Documents
of the Royal Commission
on Bilingualism
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2 Conference Interpretation in Canada

Thérèse Nilski

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Thérèse Nilski

The methods of overcoming the language barrier in a bilingual country have for some time been a matter of growing practical importance to ever wider circles of Canadians. This process has been accelerated and stimulated by the interest aroused in and through, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. While French Canadians have inevitably long been aware of the problems of overcoming a language barrier, the predominantly English-speaking people of Canada have only recently, in the electronic age which cuts distances and multiplies contacts, become conscious of the language difficulties on any large scale. All over Canada, people are making a more serious effort than ever before, to understand the real nature of the country. But while French Canadians have all along, by the nature of things, known about and largely taken for granted their part in the building of Canada (and are now intent on asking themselves the question: what use is Canada *to us*?) the rest of Canada's soul-searching is producing a new recognition of the value of diversity as contributed by the country's French Canadian component; and a growing number of voices are calling for more and better communication between our solitudes.

A number of suggestions have thus come before the Commission on how to foster direct communication, and how to deal with the educational problem of making more Canadians bilingual in the sense of McGill University's definition: "Bilingualism consists of the ability to express oneself in one of Canada's languages and at the same time be able to understand the other official language of Canada."[1]

A number of briefs have also suggested that, since direct communication is still so much a thing of the future, efforts should be made to extend the present use of translation (written) and interpretation (oral).[2] Thus, the Junior Bar Association, when presenting its brief in Montreal, proposed that simultaneous interpretation be made available in Canadian courts. The New Democratic Party of Ontario asked that the government provide a pool of interpreters for meetings of government agencies as well as for non-governmental organizations or associations. A number of briefs, including those by the Canadian

Book Publishers' Council and the University of Toronto Press, dealt with some of the problems of translation.

Both translation and interpretation are essentially tools of communication, and as such have a number of elements in common. It is a fairly widespread misconception, however, that the only difference lies in the sound-conveying equipment required for interpretation. In fact, the differences go deeper. As explained in subsequent chapters, not only the setup and the working conditions, but also the mental processes, and the aptitudes and skills involved in interpretation are different from those called for in translation.

This study will attempt to provide a bird's-eye view of the present and possible uses of interpretation in Canada, both in Quebec and in the rest of the country.

Conference interpretation will be taken to mean the oral reproduction, in another language, of the statements made during a meeting or discussion. While Canada has seen a rapid growth of this technique in recent years, and more is called for, few Canadians are aware of the practical implications, the advantages and limitations of the tool, or the problems involved: the circumstances in which it can be used effectively, its inevitably high cost, the present shortage of qualified interpreters in Canada (and indeed throughout the world, except possibly in Europe), as well as the difficulties of providing an adequate supply of qualified people, even for the future. Information on current trends in this field in Canada, as well as on the ways in which similar problems are being tackled elsewhere may be of practical interest to several groups of people. These include conference organizers on the lookout for efficient ways of providing their meetings with interpretation, would-be interpreters, and institutions or people who are planning to provide or are providing interpreter-training programmes.

Since interpretation is essentially a tool for oral communication between people in a group, it has had to adapt itself to the varying requirements of different types of meetings.

A. Simultaneous Interpretation

The most adaptable and most commonly used form of interpretation is the relatively new *simultaneous* method which appeared and developed with the advent of electronic equipment in the 1940's and 1950's. It lends itself to large or small meetings, for formal speeches and informal discussion, as well as for a varying number and combination of languages. Naturally, the greater the number of languages and participants, the more complex the arrangements required. Full-scale simultaneous interpretation is a specialized and complicated service; Chapter IV will be devoted to a fuller look at its requirements.

While simultaneous interpretation with its microphones, booths, and earphones is the form most used at present and therefore the one best known, other methods not requiring this equipment are also possible.

B. Simplified Forms of Simultaneous Interpretation

These may be used in special circumstances, notably for small two-language meetings where only a few of the participants have difficulty in following the main language. Reduced to its simplest form, the interpretation is whispered into a delegate's ear. Two delegates at the most can be assisted in this way, without unduly disturbing the rest of the meeting. This method is frequently used by visiting Soviet delegations, who bring their own interpreters. When the delegate in turn wants to speak, the interpreter translates his remarks "consecutively."

Where there are more than two listeners, simple equipment is sometimes used: there is no booth; the interpreter listens without

earphones and whispers into a shielded microphone (unkindly known in the profession as *le bidule* or "the spittoon"); the delegates hear the interpretation through earphones. Needless to say, this is a second-best solution, applicable in out-of-the-way places where high cost is a factor. (For example, the United States Department of State uses this method for groups of foreign dignitaries escorted on tours throughout the country.)

C. Consecutive Interpretation

Consecutive interpretation is the second, but in fact much older, method of exercising the art. The interpreter takes notes while the speaker is giving his paper or making his speech, and afterwards gives the complete interpretation. A good interpreter can reproduce even hour-long speeches with show-stopping accuracy and brilliance. This skill surrounded a number of interpreters with well-deserved glory in the League of Nations days. Today, consecutive interpretation has lost some of its early glamour and dash, but it still retains much of its usefulness in the right circumstances. Since no electronic equipment is necessary, it is economical (and highly efficient) in small, two-language working or drafting meetings where accuracy is important. The interpretation can be readily checked, speakers have pauses for reflection, and actually time is often saved as repetitive discussion is discouraged and semantic misunderstandings are avoided. That is why the method is still favoured by experienced technical bodies such as committees of the International Telecommunications Union. Consecutive interpretation also lends itself especially well to press conferences, and provides the right flourish on diplomatic occasions, such as visits by foreign heads of state.

On the other hand, there are circumstances when it ranks as a poor second to simultaneous interpretation, in all but cost. When more than two languages are involved, consecutive interpretation becomes long and tedious. Also, when lengthy, highly technical papers are presented, the system is not at its best, for interpreters cannot be expected to have the same intimate grasp of scientific matters as the participants.

In Europe, consecutive interpretation is still fairly widely used (interpreters there practise it 15 to 20 per cent of their time). In North America, it is practically unknown, except at the UN Security Council where it is regularly used. Possibly this is so because we are richer in North America, and do not hesitate to use the costlier methods; possibly because consecutive interpretation involves sophistication and habit. While it is occasionally brought into play, here in Canada, it is practised more by accident than by design. Not infrequently, at board of directors' meetings, for instance, or at meetings of labour-union locals, where there are both English- and French-speaking members, the chairman or one of the officers repeats all statements in either of the two languages for the benefit of

those who do not understand them both. This is taken very much as a matter of course—and, like Mr. Jourdain who was startled to learn he was speaking prose, the members are unaware that they are listening to one of the most tradition-honoured and exacting forms of interpretation. The drawback, however, of combining the two functions is that it is apt to be even more disastrous for the chairmanship than for the interpretation.

A very recent use for consecutive interpretation has developed in Montreal's higher criminal courts where, from 1965 on, professional interpreters have been called upon when, as occasionally happens, English-speaking witnesses need to be heard while the defendant and the jury are French-speaking, or *vice versa*. Both judges and counsel are among the most fluently bilingual of Canadians; and yet it has been found efficient and time-saving to employ professionals adept at consecutive interpretation rather than, as in the past, persons who laboriously translate the evidence a few words at a time.

However vestigial the practical applications of consecutive interpretation may have tended to become, it is nevertheless a method that still has a very important role to play. It is quite invaluable in the training of competent interpreters, however "simultaneous" they may later be called upon to be. More will be found on this in Chapter VII, on "Training."

A list of the conferences and bodies that have been using interpretation in Canada would be a long one and would cover a wide range and variety of circumstances.

A. Government Meetings

In recent years, the federal government has increasingly made use of simultaneous interpretation. In 1959, the system was introduced in the House of Commons, and subsequently in the Senate and parliamentary committees. By 1969 this service was provided by a staff of some 20 full-time interpreters under the direction of Raymond Robichaud. The parliamentary interpreters are, administratively, part of the Translation Bureau of the Department of the Secretary of State, which coordinates translation work for all departments of the Government of Canada. In addition to their duties in Parliament, the interpreters are often assigned to other government-sponsored conferences, including federal-provincial meetings and a variety of intergovernmental conferences, both general and technical. They are also able to undertake a certain amount of work on a free-lance basis, mainly in Ottawa. Occasional interpretation requiring the use of a foreign language, in addition to English or French (notably Russian and German), has been met by calling upon the assistance of staff from the Translation Bureau's Foreign Languages Division. The Translation Bureau is currently providing some interpretation training for promising candidates.

Unlike most other institutions with a permanent staff of interpreters (the United Nations, its specialized agencies, the American State Department, and many others) which find it efficient and economical to call on the services of free-lance interpreters during periods of peak demand, the federal government's Translation Bureau has not been using this method. The only government-sponsored type of meeting for which free-lance interpretation has been in demand has

been the hearings of a number of Royal Commissions, especially since the early 1960's and especially when held in Quebec.

The Government of Quebec has so far been leaving it to the other parties involved in joint meetings or conferences to provide interpretation services, as and when they are needed. The introduction of simultaneous interpretation in the Quebec Legislature was reportedly under study in the late 1960's.

Meantime, the New Brunswick Legislature introduced simultaneous interpretation of its debates in 1968.

At the time of printing this report, in 1969, the Federal Parliament's adoption of the Official Languages Bill may entail a further expansion of translation and interpretation facilities needed in Canada.

B. Meetings of International Organizations

Ever since Montreal became the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1945, Canada has been one of the few countries in the world that are hosts to a specialized agency of the United Nations. Until about the mid-1960's the United Nations family was the largest worldwide user of interpretation, both at headquarters in New York, at the sites of its various specialized agencies (UNESCO, ILO, WHO, FAO, ITU, and others), as well as at innumerable conferences and meetings organized throughout the world.[1] It contributed largely to developing and establishing present interpreting practices, and to setting standards of quality both for the organization of meetings and for the exercise of interpretation. It has trained a body of first-class professional interpreters many of whom are still on its permanent staffs in New York, Geneva, Montreal, and elsewhere. At peak periods, and for large conferences, the international organizations call upon the services of free-lance interpreters to supplement their permanent staffs. Conversely, the occasional availability of a core of permanent UN and ICAO staff members for outside conferences has been a source of strength to the North American free-lance circuit.

There are, in fact, no rigid divisions between the various types of meetings described in this chapter. Some organizations and conferences require the services of both free-lance and permanent interpreters. Certain congresses consist of plenaries with full-scale five-language interpretation, committees working in two or three languages, and occasionally, executive meetings that need only consecutive interpretation. Broadly speaking, however, the paragraphs above have referred to interpretation services provided by a permanent staff while the paragraphs below will describe the meetings generally served on a free-lance basis.

