

Modus Operandi HOW IT IS DONE

There are two modes of conference interpretation:

Simultaneous

Here the interpreter sits in a sound-proof booth behind a large glass window enabling him to see the speaker, hears a message in one language through his headphones and transmits it simultaneously into another language through a microphone to the listener. In other words, simultaneous interpreting is a kind of speech processing whereby, over a six-hour conference day, up to 36,000 words can be processed which is roughly equivalent to 120 pages of typescript. The interpreter has a volume control

to adjust the level of sound he hears through his earphones and in front of him is a box containing the on-off button for the microphone he sometimes shares with his booth-mate, a “cough” button and a device to show on which channel delegates hear him.

Delegates also wear lightweight earphones and have a microphone in front of them, as well as a volume-control and a switch to enable them to choose the channel, that is the language, they wish to listen to. They may also listen to the “floor” if they wish, that is, the speaker in the original language.

There are generally two interpreters in each booth, that is to say for each language, in order to ensure the quality of the interpretation and to cover the various language combinations. In cases where the workload is particularly heavy, however - for example, in two-way booths such as Japanese,

Chinese and Arabic - there are generally three interpreters.

In a four-language conference (say English, French, Spanish and Russian which is the most widely used language combination at United Nations) both interpreters in the English booth will work into English from French, at least one works from Spanish and the other from Russian. In the French booth, both interpreters work into French from English, at least one also from Spanish and the other from Russian. In the Spanish booth both work from English and French into Spanish and at least one works also from Russian. In the Russian booth, both interpreters work into Russian from English, at least one also from French and one from Spanish. This is the ideal situation where “relay” is cut down to a minimum. If a Russian-speaker takes the floor, for example, there will always be one interpreter in each of the English and French

booths to take it *direct*, that is, without using relay. (The use of relay is explained later in this Chapter). The International Labour Organization has the following booths at its June Conference each year: Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, German, Spanish, French and English.

The simultaneous technique is very stressful for the interpreter, involving intense concentration. This is why the work is usually shared by two interpreters per booth, each working for short periods interspersed with rest breaks. Generally interpreters work alternate half-hours, but even during the interpreter’s half-hour “off the air”, he follows the discussion, and is ready to jump into action if necessary (particularly if interpretation is required from one of his languages that his booth-mate does not have).

“Whispering” is also simultaneous interpretation but does not require a booth or electronic

equipment. The interpreter sits with the delegation, consisting of one or two delegates (exceptionally three, but no more), speaking that particular language. It is generally combined with “consecutive” interpretation when one of “his” delegates takes the floor and the interpreter then gives a consecutive interpretation of the statement into English or French, using the delegates’ microphone. Two interpreters, working both ways, are assigned to this type of interpretation and they take it in turn to work approximately half-hour periods. Today, use of this type of interpretation is comparatively rare except for speeches by visiting Statesmen, businessmen and at press conferences.

You will note that each interpreter has a glass of water in front of him, together with a notepad and pencil. It is important for simultaneous interpreters to note down all figures, dates, percentages, key words and acronyms that may be repeated, titles

etc. Figures are very easily forgotten by the time you reach the end of the sentence, especially in cases where the word order is different in the target language. An order of magnitude is not good enough - figures must be absolutely correct. If you are working into English, take your time to finish your interpretation properly. Do not rush the final words because the delegate has finished speaking. Most delegates are listening to the English channel and they will more often than not wait for you to finish.

If the speaker is reading from slides that you cannot see, say so. “The interpreter apologises but he cannot see the slides.” There is no point in “soldiering on”, running the risk of getting something wrong, especially figures. It is better to cause an upheaval while the screen is moved or some lights turned off and then get it right, rather than give the meeting erroneous information.

Obviously it is better to ascertain before the meeting begins that the screen is placed where it is clearly visible to all booths. If necessary, explain firmly but courteously that if you cannot see, you cannot do your job properly. If a film is to be shown, do not attempt to interpret the soundtrack unless you have a direct feed to your headset and have preferably had a chance to study the script in advance. Film and TV commentaries are generally spoken too fast to be interpreted correctly without a prepared script to hand. If the screen is very far away, opera glasses may be useful.

10**TIPS FOR BEGINNERS**

First and foremost: nerves. It is, to say the least, extremely daunting for an inexperienced interpreter to find himself in a glass booth overlooking an enormous hall with five thousand people listening to his every word. My advice is : forget yourself, forget it is you. Act the part of a conference interpreter.

A lot of famous actors and actresses have confessed that they are very shy people in real life, but once they are up on the stage being someone else, they are fine. Think of Italian waiters - they don't just wait at table, they act the part of the perfect waiter with the white cloth over one arm and all the gestures, posture, facial expressions and

flourishes that the part requires. There are cases of stammerers in the interpreting profession - people who, in private life, cannot speak without stammering yet once up there behind the microphone, the stammer disappears. This is because they are not just John or Mary speaking, they are The Interpreter. Take a deep breath before you start and act the part of The Perfect Simultaneous Interpreter and you will be fine.

Another thought that helped me to overcome nerves in the beginning, especially in consecutive, was the fact that all I was doing was trying to help people understand one another. That thought has always made my role clearer in my own mind and somehow helped me cope with stage-fright.

Working on medical conferences is a problem if you have, like me, a vivid imagination. I have suffered the imaginary symptoms of every disease I have ever talked about, felt creatures crawling up

inside the veins in my feet and legs during meetings of expert committees on bilharziasis (schistosomiasis), suffered diarrhoea, aches and pains in cholera control meetings, fever during expert committees on malaria, and felt sores about to appear on my arms during discussions on the leishmaniasis. I could not help scratching arms and legs while talking about smallpox or malaria. Rabies symptoms were unpleasant too. I had to interpret conferences on orthopaedic surgery with my eyes closed while slides or films were being shown especially if there was blood. I almost fainted the first time I saw a surgeon making the first incision. Until I discovered my Secret Method: not to be me but rather The Perfect Imperturbable Professional Interpreter.

If you are feeling nervous, confide in your colleagues; often the entire team will rally to your support once they know there is a problem. Control

your voice and delivery so that the nervousness is not perceptible to your audience. Keep your voice down, especially when interpreting a fast or difficult speaker. This will help you to remain calm.

If a particular speaker makes you nervous, try to imagine him looking ridiculous, in his underpants, or when he first wakes up in the morning with his hair untidy. He is only a human being like the rest of us, after all. If you find his accent difficult to understand, seek him out during the coffee break and ask him if he can hear the interpretation satisfactorily. By talking to him on a social level you may find him easier to understand later when he takes the floor during the meeting.

Stress and stagefright

You are working at super-high tension in closely confined quarters with a critical audience listening to your every word, which is at best extremely

stressful. But being nervous is no excuse for doing a bad job. No-one is interested in whether you had a good night's sleep. Like the other performing arts, stage fright is normal and may improve the quality of your work but you must learn to master your nerves so that you *sound* calm, reliable and utterly sure of yourself.

An interpreter is entirely given up to his profession while the conference lasts. In the middle of the night you may wake up with a word burning in your brain: You should have said X and not Y. It will worry you, haunt you, but there is nothing you can do about it. What is said is said. This is just one of the agonies interpreters have to put up with.

Not only must interpreters be familiar with the culture and literature of each of their active and passive languages (delegates have been known to quote from Molière, the Bible, the Koran, Racine, Martin Fierro, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Tchekov,

and to use proverbs that are untranslatable unless you are familiar with the culture associated with the language concerned), but they must also be up-to-date with current affairs and the international political situation so that they have an idea what a speaker is likely to say on a given topic before he starts to speak.

