The extract is Chapter 14 of the book:
Consecutive Interpreting - A short course, Routledge,
by Gillies, Andrew, 2019

Digitally-assisted consecutive

> Our findings suggest that simultaneous consecutive permits enhanced performances as reflected in more fluent delivery, closer source-target correspondence, and fewer prosodic deviations.
>
> Hamidi & Poechhacker 2007: 1

This book is about a form of consecutive that is very much recognizable as the one that which was practised before WWII. The only difference being the length of speech to be interpreted. Then it might have been 20 or 30 minutes, today "long consecutive" will, with rare exceptions, be between 1 and 7 minutes. However in the meantime technology has transformed our lives and conference interpreting. Both simultaneous and remote interpreting# have been born since the heyday of consecutive. Technology could also transform consecutive although it hasn't yet and conference interpreters have been slow to adopt the technologies that might be exploited in consecutive. Here is an overview of new techniques available to consecutive interpreters (although I say "new" only in the sense of "different" because some of these technologies and ideas have been around for a while).

Simultaneous Consecutive#

Invented in 1999 by Michele Ferrari at the European Commission this technique involves recording the original speech (on some sort of voice recorder) while listening to it and then interpreting not from memory or notes, but from the playback of the recording. The

interpreter does not take notes and interprets in simultaneous mode but after the speaker has stopped speaking - so consecutively - hence the name Ferrari originally gave to this technique, consecutive simultaneous (SCICNews 2001). Now known as simultaneous consecutive this technique has also been called SimConsec, Consec Simul and digital recorder assisted consecutive (Lombardi 2003 and Hamidi & Pöchhacker 2007).

This method also was later developed to include having the interpreter listen again only to certain parts of the recording; slow down, or speed up, the play back; depending on the interpreters needs (Ferrari 2011).

Simultaneous Consecutive with analogue notes

The technique above obviously lends itself to the interpreter ALSO taking conventional consecutive notes while listening to the source speech. These notes can be far fewer and focus on such things as the interpreter sees a need to focus on (Camayd for example, notes only names and numbers, such as dates, addresses etc. (2005:43). See also SCICNews 2007). The interpreter need not worry about the continual problem of mental capacity overload (and as a result perhaps not hearing part of the original) because they are taking far fewer notes and secondly because they will get to hear the speech a second time anyway.

Simultaneous Consecutive with digital pens

In 2009 the first digital pens became available that could not only record the source speech, but using a special type of paper could also associate the audio recording with the note taken at that time (Orlando 2011). In the meantime this can also be done with normal paper.
This made/makes it possible to:

- listen to the recording of only specific parts of the source speech while interpreting from notes and memory

- rewind certain fragments listening to specific parts again - a third time - while interpreting simultaneously from the recording. This is done by tapping the digital pen on the relevant part of the notes (Ferrari 2011);
- look up terms in glossaries. This is done by OCR reading the note and associating the word noted with a pre-existing glossary (Ferrari 2011).

This technique is also an invaluable tool for teachers and students as it allows us to replay the writing of the notes together with the associated audio recording, showing us what we noted, when and how (Orlando 2011).

The above techniques of simultaneous consecutive have been found to offer improved accuracy (SCIC 1999, Camyda 2005, Hamidi 2007) but:

- have a negative impact on the communicative part of the consecutive performance. Interpreters' gazes tend to wander around the room, taking in even the ceiling as they interpret simultaneously rather than looking at the audience as is normal in consecutive (SCICNews 2007).
- created more language interference for some language pairs in simultaneous consecutive than in consecutive (Ferrari in SCICNews 2007).
- there is a time-lag between the spoken word and the note taken which has to be factored in if you are using the notes to find a specific place in the audio recording.

Note-taking on a tablet computer

Tablet computers now allow interpreters to take handwritten notes directly onto the tablet. Tablets have the advantage of potentially looking more professional in the modern age; having an endless number of pages; pages that turn silently (Goldsmith 2015). There is also the advantage of not having to use up endless note-pads (assuming you always carry

around your tablet) and thereby saving paper, which may or may not be greener than using a tablet.

