

informATIO

October 2005

Number 3

Conference interpretation is a high-profile member of the family of language professions—at once glamorous and little—understood - that has played a key role in the life of ATIO since the first interpreter members were admitted in 1956. Today, ATIO's 129 conference interpreter members and candidates work in 17 languages, in settings ranging from summits of heads of state to trade negotiations, and from old-style sales meetings to ultra-modern Webcasts. This issue of InformATIO is a salute to them and their work.

This issue was prepared together with the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), Canada Region, and is being distributed to AIIC members. We also thank AVW-TelAv for distributing this issue of InformATIO to the subscribers to its corporate newsletter for the conference and congress industry.

*Kenneth Larose, President
Dorothy Charbonneau, Director, Conference Interpreters*

Uniquely Canadian: Conference Interpreter Training at the University of Ottawa

*By Jean Delisle, Director
School of Translation and Interpretation
University of Ottawa
Translation Barbara Collishaw, C. Tran.*

The Master of Conference Interpretation offered by the School of Translation and Interpretation (STI) at the University of Ottawa is essentially a *practical* program (it does not include any theory courses) with very *intensively* structured training. The recognized principles of the profession are passed on to the apprentice interpreters by seasoned professional interpreters. An AIIC study ranked this program among the five or six best in the world. Employers have always been satisfied with our graduates' work and find that they move quickly to the working level (TR-2) after an initial "breaking-in" period.

This post-graduate program aims primarily, but not exclusively, to train interpreters for the Canadian market.



Under an agreement with the Government of Canada's Translation Bureau, the STI is fortunate to be able to count on a full-time resident interpreter, Jacques Audet. A born teacher, Mr. Audet coordinates the program and teaches a significant course load. The Bureau also seconds an English-language interpreter on a part-time basis (two courses).

This 33-credit program takes a year to complete and is therefore intended primarily for full-time students, who are subject to a residence requirement of three consecutive sessions. The practicum consists of a minimum of 10 full working days (or equivalent time) as an interpreter at meetings approved by the practicum supervisor.

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The admissions process is rigorous, given the limited number of places. The School trains between four and six interpreters a year, but would like to be able to increase this to eight or 10, considering market demands and the Translation Bureau's pressing needs.

Courses are given in French and English and interpretation in both directions is required, with slightly different skill levels expected in French to English or English to French interpretation. All courses are given in a laboratory with twelve interpretation booths, located on the fifth floor of Simard Hall. In the recently modernized lab, these booths have been completely rebuilt and better insulated and digital technology has replaced the 1980s-era analog system.

The success rate in the final examination has been very high: more than 90% of registered students have obtained their diploma. Because of their hard work—this is a physically taxing program—and the dedication and experience of the educators, these students have achieved the level expected of a beginning interpreter in record time. They are “booth-ready.” They have learned to manage the stress and stage fright of an actor going on stage with no script.

To learn more about the training methods used in the STI, read Dave Roberts' informative two-part article “Training Interpreters for *La relève*”, which appeared in *Terminology Update/L'Actualité terminologique*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2000, p. 17-21 and vol. 33, no. 2, 2000, p. 24-27.

Published by:

The Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario

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Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7

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E-mail: info@atio.on.ca Website: www.atio.on.ca

Circulation: 1700

Printer: Plantagenet Printing

Graphic Designer: More In Typo Ltd.

Editorial Team: Catherine Bertholet, Fabrice Cadieux, Alana Hardy, Michel Trahan

Editorial policy:

The Editorial Committee of *InformATIO* reserves the right not to publish, or to edit with the author's consent, any article submitted or commissioned for publication. Any opinions expressed (except in articles signed in an official capacity) are those of the authors and are not endorsed by the Association.

Special thanks to:

Tony Abate, AIIC, Colin Bailey, Luc Bouchard, Michèle Bradbury, Fabrice Cadieux, Louise Côté-Limbos, Dorothy Charbonneau, Richard Copeland, Al Daigen, Jean Delisle, Creighton Douglas, Kenneth Larose, Monique Perrin d'Arloz, Christopher Thiery.

CONGRATULATIONS!