Imagine you are interpreting a vital speech on economics and the man next to the speaker coughs so you miss one key word. In simultaneous, you have no way of stopping the meeting to ask whether he said “above” or “below³” the figure he mentioned, and there may be six thousand delegates listening to you (especially if you are working in the English booth). If you have prepared well, studied the subject thoroughly and read about it in the press, you can make an “educated guess” which can be adjusted if necessary later, probably in the next sentence. This is better than hesitating,

losing control, giving in to panic and missing the next part of the speech. Conference interpreting is living dangerously: verbal acrobatics without a safety net.

Adjusting the Volume

A mistake beginners often make is to turn the volume up too high in their earphones for fear of missing something. They forget that it is important also for them to hear their own voice because if they do not, they will not finish their sentences properly or polish their delivery. The balance between the volume of the sound in your earphones and the sound of your voice is a very personal matter. Practise with the volume as low as possible. The louder the volume in your earphones, the louder you will speak and there is nothing worse than a booming interpreter who can be heard in the background on all channels, deafening all around

and putting the technician in a flat spin. “Boomers” tend to be unpopular so if your colleagues in neighbouring booths close their doors rather pointedly you will know why. Beginners should make a conscious effort to lower their voices both in volume and in pitch (when nervous, one tends to raise one’s pitch.) You will find that by adjusting the tone control, that is, the balance between treble and bass, you can lower the volume, thus protecting your hearing.

Before you start work the first morning, check the equipment in case there is something you haven’t seen before. First, make sure you know how to switch the microphone on and off - in some convention centres I have worked in, the green light is on when you are free to talk to your cabin-mate, that is, the microphone is switched off - and the red light comes on when the microphone is switched on whereas in others on the contrary the green light

comes on when the microphone is switched on. This is extremely confusing for the first hour or two. It is rather like driving in a country where traffic is on the other side of the road. Beware ! Check the cough-button, and the relay system and unless you work from Chinese or Arabic, check with the colleagues in the Chinese or Arabic booth to find out whether they will be working into English or into French.

Before you start, too, have a look at the list of participants if there is one (if not, look at the report of the last meeting where there will probably be one) to see if there are any difficult-to-pronounce names, or any English names you may not recognize in the mouth of a French, Spanish or Russian speaker. Make sure too you are up to date with the country names which may have changed following certain political events (the former USSR, for example, “Burma” or “Myanmar” - you must of

course say the same as the speaker) and know when to say “People’s Republic of” and when to say “Popular Republic of”.

Delivery

A word about your level of animation. Try to adopt the same level of animation as the speaker you are interpreting. When you are off the air, it is interesting to switch to the various channels: the original may be a dull British voice, but sometimes the Spanish and Italian booths sound so animated you would almost think the speaker was belligerent while the French booth makes him sound alert and agitated. Do not go to the other extreme, however: a dead-pan monotonous voice, however accurate the interpretation, is not pleasant to listen to and tends to send the delegates to sleep, especially after lunch.

A pleasant tone of voice is important; however desperate you may feel, do not sound desperate. Try

to sit back in your chair and feel detached enough to improve your style as you go, finish the sentences properly, and perhaps use different words from the speaker in order to get closer to his meaning. As you become more experienced and more confident you will learn not to follow the speaker too closely, but to sit back and put odd words in the little “pockets” of your brain to retrieve later when the speaker slows down.

Another problem arises when a delegate refers to the title of a well-known book, play or film - frequently the title is quite different in other languages and either you know it or you don't. The English title of Malraux's *La condition humaine* has nothing to do with “human” or “condition”.

Accuracy

According to B. Grote (AIIC), reporting on an information meeting between five interpretation

“users” and thirty-five conference interpreters in 1980:

delegates felt that interpreters should consider themselves part of a complicated “thinking machine”, that, painful as this may be to us, the best interpreters were those one could simply forget, that interpreters should take their vocation literally and “interpret” the original speaker as faithfully as a piano soloist interprets a sonata.

In case of doubt: accuracy comes before style.

Fast Speakers and Economising your Voice

It makes all the difference in the world if you have been able to read and prepare the text beforehand. However, whether or not you have

been able to do this, the strategy applied by experienced interpreters is to condense. This can be done without any loss of information. This is called *macroprocessing* and is necessary when the source text information is so dense that there is not enough time to convey everything into the target message, whatever the speed of the speaker. According to Marianna Sunnari of the University of Turku in Finland:

when working with structurally different languages such as Finnish and Indoeuropean languages, macroprocessing is needed even in an “ideal” situation, where the speaker is speaking without a script and the interpreters are familiar with the speaker and the topic. Novices, who do not master this strategy, fail to produce a coherent output message.

In any case, you must learn to economise your voice. You may be using it the whole, long day. You can learn to economise the effort required so that you won't be too tired as the afternoon wears on and if the speaker is going hell-for-leather you will find it less tiring if you speak softly.

Difficult speakers

Some people do not have the knack of public speaking: they mumble or gabble their words. Everybody has heard and had difficulty understanding speakers like these in their own language too. The more practice you can get listening to speakers like this the better. Working in booths other than the English, you will need practice too to understand the different types of accent and imperfect English you will have to interpret - delegates from Brazil, the Middle East, Japan, Norway, often Germany, Czeckoslovakia as

well as India, Pakistan and some African countries often have to use English instead of their own language. Practice makes perfect.

Remember that you must not try to improve on what the speaker says, even if it seems to you that he is talking nonsense. You cannot know what tactics, what strategies are at play. All you are asked to do is to interpret accurately and to respect the register of the speaker.

Keep up your languages

There is a saying I have heard, generally applied to “grey power” (that is, those rather long in the tooth) : “Use it or Lose it!” This saying applies to interpreters’ languages at any age. You must use your languages, read in them, speak in them, listen to them spoken or you will forget them.

Those of us interpreting from or into French are fortunate in having New Caledonia so close (only a

couple of hours’ flight from Sydney and closer than Perth) where we can brush up our French and keep it up to date. We can also listen to their radio broadcasts in French and, by means of a dish on our rooftop, even receive television programmes from Nouméa.

Languages evolve all the time. If you left Guatemala or Argentina ten or more years ago, you can be sure the language you speak is not the same as is spoken there today and you will need to make a conscious effort to keep in touch. Quite apart from that, your Spanish will now be contaminated with the language being spoken around you. You may not even realize you are saying “el reporte” instead of “el informe”. English short cuts also have an insidious way of insinuating themselves into other languages. So you must be constantly on the lookout for anglicisms in your speech. It is essential to read newspapers and literature from the countries

whose languages you work into and from in order to keep them up to date. It is no good just glancing at the headlines and reading only the subjects of personal interest. Thorough reading is required with an open mind as to type of language used, shades of meaning, paying particular attention to current affairs.

As W. Keiser (1975) explains, beginners must also *acquire total mastery of the jargon typical of international negotiations and meetings i.e. terms and expressions directly related to conference procedure, the organization of meetings, voting, the amendment of texts such as resolutions, the preambular as opposed to the operative sections of resolutions, etc.*
Useful words: The Chair - to chair - the Chairman - Madame Chairman - The President - To call the meeting to order -

to close the meeting - to adjourn the meeting - vote - ballot - casting vote - roll-call - secret ballot - to give the floor - to call on - filibuster - delegate - substitute or deputy - representative - credentials - proxy - delegation of powers - plenipotentiary - Standing orders - agenda - draft agenda - approval of agenda, resolution, statement, declaration, decision - preamble - items on the agenda - to delete an item - agreement - undertaking - provision - entry into force - ratification - signatories, etc.