C. International Congresses

Many international medical, scientific, technical, and professional associations hold worldwide congresses at two- to five-year intervals in different parts of the world in rotation. These are usually huge, formal, multilingual meetings at which carefully prepared scientific papers and the results of the latest research are presented by the foremost specialists in the field. They are usually organized in the big cities' largest hotels. New York, and to some extent Washington, are often chosen as the sites, but Montreal, possibly because of Canada's attitude towards the Eastern bloc, tends to attract such meetings. Their complex preparation and organization are generally in the hands of the national association; for example, the Canadian Paediatric Society acted as host to the World Paediatric Congress. The same association is unlikely to organize more than one such congress in a life span and therefore finds it important to rely on a sum of experience and advice available from other sources. The handbook on *The Planning of International Meetings*[2] deals with, among other things, how to provide for interpretation. It states at the outset: "No large international congress should be organized nowadays without simultaneous interpretation, but it must be borne in mind that the organization of an interpretation service is costly and difficult and is best left in the hands of a competent person. Second-class interpretation is worse than none from the point of view of communication. Financially, it is tantamount to throwing good money away."

Hence the importance of starting off by appointing an experienced and competent consultant, usually known as the "chief interpreter." His duties are to help select and recruit a qualified team of interpreters—often a formidable task, since first-class interpreters are few and far between, and interpreters specializing in scientific or technical subjects are scarcer still. At least two interpreters per language are required; but where the number of languages exceeds three, or the combination involves languages infrequently used at international meetings, the number of interpreters required rises steeply, as we shall see. Moreover, since interpretation may be needed at several concurrent sessions, several teams of interpreters may be required. It is not unusual, therefore, for a congress to have to recruit 15 to 25 interpreters. That number can seldom be found locally; hence there are constant exchanges between New York, Washington, Montreal, and even Mexico (the largest North American concentrations of interpreters). Occasionally European interpreters have to be brought over for congresses in North America, while North American interpreters are sometimes called upon to work as far afield as Tokyo, Delhi or Australia. In fact, there are peak periods of the year into which a great many international congresses need to be fitted; and as the number of good interpreters is limited, a congress is unlikely to be able to get first-rate service unless it has made its arrangements well ahead of time, generally over a year in advance.

Besides recruitment (which includes the preparation of contracts, and advice on financial and travel arrangements), the chief interpreter is responsible for advising the congress on conference planning to permit the most effective and economical use of interpreting services. His experience with equipment companies and installations may be valuable to the organizers (*see* Chapter IV).

The chief interpreter will also, together with the congress, set up the briefing sessions needed before highly specialized conferences. The interpreters are given one or more days on full pay to study the terminology and subject-matter of the meeting and are given a chance to consult specialists whose mother tongues are the official languages of the meetings (*see* Chapter IV).

The chief interpreter also helps the congress to organize a documentation committee, whose task is to obtain beforehand all copies of papers to be read out at the meeting, for advance preparation by the interpreters. This is a thorny task, for speakers generally have to be asked repeatedly before they finally agree to deliver their brainchildren to interpreters, but, for the reasons explained in Chapter IV and Appendix F, it is essential to the success of the meeting that they do so.

Finally, during the course of the congress itself, the chief interpreter is responsible for looking after the interpretation arrangements, assisting his colleagues, and ensuring coordination with the congress authorities.

Arrangements for meetings other than full-scale international congresses are proportionately less elaborate. The principles remain the same, but the services become simpler as the function decreases in complexity.

D. Working Group Meetings

Seminars, round-table discussions, study groups, and technical conferences are based not so much on the presentation to large audiences of written papers, as on free-ranging discussion among a number of participants. Again, it is important to select a team of interpreters suitable for the meeting's work load, subject, and language combinations. As always, this is best done through advance consultation with a competent and experienced interpreter. Proper physical facilities are as essential here as elsewhere (*see* Chapter IV).

E. Intra-Canadian Users

In Canada, there is a wide range of meetings which do not quite fall into either the congress or the working-group category. They include political rallies, with platform speeches by politicians; panel discussions before a large or small audience; lectures accompanied by slides or films and sometimes followed by public discussion;

sales-promotion conventions with their three-ring-circus hoopla; meetings of labour unions, local, provincial, or national; and the different meetings called by a wide variety of national associations—medical and scientific societies, as well as legal, political, social, and trade groups. Finally, interpretation is sometimes required at labour-management negotiations, company press conferences, or meetings of various boards. In each case, it is important to have a realistic assessment made of the actual circumstances and needs. Which speakers, in what languages, will have to be interpreted for what audience? How many members of the audience will not understand one or more of the languages spoken at the meeting, and which ones? Only too often the organizers just think about getting a couple of interpreters and a lot of headsets and they end up with an inefficient service, with improperly selected and inadequately briefed interpreters, which is either wastefully costly or self-defeatingly cheap.

Finally, interpretation is occasionally used for purposes other than meetings: for radio or television programmes, in courts of law or arbitration proceedings, or in escorting foreign delegations. Since the possible arrangements are multiple and flexible (especially in television, where tie-in is important, and technique has great visual and emotional impact so that new approaches are constantly being worked out), it is advisable that the persons responsible be familiar with the relative merits and disadvantages of the various practicable forms of interpretation and installation.

This chapter has dealt with the various ways in which interpretation may be used as a tool of communication. There is, however, an incidental marginal benefit which might be mentioned: namely, the possible didactic value of the service. In the United Nations, many an English- or French-speaking delegate has picked up a smattering of Spanish or Russian simply by listening to the interpreters while the familiar speeches drone on. At Canadian meetings, it is surprising how often people will come up and say, "You know, I don't really need this earplug, I understand quite a bit of French, but it's a wonderful way of checking up on what I think I know," or they will hold out the little transistor set and remark "This is one way of practising my French!"

In this sense, interpretation not only helps to communicate; it teaches how to communicate. The University of Toronto Press (in a different context it is true) expressed in its brief to the Commission "optimism . . . concerning the prospect of improving the ability to communicate between Canadians whose mother tongue is French or English, through increasing frequency of contacts." Conference interpretation has a role to play here, although it would probably be excessively sanguine, at this point, to see it as self-liquidating even in the Canadian context!

It might, however, be interesting to investigate to what extent the bulk of Ottawa MP's, who have now had simultaneous interpretation for several years, have in fact been helped to feel more at home with French. In 1957, at a NATO meeting, Lester Pearson who was then

leader of the Opposition, mentioned in a private conversation that he was opposed to the then-contemplated introduction of simultaneous interpretation in the House. It would just encourage English-speaking MP's to drop their erstwhile efforts to learn French, he said. To what extent has time borne out his initial assumption or invalidated it?

A. Criteria of Quality

Renowned interpreters, the high priests of the profession, are not averse to surrounding themselves with some of the awe that cloaks man's more occult pursuits. But interpretation is, of course, neither magic nor mystery. It is a tool, a tool that must restore instant communication whenever language places a barrier to direct understanding. Like any expensive and delicate instrument, it must be handled proficiently. To be at all good, it has to be very good; producing anything short of understanding can only amount to misunderstanding.

There is no half measure; and so, any compromise with quality merely defeats interpretation's purpose. Instead of a precise tool, the conference ends up with a plaything, a toy. Even in this field, a toy is occasionally called for; once in a while, a meeting wants only the current status symbol of "bilingualism." But, unless chosen deliberately for that purpose, a toy is a poor bargain and will not perform the work of the tool.

This particular tool has three elements, any one of which can, if defective, jeopardize the whole tool's usefulness. Although each element may and should be rated individually, the usefulness of interpretation for any given meeting must be judged as a whole. To be satisfactory, it must meet the overall tests of clarity, faithfulness, and smooth integration into the course of the meeting.

The listeners must be able to hear and to understand. Not only must the listening-sets be good and the volume and tone adjusted properly, but also the interpreters must communicate clearly and enunciate distinctly.

Faithfulness involves more than an accurate rendering of words. The interpreter must know not only the languages and the subject matter but also enough of the speaker's background to convey accurately his train of thought, and his mood and personality. Adequate qualifications and preparation as well as proper hearing facilities for the interpreter are thus involved.

Finally, good interpretation must not interfere with the proceedings. Because it is an inherently complex, and sometimes cumbersome service, it can have a disrupting effect on the meeting or prove distracting to the participants, if it is improperly planned or unskilfully handled. Of course it must not have this effect. With the proper experience and foresight, disruption can be avoided. Thus, there should be no technical or other hitches that interrupt the flow of the meeting. Good equipment and skilful technicians are essential. Soundproof booths are required, so that interpreters' voices do not flow into the conference room. Interpreters must not let their tone or pitch, pronunciation, hesitations, mannerisms—or nerves—distract listeners' attention from the subject. If, after a short period of getting used to the system, the participants are being helped to communicate spontaneously, naturally, almost without being aware of the intervening language barrier, then the service of interpretation is doing its job properly.

B. The Necessary Components

1. Qualified interpreters

Judging the quality of an interpreter's work is not easy for someone who is not already thoroughly familiar with the system. A casual listener or reader can more readily say whether, for instance, a journalist or broadcaster is doing his job well or poorly. But interpretation is a relatively new technique and involves the unfamiliar exercise of listening to a different language with each ear. If the listener does not know the language of the speaker, he cannot really say whether the interpretation is bad or whether the original speech is unclear. Even if he does happen to know both languages, his initial reaction is one of incredulity or amazement, for even a poor interpreter is more skilled at transposing one language into another than is the listener. It takes some time and encouragement, therefore, for the public to develop a critical ear. Thus the best guarantee of good performance is still acceptance by other interpreters in the light of the standards of professional practice developed by the interpreters themselves over the years.

An eminent interpreter at the Quai d'Orsay, Constantin Andronikof, puts the problem this way:

> [Il nous faut] prendre conscience de ce que nous sommes des linguistes, et non des polyglottes habiles à traduire des mots. Un linguiste, dans ce sens, c'est quelqu'un qui connaît non seulement les termes et leurs équivalents dans d'autres langues, mais encore les structures et les fonctions du langage, qui sait ce que parler veut dire, et pourquoi.
>
> L'interprète doit savoir suivre non seulement toute démarche du langage, mais encore tout cheminement de la pensée. Nous ne transposons pas des vocables, nous donnons une forme aux idées exprimées par autrui dans le génie d'une autre langue. Et si, dans telle

circonstance, nous nous y sentons incapables ou insuffisants, il faut nous l'interdire, comme nous l'interdirions à un débutant.[1]

a) Language proficiency: A, B and C ratings

Thus, as l'Association internationale des interprètes de conférence (AIIC) states in its study on the language classification of interpreters: "On n'est pas interprète en général, on est interprète pour certaines langues, dans certains sens linguistiques."[2] It is one of the cornerstones of professional practice, now universally accepted, that individual interpreters work into and from particular languages according to a system of ratings established by AIIC and already closely followed throughout the world. This classification defines the categories of professional practice undertaken by particular interpreters. The AIIC Yearbook, a membership list, rates as A, B, or C its members' qualifications in the active or passive languages they use at work. An "active" language is one into which a member interprets, and a "passive" language one into which a member does not interpret but of which he has a complete understanding and from which he interprets into his active language. The classification is:

A—the principal active language (or languages, when they are on exactly the same level);
B—other active languages;
C—passive languages.

