

Interpreting in a globalised world

Back to the Future

Jesús Baigorri Jalón
Brussels 15th DG Interpretation-
Universities Conference

baigorri@usal.es

alfaqueque



*The only duty we owe history
is to rewrite it. (Oscar Wilde)*



The interpreter as critical link

- The Critical Link network began in 1992 in Canada.
- Columbus in 1492 took an interpreter with him in his journey to the Indies.



Why History?

- The first steps of simultaneous interpreting (SI)
- The adoption of SI at the United Nations
- The status of the profession: schools, manuals, associations



First steps in SI-1

One high quality microphone will be placed on a pedestal or stand at the speaker's location to pick up his words. This microphone will be connected through an amplifier to a number of head sets which will be installed in an adjoining quiet room. Each head set will terminate at an interpreter's booth or position in the room.



First steps in SI-2

The interpreter's booth will be provided with an ordinary telephone desk stand on which is mounted a high quality close talking microphone which will be connected through another amplifier to a number of head set located at a designated section of the auditorium or meeting hall.



First steps in SI-3

The translated speech of each interpreter would follow simultaneously with the delivery of the original speech, the only delay being that of recording the speech and the ability of the interpreter to translate directly and rapidly from the stenographic notes received from the recorder. (E. Filene to Sir E. Drummond, April 2, 1925)



Hushaphone

*The machines used for transmitting speeches were patented in 1921 under the name of **Hushaphone** and have been utilised since then. (...)*

I am convinced that telephonic interpretation is not a technical problem but a problem of selecting, training and educating translators. (Note by Dr. Ritter on the Technical Arrangements for the Twelfth International Labour Conference, 1929)



First steps in SI-4

The members of the Translation Section, who have taken part in the deliberations of the committee, are unanimous in their belief that there is not, in Europe today, a translator who could read another operator's shorthand notes taken in one language, and translate it at the same time into another language, so as to keep up with a speaker whose words were coming over the wire. (Sir Herbert Ames, June 17th 1925)



First steps is SI-5

...from experiments I have made I believe it to be impossible for anyone to listen carefully to a speech through the telephone and simultaneously dictate a translation.

(Undated and unsigned [probably Mr. Devinat] report to the Deputy-Director [ca. 1926])



First steps in SI (Course)

Un cours préparatoire, d'une durée de 4 à 6 semaines, commencera probablement en décembre; à la fin de ce cours, un premier examen aura lieu en vue de choisir environ 24 candidats (si possible 12 français et 12 anglais) lesquels seront soumis à un entraînement spécial qui durera jusqu'à la fin d'avril 1927. G. Fleury annonce un cours spécial d'interprétation téléphonique. 27-11-1926



New “Electric Interpreter” Aids Delegates at Geneva

The June meeting of the International Labor Conference brought into use a device for providing persons imprisoned in their own language with a simultaneous “unofficial” translation from the original French or English address. It is highly probable that this invention will eventually be adopted, not only by the League, but also by the Parliament of the Union of South Africa. The League of Nations News, August 1927, pp. 6-7





First steps in SI

Experience has shown this work to be of a difficult and exacting nature, demanding special qualities on the part of the interpreters and particularly fatiguing owing to the degree of concentration involved, and it would seem desirable to place instantaneous interpreters in a special category receiving extra Conference pay, to encourage them to take it up. (Report by A. Gordon-Finlay 20 July 1927)



First steps in SI (1928 Course)

It was found that, on an average, thirty minutes of consecutive work proved the maximum during which satisfactory translation could be made, after which the results were liable to deteriorate owing to fatigue. (Report by the director of the 1928 experiment with simultaneous interpreting at the ILO, File Application of Telephonic Interpretation during the 13th session of the Conference, May 14, 1929. ILO Archive, Geneva





Wade (Interpreter, Permanent Court of International Justice)

I am personally anxious to get more practice in interpreting speeches at public meetings by the “simultaneous” method. Are you in need of any more interpreters, for this work, at the Labour Conference? (Letter to ILO, 18.05.31, ILO Archives)





Mathieu (Interpreter, League of Nations)

Si je ne désire pas me prêter à cette expérience, ce n'est naturellement pas par mauvaise volonté ou désir de faire obstacle au progrès, mais bien parce que j'ai acquis la conviction qu'il n'y avait pas là un véritable progrès. Je ne tiens pas à faire ce que je considère sincèrement comme du mauvais travail. Cela irait à l'encontre de ma conscience professionnelle –et je ne voudrais pas me prêter à une innovation que j'estime contraire à l'intérêt et à la bonne marche des travaux de l'Assemblée.(Georges Mathieu à M. Demolon, Chef au Service des Traducteurs & Interprètes français, le 3 septembre 1930, ILO Archives).



Pattern of rejection

A similar pattern of rejection, fear and distrust can be seen over a possible shift from simultaneous to remote interpretation.

Be it as it may, students need to be prepared for video conferencing and remote interpreting (C. Donovan

http://www.emcinterpreting.org/repository/pdf/UoW_conf_06_C.Donovan.pdf)



Lessons from History

story (early SI experiments)

history (SI was introduced at ILO conferences in the late 1920s)

History (SI gave voice to workers' unions facilitating more democratic relations in ILO's tripartite system)



Lord Cecil

It is of course, from the point of view of the Labour Conference, a very great advantage to be able to have translations into three or four languages instead of only one. And it might be a considerable boon to some of those who address the League if they were able to speak in their own language. Lord Cecil, June 1930, Memorandum “Telephonic Translation”, Simultaneous Interpretation file, League of Nations Archive, Geneva.



Adoption of SI at the United Nations

Towards the end of this regular session of the UN General Assembly (1947) the simultaneous interpreting system was adopted as a permanent service both at Flushing Meadows and Lake Success (The New York Times, November 16, 1947: 46)



From marvel to profession

*...it is generally held among diplomatic language experts that there are no more than 120 fully qualified conference interpreters in the world –which makes them only scarcely less rare than whooping cranes (26). (P.T. White, The interpreter: linguist plus diplomat, *The New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1955, Sect. VI, p. 12)*



Academic and professional recognition

Schools: ETI (1941)...

Jean Herbert: *Manuel de l'interprète*,
subtitled: *Comment on devient interprète de conférences*. Librairie de l'Université,
Georg, Geneva 1952)

AIIC: 1953



Lessons from History

SI innovations were possible thanks to the will of entrepreneurs, engineers and interpreters, at a time when the international civil service was still very young.



Lessons from History

*The challenge for interpreting schools will be to prepare professionals adapted to the linguistic and geopolitical needs of the market, interpreters with a knowledge of many different subjects and who are able to adapt to a speed which has increased at the same rate as the evolution of the times, and who are comfortable handling the auxiliary tools of the post Gutenberg galaxy era.
(Baigorri-Jalon, 2004: 174)*



Lessons from History

- From consecutive to simultaneous.
(Everywhere?)
- From in situ simultaneous to remote.
- No paradigm excludes completely the previous one.
- The big challenge is probably speed
(totally different format between written
and oral speech)



¡Gracias!

Interpreting in a globalised world

alfaqueque

baigorri@usal.es

alfaqueque

