

YOUNG INTERPRETERS AWARD 2018

WINNING SPEECHES

1st prize

Elena Ourjountseva, FTI Université de Genève

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Si nous devons évoquer aujourd'hui les révolutions technologiques et sociales qui vont peut-être bouleverser notre métier, permettez-moi de commencer par dire la chose suivante : je trouve que rien n'est plus tue-l'amour que cette bougie électrique que l'on trouve sur la table du restaurant moyen. Elle éclaire suffisamment peu pour qu'à la chandelle, chèvre semble demoiselle, mais sans avoir la sincérité, la fragilité et la chaleur d'une véritable flamme. Il est certes facile de rêvasser au romantisme des véritables bougies alors que l'on a le privilège d'avoir l'électricité chez soi, même si cela ne conduit pas forcément à avoir la lumière à tous les étages. Mais la flamme d'une fausse bougie ne se partage pas. Margaret Fuller disait : « Si vous détenez un savoir, laissez les autres venir y allumer leurs chandelles ». Dans cette invitation à partager la connaissance, l'interprète ne serait-il pas justement celui qui tient la chandelle du duo passionnel formé par l'orateur et son public ?

Bien avant de me former à l'interprétation, j'ai eu la chance d'apprendre à apprécier la valeur du savoir et des bougies à la fois. Les bougies, parce que les coupures de courant étaient fréquentes dans l'Union Soviétique dans mon enfance, et parce que la joie de courir chercher une chandelle dans le tiroir de la cuisine pour passer la soirée à lire des histoires d'aventuriers perdus dans des pays que nous ne pensions pas voir un jour était immense. Le savoir, parce qu'il avait permis à de nombreuses personnes extraordinaires de se réunir dans une petite ville de scientifiques où j'ai eu l'incroyable privilège de grandir, entourée d'adultes qui savaient et, surtout, adoraient expliquer des notions de physique quantique à l'aide de trois mouches qui volent et un bout de ficelle à des enfants de quatre ou cinq ans. Le savoir avait sauvé la vie d'une partie de ces gens, qui la vouaient à faire don de leurs connaissances, sans avarice, sans mépris pour celui qui ne savait pas.

L'interprète a le privilège d'entendre des propos rares, secrets, techniques, passionnants. Grâce à eux, il accède au savoir. Croit-il. Espère-t-il. Il a une conscience aigüe du fait qu'il ne peut savoir que trop peu. Ou trop tard. (Très exactement dix millisecondes trop tard). L'interprète est porteur du savoir, mais il porte tantôt une mine prête à exploser, tantôt un parchemin précieux trônant sur un coussin brodé d'or et la plume permettant de le parapher, tantôt un oeuf posé sur une cuillère, qu'il ne faut surtout pas casser alors que l'on slalome à toute vitesse entre les obstacles. L'interprète a peut-être parfois envie de lancer cet oeuf contre l'écran diffusant la visio-conférence qu'il entend à peine. Mais il tient la bougie du savoir à la main, et la porte, en essayant de ne pas la laisser s'éteindre.

Avons-nous encore la patience de voir la flamme tressaillir puis se stabiliser, d'accepter que ce point lumineux hésitant n'éclaire qu'une partie des ténèbres d'ignorance qui nous entourent, même si notre connaissance du monde progresse à la vitesse de la lumière ? Là encore, l'interprète a le privilège d'être une chandelle dans un monde de lasers. Il doit certes

réfléchir et parler plus vite, maîtriser des connaissances sans cesse plus techniques, continuer à y voir clair alors qu'il est ébloui par des zettaoctets d'information. Mais il doit avant tout être compris par l'humain assis à l'autre bout du micro et qui, hier encore, inventait des mythes autour d'un feu de bois allumé par un éclair. L'art de l'interprète est de transformer ce qu'il a appris sur un écran d'ordinateur en une histoire contée au coin du feu, susurrée à l'oreille.