In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter is at the mercy of the speaker and must learn to construct his sentences with flexibility, especially when interpreting from and into languages with different syntax. He must also be prepared to

handle heavy, verbose or flowery speech, to change the order in cases where logical progression differs according to different cultures, to cut lengthy sentences into several short ones, and even find vague expressions and padding to overcome temporary difficulties, that is, while you are waiting for the speaker to clarify something incomprehensible he has just said.

The interpreter is a professional speaker. He must therefore be able to adapt his style to his audience and carry the original message in the way it would have been delivered by the speaker had he addressed the audience in the language into which the interpreter works.

If you are a beginner, you can also learn a lot from listening to experienced colleagues working in your languages to see how they tackle a particular

difficulty or subject. When you are not actually on the air yourself, switch over to the other booths to hear the words being used - this may be of great help because the delegates speaking those languages will no doubt use similar wording later. This is also an excellent way to improve your vocabulary in your passive languages.

Your Conference diary

Keep careful note of all your conference commitments to avoid any overlapping or duplication. Reply promptly to telephone or email offers of work. If you are not available, the recruiter will need to contact someone else and cannot afford to waste precious time. Be sure to check your messages daily, wherever you are, and respond to them, otherwise you may find you don't get a second offer.

Open your documents early

Be sure to open e-mails and download conference documents immediately, even if you do not need to study them until later. Contracts, programmes or details of change of venue may be hidden among them and organisers are justifiably irritated when you ask for information that has already been sent to you. Do not leave it until the last minute because you also need to see, well ahead of time, how difficult the subject matter is. Some conferences require more preparation than others - you may need to Google a number of reference papers on a difficult subject before you start work on the conference documents themselves. On the other hand, if the subject-matter is easy, or one that you have done frequently in the past, three or four days may be enough. But - better safe than sorry.

Preparing for a meeting

It is a good idea to work out your own system to

keep track of documents, past and current, on a particular subject or for a particular organisation. You will need to work out your own method for indexing key words, including titles of officials and committees with their translation into each of your working languages. The better your mastery of the organisation's structure and jargon, the better your chances of being recruited again. It is also important that freelance interpreters identify with the "corporate image" of the organisation.

At least two weeks before the conference you should be able to download a complete set of documents in each of the working languages containing, for example, a full programme, agenda, list of participants, minutes or previous meetings, reports, invitations and all the documents which will be available to the other participants or which might be helpful in the preparation for the conference. Minutes of past meetings and

proceedings of earlier congresses are very useful too.

However, unfortunately you will not always receive documentation in advance: it may happen that, upon arrival at the conference venue, you are given a USB key containing the documents in which case a lot of last-minute preparation will be required. There may also be a laptop awaiting you in your booth so that you can plug in the USB key and retrieve the documents, having them on the screen while they are being discussed.

Make sure you keep time free before the meeting to study all of these papers in depth. If this is the first time you have worked on the particular subject, you should also research it as much as you can to give you some background understanding that will help you cope with fast or difficult speakers and give you the feeling you are on top of the subject. Some people think interpreters simply

transliterate words without understanding the idea conveyed by the message, but interpreters know that it is quite impossible to reproduce messages without a full comprehension of what the speaker wants to say and this, in turn, is impossible without some knowledge of the subject matter. The various search engines on the internet are of course invaluable for this purpose. The first time you work for an International Organization it is advisable to ask them for a set of the Basic Texts governing that organization: Charter or Constitution, Statutes, Standing Orders and so on, which you will keep with the glossary you have prepared during the meeting for future reference.

When sorting out the conference documents you are about to study, you will need a system to index them so you can find any document you need in the booth in a hurry (for example, Committee documents, Plenary documents, working

documents, conference room documents). Pay particular attention to key words and also the titles of officials (which vary according to the organization, for example in some there may be a Deputy Secretary-General, in another a similar post may be called Assistant Secretary-General or Vice-Secretary-General). Prepare your own multi-lingual glossary, noting carefully the “in-jargon” of the technical or professional organization concerned. You will find that “Commissions” are generally bigger than “Committees” and “Committees” more permanent than “Working Groups.”

You will also need to list the official names of the various Committees (Standing Committees, and so on) in your languages for each Organization to keep on file. It would seem that “Executive Committee” is obviously “*Comité ejecutivo*” and “*Comité exécutif*” but it may not be in some organizations. In the International Telecommunications Union where

telephony is concerned a “Recommendation” is not “*une recommandation*” but rather “*un Avis*” and an “Opinion” is “*un Voeu*” in French. “Steering Committee” or “Management Committee” has various translations depending on the organization, as well as “Council”, “Board”, “Governing Body”, “Junta”, “working group”, “*ad hoc* group” and “task force”. Sometimes there seems to be no rhyme or reason, but that’s how it is and you just have to memorize these idiosyncracies. (Also, “*le Comité exécutif a renvoyé la question pour examen au Comité X*”, “referred” in English and “*remitió este asunto a la consideración del Comité*”).

“*Trimestriel*” is nothing to do with “three” in English (“Quarterly”) and in budgetary matters “*imprévu*” is mostly “contingency” or “unforeseen”.

Preparation was much easier in the old days of “parallel pagination” in all languages even though

the English pages were much shorter than the French and Spanish. To save paper, parallel pagination has long been done away with so it will take longer to find the same place in all texts. When you do, highlight the words you want to remember. The next step is to write your glossary. If I am working in the English booth, on one page I write down recurring English expressions, names of people with their titles, etc. If you have one active and two passive languages, the rest of your glossary will be in three languages so you would divide each page into three columns with the active language in the last. I generally organize mine into groups such as names of committees and official groupings on one page, acronyms and abbreviations on another, technical words on another, general vocabulary on another, etc. to make them as easy as possible to find in a hurry. Some colleagues prefer to organize their glossaries alphabetically. In any case, it is

worth while taking the time to write very clearly and print difficult words because you will not have time to puzzle out what you have scribbled. If some kind colleagues lets you share his handwritten vocabulary, I would copy it out in my own writing first to help me remember it and secondly to be sure I can read it in an emergency. Once you have finished this task and learnt it all, I suggest you get up early on the first morning of the meeting and go through your vocabulary again in a concentrated fashion to set it in your mind for the day. I have always found it useful, too, on a difficult technical conference, to get together with colleagues from the other booths just before the meeting starts to compare the translations of unusual words and expressions - sometimes they have found different equivalents, based on one of the other languages. You will find Day 1 of most conferences very tiring - it is better not to have organized any strenuous

social events for that evening - but as from Day 2 the vocabulary seems to come naturally. I prefer to devote all my time to the conference while it lasts, and not make any private social commitments. You do not know in advance whether you will be required to work late, or at a night meeting and trying to change plans at the last minute is an unnecessary hassle when you are in the booth trying to concentrate perhaps on a new subject.

Dictionaries

It is worthwhile to invest in the latest versions of specialized dictionaries to help you study at home and to enable you to prepare your own glossary to take with you into the booth. Do not clutter up the booth with a pile of dictionaries, however, you won't have time to consult them while working and the glossary you have prepared will be much more useful. It is not "done" to stagger about with bags of

heavy dictionaries or to moan to all and sundry that the meeting is difficult. You will notice that the top professionals always give the impression that everything is easy (they do their preparation in private), that they know it all (they arrive in the booth empty-handed or carrying a newspaper in case they are bored). That is fine when, to top it all, they then proceed to give a brilliant performance.

Nowadays, excellent dictionaries are available on the internet and preparing glossaries is greatly facilitated by using a silent laptop or "Palm" that you can take with you into the booth.

Taking notes in simultaneous

While your colleague is working, it is a good idea to listen and take notes of any expressions that might recur. This is also an excellent opportunity to switch to the other booths to hear the terms being used. Note-taking in simultaneous is particularly

important in the English booth because you may not be working for some time, and then suddenly be plunged into a high-speed statement without a “warm-up” period. In any case, be sure to note down all figures and dates as you hear them, for accuracy’s sake.