The disadvantages include possible software crashes; battery failure; the need to have a back up system just in case (so you have your paper note-pad with you anyway); unwanted notifications appearing on screen mid-speech; and the need to learn a new skill - coordinating activities on a tablet while interpreting; to name but a few (Goldsmith 2015).

Tablets can of course can also record the source speech. As such all of the techniques described above are available to interpreters taking notes directly onto a tablet. Of course there is an added complication, namely that you have to flip between open apps (note-taking, voice recording, glossary) while interpreting in order to work in this way.

Before you try this out you might like to consult some of the publications in the reading list at the end of the chapter which describe the various apps available as well as the pros and cons of consecutive on a tablet.

It's perhaps worth noting at this stage that no one in the conference interpreting world has ever suggested typing consecutive notes on a laptop. There are probably a number of reasons for that that seemed so obvious they've never really been discussed or published. Firstly, despite the ubiquitous presence of laptops in meeting rooms around the world the interpreter's sitting at, and typing on a laptop computer, still seems to be at odds with the interpreter’s communicative purpose. It might also be considered rude to type while someone you are listening to is talking. Next, the position of notes on the page is a fundamental part of consecutive note-taking but it is far more difficult to place notes on a page in word-processing software. It's also very hard to stand and type on a laptop, and much consecutive is done from the standing position. I think it probably also shows that interpreters already knew what scientists are just beginning to discover in academia - that handwritten notes

require analysis, summary and mental processing and are therefore a better support for memory than type-written notes (Mueller & Oppenheimer 2014).

Real time transcription

In some courts clerks transcribe in real time a verbatim record of what is said. Voice recognition software may also be used. Assuming the availability of a screen and the reliability of the transcription the interpreter could incorportate the transcript into their consecutive technique, for example reducing the amount of notes taken (Takeda & Russel 2015:105).

Similarly the interpreter could use voice recognition software, which is now sufficiently advanced to allow a good quality reception of a source speech to be transformed into a reasonably accurate text version of the same. This technique assumes that you are using device with a screen big enough to read a text off - so most likely a tablet computer This technique might offer the same advantages in terms of improved accuracy as simultaneous consecutive but you would have to be very good at sight translation for this to be more convenient that traditional consecutive or simultaneous consecutive. There is no literature on this technique yet.

Software also exists (InterpretBank) that compares the voice-recognized text with pre-existing glossaries and shows you the corresponding glossary entries in real time. For the moment these are aimed more at the simultaneous market.

Pros and cons

All techniques that involve recording source speeches share at least one enormous advantage over traditional consecutive. You get to hear the speech twice! Research has shown that this improves accuracy.

There are also a number of drawbacks:

- that they require the interpreter to get permission to record the original in advance. In some contexts (ministerial bilaterals, negotiations etc) such recordings would be unthinkable!
- that the interpreter cannot adhere to the generally accepted norm that a consecutive should only take around ¾ of the time of the original speech[1] (Jones 2002: 5) and will most likely also have to interpret some redundant parts of the speech (Hamidi & Pöchhacker 2007).
- interpreters tend to be less communicative, with less eye-contact with the audience (Hamidi & Pöchhacker 2007) than in conventional consecutive.

It seems likely that the limited number of days worked in consecutive, coupled with lack of confidence in 1) the new technology and 2) one's own ability to use it successfully at all times (and particularly under pressure) have combined to hamper the spread of both simultaneous consecutive and note-taking on tablet computers. This may only change if a generation of interpreters learn to use these techniques as part of their studies, something that doesn't happen systematically yet.

Further Reading

Behl & Drechsel, (2013) Tablets for Interpreters

[1] This rule is of course subject to some exceptions depending on the language pair

Ferrari, M. 2011. Practical Applications of the SmartPen in the Working Life of an Interpreter.

Goldsmith, J. (2015) Consecutive 2.0: How to use your tablet for consecutive interpreting.

Orlando, M., (2017) Testing digital pen technology in a hybrid mode of interpreting