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With about fifty staff interpreters serving Parliament and its committees as well as numerous meetings and conferences with the help of a large number of freelancers the Translation Bureau's Parliamentary Interpretation Service has been playing a key role in conference interpretation in Canada ever since it nurtured the fledgling profession 40 years ago. In keeping with the focus of this issue devoted to the human face of the profession, we asked a Bureau interpreter to describe her typical work day.

A Glimpse into the Life of a Federal Staff Interpreter

*By Dorothy Charbonneau, C. Tran., C. Conf. Int., (ATIO), AIIC
Director, Conference Interpreters, ATIO*

I have been a staff interpreter with the Conference Interpretation Service (CIS) of the Translation Bureau for 17 years now. And I am here to tell you that there is no such thing as a typical day.

At CIS, my day actually starts the night before when I call an answering machine to see what the following day has in store. You see, even though I may think I know what my assignment will be, due to reasons beyond my control, a change may have been made. Then I check my corporate email to see whether I have received any documentation to be prepared for the following day. Conference interpreters at CIS don't have an office, so the answering machine is our link to our work. We are fortunate to have the support of some wonderful people who expertly direct interpreter traffic and keep us supplied in the documentation essential to our work.

Assignments vary widely, often from day to day. It is not unheard of to cover a different topic in a different location every day of the week. Working conditions conform to the international standard of three interpreters per team for a full day with each interpreter working half hour turns. Our work location can be in a federal government building anywhere in Ottawa, or any Ottawa hotel or conference centre, or some hotel or conference centre anywhere in Canada or, occasionally, abroad (though we usually know about out of town assignments a couple of weeks ahead of time). Our clients range from international dignitaries to front-line civil servants from across the country, and everything in between. Generally speaking, we all work both into and from our A and B languages (English and French). The hours of work also vary, most days are 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, 8:00 am to 6:00 pm is not unheard of, or sometimes 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, with evenings and the occasional weekend thrown in for good measure.

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Interpretation for Parliament and its Committees

*By Monique Perrin d'Arloz
Chief, Parliamentary Interpretation
Translation Bureau
Translation Fabrice Cadieux, C. Conf. Int., C. Tran.*

The parliamentary interpretation service has some fifty staff interpreters, supplemented by about fifteen freelancers when Parliament is in session. We serve the House of Commons and the Senate as well as their committees; Cabinet and its committees; party caucuses; the Parliamentary Library; the Press Gallery; parliamentary exchanges, etc.

Except for a few closed-door sessions (such as caucuses or Cabinet), interpreters' work is broadcast on television or the Internet. This guarantees an adrenaline rush for those assigned to the fast-paced Question Period or the highly technical deliberations of the Finance Committee. Interpreters are sometimes also required to work in

consecutive or whispered mode, especially when they travel with the committees.

Each parliamentary committee has a lead interpreter who follows (and interprets) the committee's deliberations, liaises with the committee clerk, and acts as a resource with other interpreters. When they are not assigned to interpretation tasks, parliamentary interpreters move to their other lives as translators. They translate the proceedings of the committees, sometimes material that they interpreted a few days ago (which usually makes their task easier) or that they might have to interpret the following week (which helps them prepare while translating).

Continued on page 10

Interpretation at the Ontario Legislature

By Richard Copeland, Director, Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services

The cry of “Order” echoes through the vaulted room. All rise and the procession enters the chamber. Clad in black robes and tricorne hats, those charged with guarding the rights and privileges of Ontario’s provincial parliament take up their positions while the Sergeant-at-Arms places the mace upon the table. So begins another day at the Ontario Legislature for the Legislative Assembly’s six staff interpreters.

As formal and dignified as the proceedings are at the outset, the interpreter knows that in a matter of minutes, the political hurly-burly will erupt and for the rest of the day the discourse will take many a sharp and unexpected turn as parliamentarians debate the issues of the day. There will be boisterous and raucous interventions from all sides and at times, passions will run so high that the Speaker will have to intervene to restore decorum. Of course, there are also many hours of debate when the issues are mundane and the speeches uninspired. Regardless, from high drama to routine matters to low comedy—the interpreter is likely to hear it all each and every day.

Interpretation was introduced at the Assembly in July 1986 in accordance with the French Language Services Act passed that same year. For almost twenty years, interpreters at the Legislature have been rendering speeches by parliamentarians into either French or English. They make an important contribution to the parliamentary process by providing the Legislature and all Ontarians with simultaneous interpretations of the debates of the House and some of its committees.

