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PROFESSIONALISM,
QUALITY
AND EXPERTISE
IN INTERPRETING

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PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETING

Goal in training

Yardstick in assessment

Descriptions and definitions?

Possessing **an unusual memory for thought and phrase**, he **did not interpret sentence by sentence**, but, while an address or statement was being made, he listened intently, occasionally jotting down a note with his stub of a lead pencil.

When the speaker had finished, this remarkable linguist would translate his remarks into English or into French as the case might be, **without the least hesitation** and **with a fluency and completeness** which were almost uncanny. Even if the speaker had consumed ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes, the address was **accurately repeated in the other language**, while Professor Mantoux would employ **inflection and emphasis with an oratorical skill** that added greatly to the perfectness of the interpretation.

Eloquence, careful reasoning, and unusual style in expression were apparently easily **rendered into idiomatic English from French, or vice versa**.

He **seemed almost to take over the character of the individual whose words he translated, and to reproduce his emotions as well as his thoughts**.

(Lansing 1921, 105-106 about Paul Mantoux who worked as a consecutive interpreter at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919)

The modern interpreter is a phenomenon sui generis. His work cannot be compared with any other professional work, and it demands a combination of qualifications which by their very nature are rarely found in a single individual.

Full command of both languages, that from which he interprets and that into which he interprets, is the basis of his work. On the spur of the moment he must orally **convey not the gist but the full content of a speech**.

He must be **an orator** and perhaps even **something of an actor**. The whole effect of an important declaration may be lost if the mannerisms and intonation of an interpreter are uncongenial to the spirit of a debate.

He must furthermore be **familiar with the questions under debate**, or at least he must have a sort of sixth sense enabling him to **detect the essential in a conventional phrase, its political implications and importance**.

While he **must, as a rule, not play down any statement, he must not overemphasize it** in his rendering or bearing.

(Ranshofen-Wertheimer 1945, 139 ff. about the League of Nations interpreters)



The work “requires an extraordinarily **high level of cultural and educational background** and a **vocabulary capable of coping with perfect facility in at least two languages with such varying subjects** as law, medicine and current history”.

Persons with **a professional background**, especially in law, have been found best.

On the whole, men have been found better than women, but Commander Steer says that “when women are good, they are very good indeed.”

Alfred Steer, the Deputy Chief and Executive Officer of the Translation Division at Nuremberg in an interview in the New York Times on 25 August, 1946 about the work of simultaneous interpreters.

(Schmidt 1946, 24; quoted in Baigorri-Jalón 2004, 237)



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Tulkit suomen kielen etuvartiona EU:ssa
Hyvä koulutus kuuluu tulkkauksissa

[Interpreters act as guardians of the Finnish
language in the EU
Good training is heard in performances]

(Headline of a newspaper article about the Finnish booth
and interpreting at SCIC)



QUALITY

a shared objective for
practising interpreters,
trainers, recruiters
and those involved in
interpreting research

Definitions?



The purpose of AllC Code of Professional Standards:
to “ensure an optimum quality of work performed with due consideration being given to the physical and mental constraints inherent in the exercise of the profession“

User perspective:

user satisfaction, or meeting the customers’ service-quality expectations
(Kurtz 2001)

Not an absolute concept:

quality under the circumstances
(Pöchhacker 2001)



The quality of an interpreting performance depends on how the interpreter succeeds in producing a text that is

- (1) **equivalent** to the source text in terms of communicative function and overall meaning or sense;
- (2) **accurate** as to the rendition of the original information content;
- (3) **appropriate** in that it overcomes cultural barriers, conforms to the social, linguistic or textual norms governing the communicative event, and meets the audience's expectations;
- (4) **usable**, i.e. easily followed and readily understood by the listeners thanks to its clear structure, cohesion, and delivery.

(Viezzi 2003)



Professionalism is related to how the practitioners participate in a career over a long period of time.

This requires

- keeping up to date with the latest developments and technologies, and the state of the world in general
- preparation and ongoing learning
- collegiality, the will and willingness to get along with colleagues.

In other words, **professionalism goes far beyond the necessary skill to transmit a message from one language to another.**

(Luccarelli 2004)



The perception of professionalism with a long-term dimension is related to the concept of

EXPERTISE

EXPERTS

- top performers who excel in a particular field
- professionals who achieve success in their occupation

ELEMENTS OF EXPERTISE

Knowledge

- experts know more and have a different way of structuring their domain-specific knowledge

Enculturation into a group

- acquisition of the skills, habits and attitudes of a profession
- becoming an accepted member of the profession

(Boshuisen, H.P.A., Bromme, R. & Gruber, H. 2004, 4-6)

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EXPERTISE vs. PROFESSIONALISM

Are all professionals experts?

Does experience always equal expertise?

NO, some professionals can be characterized as **experienced nonexperts**, i.e. they carry out practised routines rather than focus on solving problems

(Bereiter and Scardamalia 1993, 11)

Does expertise in one domain transfer to other domains?

NO

(Ericsson, K.A., Charness, N., Feltovich, P.J. & Hoffman, R.R. 2006)

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Trainees need to

- acquire knowledge and skills
- develop a professional identity



HOWEVER

Professional interpreters are

- not automatically qualified trainers
- not automatically qualified assessors

PROBLEMS OF ASSESSMENT

- Interpreters and trainers feel that they can assess the quality of colleagues or trainees intuitively, on the basis of their experience and professionalism, but they are unable to express their subjective judgements by objectively measurable standards.
- Users may not trust interpreters as they are unable to control their rendering.
- Researchers have not been able to agree on a universal, generally accepted quality model applicable to conference interpreting, or any type of interpreting at all for that matter.

(Kalina 2005)

HYBRID EXPERTISE

- incorporating different areas of knowledge
- regarded as necessary in conference interpreting from the very beginning

NETWORKED EXPERTISE

- arises from social interaction, knowledge sharing and collective problem solving
- embraces joint or shared competence of communities and organized groups of experts and professionals

(Hakkarainen, K., Palonen, T., Paavola, S. & Lehtinen, E. 2004)

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