Nous vivons à l'ère de la révolution numérique, de la vitesse, de l'information. Cela tombe bien : l'interprétation est l'hyperactivité du savoir. L'interprète sait à la fois tout et rien. Il apprend pour oublier et réapprendre. Il a d'ailleurs sans doute voulu faire du poney, de la danse et du football en même temps dans son enfance. Et pourtant, il va devoir parler de mille sujets plus complexes les uns que les autres comme s'il y avait consacré toute sa vie.

N'ayez crainte : notre fameux « filtre logique » l'y aidera. L'Himalaya culmine à 30 pieds. Un accident a eu lieu hier : une victime et demi est à déplorer. Au début de notre formation, comme, sans doute, par la suite, la joie de partager notre savoir est quelque peu amoindrie lorsque nous échouons à inhiber ce que l'on sait être une absurdité. L'avantage de l'interprète ? Avoir le privilège de se sentir au moins un peu honteux en cas d'erreur flagrante. De s'empressement de la corriger. De devoir préférer la justesse à la surenchère. L'interprète doit vouloir la vérité, celle de l'orateur auquel il prête sa voix. Malgré des données peut-être, ou assurément, erronées, malgré la langue de bois, cette vérité-là est vérité car elle est action. Elle a lieu hic et nunc. L'interprète transmet le message d'un orateur pour que ce dernier soit compris, pour provoquer une réponse ou une réaction : l'interprète rend sa puissance performative à la langue, il l'aide à devenir un acte qui se réalise sous nos yeux, en réalité, et non dans l'univers de la post-vérité. L'interprète ne se cache pas sur un forum.

Quand il est dans le noir, l'interprète doit aller chercher une bougie dans le tiroir de la cuisine, écouter, se plonger dans l'esprit d'un orateur dont les croyances, les convictions, les connaissances sont parfois si éloignées des siennes. Comme le disait l'un de mes professeurs, l'interprète doit sincèrement accepter de penser comme l'autre. A l'heure des grilles de lecture toutes faites et de la surinformation qui pousse à la paresse intellectuelle, il doit sans cesse oublier et réapprendre tout ou partie de ce qu'il savait et penser comme mille personnes à la fois. Il vit dans l'instant où se forme le savoir : celui de la parole, de l'écoute, de l'échange.

Il a envie de croire que des flammes vacillantes, mais nombreuses peuvent engendrer un monde baigné de lumière ; qu'une chandelle qui ne brûle plus pourra être rallumée grâce à une autre et produire une illumination partagée qui, pour cette raison, ne saurait s'éteindre. L'interprète est prêt à tenir la chandelle, désolé de s'imposer, rougissant, mais fermement décidé à jouer les entremetteurs pour éviter toute scène de ménage. Ne reculant pas devant la facilité pour raviver la flamme d'une liaison – diplomatique - contrariée, il n'a pas peur de répéter que l'amour et le savoir ont pour point commun de devenir plus grands chaque fois qu'ils sont partagés.

2nd prize, *ex-aequo*

Amelie Jánoska, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

Dear fellow colleagues,

I am an interpreter. I have been studying for ten years to become one, and today despite not having written a single line of my master's thesis nor having my diploma yet; I woke up being an interpreter. This sense of "being" has nothing to do with the official end of my studies coming closer, nor does it have to do with feeling prepared and armed enough to step out of the alma mater bubble, this sense of "being" has to do with a rare moment where instead of planning or hesitating, I simply took a piece of old school paper and a purple pencil (because that was the only one sharpened) and started putting down notes. These notes were about my last two academic years: in them I recounted the day I entered Karl-Franzens University of Graz, in Austria, and also captured my first community interpreting assignment at the local center against violence.

First I drew eggplants, because that is the only thing I can draw with a purple pencil. Then, after having created a whole greenhouse I drew a crisp line with one stroke in the middle of the paper and started writing:

I am an interpreter. I have been one during all of these years, but have never realized it. Instead I focused on failing some exams, lacking an expression in the target language, having a lengthy time lag, and not knowing where the accent is in *mononucleosis*. I never took the time to focus on the little steps I kept on taking forward, or the knowledge and experiences I have gained during those years. As I was thrown into the frying pan, right at the beginning as a practicing community interpreter I realized: this is learning by doing. Margaret Fuller said: "If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it." I do have knowledge. I have the Knowledge of four Languages, the Knowledge of Listening, the Knowledge of Speaking, the Knowledge of doing both at the same time, but most of all: I have the Knowledge of Empathy.