Just like all conference interpreters, legislative interpreters require tact and diplomacy since they must serve all members of parliament equally and must always be apolitical and impartial. In such a politically charged environment, discretion and good judgment are essential. But in addition, simultaneous interpretation at the Legislature is definitely a unique assignment.

How so? Picture a conference with 103 delegates all having something to say and often saying it when they haven’t been recognized by the chairperson, and where the subject matter ranges from health care to education, from nuclear energy to the environment, from banning pit bulls to making amendments to the building code. Consider that for every minute that the House sits, the interpretation is broadcast across the province on

the Ontario parliamentary television channel. Finally, for the hours and hours of debate, legislative interpreters only rarely receive documents and generally have little, if any, notice of what is about to be debated.

In such an environment of uncertainty, the interpreters must invest heavily in preparation to cope with the broad vocabulary required and frequent use of technical terms. Daily, they have to contend with rapid-fire delivery of Oral Questions and frequently they must travel with committees as they hold local hearings in communities designated for French-language service.

Legislative interpreters, supplemented by freelancers, including many members of ATIO, generally work shifts that allow them to cover the irregular hours of the parliament. This might mean a day shift with a couple of hours for research and preparation before heading for the booth or an evening shift with the prospect of working until midnight. It could mean one member of the team interpreting from French into English and English into French within the same 20-minute turn with frequent changes of source language, sometimes within the same speaker’s remarks.

Regardless of whether they are working in the House or in committee, at the Legislature or travelling to remote parts of Ontario, or whether they are assigned to Oral Questions or Routine proceedings, legislative interpreters know that each day will include new challenges to their vocabulary, debates that stimulate discussion and provoke thought, and work that ultimately has an impact on the day-to-day life of all Ontarians.



Public Relations at AIIC: A Collective and Individual Effort

By Louise Côté-Limbos, C. Conf. Int., C. Tran.
Translation Al Daigen, C. Tran.

The study conducted by the Canadian Translation Industry Sectoral Committee in 1999 concluded that the profession of conference interpreting was poorly understood. And that is still the case today. When I first tell people what I do for a living, they usually stare at me blankly. But when I then explain that I do simultaneous translation, like in the House of Commons, they usually understand what I mean.

As this same study also found, however, when people do know what conference interpreting is, they generally have a positive image of it. The challenge for conference interpreters, then, is to increase knowledge of their profession among their clients, other professionals, the general public and potential future conference interpreters. To meet this challenge, conference interpreters must conduct two parallel public relations campaigns, one through their association, the other as individuals.

The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) has developed a number of tools and structures to support these efforts. From 1991 to 1994, AIIC'S International Committee for Public Relations published a whole series of brochures, kits and information sheets aimed at anyone who is involved in international conferences in any way. After producing these materials, the committee was replaced with an informal public relations network and a Communications Committee that defines AIIC's major public relations and communications strategies. A few years back, to keep up with modern technology, AIIC launched its Website, www.aiic.net, and its Webzine, *Communicate!* It also registered a domain name, aiic.net, that all members can use in their e-mail addresses.

But AIIC is an international organization with some 2800 members scattered around the globe, and its regionalized structure creates some special challenges for its public relations efforts. As Francesca Geddes, the coordinator of AIIC's International Public Relations Network, explains, "If people are going to know us and recognize us, AIIC must project a consistent image and provide its regions with a common foundation for their own public relations efforts." The problem is to build on this common foundation while also reflecting the very different realities in various local markets.

At the same time, AIIC must avoid engaging in purely commercial marketing campaigns, which would be inconsistent with its mission and would violate the rules of other professional associations to which many of its members also belong. Not all associations impose the same restrictions, however, and some, especially in the United States, promote their members in a far more "commercial" way. It remains to be seen whether this approach will gain ground in Canada, and potentially in AIIC.

