THE SECOND BEST THING.
GAME PLANNING FOR A MISSION IMPOSSIBLE OR JUST FOR ENJOYING THE PROCESS OF THE WORK[1]

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Abstract: This paper discusses the use of game theory in thinking about and the practice of interpreting, especially in the often impossible context of simultaneous interpreting (SI). By introducing game theory together with the basic concepts and accompanying reasoning, the author intends to explore and present a manageable and rationalised way of preparing and undertaking a difficult SI assignment. So, in the development of his ideas, partly through telling a Chinese legend and partly through presenting a case study of a real life SI assignment, he will make the following points. First, the interpreter must have a good knowledge of his/her own strengths and of the nature and difficulty of assignment and must undertake research to enhance that knowledge. Secondly, on the basis of this knowledge, he/she must set an optimal and realistic objective for the assignment. Thirdly, through research, he/she must design strategies to achieve the selected objectives and, at the same time, through research, he/she must assess the costs and risks and then design specific strategies to contain/reduce the costs and manage/minimize the risks in order to optimise the results of the assignment. Last but not least, he/she must evaluate the game plan designed for the job to facilitate future game planning. In the spirit of game theory, SI becomes a very brainy, intellectual activity and is no longer a process of mechanic reproduction, pedantic compilation of glossary and an unmanageable chancy behaviour.

Key words: game theory, simultaneous interpreting, objective-based solution, problem-based solutions, opportunity cost, cost and cost management, risk and risk management

1. INTRODUCTION

I believe that accurate, comprehensive and objective interpreting is a mission impossible in a true simultaneous interpreting (SI) situation. Indeed, I would like to argue, as I did in previous publications, that accurate, comprehensive and objective translation is impossible (Zhong 1998) and that the practice and teaching of translation and interpreting should better transcend the discourse of accuracy (Zhong 2002). Unless the speaker is thoroughly articulate (and totally manageable/manipulatable by the interpreter) and unless you are an artificial intelligence device with the capacities of a superman, including ears that capture

every minute syllable, a mouth that delivers utterances at a super speed and a brain that more than equals the CPU of the Deep Blue, you will make mistakes. You will misunderstand the speaker, miss or mistreat his/her words, sentences and even whole segments, speak too fast or too slowly or with too loud or too low a voice volume, say things that you do not know you are saying and fail to say things that you know you should have said or the speaker would have liked you to say. However, you do not have to feel miserable or terrible about it if you accept that interpreters are mortals. And if you are prepared to live with these inevitable unfortunate mishaps as the cost of completing your job – many simultaneous interpreters do complete their jobs to an acceptable level of satisfaction to their users and themselves; and as the cost of enjoying your job – many simultaneous interpreters do enjoy the challenge, the pay and the lifestyle that come with the job. This study aims to re-examine a strategy that I rationally designed to tackle and complete a difficult SI assignment with enjoyment. This strategy I call game planning.

In this paper, I will first present a task, a real life assignment, which I personally undertook as a simultaneous interpreter at an APAC Ministers' Forum and Senior Officers' Meeting held in Bali in October 2003. The assignment was a "mission impossible" and was typical of the sort of jobs that most simultaneous interpreters have done or will encounter sooner or later in their professional life. However impossible as it was, the imagination and expectations of the public and especially the patrons and users of the SI service would still require the simultaneous interpreter to come up with a credible result.

Then, I will introduce a game plan, which I myself adopted to tackle the job and which actually rendered the job rationally manageable. What I will be suggesting is a process of intellectual calculation and planning to complement the conventional and familiar preparation for SI, such as glossary compilation and literature search. To anticipate forthcoming detailed discussions of game planning, I would like to point to a number of essential elements as follows:

1. Do not try to produce a perfect, one hundred percent accurate or adequate rendition.
2. Have a plan, either drafted in black and white or drafted silently in your mind.
3. Undertake research to acquire an understanding of the mission, including possible problems, costs, risks and solutions involved in completing it.
4. Prepare a hierarchy of strategies to be implemented and be flexible enough to adapt to the changing situation.

