

**Conférence Internationale permanente
d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes**

2010 CIUTI FORUM

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Translation and Interpreting in new geopolitical settings

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“Internationalisation at home. Language mediation involving non-European languages”

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Monsieur le président,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Cari colleghi e amici,

Before all else, I should like to say how pleased and honoured I am to have been invited to speak at this Forum. As many of you know, CIUTI was a founding member of the Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council. CIUTI was represented by its then president, Martin Forstner, on the now legendary 1994-95 SIGMA Scientific Committee on Languages, whose members benefited from the advice received from the Commission official sitting on my right - Pinuccia Contino.

CIUTI went on to actively participate in five successive ERASMUS Thematic and dissemination Network projects in the area of languages, and CIUTI vice president Maurizio Viezzi represents CIUTI on the CEL/ELC Board and chairs the Evaluation Board of one of our current network projects.

CIUTI and the CEL/ELC share a common concern for identifying and analysing new and emerging needs in the social, economic, political, and professional environments relevant to higher education in general and to the training of language mediators – notably translators and interpreters – in particular. Changing needs present challenges for training institutions, which have to adjust their programmes and offerings in order to meet these needs if they want to avoid a disconnection between their programmes and the market.

The theme of this Forum is another indication of CIUTI's overarching aim to stay in tune with new developments. Globalisation – a term that was practically unknown only 15 years ago – globalisation has – together with the collapse of communism - brought about dramatic geopolitical changes, and it is certainly most befitting that this Forum is looking at new needs and challenges for translation and interpreting resulting from these changes.

That's one side of the globalisation coin. The other side concerns European societies even more directly. As a result of increasing trans-European mobility and, above all, migration into Europe, all European states are now multilingual and multicultural societies. In fact, the linguistic fabric of Europe, as well as individual language profiles and language use in Europe have changed beyond recognition over the past ten to fifteen years. The VALEUR project carried out under the auspices of the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages in the period 2004 to 2007 found that in the 22 European countries covered by the project, no fewer than 438 languages were spoken.

Individual language profiles have become more complex to the extent that many children and young people have more than one mother tongue, or as we now say, first language; in many cases, the EU's 1+>2 formula, which looked revolutionary in the mid-nineties, has been overtaken by developments. And – more English is spoken in Europe today than ever before.

Of course, there are considerable differences across Europe. However, one thing seems clear to me. While not so long ago, professional translation and interpreting were primarily regarded as being indispensable for the functioning of the European institutions and of international organisations, there is now an acute need for interpreting – and translation – at local and regional level as well. The Brussels language regime was based on the notion of monolingual Member States – and even though this notion was not a hundred percent correct from the very beginning, the current situation cannot possibly be compared to that of 50 years ago.

In other words, we in Europe are confronted with a new generation of the multilingual challenge – and this new generation has a lot to do with globalisation, with mobility and migration, and with the internationalisation of private and public organisations in Europe.

Of course, what I am talking about here is anything but an entirely new topic. In our very first Thematic Network carried out from 1996 to 1999, the final recommendations coming out of the sub-project on Translation and Interpreting included course profiles for public service and business interpreting, featuring specialisation modules for interpreting in legal settings, for medical and psychiatric interpreting and for social interpreting. And only last September, a symposium on Community Interpreting: Training & Research at University Level was organised by the University of Graz under the auspices of CITUI.

However, I am not sure that the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of community interpreting – and community translation, for that matter – are fully recognised by all concerned. The sheer number of languages spoken in Europe today makes it necessary to think of alternative ways of training. At the same time, community interpreting and translation – including court interpreting and translation - is not just a matter of ensuring communication between speakers of different languages – it is – or at least it should be – part of the human rights agenda.

I am fully aware that community interpreting and translation is not just a matter to be taken up by higher education training institutions. Prime responsibility rests with public authorities out there in the states, regions and local communities. Yes, community interpreting and translation cannot be had for nothing; it has its price. But

at the end of the day, it is probably less costly than the misery and tensions that can result from the lack of such services. In a presentation I made years ago at one of the SCIC-Universities conferences, I said that the cost of the EU's language services should be seen in relation to the horrendous suffering that two world wars had inflicted on Europe. Now we are no longer concerned with war and peace at European level – we are concerned with the well-being of all the people living in Europe.