And AIIC explains:

> . . . le travail d'un interprète en langue "A" est le plus aisé, le plus élégant et, pour l'usager, le plus convaincant ainsi que le plus agréable à écouter. . . . C'est presque toujours la langue que l'on appelle communément "maternelle." Cependant, cette notion de langue "maternelle" est difficile à utiliser dans une profession telle que celle des interprètes, qui ont souvent acquis plusieurs langues au cours de leur enfance, de leur adolescence et de leurs études.
>
> L'A.I.I.C. a donc opéré jusqu'ici au moyen de la notion "*sans se distinguer d'un autochtone*." Précisons tout de suite que "sans se distinguer d'un autochtone" ne se réfère pas uniquement à l'accent; il faut de plus que la construction soit idiomatique, que le débit soit aisé, il faut que la richesse des moyens d'expression corresponde à ce que l'on est en droit d'attendre d'un "autochtone" *cultivé*, qui a toujours parlé cette langue et qui a fait ses classes en cette langue.[3]

At the other end of the scale, "C", or the passive language, fully understood but not necessarily spoken, also presents a clear-cut case. But it is the category "B" in between that is a more troublesome one to define, for it covers a whole range of possibilities. These are the languages that do not quite measure up to "A" standards, that is, they are distinguishable from the speech of an educated native-born person, but still the interpreter can use them fluently. A reputable interpreter will not agree to interpret into

his "B" language at an exacting meeting, although he may very well work into it in consecutive interpretation or, occasionally at easier meetings, in simultaneous interpretation.

Because of the essential stringency of the necessary language qualifications, few interpreters use more than three or four languages at work, and few have more than one A (about 20 per cent have two A's while only 3 out of AIIC's 444 members in 1962 had three A's).

b) Recruitment related to language "ways"[4]

A corollary is that at multilingual conferences, the number of interpreters required rises steeply. Where three languages are used, there are six language combinations or "ways." With four languages, there are twelve language ways, four times three. With five languages there are no fewer than twenty language combinations and that makes the translation operation highly complex. Because it is difficult and indeed sometimes impossible to find a team of interpreters who can cover all those twenty ways directly, the unusual language combinations are covered by the relay system (for instance a French interpreter who does not understand German, interprets a German speech not from the original, but in relay from what he hears his English or Spanish colleague saying). This is a disagreeable and often perilous procedure, to be used only as a last resort. Ideally, therefore, at multilingual meetings the team should consist of N multiplied by N - 1 interpreters, where N represents the number of languages used at the conference. In Europe, AIIC follows a complicated system of *grandes et petites équipes* to meet the problem of language ways. In the Americas, the current practice is to recruit a minimum of two to three interpreters per language in such cases.

However, it is not always essential to equate the number of languages spoken at a conference with the number of languages into which interpretation is provided. A new trend is developing, based on a recognition of the need to allow people to speak their own language as often as possible, coupled with the increasing comprehension of several basic languages among the world's experts. Thus, a conference may determine which are the generally understood languages in its field; usually these will be chosen from among English, French, Spanish, German, or Russian. All that is said at the conference is interpreted into these chosen languages. However, speakers may also be allowed to use a certain number of additional languages, possibly including Dutch, Italian, Japanese, or Portuguese. Interpretation is then also provided from these languages into the selected basic languages. When it is established that these are understood by all the conference participants, as they often are, this solution offers certain advantages of economy and flexibility.

c) Work loads

In Canada, three- to five-language conferences are not very frequent. At a guess, 80 to 90 per cent of interpreters' working time here is spent at bilingual meetings (which only involve two language ways). After much trial and error, it has become established as a sound working rule that a normal day's work load at a bilingual

meeting requires a team of three interpreters if they are working in a single booth. Where the proportion of English and French is more or less evenly balanced, one of the interpreters should have an A rating in French, the other an A in English and, ideally, the third one an A in both English and French. This allows interpreters to relieve each other every 15 to 30 minutes.

A linguistically balanced meeting is, however, as unusual as an average man. It is therefore important to establish the actual proportion of English and French to be spoken, so as to form just the right team of interpreters. Recruiting the best possible team for each meeting is one of the more specialized aspects of the whole business, and one whose handling very definitely calls for sound advice by an experienced person.

d) Interpreting written texts

A question interpreters are frequently asked is: "But how can you keep up if the speaker is very fast?" Curiously enough this is seldom a major problem in itself. It *is* a problem to follow a muddled speaker, or one who cannot be heard clearly, or one who is talking on a subject the interpreter knows nothing about. Still, a brilliant fast speaker is often easier than a very slow and ponderous one. As long as the speaker is intelligible to his audience directly, the experienced and briefed interpreters can generally keep up.

But if any difficulty exists, it is compounded whenever a speaker reads a prepared text. Interpretation is geared to the kind of communication that occurs during speech; the translation of written texts should, ideally, be written. The thought process is different in the two instances and so is the vehicle of communication. In writing, the subject is carefully thought out and precisely drafted; there are fewer words, they are used more meaningfully, the sentence structure and style are apt to be more involved and also more literary. The writer has taken pains over his draft, moving a sentence here and changing a word there. Instead of putting his thought into words as he goes along and addressing his listeners directly (however brilliant and fluent and articulate a speaker may be, an interpreter's brain waves have a chance of flowing along the circuit at the same rate) the speaker who *reads* his message conveys it in a more remote, condensed, and linear form; and it is far more touch-and-go whether the interpreter will manage to take in and convey all he is hearing for the first time, without leaving gaps or making mistakes. That will depend on a number of factors: mainly the subject matter, its complexity, and the rate and clearness of delivery. It is one of the unfortunate facts of life that written texts are almost invariably read out faster and more colourlessly than if they were spoken. Hence they are that much harder to follow and understand.

To guard against this, it is sound practice for scientific and technical congresses to place a word limit rather than a time limit upon papers to be presented by the participants. Otherwise a speaker may be tempted to cram twice as many words as reasonable into the ten or twenty minutes allotted to him—with unfortunate results for his

audience, especially for those of his listeners who are not altogether familiar with his language.

For all the above reasons it is unfair to expect an interpreter to do a first-rate job of interpreting a complex written text he has never seen before. If the speaker has gone to the trouble of writing out his text, and wants full justice done to it, he should get it translated in advance, also in writing. Otherwise, he should see to it that his interpreters get a chance to study the text *before* the meeting at which it is to be delivered, in order to become acquainted with the train of thought and particularly to look up any scientific, technical, or unusual details or terminology. Being handed a written text just as the speech is about to begin is worse than useless: trying to listen, to read, to understand, and to speak intelligibly all at the same time is unlikely to be a successful exercise. In fact, few good interpreters like to follow a written text while they are interpreting; even if they have studied the text in advance, their work is likely to be better if they concentrate on listening once the actual moment comes.

AIIC writes on this subject: "L'expérience prouve que l'on ne rappelle jamais assez que l'interprétation simultanée ne doit pas être confondue avec une sorte de traduction à vue: un traducteur lit *puis* écrit: son rythme de travail, fonction de la difficulté du texte, varie entre 100 et 500 mots à l'heure; l'interprète doit écouter et parler *simultanément*: il doit travailler à la vitesse à laquelle parle l'orateur: 6,000 à 8,000 mots par heure."[5]

Incidentally, it is in this context interesting to note the comparative work loads handled by the two sister professions, interpreting and translating:

> D. Seleskovitch a calculé que dans l'hypothèse d'une séance de sept heures (dont six en moyenne seraient consacrées à la parole) en "grande équipe" [3 interprètes pour 2 langues] chaque interprète effectue 33% du travail, donc 2 heures. À environ 120 mots par minute, il fait 14,500 mots. Si le traducteur, à journée égale, compose entre 6 et 7 pages, il fait de 1,500 à 1,750 mots. Donc, en mots, l'interprète travaille 7 à 8 fois plus que le traducteur. Cela n'enlève rien à celui-ci, mais précise l'intensité du labeur de celui-là, sans compter les autres facteurs.[6]

This calculation also throws light on why it is impossible to expect off the cuff interpretation of a written text to equal a good translation in accuracy and style. On the other hand, in practice, interpreters are sometimes handed a prepared translation of a speech, which unfortunately turns out to be a poor translation, unidiomatic or inaccurate; but a good interpreter should normally have no difficulty in correcting such shortcomings for the live audience as he goes along.

Ironically enough, it sometimes happens that, impressed by all the above dire warnings, a scientific congress will ask its speakers on no account to stray from the written texts they have submitted for study to the interpreters. Consequently before long a distinguished

university professor, much used to lecturing, gets up and querulously announces he is being forced to read a paper rather than speak on his subject. An unhappy confusion. The interpreters much prefer coping with extemporaneous speech rather than labouring over a written text. If the subject is abstruse, they will greatly appreciate being given a chance to study the lecturer's notes in advance, or some bibliographical references. But it is only if a speaker insists on reading his text that he must, in his own interest, make sure it is supplied to the interpreters well in advance. (A specimen letter to conference participants, covering the above points, is reproduced in Appendix F.)

e) Preparatory documentation and briefing

It is assumed, in what follows, that the interpreters have the necessary aptitudes, educational background, training, and other prerequisites mentioned in Chapter VII. But however well educated, qualified, and experienced they may be, they will need to do a certain amount of study and preparation for the great variety and range of conferences they will be dealing with. For instance, during the drafting of this study, the author has worked in areas as diverse as general economics, politics, and current affairs, interspersed with the following specialized subjects: stomatology, air-traffic control and telecommunications, anaesthesiology, right-of-way legislation, medical research in a variety of fields, criminology, the lumber and pulp industry, psychiatry, computers and information processing, book publishing, and architecture (at both Canadian and worldwide meetings). Different degrees of preparation are of course required for different conferences. For some, the interpreter has to study textbooks and manuals in advance, preferably in the two or three languages involved; in such cases a two-day period of briefing is also required to prepare papers and consult specialists suggested by the meeting. But even at best, when the subject and terminology are already familiar, the interpreter will need to refresh his memory, to review the subject and the vocabulary, possibly to find out about the background of the organization, to become familiar with the names of the participants, and also preferably to read related material in his own active language to get into the spirit of the thing.

From past experience, the following documentation should be provided in advance: in all cases, a detailed programme of the meeting indicating speakers and subjects; and, as required, a list of the participants, the constitution and by-laws of the organization as well as any financial or statistical reports, and background material for technical and scientific subjects; also, invariably of course, any written texts to be read out. Experience shows that both organizers and participants are never sufficiently informed, reminded, and hounded about these requirements.

So far, interpreters have tended to specialize essentially by language. Thus, they have promoted uniformity in, and recognition of, a standard language classification system, as explained earlier. On the other hand, it has been taken for granted that a top-flight interpreter has, or should have, the ability to cope with the most

diverse range of subjects that come his way. However, the best interpreters are themselves gradually coming to realize the limitations of such versatility. They are beginning to look towards the day when subject-specialization will become part of their accreditation system. At present, it is only after some years of more or less painful trial and error that we individually discover which are the subjects and types of conferences we ourselves lean towards, or away from; and which of our colleagues are especially good—or especially hopeless—in given fields as diverse as, for example, business and finance, the physical sciences, technology, law and politics, the medical and biological sciences, or the arts.