The elements are basically the same ones that have been featured in game plans designed for different disciplines and endeavours, such as cold-war interna-

tional relations, gambling and financial planning/investment. The point I am trying to make is that game planning provides a manageable and rational way of tackling an impossible mission, though it is not a totally perfect solution – some other options might have been better in hindsight. The second best solution may actually be the best solution available to simultaneous interpreters who, I repeat this as it is an especially relevant philosophy to the proposition of this article, like every one else, are mortals.

2. GAME THEORY

John Nash is credited with the mathematical theoretical formulation of game theory for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1994[2] in recognition of the fact that, through the efforts of John Nash and many other theorists, game theory was invented and applied to different disciplines, including notably international relations and business studies since the middle of the 20th century. The truth, however, is that attempts to manage seemingly chaotic situations and problems through frameworks similar to game theory dated back long before John Nash. One such attempt was mounted by Tian Ji in a horseracing match in Ancient China about 25 centuries ago.

Mathematical presentations or popular western case studies (e.g., the prisoners' dilemma, Stiglitz 1993) could have been used to explicate game theory. However, I have chosen Tian Ji's horse race for the sake of explicatory simplicity. Furthermore, I feel that the latter is more accessible to readers not particularly familiar with economics and contains an equally explicit awareness of the complexities of game theory, including setting objectives, identifying problems, designing strategies/solutions and evaluating output.

Tian Ji, a general of the Qi Kingdom in the Dynasty of the Warring States (about 475–221 BC), had lost every race and a great fortune to the emperor of the Kingdom before that legendary match. Each match comprised three races and he had always lost all the three. He knew that he had to win a match because, with every match lost, he was losing more of the emperor's confidence in his competence. Yet, the horses in the royal stable were always better than his, even if just by a small margin. His losing streaks were not to eventually end until after his adviser Sun Bin[3] proposed a strategy, which was based on the latter's observation of his lost matches. Sun Bin's strategy was analogous to what is known today as a game plan and will be introduced in this paper in conjunction with my own game plan designed for tackling the impossible mission in an APAC ministers' forum.

3. THE 4TH MINISTERS' FORUM ON INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION AND THE INTERPRETERS

The forum was held in October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia, attended by ministers representing Asia Pacific countries including Australia, Chile, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, P.R. China, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and the USA. The subject matter of the occasion was financing for infrastructure, which was of great currency and concern in recent years in different corners of the world. The conference was to follow basically a predetermined schedule: the Opening Ceremony on the 1st night, the Senior Officers' Meeting on the 2nd day, the Ministers' Forum and the Closing Ceremony on the 3rd day. In the Senior Officers' Meeting, high-ranking technocrats from each of the countries represented were each to deliver a country paper of 10 minutes discussing infrastructure in their respective countries. Their discussions were to form the basis of the communiqué to be finalized and signed by the ministers on the third day. I have chosen the paper delivered by the Chinese senior officer for discussion in this game plan scenario.

Six interpreters, including myself, were commissioned to provide SI for the occasion over 2 days, that is, the Senior Officers' Meeting on the 2nd day and the Ministers' Forum on the 3rd day. Two rapporteurs were also used who were to tape all the speeches and interpretations and transcribe all the English speeches and interpretations. The interpreters were to work in pairs rather than in teams of three as was the desired norm and to interpret between English on the one hand and Japanese, Mandarin Chinese or Spanish on the other. My booth partner and I had worked for close to 10 years and developed a professional and rather flexible partnership. As usual, for the Senior Officers' Meeting, we agreed to divide up the work by papers and also to help each other out by taking over the microphone if the other person got stuck in the middle of a paper. As a result of the job division, the China country paper was to become my responsibility.

But, as we were both aware, merely a good working partnership was not enough to guarantee that we would automatically complete the job. I envisaged a range of difficulties awaiting us, including, among others:

1. Lack of preparation, either in terms of time and literature, as we had only a week to prepare for the forum and not a single paper was supplied to us prior to our arrival at Bali. It was only in the middle of the Opening Ceremony that we received a copy of the China country paper and a few other scripts.