For now, AIIC focuses its public relations efforts on maintaining its members' reputation for quality and helping people learn more about them. Here are examples of some of the public relations initiatives taken by AIIC Canada:

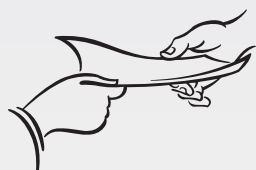
- every year, we send our regional directory to 150 conference organizers, hotels, and conference centres;
- every year, we present the AIIC award to a technician and a student;
- we give all our members the opportunity to include the AIIC logo on their business cards;
- we give interviews to the media (for example, one last year, on Radio-Canada) and make presentations at conferences and symposiums sponsored by other organizations, such as OTTIAQ and Protocol and Diplomacy International;
- our members participate in the Interpretation Program at the University of Ottawa's School of Translation and Interpretation, and make presentations to students at the Université de Montréal;
- we have created and maintain the AIIC Canada Website.

AIIC's public relations activities vary from year to year, depending on the financial resources available, but one thing never changes—the need to keep pursuing these efforts in innovative ways. And none of these efforts is more important than the role that each conference interpreter can play individually as an ambassador for the profession in all dealings with clients, students, colleagues who are not members, and the general public.

Louise Côté-Limbos is a member of AIIC's Council and its International Public Relations Network.

Guidelines for Speakers

The organizers of this conference are providing professional interpretation to enable delegates of different languages and cultures to understand each other. The interpreters are your allies in conveying your message to the audience. You can help them by following these simple guidelines.



- If you have a **written text** or **notes for your speech**, whether or not you intend to follow them closely, please hand them to the conference secretariat for distribution to the interpreters. Interpreters do not simply rely on words, they interpret the meaning and should therefore familiarize themselves with your subject and terminology. You are free to depart from your text or add to it as you go along. AIIC interpreters are bound by professional secrecy, and the content of your document will remain confidential at all times and will be returned to you on request.
- If your paper is **technical**, please give the interpreters any terminology you may have or any background papers on the same subject in other languages. You may also ask the conference secretariat to organize a briefing with the interpreters. Meeting the speakers would be useful in order to clarify specific points which will help improve performance.
- If you wish to show a **film, slides or transparencies**, please make sure that the interpreters receive the script or a copy of the transparencies. The booths are often situated far away from the screen and it would be helpful if the interpreters had copies of the projected text in front of them.

- When reading from a script, speakers tend to speed up, which means that the audience will find it difficult to follow and, as a result, parts of your message will be lost. If you have not spoken at meetings with interpretation before, it may be advisable to **pace your delivery** beforehand. Ideally you should allow **3 minutes per page** of 40 lines.

- Before you speak, please make sure your **microphone** is switched on. Knocking the microphone or blowing into it as a test will merely be amplified in the interpreters' headphones and cause an unpleasant noise. To test the microphone just say a few words like "Good afternoon" or "Thank you Mr. Chairman."



- Please do not speak too close to the microphone as this creates interference, and avoid leaving your receiver set close to the microphone when you speak to prevent feed-back whistling. The technician will be able to advise you on this.
- If you need to **move away from your seat**, i.e. to point at a slide or transparency projection, please use a **neck or lapel microphone**. Without a microphone the interpreters cannot hear you, however loud you speak.
- If you are speaking from the rostrum or a lectern and want to reply to questions from the floor, please make sure you have a **receiver set** with you to follow the questions as they are interpreted.

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Checklist for Conference Organizers

You have recruited professional conference interpreters to provide a high-quality service during your conference. Here are some guidelines to help them do a better job for you.

- **Speakers:** Please give each speaker a copy of the “*Guidelines for Speakers*” which your consultant interpreter will be happy to provide.
- **Documentation:** Interpreters have a wide range of knowledge, but cannot be experts in all subjects. In order to familiarize themselves with the topic of your conference, please make sure they receive the conference papers in all languages as early as possible. They will study these documents and prepare their own glossaries. This will help them gain a better idea of the subject under discussion and understand your speakers better, especially those who have difficult accents or speak very fast.
- Apart from the agenda and written speeches, please send the interpreters minutes of previous meetings on the same subject, background information on the organization or association, curricula vitae for key speakers, the names of officers of the organization and speakers. Interpreters should receive the same documents sent to the delegates.
- When papers are circulated during the meeting, in particular texts for discussion, please ensure the interpreters obtain a copy before they are discussed. Each booth should receive at least one copy of such papers, if possible in all conference languages.

