the speaker pronounces words.

However, truncating what the speaker says into smaller chunks is quite easy

because he makes use of a simple grammar.

Considering the examples we have just seen

the speaker is challenging if you don't guess hwat he means.

However, truncating what the speaker says into smaller chunks is quite easy

because the speaker, like many foreigners, uses a simple grammar.

He also makes quite many pauses.

The possible result of the application of an exit strategy

which is that of producing short sentences

is to keep as much of the original as possible.

[he reads the slide]

OK, when doing this, remember this.

This manipulation of the Source Text is only possible at the grammar level.

Not at the content level.

Otherwise this may cause differences between those who hear the speaker

and those who read the subtitles.

Also consider that somebody having heard what the speaker says

may contradict him or her

or correct him or her.

So it is important subtitles are consistent with what the speaker says.

Plays on words are really terrible to respeak for many reasons.

especially if you have to subtitle them live.

In the movie Pulp Fiction, Uma Thurman tells a joke to John Travolta

[he reads the slide]

I don't want to know how much time it took

to those who had to subtitle this into other languages,

or if they managed to do it.

But even intralingually, this is not an easy task.

This joke is based on two homophones.

The verb "catch up" as a synonym to "speed up"

and the noun "ketchup", the tomato-based sauce.

When it is a play involving a non-standard spelling,

we normally stop respeaking and type the word in uppercase letters.

 It is a signal to the audience that that is the word or group of words

where they have to focus their attention,

as that is the funny part of the joke.

Some colleagues use inverted commas.

Some others put an exclamation mark after the wordplay.

Some others use the caption [laughter].

What do we do in this case,

where a homophone is used to provoke the laughter?

One solution can be that of spelling the non-standard homophone,

the unexpected one.

In this case we use ellipses as a suspense technique.

Then we use uppercase letters

to say that they have to concentrate on the word Ketchup,

the unexpected, laughter-provoking synonym to catch up or speed up.

In this video lecture, we have seen some concrete examples

of how to behave when a speaker is challenging.

When a speaker is challenging,

we need to adopt what we call here Exit Strategies,

meaning strategies to apply to exit a potentially dangerous situation,

for either the subtitler, the audience or both.

In case of a fast speaker,

the mostly used technique is the Gordian Knot,

or cut and knit strategy.

You try to reduce the speech by omitting whole chunks

and managing to make the non-omitted parts coherent among them.

An extreme solution is the Garwood strategy,

meaning leaving everything out and explaining why you did so.

The Garwood strategy is also an extreme strategy

for incomprehensible speeches.

However, replacing incomprehensible bits with general or logical bits

is to be preferred.

When a speaker speaks with a low volume, the Gordian Knot is the best solution.

When a speaker makes an Impromptu speech with mistakes and features of orality,

the strategy is to skip them

and try to produce short and correct sentences.

Finally, when it comes to plays on words,

the best solution is to type the laughter-provoking unexpected word

in uppercase characters.