I feel obliged to stand tall and write these nouns in capital letters carrying the message of Margaret Fuller's words: a truly brave and inspirational lady who was the first woman to use the library at Harvard College, as well as a pioneer in literary criticism and journalism. She stood up for what she believed in. Reflecting on today's world where even colors and scents are gendered; I am of the opinion that she should have been a baby pink, strawberry cupcake scented candle in her times. Or at least, this was what society expected her to be. However, Margaret Fuller let others light their candles in her flame of knowledge. She was not a scented candle, but a torch for women's rights in higher education back then in the still medieval darkness of the 19th century.

After re-reading this quote many times I started wondering: What do a person and a candle have in common according to this metaphor? The answer is: both need a spark to light up. The spark I see in people's eyes who are in need; whose eyes light up right after they hear me saying in their native language: "I am going to be your interpreter today". This simple sentence has impact when for these people it has been perhaps days, weeks or maybe even months of not speaking to anyone in their mother tongue, and for this time expressing

themselves in broken German or English in crucial situations such as at the hospital, at school or at the centre against violence. In addition to that we have to remember: only something very dry can catch fire. I am talking about people, who have been addicted, assaulted, abused, arrested, lost, humiliated, hurt, broken and fixed and then broken again.

A professor at my faculty used to tell us: "Interpreting is a job that cannot be measured. You never know if you did your part well except for if the two parties you have interpreted have understood each other. At business meetings the visible result, the acknowledgement might be a signed contract, but community interpreting is different. You can't really measure it." Though I admire this teacher a lot, I was convinced from the very beginning on that what she said couldn't be completely true. There has to be a certain feedback, a hint, something, even if not a signed confirmation with a stamp on it that I did my best. Today I know, my acknowledgement is not in the "Thank you for coming", "Thank you for replying so fast" from the social workers, which I still appreciate a lot, but it is in all the "Thank you for not looking at me when I cried" from a rape victim at the hospital, "Thank you for telling me I can be a better mom and not saying I have been a horrible one" from an ex-prisoner seeing her daughter after eighteen months, "Thank you for saying I have eight more weeks to live instead of saying I will die in two months" from a homeless man diagnosed with tonsil cancer.

I am an interpreter. I know how words can hurt, but have on contrary, experienced how the right words can heal once they are spoken in the right place at the right time. Interpreting and communication itself are not only about what is said, but also about how it is said without adding or extracting something from the original message.

The result of community interpreting can very well be measured. It can be measured in the candles lit in my clients' eyes. Therefore, it is time that we start highlighting another concept besides of the visible and invisible interpreter: the perceptible interpreter, who makes a difference. I want to see a more proactive approach to the interpreting profession. We need to stand tall, speak up and show the world and mainly our employers and clients that professional interpreting is not the level of transferring words from one language into the other, but that it is a vocation that needs to be done with professionalism, precision, devotion and attitude.

Margaret Fuller said: "If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it." I say: If you have knowledge, *go* and light others' candles in it. If you are an interpreter stand up for our profession and never get tired of correcting people who confuse the terms: translator, interpreter and entrepreneur. Be persistent just as my Finnish friend who never gave up correcting me when I made a mistake. She would shake her head skeptically each and every time asking me: "How can you still jumble up a moose, an elk and a reindeer? You are an entrepreneur!" I would just smile and say: "I am an interpreter."

2nd prize, *ex-aequo*

Ivana Žagar, University of Zagreb

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

I have a confession to make. I might have had a slight upper hand in this competition. I assure you, the reason is perfectly innocent, and rather simple. You see, I have been living and breathing everything to do with conference interpreting for many years, consequently, I have known about this competition for quite some time. This is where my alleged advantage ceases to exist, I promise.