- **Briefing:** If the conference is very technical, it is advisable to organize a briefing between the interpreters and the speakers. Interpreters will thus be able to ask questions on terminology and procedure.

- **Liaison:** For smooth coordination, it is advisable for you to appoint one person who will be responsible for the liaison with the interpreters through their team leader. The payment of the daily subsistence allowance, stipulated in the contract, should be handled by these two persons in the course of the meeting.

- **Technical Equipment:**

Ensure the equipment supplier is providing the number of booths and channels required for your meeting, that the



equipment is reliable and that there are enough receivers for all the delegates. Before the meeting opens, ask the consultant interpreter, or the team leader, and chief technician to check that the equipment is working properly.

- **Projection:** If films, slides or transparencies are to be shown and require interpretation, please ensure that the screen is clearly visible from the booths and that the interpreters have received a script or a copy of the texts to be projected in advance.

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Interpretation for the Internet Age

By Fabrice Cadieux, C. Conf. Int. C. Tran.

Just after I joined the ATIO Board of Directors, circa 1993, we had a brainstorming session about the future of language professions. Most of the talk focused on the sea change that machine translation was expected to bring about in translators' work and livelihood. When it came time for me to talk about the changes in store for conference interpreters, I couldn't think of any: it seemed obvious to me that the machine that could replace my colleagues and me hadn't yet been designed.

A dozen years later, machine translation is barely emerging from the realm of sci-fi, but the work many conference interpreters perform has changed dramatically. The core of what we do (simultaneously rendering a message in another language) has not changed, but the conditions in which we work are evolving ever more rapidly. To begin with, the very paradigm of the "conference" has changed with the advent of modern communication methods, first teleconferencing, and then, more recently, Webcasting.

Nowadays, especially in the private sector, you need a really good reason to meet face to face with someone you can just as easily talk to from your office. At first, teleconferencing and the Internet were seen as ways to cut back on travel. But their use has led to the adoption of new ways to communicate. People now meet more often, for shorter periods and at shorter notice. Also, a widely dispersed group can receive a message that would be cumbersome and costly to convey in person.

For example, the CEO of a major bank can now address tens of thousands of employees of his financial group in real time over the phone and the Web, and even answer their questions live. A car manufacturer communicates simultaneously with all of its dealers, using a private closed-circuit television network, to preview the latest promotions. Just about every major company now announces its quarterly results over the phone to dozens of financial analysts.

More and more, interpreters are taking their place in these situations and many others. The stakes are high—had we not found a way to adapt, communication in this new era would be on its way to becoming unilingual. But interpretation is flourishing in these novel settings. The

price of this is a reinvention of our work habits and questioning of yesterday's dearly held precepts, such as a line of sight to the speaker, working in a team, or being paid by the day.

Indeed, how could interpreters still demand to see the speaker in a teleconference when other participants don't? Today's interpretation assignments are often short and intense, with individual interpreters (sometimes specifically requested by the client) supplanting the traditional team. Is this progress? What about the longstanding habit of working and being paid in units of a day. Is this still applicable when today's assignments last an hour or even half an hour, but in conditions that are often more challenging and intense than traditional booth work? Another question: clients often request female interpreters to interpret women and men to interpret men. Is this a logical solution to avoid excessive cognitive dissonance in listeners who only have the interpreter's voice to go by, or does this cross the line from interpretation into voice talent?

Some suspect that it's no use trying to provide the same quality of service in unfavourable and sometimes impossible conditions. A European Parliament study on remote interpretation (which would have avoided travel for some of the huge complement of interpreters required by the multiple EU languages) came down with a largely negative report, finding that physical remoteness and the transmission of sound over long distances had negative effects on the quality of interpreters' work and even their health.

And what about sound quality, arguably the key variable in an interpreter's work? The sound that comes over the telephone line or an Internet connection is often far from the ideal of purity and clarity that a good technician can attain in a meeting room. Sometimes, the sound on a teleconference or Webcast is practically unusable. But the participants themselves don't hear any better... The future of conference interpretation may be playing out right now. It is up to our profession to keep up with changing communication techniques while maintaining the quality and discipline that have earned us the trust we have been enjoying.

Client Testimonial

Faithful InformATIO readers will remember that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) was the first official body in Ontario to adopt a policy of priority recruitment of members of ATIO. That watershed decision (which initially applied to conference interpreters only) was taken back in 1993, just after our reserved title had been recognized under the 1989 ATIO Act. Colin Bailey is Assistant Director, Communications at CMEC, and is responsible for providing services to the many meetings organized by this interprovincial secretariat. He agreed to talk to our correspondent about interpretation at CMEC.

InformATIO: Mr. Bailey, how important is interpretation for CMEC?

Colin Bailey: Interpretation is a key function for our organization. It helps us apply our bilingualism policy in the meetings we organize, ranging from ministerial summits to working group sessions.

I: Has interpretation at CMEC changed a lot since 1993?

CB: Tremendously. Ten or fifteen years ago, we would have meeting after meeting in our boardrooms. Today, it is usually dark and most contacts take place by teleconference. This saves us a lot of money and gives us more flexibility. We are particularly proud of developing an interpretation service that is specially adapted to

teleconferences, and which has earned us praise even from ministers and senior officials. As well, over the years, we have systematically surveyed the users of our interpretation services and we have commissioned a series of evaluations from an external consultant, who was formerly the head of a major government interpretation service. Based on these data, our interpreters came out with satisfaction ratings of around 90%.

I: And how do you explain these impressive levels of satisfaction?

CB: First of all, we recruit interpreters based on professional quality. When we use Certified Conference Interpreters, recruited by an experienced consulting interpreter, we know that we can offer a service of high quality. But that's not all, we know that the client has a key role to play. That's why we take care to offer an impeccable technical setup and to provide interpreters with full bilingual documentation ahead of each assignment.

I: Do you think that CMEC will continue recruiting Certified Conference Interpreters?

CB: Your members have been able to adapt to changing working methods and have provided us with reliable, high quality service over the years. We count on them to make our job easier (in both languages) in the future!

A Glimpse into the Life of a Federal Staff Interpreter

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Among the essential qualities for a conference interpreter, beyond the obligatory language abilities, are an insatiable curiosity, extreme flexibility, the ability to sleep anywhere, eat anything or subsist on water and/or really bad coffee for hours, and infinite patience for those assignments involving an awful lot of "hurry up and wait." Over the years, a conference interpreter invariably becomes a jack of all topics and master of none.

Levity aside, conference interpreters working for the Federal Translation Bureau, whether staff or freelance, are highly trained and dedicated professionals whose mission is to provide a linguistic bridge over our language divide. I can honestly say that I love my chosen profession and I look forward to learning something new every day.

Interpretation for Parliament and its Committees

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Interpreters' assignments are recorded on an answering machine every night at 7:30 pm. It's only then that interpreters find out whether their next working day will start at 8:00 am, 11:00 am, or 2:00 pm! And even then, they only get a vague idea of when their assigned committee session will end.

When Parliament is not in session, the interpreters are seconded to the conference interpretation service.

Right now, the main concern for management is to replace departing interpreters in future. Many initiatives have been taken to encourage the training and recruiting of qualified interpreters... but that is another InformATIO article!

Would you Like to be a Conference Interpreter?

By Christopher Thiery, Associate Member AIIC

Translation Fabrice Cadieux, C. Conf. Int., C. Tran.

First of all, you should know that the profession you're thinking of joining is tiny. The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) has fewer than 2800 members worldwide. That figure doesn't account for the whole profession, but even so the overall number is still very small. An interpretation school [such as the University of Ottawa's STI] only graduates a very small number of interpreters every year, and even fewer in any given language.

But that's no reason to be discouraged. Promising candidates are always welcome, and conference interpretation is by no means an endangered vocation, regardless of what you may hear about the growing use of English.

So what do you need to become a conference interpreter? You don't need to be a genius or a language virtuoso, but you do need a few key attributes that, while not rare in themselves, are not often found in one individual. Naturally, you'll need above-average language skills, but that's just the start. Language mastery must be rounded out by the ability to cut through to key messages and to see the "big picture," and also by the ability to express your thoughts precisely and fluently. Unfortunately, it's hard to tell ahead of time whether an interpreter candidate is destined for success. Good interpretation schools try very hard up front to steer would-be applicants who have just too much to make up away from a difficult course of study when they could more profitably be doing something else. However, no one has yet found a miracle recipe for success.