Members of AIIC and TAALS (The American Association of Language Specialists), it is true, bind themselves under the *Code of Professional Conduct* to "refrain from accepting conference engagements they do not feel qualified to undertake."[7] But of course self-criticism takes some years to develop; and it is optimistic to hope that the eager beginner or the veteran plodder will have sufficient self-knowledge, self-assurance, or financial independence to search his soul about an attractive offer when it comes his way. In the past, interpreters have been few enough for news of fame and blame to travel rapidly, and thus they have tended to be reasonably familiar with their colleagues' subject qualifications. With the expansion of the profession in recent years, and the growing complexity of specialized conferences, both interpreters and (especially) conference organizers need a more objective system reflecting not only language proficiency but also subject specialization.

Meantime, it is up to conference organizers to keep their ears open for any outstanding interpreters they may have the luck to come across in their particular line of duty, and to cultivate them for the rare birds they are—remembering however that no matter how well versed the interpreters are, it still pays to brief and document them properly before each meeting.

f) Film showings

Films shown during a meeting present a special problem, if they are to be interpreted. The difficulties arise out of the split-second timing involved, the presence of background music which tends to make the words less intelligible, and frequently the poor quality of sound. For these reasons, if interpretation is really required, special precautions need to be taken:

1) The sound engineers must see to it beforehand that the soundtrack output is directly connected to the interpreter's earphones. Distortion and projector noise are magnified if a room microphone is merely put near the projector's loudspeaker.
2) The interpreter should preview the film before the actual screening, and he should be supplied with the written script if at all possible. In fact, interpreting a film is apt to be almost as laborious as dubbing if it is to be at all satisfactory.

g) Taping of proceedings

It will be clear from all the above that, while interpretation may

be perfectly intelligible when listened to—since tone and inflexion may make up for many liberties with syntax—it is likely to be disappointing when transcribed to serve as a record or translation of the proceedings. Using interpretation in this way is, therefore, apt to be of dubious value; but, if really necessary, special arrangements may be made at the discretion of the interpreter. A transcript of the interpretation will usually need editing, and the interpreter may be ready to undertake this service himself. Such editorial work is currently being carried out by the Ottawa parliamentary interpreters for the debates published in Hansard; and its incidental benefit is that it helps interpreters keep a running check on the quality of their work. However, since interpretation is essentially furnished for the convenience of participants at the meeting, should tape recordings be taken for other purposes, including broadcasting or press releases, they are considered to be an additional service, subject to a separate fee.

h) Identity of interpreters

In the international civil service, as in most national civil services, individual officials maintain a well-established tradition of anonymity; public credit or blame goes not to them, but to the responsible head of department, ministry, or government concerned. Interpreters on the permanent staffs of the United Nations and its various agencies have been shaped by this tradition; and, in their wake, anonymity has spread into the free-lance field. So, listening delegates see rows of nameless faces, lips mouthing silent words inside eerie glass-fronted aquaria—and can seldom identify a voice with a person otherwise than as male or female. And yet, since in the free-lance field the interpreter is his own master, hired under an isolated contract for short-term work and personally responsible for its quality, it is sheer anachronism to maintain the disembodied trappings of anonymity. As stated in the *Practical Guide*: "Whoever may be responsible for recruitment and team coordination, the individual interpreter retains full responsibility to the employer for his work (*see* Art. 3 of Professional Code of Ethics). It is in the interest of the employer and of all genuine conference interpreters that this responsibility should be clearly established and that everything be done to ensure that each interpreter can be identified in the course of his work. . . ."[8]

AIIC has passed resolutions urging its members to make sure, during each assignment, that their individual names are known not only to the conference organizers but can also be readily checked by the conference participants. In some cases, this is done by having the interpreters' names printed in the conference programme. However, since this is just one of the many details crammed into such a programme, here in Canada the practice of placing each interpreter's name on the booth in front of him has been gaining a foothold and seems to have much to recommend it. It is a powerful incentive to interpreters to do a good job, with the built-in reward of recognition; it is a protection to them against unqualified competition; and is one of the best ways a conference can safeguard itself against

incompetence in a field of work whose fleeting nature makes merit hard to assess.

2. Technical equipment

The second essential ingredient in satisfactory interpretation is good technical equipment, looked after by experts, working without a hitch, adjusted to the special requirements of each meeting.

a) Permanent installations

Permanent installations are invariably superior to portable systems. They alone can provide perfectly soundproof yet well-ventilated booths, a high quality of reception for both interpreters and delegates, and adequate standards of comfort and convenience for everyone involved. Unfortunately, there are as yet in Canada all too few conference rooms with adequate provision for such installations. The United Nations in New York and the State Department in Washington have conference rooms that are probably among the best equipped in the world, besides being spacious, soundproof, and air-conditioned. In Montreal, ICAO has several well-equipped rooms, and the University of Montreal has a small conference room it uses mainly for training purposes.

Montreal is fast becoming North America's second largest convention centre. Regrettably, none of the city's convention halls has permanent interpretation facilities. This compares unfavourably with the many less affluent countries of Europe and Latin America which offer splendid modern congress centres, equipped with an impressive range of highly sophisticated interpretation, projection, and visual-aids equipment. North American cities, geared mainly to large business conventions, unfortunately seem to pay less attention to the needs of scientific congresses. A timid attempt at installing permanent equipment was made when the Queen Elizabeth Hotel was being built. Unfortunately, no one with experience of interpretation was consulted early enough in the planning stage, before and during construction; by the time qualified advice was sought, it proved to be too late and too expensive to remodel the utterly unsuitable space provided. As a result, the many meetings that have used interpretation there every month for years have had to make do with portable equipment. Montreal's two newer and even more lavish convention centres, Place Bonaventure and the Château Champlain, similarly are content to offer the rudimentary facilities of rented portable equipment. Expo 67 took a few small steps in the right direction. The Administration Building's small auditorium had well-designed and integrated built-in facilities, including satisfactory booths; so did the French Pavilion with its two elegant little theatre-conference rooms. The Dupont Auditorium had a good electronic installation, but a pitifully ill-planned layout for the interpreters about whom the architects had failed to think when drawing the floor plan. All in all, this is not an impressive record for a city that prides itself on being a great bilingual and international crossroads.

b) Portable systems

In the absence of permanent equipment, portable systems have to be resorted to. They are leased out by a variety of private commercial enterprises and vary greatly in quality. These days, they are usually of the transistorized radio variety, so that delegates' earphones need not be wired. They are handier than the portable wired systems used even eight or ten years ago. Only two or three big companies in North America provide multichannel equipment for three or more languages; several smaller companies rent out single-channel equipment for two-language meetings. In every case, before signing a contract, conference organizers should make quite sure they are renting good equipment, looked after by competent technicians. Experienced interpreters can provide them with useful advice on this. In North America such advice is almost invariably impartial. While there is in principle no ethical objection to interpreters having a financial interest in an equipment company, in fact there has been a strong trend here (encouraged by the professional associations) for reputable interpreters to shy away from any such connections, in order to preserve complete independence towards companies as well as towards organizers and colleagues.

c) Requirements for an efficient service

AIIC is working out a full set of technical specifications for satisfactory interpretation equipment. Pending its publication, here are some basic pointers.

1) Audibility is essential. The sound reaching the interpreters through the earphones must be sufficiently loud, clear, and free from any kind of interference and distortion. Though it might not unduly worry casual listeners and delegates, poor sound impairs the hearing and concentration of interpreters and therefore is a considerable hindrance, if not an obstacle, to good interpretation.
2) The sound output (from booth to delegates) must also be carefully adjusted and controlled. Long stretches of listening through a "hearing aid" are a strain on delegates and every effort should be made to help them hear clearly. Public address systems are often incompatible with interpretation: their volume is set so loud that it drowns out whatever the interpreter is saying, and occasionally even causes feedback into the speaker's own microphone. A cause of frequent difficulty lies in the fact that the loudspeakers are generally controlled, not by the equipment company, but by hotel electricians, who know little about the needs of interpretation. A competent equipment company will know, however, how an obtrusive public address system may be toned down to the proper "sound-enhancement" level.
3) The sound engineers must make sure in advance of the meeting that the size and shape of the room are suitable for the required installation. This cannot be taken for granted. Sufficient microphones have to be arranged for, whenever there is to be general discussion or discussion from the floor. Compatibility of microphones and other components with equipment on the premises must

be checked. If the speakers are to show slides, demonstrations, or to use the blackboard, they will have to be provided with roving neck microphones — in advance rather than in the middle of the proceedings. Screens or blackboards should also be placed within sight of the interpreters in the booths.

4) Each of the rooms where interpretation is provided must have a good sound engineer on duty and on watch throughout the meeting. It is his responsibility to have the equipment checked and in proper working order from the very start of the meeting. He should also have adequate spare parts readily available in case of failure, should periodically check audibility levels, and should switch speakers' microphones on and off as needed (the interpreters are only responsible for the switching on and off of their own microphones). There must never be more than one microphone on at the same time in the conference room; otherwise there is both a reduction in sound intensity and a disturbing increase in background interference.

5) Interpretation booths must have: a clear view of speakers, slides, blackboards, and so on; sufficient space to seat at least two people in reasonable comfort, remembering the booths are intended for long periods of use by people whose work is strenuous and tense; adequate ventilation (a fan is seldom noiseless, and only moves the air around without actually ventilating); adequate soundproofing (unfortunately difficult to achieve in portable booths; it is extremely tiring for the interpreter to have to speak in an unnaturally low voice for long periods, and it is also very monotonous for the listener); easy access to the booths, so as to enable interpreters to replace each other without difficulty; access should preferably be independent so that interpreters do not have to go through the conference room; within the booth, individual volume controls for each interpreter's earphones, individual microphones with on-off switches, adequate light, controlled independently of room lights, sufficient table- and shelf-space for papers and notes, also water, glasses, paper, and pencils.

A reputable equipment company will be thoroughly familiar with these arrangements; but they should preferably be double-checked by the conference organizers and the chief interpreter. Coordination is thus advisable between them before the meeting. Further useful details on equipment and booths may be found in the *Practical Guide*.

3. *Forewarned conference organizers and participants*

Even with top-rated interpreters and equipment, things can still go wrong because of inadequate planning or insufficiently briefed participants.

As has been stressed above, conference organizers should have sufficient understanding of the workings and implications of the system, and should consult experienced interpreters well before the conference to plan ahead for all the services the meeting or conference is

likely to need, and to make sure these are properly integrated into a coherent whole.

At the start of any meeting, there are always likely to be a few persons unfamiliar with the system or unaware of it; it is therefore wise to have the chairman or one of the interpreters explain how it works. At round-table meetings, especially, participants should be reminded to speak into a microphone, to wait a second before starting to speak so that the technician has time to switch on the microphone, not to put their earphones close to a live mike or the whistle of feedback may startle the meeting, and to handle live microphones gingerly: a tap with a pipe or a cough is a head-splitting noise to the interpreters who generally need to have their earphone volume turned away up.

Since a meeting with interpretation requires a slightly higher degree of discipline than one without it, chairmen should be briefed ahead of time about practical points to watch.

Speakers may also be given a number of useful pointers to make sure they are communicating with their audience across the barrage of equipment they normally face nowadays. For instance, it still sometimes happens that communication is assumed to be a one-way affair. Earphones are only provided for presumed listeners. Then, all of a sudden, speakers or panel members find themselves left out in the cold when comments or questions are addressed to them in one of the other languages of the meeting. The resulting chaos and embarrassment could have been avoided by proper planning.

