

# WASCLA Language Access Summit VII

Saturday, October 15 2011

## 2 – The 7 principles of consecutive interpreting

# Note taking – The Seven Principles

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The use of a technique is always dependent upon the application of a certain number of principles. This is what we call the instructions. One need not follow the rules recommended in such instructions. Indeed the product, device or system for which they were devised may well work even if they are not observed, but will do so less efficiently. Furthermore, the simpler the instructions, the more likely the user is to follow them. The same applies to note-taking. A few very simple principles give this system its sound base and precision, and make using it straightforward. There are seven of these principles; in order they are:

- 1 Noting the idea and not the word
- 2 The rules of abbreviation
- 3 Links
- 4 Negation
- 5 Adding emphasis
- 6 Verticality
- 7 Shift

Some of these principles have already been explained by Jean Herbert in his Interpreter's Handbook<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Noting the idea rather than the word

Take any French text and give it to 10 excellent English translators. The result will be ten very well translated texts, but ten very different texts in as far as the actual words used are concerned. The fact that we have ten good translations, but ten different texts, shows that what is important is the translation of the idea and not the word. This is even truer of interpretation since the interpreter must produce a version of the text in another language immediately. He must be free of the often misleading constraints that words represent. It is through the analysis and notation of the ideas that the interpreter will avoid mistakes and a labored delivery.

Example: Let us take the following, from French into English: „Il y a des fortes chances pour que...../ There is a very good chance that...” If we base our notation of this expression on the words, the key word is *chance*. If we base it on the idea, it is *probable*.

The notes will have to be read 20 minutes – even an hour<sup>2</sup> – after the idea was originally expressed. In the first example it would be very easy to make a mistake. Having noted *chance* the interpreter might, if the context allowed, render it „there is a chance that” or „by chance”. If on the other hand he noted *probable* the mistake cannot be made. The issue of style is also dealt with in the second example where one would automatically say (interpreting into English), „It is probable that”, or „it is likely that”, or „in all likelihood” whereas in the first example even if the interpreter had correctly recalled the idea that the word *chance* represented he/she will be a prisoner to that word and might easily produce a gallicism<sup>3</sup>.

Example: „We should try to live up to....”. It would be absurd to note the word „live” and it would greatly increase the risk of making a mistake. Although it would seem to be very different from the original it would be more appropriate to note in French, for example, „à la hauteur” (in English 'to be up to'). This is the result of analyzing the idea behind what is said and noting it idiomatically in the target language. It would be just as useful to note *be =*, representing *being equal to*, which could

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<sup>1</sup> Georg & C<sup>ie</sup>, Geneva, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> this was indeed the case when Rozan wrote. Although nowadays 20 minutes is considered a long consecutive speech, his comments still apply.

<sup>3</sup> being unduly influenced by the source language is, of course, not only a problem in French-English interpretation but in all interpretation.

very easily be read back idiomatically in interpretation (ie. „à la hauteur in French“, „to be up to in English“).

Whenever taking notes, the interpreter must concentrate on the major idea and how this can be noted clearly and simply (preferably in the target language, although this is not essential).

## 2. The Rules of Abbreviation

### A. ABBREVIATION OF WORDS

The rule of thumb is that unless a word is short (4-5 letters) the interpreter should note it in an abbreviated form.

If we have to note „specialized“ it is more meaningful and reliable to note *sp<sup>ed</sup>* than to write *spec*.

Other examples:

*Stat.* could be read as „statute“ or „statistics“ whilst *St<sup>ute</sup>* and *St<sup>ics</sup>* are unambiguous.

*Prod.* could be read as „production“, „producer“, „product“ or „productivity“ while *Pr<sup>on</sup>*, *Pr<sup>er</sup>*, *Pr<sup>ct</sup>*, *Pr<sup>ity</sup>* are unambiguous.

*Com.* could be read as „Commission“ or „committee“ while *C<sup>on</sup>* and *C<sup>tee</sup>* are unambiguous.