2. Unfamiliarity with the nature of the papers, including their excessive technicality and a lot of jargon in the areas of infrastructure and financing.
3. Accents of the speakers whose first language backgrounds ranged from Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Malaysian and Thai to Spanish.
4. Frequent and unpredictable switches between speakers and between languages.
5. Constraints of facilities, by which I refer especially to the interpreting equipment being more primitive than what we had been used to.[4]
6. Frequent uses of relay interpreting.
7. Psychological pressure associated with the status of the occasion and the accompanying fear of failure, especially since all English interpretations together with all the possible errors were to be recorded and transcribed.
8. Interference by interpreters accompanying different delegations.[5]

A professional interpreter would think that he or she must and have to be able to cope with the above difficulties. Indeed, if interpreters had the luxury of all the time required, of all the possible resources desired and of all the strategies and tools needed, the above difficulties would not be so difficult after all. For example, they could find and read related information and literature about previous or similar conferences/speakers/topics through hard copy publications and the Internet. But the truth was, as mortals, we were not exempted from such natural pressures as "opportunity cost". Lack of knowledge and literature was only one of the many concerns that we had. Other concerns included psychological ones (e.g., pressure associated with such a high-ranking conference), physical ones (e.g., exhaustion as a result of the workload) and cooperation (e.g., the frequent demand for relay interpreting, not to mention the technicality of the speeches, the accents of the speakers and the unsatisfactory equipment. Because of the envisaged difficulties, I was keen to design an action plan which could realistically facilitate the completion of the assignment.

4. APPRECIATING THE MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

As mentioned previously, I received an English copy of the China country paper in the middle of the Opening Ceremony the night before the Senior Officers' Meeting. I did it by courteously approaching a secretary of the Chinese delegation, introducing myself, explaining the absolute necessity of having it and expressing a sincere desire to facilitate their work. Yet, he was unable to give me a Chinese copy of the paper or advice regarding who was going to make the speech. Nor did he want to tell me if the speech was going to be delivered in Chinese or English or if it was going to be based on the paper or improvised.

According to the conference programme, the speech was to last a mere 10 minutes. The envisaged short time was no reason for joy or comfort. A short time could be excruciatingly long if one was subjected to mental or physical torment, which was a common experience for many simultaneous interpreters. I do not know how long Tian Ji's match lasted. An average single race in Australia and Hong Kong would last about 3 minutes. But then a short race would have great consequences in relation to Tian Ji's face, fortune and even career. I, as the scheduled interpreter for the China country paper, might end up worse. I might get nervous, lose self-control, stutter, balk and even simply shut up both mentally and orally.[6] I might cause the senior officer representing the Chinese interest and her counterparts representing other national interests to fail to understand or to misunderstand one another. Not to mention that I might let down my agent, my partner, my professional aspirations and livelihood. Or, maybe, I could somehow coax my partner to take over. But by doing so, promises of all the imaginable disasters were not dissolved except that the responsibilities, consequences and blame were shifted to him.

I had fancied what Tian Ji must have felt like when facing the mission impossible. He had always wanted to win all the three races in a match by staging his best horse against the best royal horse, his second best horse against the second best royal horse and his third best horse against the third best royal horse. Yet, he had lost not only all the matches but also all the races.

As I faced a mission of comparable impossibility, in addition to the general difficulties discussed previously, I saw further complications associated with the China country paper in the following aspects:

1. The size of the paper, which consisted of 4 sections, a total of 4,600 words and approximately 13,800 syllables.
2. The technicality of the paper, as it was concerned with infrastructure and financing; the extensive use of jargon (e.g., TOT, BOT, TEUs, DWT and KWT) shows the degree of technicality. Furthermore, the paper contained an excessive number of figures in the millions, billions and trillions.
3. The linguistic mismatch between English and Mandarin. For example, the paper contained many billion and trillion figures, which would be extremely difficult to convert between the different linguistic systems of English and Chinese. For example, one trillion in English is translated into ten hundred billion in Chinese and one billion in English is translated into ten hundred million in Chinese.