But North America is unhappily prone to a more serious failing. Conference organizers are usually generous to a fault about sparing no expense to provide interpretation for foreign delegations. Yet they are sometimes unaware that they go about it in a way that is almost sure to embarrass the foreign delegates, as if they were blamed for not having had the good grace or good sense to learn English. They may be herded together in a special corner of the room, the only area wired for the service; or pressure may be more or less tactfully exercised to encourage them to speak whatever English they possess. If they nevertheless still persist in speaking their own language, all kinds of disasters ensue. Their remarks may be perfectly interpreted into English by the available interpreters; possibly, sufficient listening-sets may even be available for all the English-speaking delegates; but no one has in fact warned them that these would be required, or how to use them. So, if a foreign delegate is important enough, pandemonium follows while everyone tries to find and fiddle with a listening-set. And even at best, the delegate will be faced by the embarrassment and inconvenience of having to repeat his remarks all over again. At worst, he will suffer the indignity of having no one apparently care to find out what he is talking about. This kind of thing has actually been known to happen at meetings designed to promote international goodwill and understanding! In Canada, since the advent of the bicultural era, such incidents are unlikely to recur; but there are surely French Canadians with memories of similar experiences still present in their minds.

To prevent major and minor mishaps of this and other kinds, it is necessary to dovetail interpretation requirements with the general working arrangements of the meeting. This is normally the responsibility of the chief interpreter or the interpreting consultant engaged to organize this service.

In his Report to AIIC's 1963 Assembly, its then president, Constantin Andronikof, neatly summed up the various requirements mentioned in this chapter:

> Malgré tout ce que nous en disons, la profession reste mal connue, peu comprise, insuffisamment appréciée. D'abord, parce qu'elle est trop souvent mal exercée. Ensuite, parce que les délégués et les organisateurs ne parlent ni n'organisent pas toujours bien.
>
> L'incompétence fréquente des interprètes ne doit pas nous faire négliger celle, non moins fréquente, de ceux-là. La qualité de la prestation dépend de ces deux facteurs, encore qu'à des degrés divers. Il appartient à l'A.I.I.C. d'éduquer le monde des conférences, y compris certaines organisations inter-gouvernementales, dans l'intérêt de la profession autant que dans celui de la coopération internationale, que l'article premier de nos Statuts nous impose de servir. Nos mémentos, nos règles techniques y visent. Le Code, qui nous lie, est net à cet égard.
>
> Mais il nous faut d'abord nous éduquer ou nous rééduquer nous-mêmes. Il nous faut exercer notre métier avec rigueur, nous interdire toute complaisance, tout à-peu-près.
>
> En outre, pour assumer à bon escient notre rôle, qui après tout, est public par définition, il convient de ne plus raser les murs et de sortir de l'anonymat auquel nous condamne la réclusion des cabines aux verres fumés, situées à une altitude abstraite, dont sortent souvent des voix impersonnelles, ânonnantes et désincarnées. On ne défend bien la qualité que lorsque l'on se sait en cause.

A. Historical Background

Interpreters have been known to claim, in unguarded moments, that theirs is the second oldest profession in the world. But interpretation in its present form is barely more venerable than the array of new specialties spawned by the cybernetic revolution. As a profession, interpretation is a descendant of the democratic process that led to popular franchise and to national self-determination; but it is also a sibling of the technical revolution that has, practically before our eyes, shrunk the world and made instant communication both possible and pressing.

Ever since semantic confusion presumably first developed around the Tower of Babel, interpreters of sorts, haphazard travellers, soldiers, merchants and noblemen, were pressed into the service of kings and generals, or of missionaries and envoys who had to venture into foreign lands.

But from time to time throughout history, successive civilizations saw the flowering of a lingua franca that helped exchanges, consolidated power, increased wealth, and promoted learning. After Greek and Phoenician, for instance, Latin knew two such periods of glory, while the latest full cycle could be seen in the use of French as the language of the courts and diplomacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Congress of Vienna, that glamorous precursor of many a later international gathering, had an edge over our more sophisticated multinational assemblies; it used French in all its proceedings. It was with the advent of popularly elected statesmen, such as Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George, not educated from early childhood to shoulder their countries' international responsibilities, that language problems began to complicate the multiplying network of international relations.

The 1919 Versailles Conference marked the beginning of an era. A generation of brilliant consecutive interpreters developed and performed in an aura of glory at the League of Nations.[1]

After the Second World War, the Nuremberg Trials launched another epoch, that of simultaneous interpretation, which has gained momentum since then. A series of factors made the moment ripe for innovation. Harried lawyers were searching for ways to lighten the burden of the trial's tiresome multilingual procedure; American technical inventiveness was stimulated by a primitive, trumpet-like system already used by the ILO before the war for whispered simultaneous interpretation; and eventually a Canadian ex-RAF bomber pilot, who was an audio engineer and happened to be working on radar research in England, was drawn into designing an intricate network of cable-connected microphones and earphones for the unprecedented and mystery-shrouded job. A scattering of prewar old-guard interpreters and a chance array of likely polyglots were thrown into a series of glass-fronted booths to cope as best they could with the first attempt at English-French-German-Russian simultaneous communication. Unbelievably, it worked.

The extent of the recent proliferation of multinational meetings is seldom realized. In 1858, two international conferences were held in Europe. In 1958, a count of official international meetings revealed that 1,452 such meetings had been held in 26 European and North American countries, 17 Latin American countries, 20 African countries, and 18 Asian and South Pacific countries.[2] Barely half a decade later, some 120 countries are active in the international circuit; conferences held each year across the world well exceed 2,000—not counting the galloping number of informal meetings of which there is no official record.

B. How Interpreters Are Organized Today

Small wonder, then, that there has been a steady growth of demand for more and more conference interpreters. As late as 1958 they formed a small and select band of some 250 internationally recognized professional experts. By 1969 they numbered close to 800. In addition, there are probably twice as many practising interpreters throughout the world who do not belong to the two international associations that set standards for the profession: the prestigious, worldwide, Paris-based AIIC, and TAALS with headquarters in Washington.

Europe still has the largest concentration of interpreters in the world, as well as the longest experience in the field; North America is a close second; but interpretation is also taking root in other parts of the world. Latin America is in close touch with Europe and North America. On the other hand, the Soviet Union, and the Communist-bloc countries (Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and so on) are a world apart, but are trying out interesting new approaches to interpreter selection and training. Interpretation is also making headway in Asian countries such as India, Japan and mainland China. The Parliaments of Ceylon and Singapore introduced interpretation before the Canadian Parliament did in Ottawa.[3] Big conference centres are developing in cities such as Tokyo and New Delhi, but

despite the distances involved, interpreters there still tend to be recruited from Europe and North America. Teams of local interpreters will no doubt eventually become established on the spot. The many meetings in Africa and the Middle East still largely draw upon the European pool for their interpretation requirements.

1. *Worldwide*

All along, since the late 1940's when a professional association was first mooted, AIIC has been the pacesetter of the profession. It has promoted exacting standards of professional quality, so that belonging to the Association has tended to be a hallmark of recognition and standing, and is the best way an interpreter can choose to work anywhere in the world he wishes.

AIIC has so far been not a federation, but an association of individual members who set their policies at annual assemblies, and elect a council and an executive secretary to carry on their business in the interim. It has elaborated the *Code of Professional Conduct* (*see* Appendix E) which members bind themselves to follow; it sets minimum working conditions and fees; publishes a yearbook[4] listing members' names, addresses and language qualifications; and produces studies on subjects important to the profession—statistical data and market trends, evaluation of training methods and standards in schools of interpretation, rules for entry into the profession, standards of quality such as criteria for language classification, work load, fair treatment of members including non-discrimination, health and social security, and so on.

AIIC thus safeguards the interests of its members and also (in accordance with Article I of its constitution) provides conference interpreting with an international frame of reference; it assists international cooperation through guaranteeing the professional qualifications of its interpreters.

Among AIIC publications available upon request, the following are worth mentioning: a pamphlet offering professional guidance for would-be interpreters (*L'Interprète de conférence: son rôle, sa formation*)[5]; a series of reports and resolutions dealing with schools of interpretation; a study on the problems of language classification (DA/9/08); a study on occupational health in the profession; reports on developments in the profession and on market requirements and trends; and a pamphlet prepared for the Union of International Associations.[6] Also available are the latest AIIC and TAALS yearbooks, giving alphabetical and geographical listings of members.

2. *North America*

TAALS[7] is more a regional than a worldwide organization, and as such is particularly concerned with working conditions in the Americas; but it cooperates closely with AIIC.

For professional purposes, North America is generally regarded as a single entity; but in fact it consists of three main conference centres each with its own concentration of interpreters and its own

characteristics. The largest is the New York/Washington area, with about 100 professional interpreters, including the large permanent United Nations and American State Department nuclei and a sizable number of free lances. Next comes Montreal, with some 30 professional interpreters (most on the permanent staff of ICAO, with less than a dozen full free lances in 1969). In addition, there is a group of some 20 parliamentary interpreters in nearby Ottawa. Mexico City has the next largest concentration of interpreters; the precise number (apart from six AIIC members) is rather difficult to determine, as conditions seem to be fairly fluid, with largely unpredictable quality and performance.

3. Canada

Beyond serving as a centre for international conferences, Canada has also developed, largely owing to the Quebec *risorgimento*, a sizable intra-Canadian market for free-lance interpreting. Its special characteristics are described in Chapter VI. As regards organization, there is no separate Canadian interpreters' association, since AIIC and TAALS satisfactorily meet current professional needs. The Société canadienne des traducteurs et interprètes (STIC) does exist, it is true, but it predominantly groups translators, with only a few of the Ottawa interpreters belonging to its Ontario branch (ATIO).

Canadian interpreters should now begin to think about collecting some data on their work, so as to evaluate trends and gauge future requirements in Canada. Although statistics are collected by AIIC, they are worldwide and do not reflect the development of particular markets. Since Canada, as explained above, presents rather a special case, it would be quite enlightening, and not complicated, to gather information on geographical distribution of work, peak periods in the year, proportion of languages used, and so forth. This information would be of special significance in the future planning of interpreter-training programmes in this country.

The information in this chapter comes from personal experience. It is based on conditions in the late 1960's but goes back to the period, a decade or so ago, when free-lance interpreting in Canada was an amateur undertaking. An interpreter working alone, in appalling conditions and for a pittance, was expected to produce minor miracles. Since then the situation has improved though it is still far from perfect. This is an attempt to describe it the way one deals with a friend, where affection has withstood the test of time: with blunt and searching understanding.

A. Training

There has been a consistent shortage of qualified conference interpreters in Canada. This is not a specifically Canadian problem as good interpreters are everywhere in high demand and will probably continue to be scarce; but Canada is still lagging behind other countries in what is being done to remedy the shortage. The question of training competent interpreters, however, warrants a chapter to itself. (*See* Chapter VII.)