*Rule:* *If you have time write a word as completely as possible, however, if a word must be abbreviated, then write some of the first and last letters rather than trying to write as many letters as possible from the start onwards.*

### B. INDICATING GENDER AND TENSE

Having abbreviated a word or an idea (be it by the use of a symbol or a contraction of its component letters) it can also be very helpful to give an indication of gender<sup>4</sup> and tense).

Thus in the expression: „I will come back to this a little later“, noting the future tense will render the words „a little later“ superfluous. We will see below that „I speak“ can be noted : *I<sup>l</sup>*. Therefore we note : *I<sup>ll</sup>* “

The expression: „those mentioned“, must be noted : *rf<sup>d</sup>*; because *rf* alone could be read back as „those which mention“.

*Rule:* *To indicate gender<sup>5</sup> and number we add<sup>e</sup> or<sup>s</sup> to the symbol or abbreviation. To indicate tense we add<sup>l</sup> for the future and<sup>d</sup> for the past.*

### C. ABBREVIATING THE REGISTER

The expression „which have contributed to“ is long. The word *help* is short. Wherever possible we must abbreviate by using a word which conveys the same meaning but is shorter.

Similarly, „...which are worth looking at“ can be noted *int<sup>el</sup>* (interesting).

„In order to arrive at some conclusions“ can be noted *to end*.

„Taking into account the situation at the present time“ can be noted *as sit<sup>on</sup> now*.

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<sup>4</sup> Rozan was working from and into French. Gender is meaningless for those noting in English, however, the idea could be usefully adapted for use in, for example, the Slavic languages where nouns have gender.

<sup>5</sup> Again the ‘e’ represents the French feminine ending. Any letter can be used and this will depend on the languages involved.

### 3. Links

The part of any speech that is both the most important and the most difficult to note is the sequence of ideas and the links between them. (Jean Herbert)

An idea can be distorted completely if its relation to the previous idea is not clearly indicated. When taking notes then, we should never miss out the links. Indeed what we actually see is that if the links are noted well the rest of the idea can be summarized in just a few strokes of the pen.

A. Noting links becomes very simple if we use the key words that follow. (Over time this will become automatic.)

<i>as, why</i>	and that is because, this is the reason why, since, given the fact that, (in some instances) given that; to convey explanation
<i>tho</i>	although, despite the fact that; to convey opposition
<i>but</i>	on the other hand, but, nevertheless, however; to convey limitations
<i>if</i>	it is possible that, assuming that; to convey supposition
<i>as to</i>	as far as x is concerned, on the matter of; to convey reference
<i>tfe</i>	therefore, one can then conclude; to convey conclusion

The three symbols below are also extremely useful.

=	the same goes for, one might say the same of; to convey the idea of equality or correspondance
≠	on the other hand, contrary to; to convey the idea of difference or lack of correspondance
<i>in +</i>	in addition, furthermore, if we also take account of; to convey the idea of additional precision.

B. Linking is not just about representing the idea; it will often impact on the very content of the speech. It is a question of noting quickly and without repetition the group of subject words and the group of complement words to which the idea relates. This problem can be solved quickly and easily by using the recall arrow.

## 4. and 5. Negation and emphasis

Negation and emphasis are two essential elements of any speech and as such should be noted unambiguously.

### 1. NEGATION

Negation might be noted by means of a line running through a word or symbol.

Example:

If we use *OK* to signify „agree“, then „disagree“ will be ~~*OK*~~. It is also possible to write the word *no* before the word to be negated (thus in our example we would note *no OK*). This second method is clearer and since „no“ is a very short word using it is not a problem.

### 2. EMPHASIS

To emphasize a word we can underline it (twice if we are dealing with a superlative or absolute).

Example:

„(The study) is interesting“ : *int<sup>l</sup>*  
„(The study) is very interesting“ : *int<sup>l</sup>*  
„(The study) is extremely interesting“ : *int<sup>l</sup>*

In some cases the line may be replaced by a circumflex to avoid confusion arising from the use of verticality.

Alternatively emphasis can be noted with a dotted line.

Example:

„This report might be useful“ : *useful*

The use of underlining to denote nuance allows us to qualify the word (or idea) underlined without noting the qualifier.