The paper had four sections, concerned respectively with the following:

1. Geo-social facts about China
2. Overview of existing infrastructure facilities in China

3. Chinese Government's efforts and role in the infrastructure development
4. Strategy and policy for financing infrastructure development in China

I have also taken one paragraph from each of the four sections to provide a rough idea of the nature and style of the paper.

Section 1

China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2002 totalled 10.2398 trillion RMB yuan (1.2337 trillion US dollars), increasing by 8% over the previous year in comparative terms. The added value of the primary, secondary and tertiary industry amounted to 1.4883 trillion RMB yuan (0.1793 trillion US dollars), 5.2982 trillion RMB yuan (0.383 trillion US dollars), and 3.4533 trillion RMB yuan (0.4161 trillion US dollars) respectively.

Section 2

In 2002, the mileage of Chinese inland river route was 121,557 km, and the cargo throughout all Chinese ports was 2.8 billion tons, an increase of 16.6% over 2001, out of which 1.72 billion tons was achieved by the coastal ports with an increase rate of 18.1%, 1.08 billion tons by the inland ports with an increase rate of 14.3%. In 2002, the port container throughput was 37.21 million TEUs with an increase rate of 35.4% over the year 2001, out of which 33.76 million TEUs was achieved by coastal post with a growth rate of 36.7%. The 8 major container ports achieved an annual throughput over 1 million TEUs respectively. The container throughput of Shanghai port, Shenzhen port, Qingdao Port and Tianjin port was ranked the 4th, 6th, 18th and 26th respectively in the world.

Section 3

From 1998 to 2003, China issued 660 billion yuan (79.5 billion US dollars) long-term construction national bonds altogether and the total investment of the arranged projects added up to 3280 billion yuan (295.2 billion US dollars). The operating effect of the national bonds was 1:5. By the end of 2002, the finished investment added up to 2460 billion yuan (296.4 billion US dollars), which was mostly put in farming and forestry, water conservancy, ecological construction, transportation construction, electric network construction and transformation, urban infrastructure, environment protection, technology improvement, industry upgrading, grain storage facility construction and so on.

Section 4

In consistency with the commitments when entering into WTO, the Chinese government opened up the market of the infrastructure facilities to the outside world in advance and according to international practice, issued the regulations such as *guidance for the Foreign Investment Orientation*, *Catalogue of Guidance for Foreign Invested Industry* and so on to direct the participation of the foreign merchants in the market competition of Chinese infrastructure facilities.

Table 1

Statistical representation of the size and figures of the paper.

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Total
No. of words	1,000	1,400	1,000	1,200	4,600
No. of syllables[7]	3,000	4,200	3,000	3,600	13,800
No. of figures	72	143	34	1	250

Of all the challenges, I envisaged two that were more likely to break me than make me in the capacity of a simultaneous interpreter. One was the time available to the interpreter and the other the technicality of the paper.

I would have liked to perform the job successfully by simultaneously translating the truth, all the truth, and nothing more (or less) than the truth, as interpreting is often idealized. But then to do so, I would have to be able to do some or all of the following in addition to comprehending the ST and producing the TT accurately and adequately.

Firstly, I would have to be a super fast speaker, that is, a super fast reader if the speaker was to read out the Chinese script and then I was to read out the English script provided to me the night before. Or, I would have to be a super fast interpreter if the speaker was to read out the English script. In fact, both of us would have to be super fast speakers, having to read about 4,600 words/13,800 syllables in the scheduled 10 minutes. That is about 460 words/1,380 syllables in one minute, or over 7 words/21 syllables in one single second, which was impossible for even the most competent speakers.

Secondly, I would have to be able to render all those figures and all that jargon simultaneously into a different language system, especially if the speaker was to read out the English version. She would still have to be a super fast reader and I would have to be not only a super fast speaker but also a super competent interpreter. I would have to render all the technical terms into Chi-

nese (e.g., TEU, DWT, KWH, BOT, TOT and World Development Report) and convert into Chinese all those sophisticated figures in the hundreds of billions and trillions.