B. Appraisal of Quality: Audience Reactions

As has been explained elsewhere, interpretation is still relatively new in Canada, and people are not yet quite sure how to use it. Many regard it with slightly dazed wonder, like a circus feat: the fact that they wouldn't attempt to do it themselves removes it from the range of their critical judgement. Others, in a better position to evaluate its quality but who may have had an unfavourable experience or two, write it off as a valiant attempt of limited practical value, or as one of the more tedious ways of paying lip-service to Confederation. The point is that, even though its novelty has been wearing off, and even though the quality has been improving, by and large, as

interpreters acquire more experience and apply themselves to raising their own professional standards, there is only now beginning to emerge the kind of critical response that is essential to the provision of a satisfactory service. Several fairly regular users of interpretation, the CBC, some Royal Commissions, Expo 67 while it lasted, and one or two medical associations, have just begun to keep an eye cocked for interpretation that is effective, as distinct from that which is not, and are taking a gingerly interest in learning how to discover and secure good interpreters and reliable equipment. But the great majority still look upon interpretation as a gift of the gods, to be taken unquestioningly, with faith, hope, and charity.

The reaction of Canadians offers quite a contrast to that of Europeans, who have no compunction about bestowing praise or criticism where it is due (when they are the listeners); and about listening to determine whether the interpretation is doing its job, even if they don't need it (when they hold the purse-strings). This difference may be due in part to a psychological factor. The Frenchman generally regards it as a feather in his cap to know no language other than that of Racine and Sartre. The Englishman or Italian has no deep-seated guilt feelings about not understanding Spanish or German. On the other hand, in Canada these days the non-French-speaking majority especially, feel unhappy and a little ashamed about not being "bilingual." They hate to be seen at a meeting wearing earphones. Even the little white button and cord is a public admission of incompetence, a symbol to be self-conscious about, like a dunce's cap. A person who doesn't need it tends to treat it with remote superiority, and wouldn't be caught using one of the things (even Gallic curiosity succumbs to Anglo-Saxon one-upmanship). A person who does need it will go to all kinds of lengths to convince himself he can really get by without the gadget. It therefore takes quite a conscious effort to overcome what is an often unconscious resistance, a reluctance that only disappears once a group of people have become confident they are truly being helped to communicate better.

C. Differences between French and English Speakers and Audiences

There is also another inherently Canadian difficulty that has made it more complicated for the uninitiated to evaluate interpretation. It is the different make-up of both speakers and audiences. In the mid-1950's the problem arose in relatively simple terms. A few organizations were just beginning to explore the possibilities of a new device to improve their meetings. The so-called international labour unions realized that a good proportion of their Quebec members did not understand the speeches that labour leaders from outside Quebec came to deliver at Quebec meetings; several associations of medical specialists launched an effort to attract more French Canadian doctors into their ranks; a few companies discovered they made better sales in Quebec when they pepped up their distributors in French; and they all turned to the wonderful new gadget just appearing

on the market, whereby everybody at the big conventions might be made happy. Everyone could of course just go on speaking English as always: but even the "little guys" from Rimouski and Trois Pistoles would be given a chance to follow.

Then, what with one thing and another in the province, a curious new trend began to develop. More and more of the educated French Canadians, the ones who make speeches at meetings and who, as everybody knows, speak perfectly good English, started choosing to speak in French. As late as 1958 or even 1960, I fail to remember any instance of a French Canadian addressing his substantive remarks to an English Canadian or a mixed audience in anything but English. The last instance I recall of an active effort to discourage French Canadians from addressing a Toronto audience in French (even though simultaneous interpretation was actually there for the using) was at a meeting of the Canadian Association of Mayors and Municipalities in 1962.

A striking picture of the extent of change takes me back to the first labour meeting I ever attended, some ten years ago. It was an educational seminar for union organizers, a weekend meeting held in the Laurentians. French was mainly spoken outside the conference hall. All the talks were given by English-speaking officers or guest speakers, often from outside Quebec. A quarter or less of the French Canadian audience of 30 to 50 *syndicalistes* listened through the interpretation (when the primitive, homemade system used then did not break down). Today, I am writing these lines in the Laurentians, again at a union seminar where I see many of the same faces around me. The meeting is bigger; the equipment is better; the direct, sturdy, human companionship is the same; but practically everything happens to be going on in French. In a group of 100-odd, perhaps four or five follow the proceedings through interpretation and speak English when they have comments to make.

The change has happened imperceptibly; this is not a conscious, deliberate, nationalistic choice. The people's main concerns are practical, economic, not intellectual; nor are they trying to "ride the wave." Quite simply, the air they breathe is different; and they are responding to a strong and genuine need within themselves that lay latent a scant decade ago.

The new trend has had a curious effect on simultaneous interpretation from and into Canada's two official languages. When an English speaker addresses an audience of Canadians some of whom do not understand English, the chances are that at best, he is helpless at making himself understood by everyone in the audience, and at worst, indifferent to it. He has to rely on the interpretation. If it is good, so much the better. If it is bad, he has no way of knowing; and besides, it doesn't matter too much. The Rimouski boys aren't likely to notice, and even if they do, they aren't too likely to complain. As to the new young breed of French Canadian professionals (who increasingly rely on French in their work, and are taking a fresh delight in it) they have no difficulty in understanding the English part of the proceedings, and are too busy with the subject at hand,

to bother checking on the interpretation.

Something quite different happens when a French speaker addresses a mixed audience. The chances are he will soon find out if his English-speaking audience hasn't been following him. All his opposite numbers—the big shots, the ministers, the company presidents—are completely at the mercy of the interpretation. And most of the time he isn't in the least helpless: he can ignore the interpreters and turn around and explain whatever the French failed to convey in extremely competent English.

The point still often overlooked, however, is the extent to which it is unfair to expect a speaker to impress an audience in quite the same way, when he is forced to use a language other than his own, as he could do by using his own. Ease, fluency, fire, brilliance, anger, wit, irony, competence are all impeded by a tinge of accent or even a tiny effort at finding the right words; and if the foreign accent or syntax is marked, if the speech is laboured, the image of the speaker in the audience's eye may be quite distorted—quaintness may overshadow even outstanding eloquence, cultivation, or conviction. This is perhaps yet another of the many factors that have, over the years, reinforced in English Canadian minds, the myth of the alleged singularity of the French Canadian educational system.

The interpreter's role, then, is to convey not only the speaker's meaning, but also his tone and personality to the members of the audience. They must sense the message as if they were getting it directly from the speaker. In fact, they already have the advantage of seeing the speaker perform at his best, and they can, to some extent, hear him directly. The interpretation is there to help them understand fully what he is saying and how; and this combination of conscious and subliminal messages should project the impact of the speaker's personality and his full meaning more clearly, more genuinely, than if he were speaking a second-best language. Ideally, of course, this presupposes great receptiveness of mind in the interpreter, a knowledge of the speaker's background, a ready grasp of his ideas, an ability to tune into his mood and emphasis, as well as qualities of speech not too far removed from his own. The touchstone will be this: did English listeners manage, through the interpretation, to get a fuller, more spontaneous understanding of, say René Lévesque, than he would have conveyed had he been speaking English rather than French? This is no mean criterion to have to meet; but anything less surely misses the point.

Since 1960, there has been a marked trend in Quebec to use French increasingly in public; and there has been a tendency to rely more and more on competent interpretation from and into the two languages. In the other provinces, however, in which interpretation is now gradually spreading, the situation tends to be similar to what it was several years ago in Quebec. The bulk of interpretation is into French, with quality fairly low on the priority list; while whatever little interpretation there is into English may not fall far short of perfection.

For instance, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons is a national body that generally did not provide interpretation at its meetings outside Quebec; but it decided to do so at an annual three-day meeting in Toronto in 1965. However, of the 40-odd scientific papers, all but three or four were delivered in English. The French interpreters (good ones) were overworked, yet no one seemed to be listening to them. Even if one or two people in the huge audience did depend on the interpretation, it never occurred to them to come up to the booth and say so. Being human, interpreters will often work hardest and best just for the benefit of a single delegate, provided they know he relies on them. On the other hand, they don't particularly enjoy working just to keep the air moving. So, at the meeting in question, the French interpretation tended to fall below par a good deal of the time; and I can well imagine a French-speaking doctor, shortly before his turn to deliver a paper, picking up some earphones to see whether the interpretation was any good, and, failing to appreciate the rendering of the scientific information being conveyed at that particular point, proceeding thereupon to deliver his paper in English. Then when the time came for the odd French paper to be delivered, probably three-quarters of the audience didn't even have earphones to listen, so the fact that the interpretation happened to be competent was largely academic, and must have left the speakers as frustrated as the interpreters.

A special kind of experience often tops off this kind of meeting. The interpreters are silently chewing themselves up for having done a miserable job. Unfailingly, at that moment, some well-meaning, innocent soul rushes up. Dazzled by the long, steady flow of foreign sounds, he cannot restrain his admiration: "I just don't know how you do it!"

Such maverick encouragement is by no means uncommon. On its strength, many a would-be interpreter, his flagging spirits revived, has fiercely determined to cling to a profession for which he was signally unsuited.

The remedy, of course, is to be rigorous in assessing the need for interpretation—where there is no need, it is likely to be bad and therefore worse than useless; but if interpretation is used, make sure that all the conditions, as outlined in Chapter IV, are fulfilled, so it can perform the job of communication properly.

D. The Mirage of Equilingualism

Another result of the relative Canadian inexperience with the tool of interpretation and the lack of critical assessment of its performance, is the common assumption that an interpreter is like a tape recorder: you feed something in, press the right buttons, and out come the sounds in English, French, or whatever language may be needed. Actually, computers are now being developed that may one day manage to do this job—but for the time being we have to depend on the transistors and electronic circuits in the human brain which as yet

does not lend itself to this kind of programming. As explained in Chapter IV, interpreters work with their active and passive languages according to a stringent classification; and even those who work with just two (and the two best known throughout the world, English and French), rarely have an identical level of proficiency in both. This is not a constant pattern, imprinted upon the brain for all time, but depends a great deal upon environment, use, and even immediate circumstances. Proficiency in both active and passive languages is improved through use; but the degree of proficiency interpreters need in their active languages in particular, must measure up to standards much more exacting than for current conversation or communication. Achieving such proficiency is something of a feat; maintaining it, or not allowing it to deteriorate, is another.

Curiously enough, this is especially so in bilingual or multilingual countries. Everyday use of more than one language seldom does much for the purity of either. Familiarity may not breed contempt, but it does blunt sensibility. Respect for language may never be a very common phenomenon; but in bilingual countries it seems to fall to the lot of tiny groups of belligerent, dedicated people.

Thus, in countries like Canada, most people just take it for granted that anyone "bilingual" operates both ways with equal ease and at all levels of complexity. Current conversational bilingualism is used to judge working standards of proficiency. Every other day or so, the Montreal *Gazette* blithely carries advertisements for girl Fridays who will translate publicity material as well as more abstruse texts "from English into French and French into English" for such unsuspecting employers as, for example, manufacturers of pharmaceutical products. Perhaps if one of the languages involved were more esoteric (say Japanese or Urdu) "equilingualism" would less happily be taken for granted.[1]

But, as it is, this common attitude also trickles through into fields of activity where it represents a threat. Conference interpretation is one of these: as explained earlier, there is no room in it for complacency about language. Too many French-speaking interpreters in Canada unhesitatingly interpret into English as well (the opposite practice is not as widespread in North America, for reasons mentioned below). Too few interpreters are intransigent about the standards of their active language or languages. Too few listeners bother to distinguish good work from poor. The result is much drab mediocrity in a job where this is, by definition, self-defeating. Of course an interpreter can work into his second-best language, and can often get by. As long as he is dealing with commonplaces, things go swimmingly. Then, something more demanding comes up—difficult working conditions, or a finely reasoned argument, the rare speaker who manages to combine wit and elegance, or has a rapid-fire delivery, or uses the thin edge of irony—and the interpreter is left floundering far behind, unable to relay both the sense and the form. This is fair to neither speaker nor audience; in fact it is not interpretation.