Texts of speeches given to you beforehand

Scientific, medical and technical meetings make much use of written material which, as W. Keiser (1975) says, runs against the very essence of conference interpreting, which is oral. Speakers at such meetings generally read, and read exceptionally fast.

Do not rely, however, on the speaker reading the whole text word for word so that all you have to do is sight translation. It often happens that, as the meeting progresses it gets behind schedule and the Chairman cuts down the time allotted to each

speaker. In the worst case, the speaker may then read his paper (which may represent his life’s research work of which he is particularly proud) word for word but at top speed in order to fit into the time slot, making it impossible to keep up with sight translation - sometimes you will lose your place, panic and miss a few sentences until you find it again and the result will be an incoherent approximation of what is said and there is also a good chance you have missed out the main points. An experienced speaker will summarize his paper, which is preferable and easier to interpret provided you have read the full text beforehand carefully, paying particular attention to difficult expressions and technical words and highlighted figures, dates, names and acronyms, for which you will have found the equivalent. Acronyms and abbreviations are the tools of our profession: they can save precious speaking time so write a list of them clearly and

have it in front of you in the booth. If you are pressed for time when preparing the text of a speech about to be made, skip to the end and be sure you have the last few sentences prepared and polished, so that you can at least end on a confident note.

Briefing sessions

Briefings can be extremely useful and also help to establish an intelligent professional image. Experts usually appreciate intelligent questions and are prepared to answer them, to explain a term or a process, a piece of machinery or an operation and this also helps them to understand the needs of interpreters and increases their confidence in our professional ability. Briefing sessions with experts from different language groups are most useful after the interpreters have had an opportunity to study the documents and immediately before a

session.

Preparation of personal Glossaries

A self-compiled glossary is like a trusted friend through the years. I base mine on personal mental association and subject. As Francisca Melero (AIIC) says, glossaries outline and identify a given subject matter, and give you a prior indication as to what terms of art are likely to come up in the context of the meeting concerned. Dictionaries do not do this, they are cumbersome and their use is slow. In any case, they would have to be multilingual and subject-related to be any real use in the booth. When you compile your glossary make sure you have a logical system for sorting by subject, organisation, committee, etc. in alphabetical order for each language, enabling you to identify terms with the organisation that uses them in that particular way.

Melero goes on to say that “home-grown” glossaries are “Brain Energy Saving Devices”:

No matter whether you are a relative newcomer to the subject matter of the meeting and therefore expect having to cast around for every other technical term that comes your way, or whether you are an old hand at it and just need that extra amount of security resulting from a list of terms of art in front of you - in either case you will find that the brain energy you would have to branch off your energy output mainstream to pinpoint the right word at the right moment can be channelled towards more productive aims : improving on your linguistic quality, style and conciseness, paying attention to your voice (pitch and modulation) and other ancillary requirements. Whenever I

am working I can feel physically that my energy output represents a two-prong flow, and I am always relieved whenever I can shut off one prong.

Last but by no means least, when the chips are down and you have no documents and the subject is highly technical, you can do a very decent job just relying on the glossaries provided you have studied them beforehand.

Here, for example, are the subjects I worked on during a three-month period in Geneva:

- The standardization of synthetic fibre (when I thought the Italian delegate said “fibrocitis” he was really talking about fibre sizes).
- Sexual abnormalities of the newborn child (where I learnt about some weird practices in remote parts of the world and contraptions placed upon new-

born boy babies to ensure their procreation facility didn't disappear).

- Radiocommunications (peak-rain conditions, the effects of canting raindrops on propagation, line-of-sight, nominal boresight, DBS systems, feeder link transmitters, earth station receivers, rain fade constraints, power flux density, antenna characteristics, beamfit and synthesis calculation, orbital separation, time division multiplex, elevation angles, gain patterns, up links and downlinks, sidelobes, aggregate weighted carrier to interference ratio, spurious emissions, refractivity, vestigial sideband, double sideband, single sideband, effective versus apparent radiated power, effective isotropically radiated power, MUF and LUF).

- Metallurgy (not my cup of tea).

- Tick-borne encephalitis (mainly about the

sterilisation of the tick - no, not with a minute scalpel but rather by irradiation), haematoprotzoal diseases of livestock: piroplasms, anaplasms, theilerias, rickettsias, transmissible pathogens, hybridisation of tick species).

- Forestry (rehabilitation of degraded land, windbreaks and firebreaks, soil and water conservation, forests and woodlands, watershed management, agro-silvi-pastoral development, depletion of ground water, sclerophytic bushes, scrubs, shelter belts).

- Orthopaedic surgery and Anaesthesiology (complete muscular relaxation, blood flow, induction time, quinine derivatives, pupillary reflexes, cardiac arrest, nerve blocks, caudal, sacral, brachial, plexus and spinal blocks, distal retrograde flow stump pressures).

- The calibration of eggs (egg marketing).

- Telephony - automatic switching systems (start-stop systems, asynchronous network - automatic digital data error recorders, companders, clear-back signals, dipoles, directional couplers).

- Cancer research (too much vocabulary to include here).

- Cardiology (bacterial endocarditis, valvular prostheses, congestive heart failure, arrhythmia, salmonella septicemia, mitral stenosis, hydrostatic pulmonary edema, venous return, hemodynamic management, post-streptococcal valvulopathies, wedge pressure, balloon valvuloplasty, angina, chronic hypoxia, commissuratomy, thrombo-embolic, pulmonary shunts, glomerulonephritic immune-complex type, capillaroscopic anomalies, mitral leaks, fungal endocarditis, Osler's nodes, Roth's spots, immunoglobulins, Aschoff nodules, mechanical asystole, epithelioid cells).

- Telephony and the creosoting of telegraph poles (and how they put carburundum in p.v.c. telephone cable sheaths in India to wear away the teeth of the hungry chewing termites) (commonly known among interpreters as the Toothless Termite Committee).

- Communicable diseases (oncocerciasis, relapsing fever, trachoma, yaws, plague, measles, cholera, tinia, smallpox, kidney-flukes, trematodes).

- Breastfeeding and the reason why in some African countries women could not give both breasts to the infant (because one was reserved for the husband).

There was also a meeting about the cloning of rabbits but I have forgotten the title of the conference and two days on The Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (which the Interpreters called The Useful Pieces of Outer Space).

As you can imagine, each meeting required

specialized vocabulary. Moral: keep your glossaries in good order so that you can find what you need when you need it, and keep adding to them as research develops on the different topics and the vocabulary evolves. Conference interpreting is very difficult and tiring for the first few years, until you have become accustomed to the terminology of the organizations you work for. After a while, however, as you develop your own glossaries and become used to the jargon used by each client, it will be far less tiring and you will become more confident. For each meeting there will be less vocabulary to learn; all you will have to do is update your glossaries.

To cheer you up: most of the larger international organizations such as UN, ITU, WMO, and so on which have permanent translation sections have had Lexicons or Glossaries of technical terms prepared by their translators. These are generally available free of charge to freelance interpreters and

translators working for them.

I am afraid you will just have to learn beforehand the acronyms specific to each conference you do. And keep your list of them to be added to in the future.

Some useful vocabulary

Most professions have their own jargon which, some say, is intended to “keep outsiders out”. Conference interpreters need to learn the jargon of each profession so that, when they speak, they sound like a physician, meteorologist, brain surgeon, geologist, and so on. They must also be familiar with colloquialisms, quotes, proverbs, and common slang expressions in all of their working languages. They must also be on guard against language contamination i.e. contamination by the language spoken in the country in which they live, “faux amis” (false friends), anglicisms in French,

gallicisms in English, and so on, and should have at their fingertips a plentiful supply of synonyms, clichés and language patterns. You will find some suggested useful books to read at the end of this book under “Further Reading.”