Thirdly, I would have to be a super word detector, especially if the speaker was to read selectively from her Chinese scripts. This scenario would be highly likely if the speaker was aware of the impossibility and impracticality of reading the whole paper in the space of time available and so chose to read selectively from the script. Now neither the speaker nor I, the interpreter would be able to speak that fast against time. However, being inadequately knowledgeable about the speaker's selection, I would have to divide my time and attention between reading/interpreting and locating the speaker's selection.

5. WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE TO IMPROVE THE CHANCE OF SUCCESS?

In spite of the challenges, I knew that I had about 12 hours to prepare myself for them. I had the following possible options as regards how the 12 hours were to be invested.

1. I could try to further enhance my interpreting expertise/skills, which was desirable as I was to simultaneously interpret for a very important occasion.
2. I could research into and work on the technical vocabularies towards compiling a glossary of the technical terms and figures, which was a problem-based solution to the technicality of the paper/conference.
3. I could practice speaking and interpreting at a super fast speed, which did not seem to be a smart option as I knew there was not much one could do in speed enhancement in one night.
4. I could go to bed early and have a good sleep so as to recover from an 8-hour flight to Bali the day before and to have a refreshed physique for a busy schedule the next day.
5. I could undertake a dedicated study of the China country paper, either spending about two hours writing out all the figures (about 250 in number) and terms in Chinese or translating the whole script into Chinese, which would provide the ultimate insurance for a job satisfactorily completed.[8]

I wished I could do all the above but then I had only 12 hours and each of the options would constitute what was known as opportunity cost in modern economics. That is, any one or two options would exhaust the time opportunity

at the cost of the other options. Of course, I could forego the rest of the banquet and a whole night of sleep to maximize the time available for preparation and to execute the selected option thoroughly or even to undertake extra options. But then there would be other complications. I would incur loss of opportunity for a good physical and psychological rest, which is essential for any major simultaneous interpreting assignment. If I did invest the night in a rough translation of the whole of the China country paper, there would be no opportunity for studying those other country papers by Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand, etc.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

Tian Ji eventually won the legendary match with a game plan, which had been designed by Sun Bin. The latter was a well-known strategist in Chinese history but I reckon he was a keen researcher, too. He had observed Tian Ji's previous matches, researched the strength of the royal horses and Tian Ji's horses and studied the personality of the two opponents. On the basis of the research, he assumed that

1. There was no way Tian Ji's fastest horse, 2nd fastest horse, 3rd fastest horse could beat the fastest horse, 2nd fastest horse and 3rd fastest horse in the royal line-up respectively.
2. Yet, there was a possibility that Tian Ji's fastest horse and 2nd fastest horse could beat the 2nd fastest horse and 3rd fastest horse in the royal line-up respectively.
3. The emperor, who had won every match and every race so far and who was self-assured of success at the forthcoming matches, would in no way predict Tian Ji's moves or could not even be bothered with predicting them.

On the basis of these assumptions, he suggested to Tian Ji that, instead of trying in vain to win all the three races in a match, he strive to win the best of the three races by staging his fastest horse against the royal 2nd fastest horse and his 2nd fastest horse against the royal 3rd fastest horse. He knew that, if any of his assumptions were proved to be unfounded, the game plan might be frustrated and the mission would fail terribly. This would be an eventuality if, for example, even Tian Ji's fastest horse could not outrun the 2nd fastest horse or the 3rd fastest horse of the opposition or if the emperor could predict his move and then made corresponding adjustments in his line-up. But he also knew that that eventuality would have been Tian Ji's fate anyway even without any active intervention on his part. If, however, the assumptions happened to be right (and they turned out to be right) he would then be able to turn the match into a mind

game between a rational contender and an unprepared superpower. He had nothing to lose from making a set of calculated assumptions and then a game plan.

Confronted with an equally impossible mission and inspired by Tian Ji, I made a number of assumptions vis-à-vis the difficult China country paper and the Chinese speaker.