Example:

„important question“ becomes : *?*  
„we should look at this very carefully“ becomes : *look at*  
„I would like to say in the strongest possible terms“ becomes: *I say*  
„...an imperfect solution“ becomes: *sol<sup>n</sup>*.

## 6. VERTICALITY

It is the principles of Verticality and Shift (described in the next section) which form the backbone of the note-taking system described in this book.

Verticality means taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right. This method makes it possible to:

- group ideas logically, allowing a complete and immediate synthesis when we come to read back our notes,
- to do away with many links which would otherwise be essential to the clarity of the text.

### A. STACKING

„Stacking<sup>6</sup>“ consists of placing different elements of the text above or below one another.

„the report on western europe“

*R<sup>ort</sup>*  
*W Eur.*

„the report on western europe is an interesting document“

*R<sup>ort</sup>*                      *int<sup>l</sup>*  
*W Eur.*

„Since the French, US and UK delegations....“

„Since the French, US and UK delegations have suggested....“

*As*                      *Fre*  
                            *US*  
                            *UK*

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<sup>6</sup> „Superposition“ in French

As *Fre*  
*US suggest<sup>d</sup>*  
*UK*

„The chapters of the report which deal with economic situation in Europe offer additional information and new statistics“

*CH<sup>s</sup>* *info*  
 ————— *give new*  
*Ec.Eur* *stat<sup>ics</sup>*

If (as we will see in part 2) the sign → is used to denote „offer“ and the sign + to denote „additional“ and „new“ then our notes will look like this:

*CH<sup>s</sup>* *info*  
 ————— → +  
*Ec.Eur* *stat<sup>ics</sup>*

See the examples in the practical exercises in part 3 and study them carefully.

## B. USING BRACKETS

Brackets are an important part of the verticality system. In every speech there will be certain elements, which are mentioned to clarify an idea or to highlight a particular point, but which are not integral to the speaker's train of thought.

These parts of a speech should be noted in brackets, below the main element to which they refer.

Examples:

„....which leads to new investment, particularly in the transport sector“

→ *+ inv<sup>s</sup>*  
*(<sup>ort</sup>)*

„(We hear that our exports will suffer as a result of increases in factor costs), which will make them less competitive.“

*(so - comp<sup>ive</sup>)*

See also the examples of the use of parentheses given in the practical exercises at the back.

To encourage a natural use of the verticality technique it is recommended that you use relatively large but narrow pieces of paper. This will allow you to note the maximum amount of text on one page whilst automatically bringing your notes back to the left hand side of the page.

## 7. SHIFT

Shift and Verticality are the fundamental principles underlying this note-taking system.

To explain Shift let us take an example: „Over the course of 1954, prices rose, although not to the same extent as income, thus the population's net income increased.“ Our notes will be as follows (the symbol ↗ denotes increase):

*54, prices ↗*  
*but ————— no = ↗ income*

so ——— Pop<sup>on</sup> ↗

Word for word on the first line: Over the course of 1954, prices rose,  
Word for word on the second line: although not to the same extent as income,  
Word for word on the third line: thus the population's net income increased.

Having used Shift to give our notes a vertical layout on the page, noting the links is almost enough to give us an accurate and full version of the text.

*Shift means writing notes in the place on a lower line where they would have appeared had the text on the line above been repeated.*

The examples below show how notes would be positioned during interpretation, but have not been abbreviated.

„The report on the economic situation in Europe is a fine document which discusses some interesting topics“:

*R<sup>ort</sup>*  
*Ec.Eur*                      *good*  
  
*discusses interesting topics*

„to understand the program, one must“  
*to understand the program*  
*one must*

„The effectiveness of the Social and Economic Council's efforts at solving.....“

*effectiveness efforts Ecosoc*  
*at solving.....*

„Thus in the Report and the Study we find a theoretical and practical analysis which will help in the adoption of.....“

*tfe*  
  
*(in R<sup>ort</sup> )*  
*Study*  
  
*theoretical*  
*there is analysispractical*  
*which will help in the adoption of*

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## 3 – The note-taking technique

# SYMBOLS

Symbols are great....but it is worth abiding by a few basic principles to make sure they HELP rather than HINDER.

A "symbol" is anything, a mark, sign, letter or short word, used to represent a thing, or group of synonymous concepts.