Quick, off the top of your head, what is “nozzle” in your other language(s)⁴? And what about “Foot and Mouth Disease”⁵? (nothing to do with feet or mouths.) “*Tirer la jambe*” is a false friend if you compare its meaning to that of “pull your leg” in English. Another false friend frequently encountered: “*Ce n’est pas un hasard ...*” which is not the same as the English word “hazard”. “Sustainable” development? (“*durable*” according to official UN terminology but sometimes (Program Action 21) “*soutenable*” or even “*écologiquement soutenable*”. “Straddling” stock? (*stock trans-zone*). An interesting snippet I found somewhere: “Mitterand remains the aristocrat of French politics

while Balladur is labelled BCBG (*bon chic, bon genre*).”⁶

Beware of public-servantese. *Dickson’s Word Treasury* (Dickson 1992) calls this “the D.C. Dialect” (DCD; c.f. the book of that name by Paul Morgan and Sue Scott, exploring the new language in terms of ten easy lessons (be impersonal, be obscure, be pompous, be evasive, be repetitious, be awkward, be incorrect, be faddish, be serious, be unintelligible). Examples:

<i>English</i>	<i>DCD</i>
begin	implement
break-in	entry operation
cover-up	contain the situation
criminal conspiracy	game plan
fired	selected out
kidnap	segregate out
won’t work	counterproductive

workable

viable

Some of the examples of bureaucratic gobbledygook quoted in *Dickson's Word Treasury* are:

Anticipatory retaliation: Attacking your enemy on the assumption that he would do the same if given the chance.

Information processing center: A typing pool.

Intermodal interface: A term that was translated by former Transportation Secretary William Coleman as, "When you get off the train, a bus is waiting."

Recreational eco-unit: A garden."

He also refers to "Medicant: the jargon of people in medicine who say "deglutition" when they mean swallowing, or call a headache "cephalalgia."

[Australianisms](#)

One of the things I love about Australia is the creativity that goes into the evolution of the English language with such words as "milko", "garbo", "cuppa", "rort", "stouch" "spruker", "larrikin", "smoko" (I cannot vouch for the spelling of any of these, they do not appear in any of my dictionaries). However, none of these words should, of course, be used in the booth. Nor should baby-talk such as "coffee and bikkies" or "tummy". (One cannot help a smile at the thought of a medical conference where the interpreter talked of "tummy pains!" or "chemist" instead of "pharmacist".)

Australianisms do however present a real problem. Australian delegates, probably because they are mostly monolingual, use local colloquialisms which are difficult to transpose into other languages and seem quite unaware of the fact that everything they say is being painstakingly translated into French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic,

Chinese, Japanese and so on. Sometimes they use these expressions deliberately believing them to be amusing. Surely the top priority of a conference speaker is to be understood

Living in Australia, we hear expressions like “things are crook”, “headless chook”, “scumbag” and “fair dinkum” so often on the radio and television we might be forgiven for thinking they were English. They are however Australianisms and probably will not be understood at an international conference by many of those listening to the floor channel i.e. listening to the original English, such as delegations from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, etc. as well as the United States of America and Canada. The non-English-speaking delegates are more fortunate because you will be able to interpret them in a way they can

understand.

Before interpreting at your first international conference, therefore, it might be a good idea for beginners working in booths other than the English to give some thought to how you would interpret the following, all of which I have jotted down at recent international ministerial meetings at Parliament House in Canberra:

- “Bottom of the harbour scheme” (explain what it means, for example: a scheme whereby a company is purchased, stripped of its assets and consigned to oblivion);
- “for defo reasons” (defamation - heard at a publishers’ conference);
- “I am happy to see flax still gets a guernsey” (at a wool producers’ conference);
- “whether we all get our snouts in the trough or whether we all back off a bit”;

- “a motherhood statement”;
- “It’s a two bob each way situation”;
- “You can have your cake and eat it”;
- “It’s a rat-race out there” (that’s a hard one to translate);
- “ballpark figures”, “double-dipping”, “sunset provision”;
- “if we’re fair dinkum about these rates”;
- “non-performing loans”, “get on the gravy-train”, “the countries who copped a hiding during the war”, “Cash Flow Enhancement Programme”, “snags” (Australia) and “bangers and mash” (U.K.) (at a conference on food and the retail industry);
- “to cut off our noses”;
- “dag”;
- “rubbery figures”; and - “razor gang” (which is not as bloodthirsty as you might think - it means a committee involved in reviewing expenditure).

A former Prime Minister used all the following

expressions in one session when I was interpreting for him: “The two concepts are pegged”, “We were investing our dollar while everyone else was having a barney in the Middle East,” “The Americans are mucking around with their currency”, “We are running twin deficits”, “there’s plenty of money sloshing about”, “The Australian dollar is a commodity-driven currency”, “and that is when we started sucking in all the producer goods”, “investment shot through the roof”, “the interest rate literally took the stuffing out of the place” and “the little countries keep getting ripped-off”.

When I was a beginner, I decided how I would translate “*couper les cheveux en quatre*” but am still waiting for a French delegate to say it so that I can talk about “capillary quadrisection”, much more satisfying than mere “hair-splitting”, though I doubt if I would have dared.

Millions, billions, trillions or milliards and billiards

First of all, let me confuse you. In the United States of America and France a trillion is a thousand billions (that is, 1 followed by 12 zeros), equivalent to an English billion. However in Great Britain and Germany, a trillion is 1 followed by 18 zeros. What the British and Germans call a trillion is what the Americans would call a quintillion. What the Americans call a billion, the British call a milliard.

In the United Kingdom, a billion is a million squared, a trillion is a million to the power of 3, a quadrillion is a million to the power of 4, a quintillion is a million to the power of 5, etc. The *Oxford Dictionary* gives the word “milliard” in English meaning “a thousand million”, which is the same meaning as that of the “milliard” in French, Russian, Spanish, Italian and German. So you

cannot be criticised in Australia for saying “milliard” in English when you hear “milliard” in French, Russian, Spanish, Italian or German. This is certainly the easiest solution and saves mental acrobatics.

Just count your blessings that you are unlikely to come across firkins, rods, poles and perches, a barleycorn (one-third of an inch), a mease (500 herrings), a pig (British measure of ballast equal to 301 pounds), half-crowns, florins, shillings or farthings.

Use of lap-tops

Nowadays many interpreters bring their personal laptop to the booth containing the conference documents as well as their glossary which also enables them to keep up-dating it as they go along throughout the day while their colleague is working. It also has the advantage of enabling reference to

past conference vocabulary for that organization or on the same topic. It is, however, important to be as discreet and quiet as possible to avoid distracting your colleague and a soft-touch key system is preferable to prevent the clicking sound which might be picked up by the microphone.

The laptop should be able to be connected to the internet in the booth and have a reasonable amount of memory. It is sometimes a great help if your colleague working beside you can search, in a flash, for the key word that persists in eluding you.

Binoculars

A pair of binoculars might be useful in the booth if you are working in a large hall such as Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide or Sydney Convention Centre, or anywhere where there are 1000 delegates or more.