1. Like every other Chinese official speaking on behalf of China in an international arena, the Chinese senior officer would speak in a predictable manner. That is, he/she would toe the line of a meta-narrative, that is, the same logic, whatever subject matter his/her speech was to cover.
2. The meta-narrative to be adopted for this occasion would be that China was a huge country with a huge population, less than satisfactory infrastructure and huge challenges, that the Chinese government had been making great efforts and achievements in this area and that the Chinese government would adopt this or that reform strategy to further improve infrastructure in the country.
3. There was no way that the speaker could read out the whole paper verbatim in the scheduled time and therefore he was to read out selectively from the paper. This assumption was based on the actual size of the paper and the time constraints as previously discussed.
4. If the speaker were indeed to read selectively from the paper, Sections 3 (Chinese Government's Efforts and Role in the Infrastructure Development) and 4 (The Strategy and Policy for the Market-Oriented Reform of Infrastructure Development in China) would be selected. This assumption was based on knowing, from experience, that Chinese officials tended to talk about the Chinese government's role in development, that financing strategies and policies were the theme of the conference and that, in a typical Chinese narrative, the concluding part was more important than the opening part.
5. The officer was to use many technical terms and figures. This assumption was based, on one hand, on the nature of the paper and on knowing that the officer was a technocrat rather than a bureaucrat and, on the other hand, on my empirical knowledge about Chinese senior officers' fondness of substantiating claims with "facts" and "statistics".

7. THE WINNING STRATEGIES

I would like to imagine that, with adequate preparation and cooperative speakers, I should be able to perform up to the expectation of the Forum by translating the truth, all the truth, only the truth, and nothing but the truth. But then an apparent fact was that I was bound by opportunity cost and, therefore, adequate

preparation was beyond the question. In addition, whether the speakers were cooperative was not under my control.

Even if, though, I were to fail to live up to the ideals of simultaneous interpreting, I would still like to come out of the day alive and dignified. I would also like to enjoy it if I could in any way. Above all, since I was in a position of having nothing to lose, I would like to see if, by pro-actively stretching my subjective thinking power, I might somehow pull off the huge mission. After all, I would like to believe myself to be the best candidate available for the job and I had indeed been appointed to the position that I had.

I would like to think that game planning including analysis and just thinking about a forthcoming assignment would enhance my optimism and confidence in tackling it. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Game planning actually made me more distressed and my heart heavier, having become more sensitive to the specific obstacles involved in translating the paper. Nevertheless, by game planning, I did design and adopt a strategy for coping with the assignment with all the difficulties contained in it, which would actually work and I would come away with a broad smile and a long round of applause the next day. Following is a recollection of the strategies with some hindsight touch-up.

This strategy worked for me in this specific context and I would like to wishfully think that it could be applied to all other SI situations and assignments. The reality is that all strategies, mine or those used by other practitioners, have to be thought out with regard to their purposes, nature, setting and agents/recipients. And, like all suggestions, past performance is no assurance for future performances. Nevertheless, I believe that the spirit of game planning is lacking in the profession of translation and interpreting and it is needed to inspire us to transcend the belief in mechanical translation, the search for equivalence and dependence on luck.

So, following is the strategy, in a rather simplified representation. With regard to general preparation, I decided that I would:

1. Finish (and enjoy) the banquet and retire early to have a sound sleep of about 7 hours. After all, where there was only so much one could do to prepare for the assignment, there was no point in suffering physically and mentally from aggravated eating and sleeping disorder.
2. Invest the other 5 hours or so available into an extensive preparation, skimming through the China country paper and other papers available.
3. Compile a compact bilingual glossary list (containing mainly typical infrastructure and financing terms, e.g., BOT, GDP) while looking through the paper.
4. Undertake intensive but selective reading if there was time left after skimming the papers. Foremost in the selection list would be the China country paper and foremost in the Chinese paper would be Sections 3

(i.e., efforts and achievements made by the Chinese government) and 4 (i.e., financing strategies to be taken).
5. Not aim to produce renditions for average words, sentences, paragraphs, technical terms and figures, apart from the compact glossary. Any time available would be invested in studying or in just thinking about the attitude, position and subject matter of the papers/speakers.
6. Talk to colleagues to sound out their knowledge about the subject matter, the speakers and the papers.