When I was head of the Interpretation section at the *École supérieure d'interprètes et de traducteurs* (ESIT) in Paris, I was often asked what it took to succeed in the profession. I eventually came to the conclusion that while I didn't really know what could make you succeed, I had noted that the most frequent reason for failure among candidates was their inability to express their thoughts precisely, including in their mother tongue.

So you've now graduated from interpretation school. The work of a conference interpreter is extremely fulfilling, and not only for the obvious reasons. At the most basic level, bridging the language barrier is often a source of great

satisfaction. This can be a source of frustration when you exert yourself so much to render careless, confusing or unprepared speakers. But if you make an effort to keep up your curiosity, you will never run out of things to discover, with each day bringing new people talking about new things.

The very act of interpreting is also a highly satisfying intellectual exercise (just like any difficult skill once mastered). As well, learning to handle skilfully the subtle and effective instrument of language is a joy in itself.

You would also have to keep up with a very demanding job. First of all, interpreting is in itself a challenge, requiring extreme concentration, whether it be consecutive mode (when interpreter takes notes and renders a presentation subsequently) or in simultaneous mode (in a booth, with headphones and a microphone). And every time you're about to "be on," you'll get those "examination day" butterflies!

This can be all the more acute since as a conference interpreter, even when you're part of a team, you always work "without a net," with no one to check or revise your delivery.

What about working conditions? Most conference interpreters enjoy fairly flexible arrangements. Freelancers can accept or refuse assignments, and staff interpreters don't normally have to show up for regular office hours. On the other hand, interpreters have to perform every time. First and foremost, this requires **discipline**. This applies not only to the actual interpreting, but also to daily professional practice. For example, a conference interpreter is never late for a meeting, even though participants might be. This also means absolute professional secrecy. No piece of information, no matter innocuous, can be divulged by an interpreter, even years later (interpreters specifically refrain from writing their memoirs!).

Thanks to this kind of discipline, conference interpreters have gained the trust of their clients and built up the respected profession you're thinking of joining today.

Published with Christopher Thiery Permission

Unsung Heroes

If interpreters work in the background at meetings, their indispensable partners—interpretation equipment technicians—sometimes feel taken for granted just as much. InformATIO asked Tony Abbate, a long-time and highly respected Technical Service Representative with AVW TELAV Audio Visual Solutions in Toronto, to talk about what technicians do and the highs and lows of their work.

InformATIO: Many people, including some who work closely with you, don't realize the extent and the importance of your role. What are most people surprised to find out about what you do?

Tony Abbate: Probably how long we've been around when a meeting starts. By the time the participants and the interpreters start to stroll in, we've typically been on site for three or four hours, setting up the microphones, the booth and all the rest of the equipment, and then one of us usually stays all day to operate the system. If the meeting lasts just one day, then we have to dismantle everything, sometimes under time pressure if there's something else booked in the room soon afterwards.

I: That makes for a very long day, do you ever have trouble keeping up?

TA: It does get difficult at times since some groups require constant attention, not turning their microphones on and off (which forces the technician to do it for them), and without a live microphone (or with too many microphones on at the same time) the interpreters can't hear what is being said.

I: So what happens then? They rap angrily on the window of the booth?

TA: They let me know. I sometimes get asked whether interpreters are hard to get along with and I don't find that at all. It's like anything, if you go in with an open mind and do your job well, you can work with anybody. The same goes for banquet staff in hotels and for the customers themselves.

I: What about the technical side of the job? I would assume that achieving high-quality sound with portable equipment would be your number one challenge.

TA: Actually, good sound is quite achievable if the system is properly set up. My biggest challenge involves space—often I have to come up with creative ways to fit an interpretation booth in a room that's just too small for it, or to get boxes of equipment up a cramped set of back stairs. Another recent

Continued on page 14

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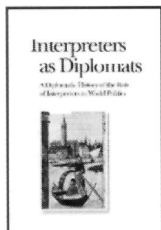
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Focus on Conference Interpretation • Focus on Conference Interpretation

From Alexander the Great to the UN

By Fabrice Cadieux, C. Conf. Int., C. Tran.