Accreditation and language claims

When the time comes to seek accreditation as a professional conference interpreter, be modest. You may be able to get by in local conditions, working with colleagues who are friends and will help you out if necessary, but not when working on an expert international team with colleagues you have never met before. So do not claim too many languages when you first begin, and do not claim any languages of which you are unsure. Due to unforeseen circumstances you may suddenly find yourself acting as pivot in an important meeting on a difficult subject, working from one of your “shaky” languages. Well may you regret having been so rash - you could ruin your reputation and career for good. Imagine how you would feel if your colleague has to leave the booth for a moment and the Chairman announces an unexpected speaker on the subject of “The Kinetics of the Reaction Inactivation

of Tyrosérose During its Catalyzing of the Aerobic Oxidation of Catechol”. (*La kinétique de l’inactivation par réaction de la tyrosérose durant sa catalysation de l’oxydation aérobie du catéchol.*) (Coleman-Holmes 1971)

John Coleman-Holmes, in his book *Mâcher du Coton* (1971), describes “Corinne Mauffetard” who has not spent enough time preparing for the conference because the documents she received were so boring, difficult and off-putting. She tells herself she’ll get by when the time comes. When it does, she speaks too close to the microphone, in a panic-stricken high-pitched voice, constantly correcting herself to improve on what she has just said. She cannot keep up so leaves out one sentence in three. When she gets too involved in one sentence and cannot find a way out, she jumps ahead to what the speaker is now saying leaving a trail of *non sequitur*. The only words that are

always clear are the “Thank you, Mr. Chairman” and the beginning and the end.

It is true that delegates rarely complain. Colleagues are another matter however - while they say nothing and grimly pretend to read a document with headphones firmly clamped in place, they do not miss a single syllable. They know that no-one will say the bad interpretation was the work of Corinne Mauffetard, but rather that it was “a woman’s voice”, or that “the interpretation was bad”. Colleagues react by trying to limit the harm done and get her away from the microphone but this is as difficult a task as trying to remove a lion cub from its mother. However, Corinne Mauffetard will not be offered any more conference contracts

This was before the days of “*Les juifs et les gentils*” (during the Pope’s visit to Geneva) and the “*marineros congelados*” at the WHO Sperm Bank

Conference.

A little later in his book, Coleman-Holmes describes “Bertha Frühlingsweihe” who never talks nonsense. She has even been known to say into the microphone in a dignified voice: “The interpreter apologizes but has not understood the speaker”, which made her famous among colleagues. The audience listening to him in the original had not understood either. Before reaching this point, she let the speaker go ahead to avoid the hypnotic effect of following word for word, giving her time to find out what he meant and produce a clear sentence. She only used his words (or their equivalent in her language) if she judged them to be best. She knew how to rethink his words and express them in her language, leaving out what was unnecessary. She spent many long days before the conference studying the documents and noting down terminology and ideas. She copied them all down in

a glossary, one glossary for each subject and each employer and recited them to herself. If the documents were late in reaching her, she telephoned and pestered those concerned until they arrived. Some clients dropped her preferring more easy-going interpreters until an important, difficult, technical conference came along. Then they knew they needed Bertha who could be relied upon for accuracy, rather than someone who would merely get by.

Would you rather be Corinne or Bertha? I am sure that Corinne does not feel fulfilled (*“bien dans sa peau”*) and happy in her job whereas Bertha no doubt does. Perhaps it would be best to be somewhere between the two.

Give as good as you get

You must give your listeners exactly the same as you are getting in your earphones. You cannot take

it upon yourself to change, improve or correct what the delegate says. So if the Chairman says “It is now four o’clock” and you know it is five o’clock, all you can do is say: “The Chairman says it is four o’clock”.

Proverbs and Jokes

Generally speaking, proverbs cannot be translated. You hear “*Les absents ont toujours tort*” but in English the only proverb about absence that springs to mind is “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”, which is completely different. “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” in French would probably be: “*Après la soupe un verre de vin remplace une visite chez le médecin.*”

So you see you will need to keep a few useful proverbs up your sleeve “*por si acaso*”. The eminent Eric Simha of WHO fame used “*il ne faut pas essayer de tondre un oeuf*” if working into French and he couldn’t think of anything else and Pierre

Lambert frequently referred to “*la plus belle fille du monde*” (a French saying about the most beautiful girl in the world being able to give no more than she has). Another of his passe-partout proverbs in English was “You can’t boil an egg twice!” and “You can’t make an omelette with breaking the eggs” (“*Pour faire une omelette il faut bien casser les oeufs*”).

What is a good joke in one language may not be at all funny in a different culture and what we find correct may be offensive to others. So be careful. You might also like to keep a joke up your sleeve, in case someone tells a joke you don’t understand. It would be a pity for the delegate concerned to lose face because no-one laughs. Better by far for you to tell your own joke so that the delegates listening to you laugh at the right time, thus keeping everyone happy. I have my own little story that I can drag out or keep short and snappy, depending on the time it

has to fill, about the man painting the ceiling, perched at the top of a ladder, in a lunatic asylum. Another man comes along and says: "Hold on tight to the paintbrush, I need to borrow the ladder a minute!" Some interpreters have been known to say coldbloodedly into the microphone: "Would you please laugh: the speaker has just told a joke I did not understand." But I find that rather lacking in imagination.

Cocktail Parties and Receptions

If you are invited to social occasions, do not stand in a huddle with your colleagues, do not grab a plateful of food and stand next to the buffet to be in the best position to grab more. Circulate. Introduce yourself to the delegates listening to your booth, ask them if they can hear you satisfactorily. You may even ask them about an expression you have had difficulty with. They will be happy to make

your acquaintance and to help you if they can. Seize the opportunity to do a little for Public Relations. Consider yourself an ambassador for the profession and for the colleague who recruited you. With luck, what happened to me once may never happen to you: On the occasion of the election of an Australian delegate to a high-ranking position at an international conference overseas, I was asked to interpret his "thank you" remarks at a celebratory reception. When I took my position on the stage next to the elected official, he announced: "The interpreter will now sing 'Waltzing Matilda' in French and Spanish".

Apart from such situations, coffee breaks, receptions, luncheons and dinners do afford opportunities for improving the image of the profession. However, if you have a question for a delegate, introduce yourself and put your question succinctly. Do not monopolise the delegate's

attention as meetings give participants a chance to make useful contacts and deal with business and professional matters; if the interpreters take up too much of their time, they may resent it.

Sometimes speeches are made at conference receptions or dinners. There is no obligation upon the interpreters to interpret these if they have already worked six or seven hours that day. However it is an elegant gesture if they do and works wonders for our public relations. Personally I enjoy rendering speeches of this kind and have rarely refused. (It goes without saying that no extra charge is made.)

Overtime

Free-lance interpreters are hired by the day and are not paid overtime. You cannot provide high quality simultaneous interpretation for more than seven hours in one day. Once you have worked six

to seven hours no matter how much extra you might be paid, your work will be sub-standard. If conference organizers require more than seven hours' interpretation on any one day, they need to recruit a second team of interpreters. The problem generally arises towards the end of a conference, when the Chairman realizes how much of the agenda still remains to be dealt with and how little time is left. As the deadline approaches, people start to panic and this is when night meetings are convened.

With a second team of interpreters this can be organized, and the team covering the night meeting is generally free the following morning to recuperate. International conferences do not respect office hours. At some of the larger United Nations conferences, you may be working from 8 a.m. until 9 a.m. and then be free until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and work until 7 p.m.. It is very

difficult to make private arrangements and one's social life has to be left in abeyance until the conference is over because you never know in advance when you will be free and there is no guarantee you will be free in the evenings. So be warned: conference interpreting is not a nine to five job.

Copyright ⁷

The interpreter's contract should specify that the interpretation is intended solely for immediate audition in the conference room. Without the prior consent of the interpreters involved, no-one, including conference participants, is entitled to make any tape recording of the interpretation for any other than internal purposes, such as the writing of minutes and reports within the organization.

If recordings are made nevertheless, the

interpreters involved may request appropriate remuneration for it in accordance with the provisions of international copyright agreements.