With regard to the China country paper, I decided that I would:

1. Not be bothered with trying to be the best interpreter or to produce a perfectly accurate and adequate rendition.
2. Not strive to translate the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth, but rather I would strive to produce a cohesive representation of one dimension of what the speaker was to say, i.e., what I called the "meta-narrative" of her speech.
3. Adopt a hierarchy of translation strategies and stick to the easiest strategy unless I could comfortably handle more. The strategies were the following, going from the easiest to the most difficult ones:
   a) Translating the meta-narrative of the paper, especially in the worst-case scenario.
   b) Making a rough representation of the ideas and messages of the paper.
   c) Translating details, including statistics, jargon and facts.
4. Interpret instantaneously from short-term memory rather than undertaking sight translation (i.e., reading the script given to me in parallel to the speaker).
5. Use short sentences, or even just sequences of terms so as to let the audience read logical meaning into the target text.
6. Do literal translation and use neutral and generic words rather than technical jargon.
7. Avoid overspending time on jargon by using signals like 'etcetera' when interpreting into English.
8. Read out the jargon (BOT, DWT, KWH, TEUs, etc.) in English, if I could not translate them when interpreting into Chinese, assuming that the Chinese technocrats could recognize them.
9. Use only US dollar amounts and omit all reference to Chinese money where the source text contained both Chinese and US money figures.
10. Translate figures into approximate terms. Thus, "22.439%" would become "about 20 percent" and "179.345 billion US dollars" would become "nearly 200 billion US dollars".

To explain what I mean by a hierarchy of SI strategies, I will cite a few possible renditions of the extract taken from the 3rd Section of the paper, which is printed below:

> From 1998 to 2003, China issued 660 billion yuan (79.5 billion US dollars) long-term construction national bonds altogether and the total investment of the arranged projects added up to 3280 billion yuan (295.2 billion US dollars). The operating effect of the national bonds was 1:5. By the end of 2002, the finished investment added up to 2460 billion yuan (296.4 billion US dollars), which was mostly put in farming and forestry, water conservancy, ecological construction, transportation construction, electric network construction and transformation, urban infrastructure, environment protection, technology improvement, industry upgrading, grain storage facility construction and so on.

I decided that, in accordance with my game plan, should the Chinese officer read out the above paragraph, I would render the meta-narrative of the segment to the following effects in the target language (for the sake of English readers of this paper, I will transcribe the target text in English rather than in Chinese).

> The government has played an active role in infrastructure development, by financing tens of billions of US dollars in various projects, mainly in farming and forestry conservation, transport, etc.

Then, if there was more time, the speaker was not excessively fast and I was in good control and shape, I would attempt to translate more detailed messages. In the latter case, I could render the ST to the following effects:

> In the last few years, China financed about 79 billion US dollars in infrastructure. But the total investment was about 290 billion US dollars. By 2002, the finished investment was 296 billion US dollars, mainly in farming and forestry conservation, transport, electricity, technology improvement, industry upgrading, grain storage, etc.

8. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED ON THE DAY: USE OF THE GAME PLAN

On the day of the Senior Officers' Meeting, many of the general difficulties that I had envisaged did actually materialize. The senior officers representing various APAC countries delivered country papers one after another. My perform-

ance was hampered by unfamiliarity with the diverse country situations, technical terms and statistics contained in the presentations, the popular delivery mode used (reading rather than speaking, usually without power-point projection), the heavy accents and the fact that some of the speakers had to constantly struggle with English vocabulary, syntax and rhythm. The facilities were not very cooperative either. While sitting in the booths and trying to concentrate on what was being transmitted through the headsets, I had to strive to ignore the voices of the speakers and fellow interpreters directly piped into the booth through the uncovered ceiling. When fellow interpreters walked out or in for a rest, I could even feel the wooden platform quaking under the feet. But like my colleagues, I did manage to complete my part of the job without any major hiccups. Looking back, I believe that the act of envisaging did minimise the surprises and prepare me better for tackling the job.

When the Chinese senior officer was about to speak, I had been waiting for the moment with great excitement and expectations, as I wanted to launch and test the game plan that I had designed for the speech. "This is it! I can test my brainpower now", I told myself. There were no more fears, no more angst and no more worries about the immediate pressure and hardship. There were only the thirst to hear what she was going to say and the will to concentrate and to test my anticipation, prediction and strategies against the actual speech. And there was also the secret desire to witness how my subjective thinking could reshape and influence the progress of the communication in the meeting.