There is, of course, a practical problem involved. Particularly in Canada, where two-language meetings are the rule, interpreters having an A rating in both English and French have a distinct edge over their colleagues with only one of the two, and are of course, likely to have more work. This is a strong (and perfectly justifiable) enticement to Canadian interpreters to try to become equilingual. But in practice, looking at those interpreters in Canada who can truly boast of having an active command over both the official languages (and they are, comparatively, but a handful) one should not overlook the fact that most if not all of them perfected their second language by living or studying abroad: in France, or in England or the United States.

However, a point not to be glossed over still remains. What are we to do when interpreters raised outside Quebec are confronted by the rich colloquial expressions, the broad accent, that are still very occasionally heard in public in this country? On that subject, the Chief Parliamentary Interpreter Raymond Robichaud writes:

> Originally ... it was all very well to have French-Canadian Members [of Parliament] interpreted into impeccable English with the proper accent, but it was quite another matter to have the interpreter actually say in English what was being said in French. What is preferable? To have a speech on some local Quebec problem inaccurately interpreted into flawless and idiomatic English or rendered, with almost perfect accuracy, in poorer, though adequate English with a slight French-Canadian accent?[2]

No one will hesitate to place accuracy ahead of diction. The problem does, however, point up a real, if geographically circumscribed, weakness in the present language classification system. Perhaps what is needed is some supplementary rating, such as: French (Quebec) or English (southern United States)?

As was earlier pointed out, having or achieving a necessary language proficiency is one thing, but maintaining it is another. Especially so in an environment that only intermittently pays any attention to this point; and all the more particularly in North America with its huge imbalance between the amount of English in use as compared to French.

No less than translators, no less than writers, interpreters need living roots for their active languages; and in volume alone, even in Quebec in the mid-1960's, not to mention the rest of the Western hemisphere, there is less authentic French than authentic English to draw upon "live", in every field, from books, magazine ads, shop labels and mass media, to scientific papers at learned society meetings. In other words, surrounded by this sea of Englishness, French interpreters will, after a time, acquire English with little effort, and come to consider it as one of their active languages. Short of consciously applying themselves to the task, English interpreters will never, in a largely English-speaking setting, acquire French in this way. (Incidentally, this is a field where achievement is often inversely proportional to effort, however immoral this may sound.)

On the other hand, English interpreters have the current running in their favour as far as their standards are concerned: there is no dearth of material around them to keep abreast of the latest turns of current literary or scientific language. By contrast, French interpreters have more of an uphill battle to face; they have to be infinitely more intransigent about not allowing their French to be contaminated by the English that is constantly used around them; they have to dig deeper to keep up-to-date; and they are seldom helped by their French Canadian audiences who do not provide the incentive of being discriminating, that is both demanding and appreciative.

It follows from all the above, therefore, that there is need, in Canada, for a better understanding of, and greater respect for, the difference between an interpreter's active and passive languages. But even at best, assuming utopian comprehension, an occasional practical problem remains: it is in practice extremely difficult to foresee accurately and unfailingly the actual proportion of English and French that will be spoken at a meeting. It may therefore occasionally happen that an interpreter has to help out an overworked colleague, and pinch-hit into a less-than-active language. Since this is a strenuous, and indeed generous, thing to do, the interpreter tends to pat himself on the back and regard his work as a splendid accomplishment, rather than recognize it for what it really is, a compromise, a lesser evil, acceptable only where its relative advantages clearly outweigh its inherent risks. The Canadian approach towards bilingualism encourages easy versatility. In interpretation, much more attention needs to be given to cultivating one-way excellence. This should especially be remembered when training future interpreters.

E. The Mountain of Cost

Here again, Canada is not unique in facing the problem of the inherently high cost of simultaneous interpretation. However (as compared to big international meetings where interpretation is but a fraction of the total costs incurred, and is often part of the largesse extended by the host country to foreign visitors) in Canada, interpretation often represents the largest slice in the organizing expenses of national meetings, and is a service imposed by the bilingual character of the country.

It happens, therefore, that some organizers of Canadian meetings think interpretation a luxury beyond their means. They occasionally try to cut costs by turning to bilingual students or employees, or even to translation firms or language schools. But the risks are high that such interpretation will fall short of usefulness. This is not very serious in the case of meetings that only require interpretation as window-dressing, a symbolic gesture towards French Canadian members who don't need it anyway (even though such conscience money, hardly trifling even at cut-rate prices, could have been used more constructively elsewhere). It is sadder in the case of meetings

where interpretation is really needed. Cheaper, substandard interpretation is no solution, however hard up an organization may be. Sometimes interpreters feel sufficiently at one with a cause to donate their services free (for example, to the Canadian Cancer Society, to the Voice of Women), but these are isolated instances. Parliamentary interpreters are also, on occasion, loaned free of charge to government-sponsored meetings. But in a country with two official languages, it is reasonable to suggest that the government might bear some responsibility for providing interpreters and possibly equipment, to national organizations that need the service but cannot get it for themselves (either because they cannot afford it, or because the demand exceeds the supply). In fact, some such assistance is already forthcoming either more or less directly, through CBC or Canada Council grants to specific meetings, or indirectly as in the form of tax relief to pharmaceutical companies that have financed interpretation facilities for medical meetings.

A very relevant point was raised at the Commission's Toronto hearings in 1965. One of the Commissioners, Royce Frith, asked the Canadian Book Publishers' Council (in connection with paragraph 5 of their brief) about the possibility of reducing the cost of translation in the future through training a larger number of talented translators. As explained in the reply, the problem lies not so much in a shortage of talented translators, as in a shortage of competent people willing to undertake the work, even at the apparently high rates offered. There is no point in trying to lower rates to levels paid for clerical work. This answer also applies to interpreters: while the law of supply and demand does have some relevance, the question basically is that of paying enough to attract or induce people of the right calibre to do this job, people who by definition are also in high demand in other fields and professions.

The emphasis here, as undoubtedly in many other areas, must be not so much on training translators and interpreters as on educating a great many well-rounded bilingual people. For whatever it may be worth, this limited practical evidence is adduced in support of sound education, including a working knowledge of more modern languages than one, geared to the growing demands and interrelationships of today's world. While it is doubtful whether widespread active bilingualism is feasible or indeed desirable, passive bilingualism should be an educational goal throughout the country. If enough well-educated people, able to understand both languages and to use one of them well, are produced in Canada, not only will there be less demand for translation and interpretation (which are crutches at best), but there will be a larger pool of talented people to draw upon—among writers, lawyers, journalists, researchers—for whom translation or interpretation might be a meaningful side-line or even an open door, providing a wide range of experience useful to any career.

A. Past and Present Trends

Conference interpreting requires certain inherent aptitudes: intelligence, quickness of mind, adaptability, empathy, a feeling for words, linguistic ability, clarity of expression, and a good dose of physical health and mental resilience. It also requires a number of acquired characteristics: a knowledge of languages, a well-trained mind, a broad store of knowledge, and a certain amount of experience and maturity. Finally, a good interpreter needs training and practice in the actual skills of interpreting.

All this may sound quite exacting. It is. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the fact that, out of the hundreds of would-be entrants into the profession each year, very few will actually become conference interpreters. One of the reasons is that a good interpreter has to have intellectual capacities not too far removed from those of the people for whom he is interpreting; and, for top-flight conferences, which all qualified interpreters are in theory supposed to be able to handle, the range becomes understandably narrow. At many, if not most, international meetings, a fair proportion of the world's best brains in any given field is likely to be present; consequently the overall standards of a profession which is essentially geared to international meetings must measure up to exceptionally exacting requirements.

Hence the paradox that, despite the limited openings available every year for new conference interpreters (at present about 50 a year throughout the world, including international organizations and the free-lance markets), and despite the enormous number of hopeful entrants into the profession, there is still an appreciable scarcity at the conference level where a high quality of service is required. Exacting employers are by no means enjoying an *embarras de richesse*.

However, it also happens that, in the complex mesh of today's affluent society, there are many meetings in addition to top-level ones. Practicability and cost are no longer major obstacles to solving business and other problems through travel and improved

methods of communication with people abroad. Such communication will often rely on conference interpretation, frequently of a fairly routine nature and requiring no more than average levels of talent and proficiency. It is clear, therefore, that there is room in the profession for more than just top-flight interpreters. This point is however not generally recognized as yet, and no intelligent way of coming to grips with it has been worked out within the profession or outside. It is somewhat analogous to the hassle, in another field, between general practitioners and specialists. How can the surgeon, in all fairness, treat patients for influenza, when the G.P. is expected to refer surgery cases to him?

Possibly somewhere at the root of the problem with interpreters lies the fact that, at the "specialist" level, they generally combine two contradictory traits: outstanding ability, and fairly low drive. If they combined high ability with high ambition, they would probably be sitting at the conference table instead of in the interpretation booth. Of course there do happen to be ambitious, aggressive people among interpreters too; and some get to the top, at times, in other professions than their own. But by and large, interpreting is an occupation in which aggressiveness is liable to be inversely proportional to talent, and seldom makes up for its absence. Hence, also, the amount of pent-up frustration characteristic of this way of life.

Since conference interpretation is such a relatively new phenomenon, the early days of amateur status and trial-and-error experimenting are still part of the experience of many present-day interpreters. Conditions have, in the meantime, changed; but it is still true that many of today's best interpreters have never had any formal training for their work: they had to discover all the hows and whys for themselves as they went along. They are mostly people who just happened to have the right combination of talents, were more or less accidentally drawn into a form of work that somehow evolved during the present century, and who gradually sharpened their skills to match new technical requirements. Working side by side with an intelligent, and preferably experienced, interpreter, is still one of the best ways of learning and improving one's skill. Indeed, this is a profession where the learning process never stops. Even old hands get something new out of every conference—perhaps no longer just improvements in working techniques, but always a broadening knowledge of the world and of the people around them.

Today, however, a new generation of bright young interpreters is more and more coming to the fore in Europe. A growing number of new entrants into the profession are not, as in the past, self-made, but have graduated from schools of interpretation, where experienced interpreters have helped to steer them along the right lines. For example, in the Sorbonne's École supérieure d'interprétation, a faculty of experienced practising interpreters helps today's students off to a wonderfully promising start by passing on to them the knowledge and experience it has taken years of practical work to acquire. This is done by carefully selecting those applicants who will have a chance to make the grade, giving them the necessary know-how and practical

training, in effect helping them to develop proven short-cuts, the handy conditioned reflexes that will give them time and leeway for the more difficult manoeuvring required by the original thought, the unexpected phrase, or the unaccustomed word. Students are also helped to recognize routine pitfalls and to avoid painful mistakes and unfortunate working habits; then, once they have qualified, they are sponsored professionally within the conference circuit. Nothing comparable is as yet happening in America.