It must be remembered that conference interpretation is an oral intellectual exercise, quite distinct from drafting a written text. Any attempt to put the content of recording of conference interpretation into written form, without considerable preliminary editing, can only yield questionable results. Spoken language is never completely transferable into acceptable written form. The interpreter concerned is entitled therefore to listen to the recording of his interpretation and edit it as he thinks fit, with the help of the technician, before the tape is released.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948) recognizes in principle the protection of the moral and material rights of authors in relation to their works.

The protection of intellectual and creative works and their use by third parties are subject to national legislation, bilateral agreements and international agreements, in particular the International Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Artistic and Literary Works. The performance of conference interpreters is thus protected under international law. The Berne Convention provides protection for the interests of authors; translations are protected as original works and translators are protected as authors. When fixed in material form of any nature whatsoever (printed, sound or audiovisual recording, records, discs, magnetic tapes, videograms, slides, films, wire, cable, transparencies, photocopies, microcards or any similar method) the performance of the conference interpreter becomes a translation within the meaning of the Berne Convention; the exclusive

rights foreseen in the Convention therefore apply to the author, that is, to the interpreter.

The assignment of copyright must be made in writing. The organizer must therefore apply for permission beforehand, and *no interpreter may be recorded without his knowledge and consent.*

Model contracts to cover the assignment of copyright in connection with recording of conference interpretation have been prepared by the interpreters' professional association specifying the type of use to be made of these recordings; any use not specifically provided for remains the property of the author. An individual contract must be established for each interpreter, i.e. for all interpreters working in the language or languages being recorded including any interpreters acting as relay or pivot. Each contract must be signed by both parties.

Interpretation at press conferences is, however, specifically excluded from these provisions and cannot be charged extra under copyright. Re-broadcasts of interpreted versions of a press conference may - details must be negotiated. Clients often refuse to grant copyright for press conferences because of the ensuing difficulties in the event of resales. Colleagues might therefore prefer to waive their rights but ask for greater remuneration because of the stress involved. The same procedure could be adopted for news bulletins where the World Intellectual Property Organization has stated that "*droits patri-moniaux*" (economic rights) cannot apply.

When approached with the request that another microphone be placed in front of me by radio or television news reporters at conferences in Australia, I have generally considered this a useful publicity exercise and have agreed on condition no

more than five minutes' recording was used. This sort of publicity is very precious to us in this country where the public is largely unaware of our profession. It may be possible, also, to obtain that in exchange a reference to the interpreters be given and to their professional accreditation, status, and so on.

However, if you discover at the end of a session as I did once, coming down the main stairs of the Convention Centre in Manila, that copies of the tapes of the session are on sale in all conference languages, and order forms are being handed out - then you must take immediate action to inform those responsible:

- that they should have obtained the interpreters' prior consent;
- that an agreement has to be drawn up and signed immediately; and

- that a percentage of the sales figure from the tapes is due to the interpreters under copyright law.

As mentioned earlier, I have also always insisted on my right to vet any recordings made of my interpretation and to edit them later, as I felt necessary.

Copyright when working for Television

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has stated clearly that although it is possible to waive one's "economic rights" (that is, rights to remuneration), one never loses the "moral rights" (that is, the rights to edit, to prohibit publication or to prohibit any changes being made subsequently). This means that colleagues could waive their right to copyright for television whilst using the above ruling to help them obtain, for example, the screening of the name of the interpreter and/or the fact that he is member of a

professional association. Newscasts however are not covered by the Berne Convention so are not copyright protected except for repeat broadcasts.

Lunchtime

Go for a walk outside, preferably alone, to give your voice a rest and oxygenate your brain rather than staying in the convention centre in the electric light and air-conditioning.

Dress

Dress to fit in with the meeting, not for effect. You may find yourself having to provide consecutive interpretation at a luncheon or because the equipment breaks down, so do not count on the anonymity and seclusion of the booth.

Compliments

If a delegate compliments you, be loyal to your colleagues and include them in the tribute. Try to

cover up for any shortcomings in the team and never criticise colleagues to others.

If someone mentions recruiting you for another meeting there are two ways of handling the situation. If you have been recruited by a colleague (whether a member of the team or not) note down the person's name and address and pass it on to the recruiting colleague. In return, that colleague will almost certainly include you in the team if your language combination and domicile fit. If you were recruited directly by the organization, there is nothing to prevent you organizing a team for a future meeting if asked. When doing so, always refer to the rules regarding team strengths, fees and per diems and ask for advice from a more experienced colleague if necessary. Acquaint yourself with the Guidelines for consultant interpreters published by AIIC and the interpreters' code of ethics. Remember that your team should

convey as favourable an image of the profession as that held by the person who asked you to recruit. Do not use mediocre interpreters or make up a team of beginners just because these are easier to get hold of. There should never be more than one beginner in a team, and a beginner should never be pivot.

If you remember all these tips you will soon be The Perfect Imperturbable Simultaneous Interpreter you were pretending to be when you were nervous at the beginning of this Chapter.

17

PROTOCOL &
ETIQUETTE

Protocol

Most world leaders bring their own interpreter with them. The diplomatic corps of most Western countries rely on a team of civil service staff interpreters. The former President of AIIC, Gisela Siebourg, was interpreter to Chancellor Kohl of Germany and could generally be seen standing behind him in official photographs. Similarly, Christopher Thiéry could generally be seen behind M. Mitterand, or M. Rocard, of France. Unfortunately this is not the case in Australia.

The tête-à-tête

You may be the only interpreter, in which case you should sit between the two speakers. Do not be shy and hover in the background - you will only regret it later if you cannot hear properly. It is important to choose carefully where you sit before the discussion begins; you may ask the participants where they would prefer you to sit. It is also a good idea before the meeting begins to ascertain discreetly how much interpreting is needed (unless you have worked for them before). They may not need you to interpret every word and find that irritating. Perhaps they prefer to signal to you if they have not understood something. There is no relaxing however : you must follow every word and be ready to jump in and explain whenever necessary.

Always have a notepad and pen available to jot down figures and dates.

Rather than consecutive, in this situation a form

of simultaneous is generally used as it saves time and enables the listener to understand almost as quickly as if they were both speaking the same language, so that the interpreter's presence is often forgotten altogether (the greatest compliment!).

If the visitor brings his own interpreter with him, each interpreter interprets what is said by his own Minister. The two interpreter colleagues often help one another out especially in case of misunderstandings or problems of any sort and there must be no hesitation for reasons of politeness in stepping in courteously to rectify any error or misunderstanding.

Two-delegation discussion

Sometimes two delegations sit opposite one another at a rectangular table. The interpreters sit at the table in the centre, next to the delegation leaders. In this way they can hear all that is said and

interpret it in consecutive or simultaneously, addressing those seated opposite. If, on the other hand, there is only one delegate requiring interpretation, the interpreter sits next to that person or just behind his chair and a quiet whisper is all that is needed.

After dinner speeches

These often come at the end of a hard day when we are not at our best. However they are important for the image of our profession and generally give rise to much admiration from our audience (although they are generally not difficult), provided we carry out the task graciously and with elegance and humour. You will find that once you stand up and there is a general hush, your adrenalin starts flowing and you are capable of unexpected oratory brilliance. Those who do after dinner speeches well enjoy the experience. These are always done

standing. Once again, be sure to have a notepad and pen handy and to stand where you can hear the speaker without effort. Feel free to stop the speaker after a few sentences, when you feel he has come to a convenient break. If there is a written text, it is up to the interpreter to obtain a copy beforehand. If the speech is addressed to an audience which does not understand the language being used, the interpreter should interpret simultaneously into the microphone. There is nothing more boring for an audience than to have to listen to the same speech twice particularly if the first time is in a language they do not understand. It is advisable to drink only water until the speeches are over. After that it is up to you.