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## Why... use symbols?

- they are quicker and easier to write than words
- they eliminate source language interference (calque)....because they represent ideas not words

## How... to use symbols?

- symbols should be clear and unambiguous
- prepare symbols in advance, don't improvise mid-speech and save much heart-ache.
- consistent. If "**E**" is "*energy*" today, then let it stay that way. Find another symbol for "*environment*"
- make them **organic**....from one symbol can grow many other related symbols (see below)

## What... to note symbols?

- with** - ideas that recur....ie. *think, discuss, propose, agree, decide*. These symbols can be used regardless of the meeting topic.
- and/or specific technical terminology encountered during meeting preparation. These symbols will be used once and discarded.

When we talk about ORGANIC SYMBOLS we mean simply that one symbol is taken as the root for several related symbols.

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The most obvious example is the underlining...

You can underline any symbol to add emphasis

***big* ..... big**

You can also double underline, draw a squiggly line or a dotted line underneath a symbol or word denote differing degrees of emphasis or certainty....

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There is a system for noting verbs that ties in with this idea....

...verb tenses

***work work*<sup>9</sup> work / / work / wôrk**

working worked will work would work

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Here are some more examples of one symbol giving rise to several more...

$\square^{al}$	national (adjective)
$\square^{ally}$	Nationally
$\square^{ze}$	to nationalize
$\square^{tn}$	nationalisation
$\square^o$	national (noun), citizen
$\leftarrow$	return, come back, reverse, regress
$\nearrow$	rise, increase, grow, climb etc.
$\searrow$	fall, decline, slide, slip, drop, shrink,
$\leftrightarrow$	exchange, relations,
$\rightarrow$	lead to, consequence of, therefore
$\curvearrowright$	continue,
$\curvearrowleft$	...
$\odot$	pleased.
$\ominus$	annoyed, unhappy, unimpressed, etc.
$\oplus$	very unhappy, disgusted, etc
$\tilde{O}$	to think
$\bar{O}$	to know, (for me, the straight line denotes certainty, in comparison to the squiggly line for "to think".)

The circle can also be used to denote a person who is associated with that symbol's meaning. This can be done by adding a raised circle to another symbol.

$\square^{al}$	national (adjective)	$\square^o$	citizen
<i>econ</i>	Economy	<i>econ</i> <sup>o</sup>	economist
<i>E</i>	Energy	<i>E</i> <sup>o</sup>	energy expert, supplier,
$\pi$	Policy	$\pi^o$	politician
$\cap$	that, which	$\cap^o$	who

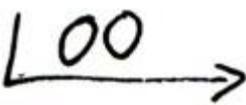
You can get your symbols from anywhere that suits you...as long as you stick to some basic rules. Here are a few ideas.

Only use these symbols if they click in your mind, don't just use them because you've seen them here. You don't have to use the meanings assigned them here either. Symbols should be instantly associated FOR YOU with the meaning you give them.

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Maths	<b>= + &gt; &lt; % /</b>
Science	<b>E μ t</b>
Music	<b>#</b>
Text messages	<b>L8R R U OK? 2 etc.</b>
Keyboard	<b>% &amp; @ ¶ ™</b>
Punctuation marks	<b>? ! ( ) " :</b>
Vehicle registrations	<b>D DA UK CH F</b> (beware of mixing up China & Switzerland, or Poland and Portugal)
Short words in other languages	<b>so hi ta ok / bo ale juz / deja / ergo etc / pero /</b>
Currencies	<b>\$ Y L €</b>
Periodic table	<b>Fe Na Po Ag CO2 CO NO2 H3S04</b>

**EXAMPLES OF SYMBOLS I USE:**

look forward to 

want to 

know 

decide 

propose 

lead to, cause 

promise 

agree 

challenge 

relations 

change 

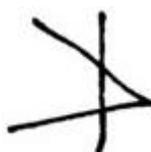
need 

continue 

join 

listen/hear 

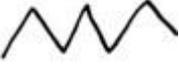
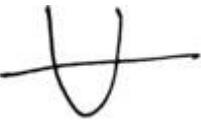
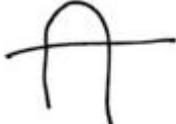
say 

attack 

thanks 

development 

agriculture 

agreement	OK, 	environment	
role		energy	
success		trade	
problem		politics	
repression		democracy	
impact		work	
country		money	
meeting		inflation	
industry		spend	
deficit		surplus	

**DEVELOP YOUR OWN SET:**

<u>IDEA</u>	<u>SYMBOL</u>
COUNTRY	
IMPORT	
EXPORT	
GOVERNMENT	
MAN	
WOMAN	
CHILD	
POPULATION	
POLICY	
ECONOMY	
ENVIRONMENT	
POWER	
CENTURY	
MONTH	
WEEK	
DAY	
TODAY	
YESTERDAY	
DECISION/AGREEMENT	
DIVISION	
SAY, AFFIRM, DECLARE...	
THINK	
HAPPY	
SAD	
WANT	
MUST	
CAN	
NEED	
CHANGE	
INCREASE	
DECREASE	
MARKET	
WORLD	
LAW	
EXAMPLE	

EFFECT	
CHALLENGE	
INDUSTRY	
IMPORTANT	
INTERNATIONAL	
STATE	
DEVELOPMENT	
SECTOR	
EXPENDITURE (GIVE)	
INCOME (TAKE)	
PRODUCTION	
ORGANIZATION	
POLLUTION	
PROGRESS	
EQUILIBRIUM/BALANCE	
DISEQUILIBRIUM	
PROTECTION	
WORK/JOB	
AGRICULTURE	
COOPERATION	
REMEMBER	
FORGET	
SURPRISE	
WORRY	
FEAR	
PEACE	
WAR	
WEAPON	
SEE	
HEAR	
NOT ONLY...	
BUT ALSO...	
WHY/BECAUSE	
BEFORE	
DURING	
AFTER	

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## 4 – DOs and DON'Ts of consecutive interpreting

# DOs and DON'Ts of consecutive interpreting:

## DOs:

- Create a personalized set of symbols and list of abbreviations that can be reused
- Associate symbols to ideas
- Use a good notepad (no loose sheets)
- Separate the page properly
- Include subject, verb, object and separate sentences using LINKS
- Write only on one side of the sheet
- Use unequivocal symbols for reoccurring notions
- Have the beginning/end of each sentence clearly noted especially if it's at the bottom of a page
- Have the end of the speech clearly noted
- Make good use of the left margin
- Take notes diagonally, note lists vertically
- Speak fluently, pause between sentences and paragraphs not in the middle of them
- Look at your audience, not at the floor. Many colleagues go by the numbers 70/30. That is 30% of the time you are looking at you notes, 70% at the audience
- Speak sufficiently loudly, don't shout and don't whisper

## DON'Ts:

- Do NOT shorthand
- Do NOT take notes horizontally without properly separating the sentences
- Do NOT transcribe everything that is said without paying attention to active listening
- Do NOT memorize other people's symbols without trying them before
- Do NOT mumble, speak clearly
- Do NOT hum before starting to deliver the translated speech

## Specifically on note taking:

- Start with "monolingual" consecutive translation. Listen to a speech in your native language; write down your notes, then try to do some reformulation exercises into your native language. This will increase your confidence in reading your notes quickly and broaden your vocabulary
- Take a moment to think about your note-taking technique. You can write a lot, or use only a few written elements - the important thing is that what you write is CLEAR to you. It's easy to get confused with similar words (like "project", "plan", "process") but you need to make your own way through them with your own system of symbols
- Sight translation is also very useful. Try to use a tape recorder and listen to yourself afterwards, or ask a friend to help you
- Another useful technique to begin with consecutive interpreting is to start listening to one single sentence at a time. Listen to it, take your notes, then STOP the tape recorder and try and translate the sentence. Seems like a "slow" way to begin, but you gain confidence in what you're saying, you feel no pressure to take notes hastily, and you learn how to do it THINKING about what you're writing down
- Scribbling a few words on the paper is useless if you have not understood the concept itself
- Write the thing that comes most quickly to your pen
- Don't look for equivalences while listening, now is not the time (unless the speaker pauses for some reason)
- If you are not understanding, STOP taking notes and LISTEN!
- Note legibly
- Abbreviate long words
- Use the space available to portray the hierarchy of ideas and...
- ...to place those ideas relative to one another
- Separate the different parts of the message (which often correspond to sentences), using horizontal lines
- The structure of the page should be visible from 3 feet away
- Use signs and symbols which already exist
- Use individual letters as symbols if they are clear in a given meeting or context
- Make sure that the colour of the pen (or pencil) and paper that you use are such that the former clearly stands out against the latter
- Number the pages if they are not bound
- Cross out each passage in your notes as you complete reading it back
- Glance at each section of your notes BEFORE speaking
- Look up at your audience