Of course, universities and specialist organisations should regard it as their responsibility to alert public authorities about the importance of and the need for community interpreting and translation.

As you know, I am not a specialist – I am neither a translator nor an interpreter, even though quite a number of my former students are now working as professional translators. I am saying this because I do not wish to claim that I have all the answers when it comes to the training of community interpreters and translators. However, I should like to flag a number of issues which to my mind need to be addressed or born in mind.

Let me start with two rather general issues. Community interpreting and translation is not an alternative to learning the language of the host community. However, for quite some time now, we have rightly been talking not about assimilation, but about integration. When around 1900 my grandfather moved from Thorun in what was then West Prussia to Berlin, he immediately changed his name from Wladislaw to Robert and abandoned his first language Polish in favour of German. In today's age of global communication, migrants tend to stay in touch with their families and friends living thousands of miles away in other continents. It is not just anecdotal evidence that leads me to believe that first generation migrants rarely acquire a command of the official language spoken in their environment that will enable them to communicate successfully in stressful situations.

What is particularly important for community interpreting and translation is the availability of people who are literate both in their first language and in the official language of the host community. Because of this, major efforts have to be made to enable speakers of, for example, Asian and African languages, to become literate in these languages; it is hard to imagine European students being successfully trained in Asian or African languages.

If I am not mistaken, the principal challenge is this. Training institutions cannot be expected to offer professional T&I courses in all the languages required for community language mediation. Because of this, they might have to develop and offer courses in intercultural communication and language mediation for bi-literate people with a migration background who wish to work in the context of community interpreting and translation. Courses of this kind would not be language specific and would be designed to introduce participants to interpreting and translation techniques, professional ethics, public services etc. In this way, training institutions would use their experience and expertise in the training of professional translators and interpreters to enable people working or intending to work as community interpreters and translators to acquire professional standards required for quality services in this area of activity. I believe that there are things in the general

recommendations that came out of our first Thematic Network that could still provide food for thought – and for action, for that matter.

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that in order to provide appropriate training of this kind, we need to broaden our knowledge base on community interpreting and translation. We need to carry out studies and conduct research to identify needs regarding users, languages and settings and we need to identify the precise competences that community interpreters and translators need to have – and all this in order to improve existing programmes and offerings, and to develop new programmes and offerings. In all this, we must be honest to ourselves. In this day and age, needs are apt to change frequently and rapidly – and training institutions, trainers and trainees have to be aware of this. In the words of the final report of the European Commission’s High Level Group on Multilingualism, “While it would be useful to conduct studies into current and future demands in legal / court and community interpreting and translation, it should be clear that analyses of this kind can be quickly overtaken by developments”. The HLG therefore expressed the view that “the programmes to be developed should also equip students with competences sought after in related sectors of the labour market”. It would seem to be particularly important that students on these programmes acquire a high degree of professional flexibility.

I think I’d better stop here. It would, of course, be useful also to reflect on T&I needs resulting from the internationalisation of public and private organisations in Europe and from the increasing number of international trade links established by European SMEs. This will to some extent be addressed by the Business Platform for Multilingualism set up by the European Commission, which I happen to chair. I focused on the internationalisation of community interpreting and translation because we are about to launch – at long last – a Special Interest Group on “Community T&I and the role of higher education”, which will be chaired by CIUTI Vice President Maurizio Viezzi. Without Maurizio’s advice I would not have been able to prepare my speech anyway. The SIG will mark another stage in close collaboration between CIUTI and the CEL/ELC; and I am confident that the Group will come up with proposals for concrete action, for example European projects.

Before I conclude, however, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outgoing European Commissioner for Multilingualism, Mr Leonard Orban. In the speech he delivered at the 11th SCIC-Universities Conference in May 2007, he said:

However important it may be to focus on high quality conference interpreting, I would personally also like to see attention paid to other forms of interpretation.

....

... we should not forget that others, who are less privileged in a number of respects, are entitled to the same quality interpretation. I am thinking here of people, European citizens or not, who need to defend their rights in court. I am also thinking of those who are in need of assistance from public bodies and must be able to state their case unequivocally in their own language.

....

... I would like to call upon the national authorities and universities to play an active role in also ensuring high quality training in the area of court and community interpreting.

It is in this spirit that our new Special Interest Group under Maurizio Viezzi's chairmanship will go about its work.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION