It is a pleasure to share this review of the third edition of *The Interpreter’s Edge: Practical Exercises in Court Interpreting* by Holly Mikkelson, which for years has represented the gold standard in interpreter training.

While seeking course material for an introduction to interpreting (Spanish and English) course I was preparing for the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s Translation Program, I found great consensus among knowledgeable professionals in the field; everyone recommended the training material from ACEBO. Following my attendance at the Agnese Haury Institute in Tucson in 2001, I listened to some of the tapes while driving. I then passed both the written and oral portions of the federal court interpreter certification exam on my first try. I still do not feel I have mastered the entire contents of *The Interpreter’s Edge*, even after using it in the classroom for 10 years, but with great confidence I tell my students that if they have a thorough grasp of that material, they stand a good chance of passing interpreter certification exams. The texts and scripts cover a broad range of topics common to the courtroom setting. There have been many instances in my own interpreting where I have been thankful for the time I spent with these texts and scripts, as words or phrases came up that I had learned through *The Interpreter’s Edge*.

I cannot stress enough the importance of reading the “How to Use” section (pages ix-xi), as well as the introductions to the three main sections covering simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, and sight translation. Be sure to look at these before reading any of the simultaneous or consecutive scripts! However, the way you use the book will depend on your skills, your timetable, and your own personal preferences.

**Content**

The book is divided into three main sections: “Simultaneous Interpretation” (120 pages), “Consecutive Interpretation” (106 pages), and “Sight Translation” (94 pages). *The Interpreter’s Edge* also includes eight CDs. It is important to understand that, unlike some of the other resources available from ACEBO, these CDs do not include recordings of anyone interpreting the scripts. Rather, the recordings consist of the original scripts themselves, in order for the interpreter to hear what is said as if he or she is in the courtroom. This does not mean, however, that you must research unfamiliar vocabulary on your own. Following the lessons in each of the three sections are very helpful notes. In terms of my own skills, I found that the terms discussed and translated in the notes sections were exactly the ones I needed. If you are an experienced interpreter, you may wish to peruse a few pages of the notes sections to see whether it will be fruitful to study those pages prior to interpreting each lesson. Then I would suggest that you try interpreting one of the scripts “cold.” See if this amount of preparation is appropriate for you. This way you have an opportunity to incorporate new terms into your vocabulary and then immediately use them in a simulated court interpreting experience.

Each of the three main sections includes not only practice texts/scripts (included on CD in the cases of simultaneous and consecutive), but also short introductory sections that are densely packed with excellent advice and guidance on interpreting in general and how best to take advantage of the material that follows.
Do not underestimate the value of the shadowing, dual tasking, and paraphrasing exercises included in the simultaneous section. Shadowing will help you become accustomed to speaking and listening at the same time. Dual tasking will increase your concentration. Paraphrasing will help with decalage and mental agility. Those deeply immersed in test preparation will particularly appreciate that each lesson specifies the rates of speech, which vary across the different lessons. The introduction indicates that, “most interpreter certification exams are given at 140 to 160 words per minute” (pages 1-3), and you will be aware of the word-per-minute rate for each of the 20 lessons.

The consecutive section, in addition to 18 lessons with consecutive interpreting scripts, includes a helpful introduction and six additional exercises that work on memory and note-taking skills.

Holly Mikkelson aptly points out that sight translation “is often given short shrift in court interpreter training” (pages 1-3). This section includes 24 texts specifically chosen and designed to develop all the skills needed for sight translation.

The Interpreter’s Edge is versatile, in that it can be used in a classroom setting or for self-study. It is appropriate for interpreters with any amount of experience. Those needing more preparation will definitely want to study at least the vocabulary in the notes sections thoroughly prior to attempting to interpret the lessons. Those better versed in courtroom vocabulary may want to jump right in, recording a rendition or working with a partner or group, and then double-checking vocabulary choices against the notes. An important point to remember about the translations provided in the notes section is that even though there are often alternate ways to interpret each word or phrase, you can always feel confident using the translations provided in these lessons.

Having used this book for 10 years in an introductory course, my experience has been that the students who excel are those with very strong language skills and very little interpreting experience. Sadly, I have found that bad habits in experienced interpreters are very hard to break. This is particularly the case when it comes to length of utterances. Any interpreter has strengths and weaknesses, but it seems that many lack the discipline necessary to allow a witness to complete a thought before interrupting that witness to interpret. Consecutive interpreting is particularly stressful, and we all fall into the habit of jumping in to interpret before we forget what has been said. We may have perfect accuracy on short utterances but be unable to handle long ones. In this regard, The Interpreter’s Edge teaches the best practices and discipline necessary to pass interpreter certification exams. It is very important that, during your practice, you wait to pause the recording until the witness has finished speaking. Resist the temptation to pause the CD and break up the utterance. Work on your note-taking and memory skills.

As a special note to translators, I want to point out that my own background is in literary translation. Frankly, I was surprised to learn that translation is excellent preparation for interpreting. As translators, we are constantly expanding our vocabulary and structuring sentences. We cannot simply skip or avoid unfamiliar words. Often without realizing it, we are building the foundations for effective interpreting. If you are primarily a translator and are thinking about trying your hand at interpreting, I strongly encourage you to use a resource such as The Interpreter’s Edge in order to start off on the right foot and develop good techniques and discipline.

This is a third edition, published in 1995. Some of the texts are somewhat dated, and the value of the exercises would be increased by updating them. Another concern is that there are some monosyllabic words written with accent marks (again, dating the material). Examples of this are vi, consistently written vi, and di, written di (e.g., page 245, line 1). Other than this, I have not come across typos or other errors in these materials.

Overall Evaluation

All in all, The Interpreter’s Edge is an excellent resource for court interpreter practice and training. Of course, it is difficult to find a one-size-fits-all product for something as complex as interpreter training and exam preparation. Those wanting to hear Holly Mikkelson do consecutive interpreting will want to use Edge 21: An Interpreter’s Edge for the 21st Century. For more advice on note-taking, check out the ACEBO video Consecutive Interpretation and Note-Taking. Finally, many of my colleagues and I will never be seen in court without our copy of The Interpreter’s Companion, another excellent resource from ACEBO.

Susan Rascón, J.D., is a federally certified court interpreter and an ATA-certified Spanish->English translator. Contact: susanrascon@gmail.com.