As it turned out, the Chinese senior officer rushed through her speech, spoke quite fast, randomly and improvisatorially, used a lot of jargon and cited many figures and jumped between Chinese status-quo, her government's achievements and efforts and strategies to be adopted in the future. But that was OK with me as I knew she was going to toe the meta-narrative in which I was well-versed and I had anticipated the way of her speaking. I was most comfortable thinking that I had a plan, a strategy with which I could, to different extents, manage whatever she said. As it turned out, she did not read the script verbatim, making me feel happy for not having been stupid enough to spend the whole night translating the script at the cost of necessary rest.

I had intended to translate the "meta-narrative" of the speech and that was what I did to begin with. But then I soon gained composure and even felt a sense of elation as things came under my control. I then proceeded to the next strategy in the hierarchy, that of translating the messages. And again I felt that I had the upper hand. Very soon, I felt that I was able to cope with the details, including the jargon and the statistics.

In the last four minutes or so, the speaker initiated a debate with her Malaysian counterparts over the right to host the next APAC ministers' forum. That was fine too, as I had already warmed to her way of thinking, her official position, her speaking style and her accent. And I had boosted my confidence

(and also pride), knowing that I could render her speech. More importantly, I could see my partner thumbing up signalling admiration at my ability to anticipate what she was going to say. Oh, what a feeling!

When the Chinese senior officer concluded her speech and while I was in the last few seconds of translating it, I could first hear silence and then a round of applause erupted. The applause was apparently directed towards the Chinese senior officer, but I privately took the credits, as if it was intended for me. After all, but for my interpretation, made possible by the game plan, and for the relay interpretation provided by my colleagues, the senior officers representing the other countries would not get an idea of what she said.

9. CONCLUSION

Game planning, when it is informed by serious research and proactive thinking, provides an alternative approach to effective SI that could complement common existing ones. In this paper, I have demonstrated the process of designing a game plan for a specific SI assignment. In short, game planning provides a proactive and rational way to comb and tackle a seemingly chaotic complex situation by research to understand the problem involved and to design a hierarchy of problem-based strategies.

To conclude, I would like to highlight what I consider essential for game planning for SI.

1. Forget perfect translation and transcend the discourse of translating the truth, all the truth, only the truth, and nothing but the truth.
2. Make sure that you can achieve the next best thing, i.e., identify what is the next best thing and how to achieve it.
3. Get to know what is possible/impossible and what is feasible/infeasible. Do not even try to do the impossible or infeasible.
4. Prepare a hierarchy of action options, including an emergency option.
5. Do not overlook the fun aspect of the job.
6. Think over what role your subjective power can play in the job.
7. Think over what it is that is most worthy of doing in the limited time available and what it is that can be sacrificed.
8. Risk and risk management.

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Notes

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[2] *A Beautiful Mind* by S. Nasar (1998, Faber & Faber, London & New York) provides an interesting biographical account of John Nash. For an introduction to how game theory works, the best place to start may be economics books such as Stiglitz 1993.

[3] For an introduction to Sun Bin's warring strategies, I recommend S. Griffith (translation), 1963, *The Art of War/Sun Tzu*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[4] For example, the booths did not have ceilings as a result of which we could have a mixture of sounds from the headphone, the speakers on the podium and interpreting.

[5] Indeed, during the Ministers' Forum, an interpreter accompanying the Japanese Delegation did rush into the Japanese booth, pushed away a colleague of mine from her seat and sat down to interpret. The intrusion immediately caused confusion to the forum proceedings.

[6] Moser-Mercer, B., Künzli, A. & Korac, M. (1998) have proposed coping strategies for physical and psychological stress.

[7] This is an approximate figure and is based on the assumption that an English word has an average of three syllables.

[8] Indeed, a Japanese interpreter whom I gave a copy of the China country paper decided to undertake a rough translation of the paper as he claimed to face similar challenges.