## WHAT SHOULD BE NOTED:

- **Ideas**; the essence; a single symbol or word can represent an entire idea.
- **Causality**, consequence, links etc. and the relation of the ideas to one another in time.
- **Numbers**. Note the numbers immediately, interrupting whatever you are noting to note the number as they cannot be remembered from context and noted later as ideas can.
- **Proper names**. If you don't know a name, note it phonetically and see if you can work out how to say it properly in your target language later. If you can't then substitute a generic like "the UK delegate" rather than mangling the name.
- **Tense** of the action, i.e. present, past or future.
- **Technical terms**. Specific to the context of the speech.
- **Lists**. Lists of words which are not integral parts of the sentences in which they are held overload the memory. So note them.
- **The first sentence** of each new idea should be noted with particular care. This does not mean verbatim but with care.
- **LAST sentence** of the speech should be noted with particular care.
- Striking usage. If the speaker uses a word or expression that stands out he has probably used it deliberately and will want it to appear in the interpretation.

- Whether the statement is negative, positive, interrogative or exclamatory.
- Connections between ideas and arguments.
- Emphasis and stress.

### **Reading back notes:**

It may seem strange to even mention how to read back notes. However, interpreters should be aware of the risk of communicating less well because of looking too much at their notes and not enough at their audience. This risk is particularly great if the interpreter takes relatively complete notes. Interpreters, like public speakers, must learn the art of glancing down at their notes to remind them of what they are to say next and then delivering that part of the text while looking at the audience. The clearer the notes, both in content and lay-out, the easier this will be. And the clearer the ideas in the interpreter's mind, the more cursory the glances down at the notes can be.

There is a specific technique that interpreters can try to develop, and which can be compared to a pianist reading music while playing but not sight-reading. The pianist who has practiced a piece is in a similar situation to the consecutive interpreter: essentially they know what they want to play but the sheet-music is there to remind them. The pianist looks at the opening bars and then starts playing, and continues reading ahead of the notes they are playing, their eyes on the music always being a little ahead of their fingers on the keyboard. Similarly the interpreter should look at the first page of their notes then start speaking while looking up at their audience. As the interpreter moves towards the end of the passage they have looked at, they glance down at their notes again to read the next passage. In other words they do not wait until they finished one passage to look again at their notes, which would mean that the interpretation would become jerky, reading then speaking, reading then speaking. Rather the interpreter, while still talking, is already reading ahead, preparing the next passage, thus providing for a smooth, uninterrupted and efficient interpretation.

### **Public speaking:**

- Take a few simple steps to avoid the squeaky voice syndrome that is associated with inexperienced speakers. When you get rid of tension, your voice becomes more powerful.
- Give some thought to your voice, and consider some training if you are going to do a lot of public speaking.
- Start getting practice in making the odd short speech. You are better off having your first attack of nerves asking a question in a departmental meeting than when you suddenly have to address a conference. Knowing how to say 'a few words' is a confidence booster for anyone.
- Make your speech sound spontaneous. Apart from the occasional star, most people need to plan carefully. You get extra brownie points if you speak without notes, but you then need a firm structure. Your performance can be raised several notches if you practice and almost know your script by heart.
- Try to gear what you are saying to the audience. People nod off in pews when they do not relate to the sermon.
- Keep your speeches short and remember you have to entertain. You have to let your audience know that you are on their side. You help keep them awake by giving opportunities to laugh, applaud, raise their hands or boo their enemies.