I would like to start this speech with an image of a bridge. On the one side lies my heritage, where I come from, a region of relatively recent war conflicts. While I was too young to remember any specific moments from the war, I remember I felt terribly isolated, detached from the rest of the world which was hiding behind the frontlines of the battles I did not comprehend. It is also a region of incredible beauties, cultural diversity and excellent food. On the other side of the bridge are foreign places I have visited and in which I lived, as well as the places I have yet to visit or call my home. I have been lucky enough to have travelled all over Europe, meeting people from all over the world, being introduced to stories of happiness but also to stories of sadness from far away. I used to imagine myself occasionally crossing this bridge with the idea I would take some of my thoughts on the complicated nature of where I come from, share it with my foreign friends, and take some of their experiences back with me. And being caught up in this beautiful exchange was the most perfect feeling of freedom and reciprocity, until I realised there was more. I did not want to simply utilise this bridge; I wanted to be the bridge.

The first time I was met with the concept of conference interpreting was while watching the trials at The Hague on our living room television, like so many in my country did. Well, watching might be an overstatement; my age at the time might not have allowed me to be fully immersed in the seriousness of the moments I was witnessing on the screen. And while I might have not been old enough to comprehend the complexities of the court proceedings at hand, something else caught my eye – or my ear, I should say. I found myself intrigued by the bodiless voices I was hearing over the voices of the actual speakers. These mesmerising voices I would later come to find, belonged to simultaneous interpreters. And my fascination began. How was it possible they could instantly interpret thoughts, ideas and messages from one language into another? It was communication in its purest and most direct form, giving a voice to the speakers of the original content, and knowledge to the listeners.

The interpreters at The Hague were of vital importance to the trials themselves; moreover, the trials would not have been possible without them being able to serve as links between the people within the process. I could not have thought of a more noble and useful role to play; creating communication out of thin air, shaping it into coherent thoughts, accurately converting the messages from one language into another. And all those people that were heard

by this court of law, people who might have thought they would never be heard, now had someone to carry their testimonies beyond linguistic and cultural barriers. How proud they must have felt, I thought, those interpreters at The Hague, for the effect of their labour was instant and palpable. I saw them as superstars working in the shadows of their booths, spaceship captains tucked away in their pods of invisibility, using their unique skill to establish communication between different worlds while remaining calm and well-spoken. It was the trials at The Hague that opened my eyes to the very existence of this profession, but also to the importance of the role it played in the context of the events at which it took place. While there are so many important components within a multilingual event, having somebody to enable the very communication between the participants is key. The knowledge an interpreter holds in a way is the starting point from which the knowledge of everybody else can be shared. And with the ever-growing globalisation of the world, the importance of conference interpreters has only increased. More often than ever we have the chance to meet people from different countries and continents speaking different languages, and bound by both professional and personal ties, we must achieve efficient communication to establish meaningful connections. The European Union stands as the perfect example of this.

The EU has recognised the importance of efficient multilingualism and has introduced the noble idea of equality among all its official languages, including Croatian, which as a speaker of a relatively small language from a relatively small country, makes me particularly proud. By employing interpreters to serve as voices of all its citizens, enabling them to express themselves in their own mother tongues, the EU has created a sense of togetherness and connectivity throughout its member states. And the EU interpreters stand as often invisible communication keepers, making sure the dialogues are never silenced and misunderstandings are reduced to a minimum. They guard the knowledge and share the knowledge of others on the fundamental level of interpreting and conveying meaning. Particularly today, when our world faces a new wave of hardships and empathy is often replaced by either fear or ignorance, it is important to talk to each other, communicate our worries, hopes, ideas, and most importantly - knowledge.

And this probably is the most important reason why I want to become an interpreter for the EU. The idea of standing on the frontlines of communication between people who could change this world and make it better when given sufficient and accurate information, while simultaneously (no pun intended) being intellectually challenged by the unpredictability of the interpreting profession, seems to me like the perfect combination of making a difference in the world as well as contributing to my own life. And today, as I am working towards my goal, I think of that confused young girl from many years ago, the one who felt isolated, the one who felt the rest of the world was out of her reach. Today she is a part of a much larger community, a community which recognises her as an equal. And maybe, if she works hard enough, she will one day be allowed to use the knowledge she had gained through her programme to help exchange the knowledge of others between the people of the world, giving her speakers a voice, and herself a mission. Thank you.