Ruth A. Roland's *Interpreters as Diplomats*, published by the University of Ottawa Press, abounds in fascinating details about interpreters and translators in the world of diplomacy and politics, especially during more obscure periods or in lesser-known regions of the world.

How did Alexander the Great or the Crusaders manage to communicate with their multilingual troops and the populations of the countries they traversed? What part did language professionals play in opening China and Japan to the West?

Recent times are also accorded extensive treatment in the book, with considerable space devoted to the rise of interpretation and translation in relations between countries and within international organizations since the hegemony of French was overtaken by linguistic diversity. Readers will find many details about language professionals "behind the scenes," such as procedures at

international conferences before the advent of simultaneous interpretation, or the origins of the world's great schools of translation.

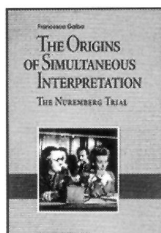
Regrettably, though, this extensive material, compiled and in some cases published for the first time, is too often deployed by the author for entertainment rather than rigorous analysis. Readers seeking a synthesis of the role of language professionals in diplomacy will be disappointed. Overall, *Interpreters as Diplomats* is a tantalizing survey, albeit impressionistic and anecdotal to a fault, of the vital part played by our forebears in world events.

Roland, Ruth A., *Interpreters as Diplomats, A Diplomatic History of the Role of Interpreters in World Politics*

University of Ottawa Press, 1999, 209 pages,
ISBN 0-7766-0501-1, \$28
order from utpbbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca

Was the Nuremberg Trial Fair?

By Fabrice Cadieux, C. Conf. Int., C. Tran.



The 1945-46 proceedings against Nazi war criminals were the first large-scale experiment involving simultaneous interpretation. Held in four languages (French, English, Russian and German), the ten months of court sessions were made possible by the invention of new interpretation methods (both human and technical). Many (including leading interpreters of the prewar era) resisted the introduction of simultaneous interpretation, especially in a judicial proceeding whose credibility and exemplary character, it was feared, might be compromised by the use of an untested and controversial system. In the end, what was the impact of interpretation on the trial?

In her book *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation* (University of Ottawa Press), conference interpreter

Francesca Gaiba brings together many unpublished sources, including many accounts from interpreters at the trial, to answer key questions about the seminal event in modern conference interpretation: what was the impact of interpretation on examination and cross-examination? What was the general effect of language issues on the proceedings? Was trial fairness affected by the use of simultaneous interpretation? The issues raised in this fascinating account find echoes today in societies where linguistic barriers (in legal settings and elsewhere) are a ubiquitous challenge.

Gaiba, Francesca, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*

University of Ottawa Press, 1998, 191 pages,
ISBN 0-7766-0457-0, \$26
Order from utpbbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca

problem involves interference with my signals from customers' Blackberries. Many of them just won't turn them off!

I: How does one become a technician? And how does a typical career evolve?

TA: Many technicians start in their early 20s and have training as audio engineers, but there's a wide range of backgrounds. I studied accounting at first and later worked in advertising before I started out in this career. I've been doing this work for 15 years and I've seen a lot of amazing things and a lot of changes also.

I: What have been the highlights so far?

TA: Thanks to this job, I've been able to see Canada, many places—Northern Ontario, the Prairies for example—where I'd probably never go on vacation! I've also travelled abroad. For example, I went to Australia a few times when my company supplied services for the Sydney Olympic Games.

I: What does the future hold?

TA: Technicians who make it a career can move on to management or sales positions, or else move to the audio

visual side. A number of interpretation equipment companies also provide AV services, and that area is growing fast. In fact, whereas simultaneous interpretation used to be the prestige department in an AV firm, now it's becoming less and less prominent and the real glamour is now in the huge computerized shows. Another new area is Webcasting, although that's a totally different type of work. But people will always want to meet, and there will still be a need for professionals to overcome the language barrier!

Calendar of Events



✓ NOVEMBER 2005

November 2-4, 2005: American
Literary Translators Association
Annual Conference (ALTA)
Omni Mont-Royal Hotel
Montreal, Quebec

Information: www.literarytranslators.org/conference.html

November 9-12, 2005: American Translators' Association
Annual Conference
Seattle, Washington

Information: www.atanet.org

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