Press conferences

This may be the most important part of the visit for the foreign Statesman. It is increasingly

common for press conferences to be interpreted from the booth in simultaneous, which is the ideal situation. When this is not so, however, and consecutive is used, the interpreter sits next to the person giving the press conference and works both ways according to linguistic needs. The question and answer part of the session is sometimes a challenge because those asking the questions may not be accustomed to speaking in public or through an interpreter and may be difficult to follow or have very pronounced local accents. This is where the interpreter's acting talents come into play; he has to switch from one role to the other and keep the rhythm going, imitating as closely as possible the tone and attitude of the questioner.

Interpreting at the dinner-table

Seating is often a problem because the seating arrangements are based on strict protocol and

sometimes the interpreter is given a chair behind the visiting statesman, so that it is difficult to hear the conversation that is taking place at the table. Unfortunately this is often the case in Parliament House in Canberra. However, when working at the Embassies, where there is a greater realization of the need for interpretation, a seat is generally provided for the interpreter at the table next to the Statesman, which makes his work more efficient. (It is often difficult, though, to find a moment to take a mouthful of food before your plate is whisked away.)

Cocktail parties, visits and excursions

Always arrive at the reception or the departure point before the Minister, you must be there waiting for him when he arrives. Wherever your Statesman goes (except for the toilet!), you must always be one step behind and stick to him like a

Siamese twin. You may never leave a Reception before he does. You must always be there when you are needed and be invisible the rest of the time. It is useful if possible ahead of time to find out the linguistic requirements of those waiting to speak to the Statesman. Be ready to jump into action when required, if necessary thrusting your way through the crowd of people surrounding him.

Dress

Your aim should be to avoid being noticed. For the same reason, you should dab your nose if necessary but not blow it in public - better to disappear for a few seconds to blow your nose in private.

Patience

You will be sure to spend a lot of time waiting in corridors. Sometimes you are only there to reassure the visiting Statesman, maybe you will not be

needed to interpret at all. Sometimes your presence is merely for the sake of prestige. Be patient. Above all, be vigilant. Just when you thought you could relax, someone may turn to you for a word or a quick explanation. Be sure to have a copy of the programme in your pocket, and to know it by heart so that whatever happens, you know where your next assignment is taking place in case you are seated in a car at the back of the procession and there is a traffic hold-up.

Familiarity

Beware of the Australian habit of using first names. It is safer to say *Mr. So-and-so* when interpreting; Australian familiarity is a shock to more formal nationalities, particularly in an official setting such as Parliament House.

Introductions

The easy way to remember who to introduce first

is to stand beside the most senior person and to introduce the others to him or her.

Dignity

We must remember the dignity of our profession at all times. Naturally displayed dignity together with conscientiousness and professionalism are the best way we can serve our profession.

Trygve Lie, the first Secretary General of the United Nations said: “The world today depends in the first instance on the politicians and in the second on their interpreters.”

Etiquette in different countries

Rules of etiquette vary enormously between countries, depending on climate, history and tradition.

When you are invited to dinner at someone’s home in Europe, take flowers for your hostess. But

not chrysanthemums. Chrysanthemums are the flowers of the dead; on 1st November (All Saints' Day) families visit cemeteries and deposit chrysanthemums on their dear ones' graves. In Asia, avoid white flowers, especially carnations or gifts with white floral motifs as these too are associated with bereavement.

Greetings

Hand-shaking between men is the rule in France. You must say goodmorning and good-bye to each person either with a peck on each cheek (man to woman and woman-to-woman) or a hand-shake (men, or women to men). It is customary to remove your glove before shaking hands. Hand-kissing (men to women) is also prevalent in France.

In Switzerland and Luxemburg you kiss three times on the cheek, in France the older generation prefer twice, the younger three times, but this may

vary from place to place.

In Spain and Italy men often embrace one another rather than shake hands.

Table manners

There are a lot of differences to remember. For example whereas in England it is polite to keep your hands under the table when not using them to eat, in France this is considered very impolite - hands should always be above the table (you may rest your wrists on the table edge) to show, I believe, in medieval times, that you were not hiding a weapon. (Nowadays it may be to show your hands are not up to mischief under the table...) If you are in England you will drink your soup from the wide side of the spoon because you are a *grandboutien*, whereas in France you use the pointed end of the spoon because the French are *petitboutiens*. The problem is that in England soupspoons are round

and not oval which really complicates matters for French visitors. Similarly, you may be a *grandboutien* or a *petitboutien* depending on which end of your boiled egg you attack.

It is not polite to cut your bread roll with a knife, you should break it with your hands. People do not put butter on the bread accompanying their meal. In France it is often considered an insult to the cook or the chef to add salt or pepper to your food at the table, in fact in some famous French restaurants the Chef has been known to come out of the kitchen to complain ! (He prides himself on the fact that the food he serves is absolutely perfect as it is.)

In Spain it is common to dunk your bread in your breakfast hot chocolate or café au lait, but this is 'not done' in England.

In Italy where people are superstitious you should never pass the salt to someone, they might

think you wished them ill. Whatever you do, do not have thirteen guests at the table; it is not worth the risk of inviting fourteen in case one of them does not turn up. A plate piled high with spaghetti is often served first in Italy, as an entrée *before* the main course. Cheese is often served at the beginning of the meal in Spain, also nowadays in New Zealand I am told where cheese and wine often start the meal. In France the cheese comes before the dessert. The French find it very peculiar that the British go from salty main dish to sweet dessert and then back to salty cheese to finish. In Britain of course port used to go with the cheese; while the gentlemen were savouring their port, the ladies retired to powder their noses and talk gossip - leaving the gentlemen free to tell uncensored jokes without being inhibited by the presence of the ladies. In France port is taken in the late afternoon or as an *apéritif* before, not after, dinner.

Dress during conferences overseas

The shorts worn by adult Australian males are generally worn only by boys up to the age of about 12 in many other countries, except when on holiday by the beach. Do not be too casual. If you don't dress well you are perceived to be showing disrespect to those you meet. On the other hand it is unwise and inappropriate to dress to a high western standard in India, China, Africa or South America because this increases your chances of being robbed, mugged or kidnapped. In hot climates, cotton is preferable to any synthetic fabric however elegant.

Etiquette in Asia

The first rule is never to assume that what is polite or appropriate in Australia applies in other societies. The second is to learn about local customs from guide books or tourist information provided

on the plane. The third is to be unfailingly polite and courteous and keep smiling whatever difficulties there may be (even when you thought you were opening your taxi door and discover you were holding it open for a resident). You must never shout, lose your temper or try to intimidate. He who loses his temper also loses face. And cannot be trusted.

Avoid touching children on the head. The head is the highest part of the body symbolically as well as physically. Similarly, pointing with the feet, the lowest parts of the body, is grossly insulting. One should sit with one's feet respectfully tucked to one side.

The left hand does not exist outside the western world. In other words, you never touch anyone or any foodstuff with it. Never use your left hand to give or receive and never crook your finger to call someone - this is extremely impolite.

When visiting a temple, dress properly: no shorts or revealing clothing. Shoes must be taken off before entering a room containing a Buddha image - all Buddha images at any time or place must be treated with extreme respect. It is a good idea for ladies to carry a large scarf in their handbag with which to drape themselves as appropriate.

Handshaking is customary in Indonesia for men and women on introduction and greeting and smiling is a national characteristic in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Gifts

Alcohol and pig products are not a good idea in many countries. Ties and cuff-links are not commonly worn in Asia.

A final word: when you are next off to Beijing for a conference and you pack a few stuffed koalas and kangaroos as gifts, remember to remove the “Made

in China” label from underneath