A special feature of this profession is that, during an actual meeting, no special allowances can be made for a "beginner"; it is sink or swim from the first, and the neophyte interpreter has to be good enough to shoulder his own share of responsibility in the team with which he is working. Hence the usefulness of training, and above all the special importance of simulated practice, as well as, naturally, discrimination in grading the difficulty of the actual in-service experience a beginner can be given at first.

AIIC writes in its pamphlet on vocational guidance for would-be interpreters: "Mais le débutant devra se rappeler que le métier n'est pas moins exigeant pour lui que pour l'interprète aguerri. En effet, dès les premières séances, l'interprète doit faire la preuve de sa maîtrise, aptitude rarement exigée dès les premiers pas dans d'autres professions. Il est jugé chaque fois par un auditoire auquel il doit rendre pleinement le service pour lequel on fait appel à lui. Le débutant devra donc éviter de vouloir se 'lancer' à l'occasion de conférences trop difficiles pour lui."[1]

B. Getting Launched and Work Opportunities

This raises the question of how interpreters, beginners as well as veterans, are in fact recruited for free-lance assignments.

1) The big employers, mainly the UN agencies and other international organizations, have their own personnel departments, familiar with the AIIC and TAALS yearbooks that list professional interpreters alphabetically and geographically; and they also keep their own lists of free-lance interpreters whom they have found reliable and qualified. Because of the shortage of good interpreters, these agencies are very much on the lookout for promising beginners, and in fact often give them a certain amount of training. In North America, they offer the main opportunities for new recruits into the profession.
2) Otherwise, free-lance interpretation assignments are mainly a matter of contact between colleagues who are familiar with each other's qualifications, languages, and specialties. A few interpreters go in for "organizing"; they seek out information on future meetings, offer their services and if appointed as consultant or chief interpreter, get down to recruiting suitable teams. Except for big international meetings, however, this is a tedious and relatively unpopular task, and in fact, most conferences turn to a competent interpreter they happen to know and ask him in

turn to get in touch with suitable colleagues. If a conference has had no previous experience of interpretation, and knows of no sister organizations that have, it may ask for advice from the UN, the American State Department, ICAO in Montreal, or the University of Montreal. It is thus put in touch with interpreters who take it from there. To get work, therefore, it is crucial for a beginning interpreter to become known by his colleagues. Despite inevitable professional jealousies in a temperamental profession, true worth is still quite rare enough to be eagerly recognized. Not unexpectedly, however, flair, fine intentions, or high ambitions alone are meagre substitutes for competence.

C. Schools

As was mentioned above, there is a marked disproportion between the number of people who want to make a career of interpreting, and those who actually reach their goal. It is estimated that every year in Europe alone some 20,000 students are admitted into a vast number of more or less reputable schools of translation and interpretation. Perhaps 100 of these eventually get interpreters' "diplomas"; and some 20 of them will in fact become practising interpreters. This staggeringly low survival rate (which is not, of course, the same for all schools) has been one of the objects of AIIC's concern and study over some years. A series of factors has been diagnosed as causing this obviously unhealthy situation; and AIIC has sought remedies by promoting solid educational standards and conditions in schools of interpreting, and by giving official recognition to schools that meet its criteria and train "viable" interpreters.

1. Selection of applicants

One of the main reasons for the meagre ratio of successes in so many schools of interpreting is an inadequate selection of candidates. Few schools apply rigorous selection criteria and yet these are the only fair basis for offering applicants an honest course of interpreter training. Indeed, one of the best ways of gauging the merits of a school is to compare admission figures with the number of practising interpreters produced. By that acid test, most schools rate a batting average of one out of every 200 students or so; the Sorbonne school is reputed to do considerably better, with a success ratio of one in 10 to one in five. Comparable figures for the other schools recognized by AIIC are not available to the author but it is unlikely that they are higher; while the London Working Party which is not even a school in the current sense, tops the list with a score of over five in 10. (*See* Appendix B for details on this noteworthy experiment of some years' standing.)

Another factor accounting for the disproportion between school admissions and new entrants into the profession is that only very few people are aware of the rigours of conference interpreting proper. Quite frequently, for instance, parents of teen-age girls, casting

about for careers that will tide their daughters over till marriage (their main provisional interests being "languages" and "travel") tend to think of "interpreting" as a broad generic term covering the various forms of translation, escort interpretation, bilingual secretarial work, and publicity or public relations in business dealings with foreigners. There are, of course, a great many opportunities here for people with linguistic interests or abilities; but while it is perfectly legitimate to offer training for such jobs, it is a very questionable and unfortunately widespread practice to gild the lily by offering so-called interpretation courses. Commercial schools, which need a sizable enrolment to stay in business, are especially apt to do this, and few of the hopeful students are knowledgeable enough to distinguish between vague general training of this kind and the demanding type of instruction which conference interpreting (in the real sense) calls for. The genuine teaching of conference interpretation is not a profitable venture. To provide a well-prepared, well-balanced course of study at the proper level for a small group of rigorously preselected students seems to require the usual academic safeguards, as is shown by the fact that all the accredited schools of interpretation are attached to reputable universities. They are: l'École d'interprètes et de traducteurs de l'Institut des hautes études commerciales de Paris, l'École d'interprètes de l'Université de Genève, l'École supérieure d'interprètes et de traducteurs de l'Université de Paris, and the Dolmetscher Institut at Heidelberg University.

In a good academic setting, moreover, the teaching of interpretation seems to be yielding an unforeseen dividend: it is proving to be a valuable tool for original linguistic research, and it creates laboratory conditions of some interest to current philosophy and psychology. The probing of how interpreters' minds function at work is helping to bring out into the open, and to throw new light upon, the nature of certain instinctive or learned responses, reasoning processes, analytical patterns, and emotional triggers or reactions.

A word of caution may, however, still be in order here. Conference interpretation is an up-to-date, practical, and fairly fashionable pursuit; even highly reputable linguistics departments may be tempted to tie it into their curricula to lend them a dash of glamour or a glint of hard-cash realism. But shoddy conference interpretation, whether at the training or at the practical stage, is likely to do neither. Therefore, before undertaking to offer interpretation courses, a university or any other institution with a reputation at stake would do well to consider very carefully the various essential factors involved, in the light of the specific circumstances which differ from place to place.

Now, from the student's point of view, if, after having had buckets of cold water duly poured on him, a promising young North American still wants to become a conference interpreter, where should he turn for specific advice? Outstandingly qualified applicants may well find it worth their while to apply to the main institutions that, on this continent, employ interpreters and provide some form of

interpreter-training: the United Nations in New York, ICAO in Montreal, the Bureau for Translations and its Foreign Languages Division in the Department of the Secretary of State in Ottawa, and Language Services in the Department of State in Washington. The institution that has longest offered interpretation courses in North America is Georgetown University's Institute of Language and Linguistics in Washington, D.C. In Montreal, the University of Montreal's Department of Linguistics, which had been offering some interpreter training for a number of years, now gives an introductory course on conference interpretation to students working for an M.A. in translation. The course is organized by experienced conference interpreters and is eliciting a great deal of interest. A number of other institutions are, reportedly, studying the possibilities of launching interpreter training programmes. These include Carleton University, Ottawa, Laval University, Quebec, and Bard College, New York State. One would hope that, at the very least, the linguistics departments of Canadian universities will become better acquainted with current needs and opportunities in the field of conference interpretation, and will thus be able to give students realistic guidance including information on scholarship possibilities abroad, such as the fact that the University of Paris is already cooperating in bilateral exchange programmes of definite interest to Canadians.

2. *Admission standards and curricula*

While experienced interpreters have a pretty good pragmatic idea of the kind of person who is likely to do well at this job, more objective research would be beneficial on the aptitudes and prior qualifications a would-be interpreter needs *before* he starts training, if he is to have a reasonable chance of success. Some such research was being conducted a few years ago in England and Yugoslavia but as yet no data appear to have been published. Pending the elaboration of a more scientific approach, AIIC has described the necessary aptitudes in its *Guidance Material for Future Interpreters* (*see* Appendix A; also B, C and D). AIIC also organized, in December 1965, a symposium on the teaching of interpretation. (The proceedings are available from the Association's headquarters, 33 rue des Archives, Paris 4e.) This provided a first, and much needed, opportunity for a general exchange of views and experiences, and for a comparison of methods and results in the various existing schools.

On the basis of the growing amount of practical experience, a consensus seems to be emerging on a number of points related to admission standards and curricula. Initially, the tendency was to regard interpreters as specialized translators, and therefore to require them to go through a full translator training programme before embarking on interpreter training. It has turned out, however, that this discourages or frightens away many of the most promising interpreter trainees, who are by temperament ill-suited for such a course.[2] It is more and more widely recognized that interpreters are best trained independently in relatively short, very intensive courses given to carefully screened applicants. Such training should

be at the postgraduate level, that is, the applicants should have an M.A. degree or the equivalent, in economics, history, law, science, etc., but not necessarily nor even preferably, in languages. It is also increasingly stressed that teaching languages should be quite distinct from training in interpretation. Courses on interpretation are a poor substitute for sharpening the mind on a recognized discipline; and they amount to a costly and imperfect method of teaching languages. Ideally, short intensive interpretation courses should be offered to university-educated persons who already have a sufficient mastery of two or more languages, and seem to have the right aptitudes.

By the time a person looks for training to become an interpreter, it is at any rate too late to teach him an "A" language: he should have grown up in it and studied in it to have a chance of ever making the grade. "B" and "C" languages can still to some extent be acquired at this point, but instead of spending three or four years in language and other classes at an interpreters' school, an applicant would generally do better to go off for an intensive year's language study, preferably at a good university in the country whose language he is studying. Canadian interpreters are relatively lucky to have both English- and French-language universities right in their own country; but they would nevertheless occasionally benefit from a thoughtfully planned trip abroad to limber up their "A" language.

An interpreter's languages must be geared to existing market needs: there are certain language combinations which, though interesting in themselves, will not in the foreseeable future help an interpreter to earn his living. French-Italian-Spanish, for instance, may not get an interpreter a job in Canada in half-a-dozen years. To survive in the Canadian free-lance market, an interpreter must have an A rating in either English or French and preferably at least a B in the other; and, preferably also, at least one B or C in Spanish, Russian, German or Portuguese (in decreasing order of practical importance). For the time being, at any rate, no other languages would be paying propositions in the North American free-lance conference circuit, though the United Nations and the American State Department employ a limited number of Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and other interpreters on their permanent staffs.

In Europe, the market appears to be nearing saturation point for certain language combinations. An experienced interpreter and much respected teacher of interpretation, W. Keiser, puts it this way (November 1965):

> There are indeed still certain language combinations which are very much in demand even in Europe, such as real English "A's" with Russian or Spanish in addition to French; or, for the very important circuit of the European Common Market organizations, genuine French "A's" with Italian or Dutch in addition to German and English. On the other hand, *French*-English-Spanish and *German*-French-English are quite well covered . . . it being understood that outstanding conference interpreters will find work even in these language combinations.[3]

Obviously, schools of interpretation need to gear their training (and hence also their selection of applicants) to languages for which there will be an actual demand among employers.

The question, of course, then arises: what is the interpreters' school supposed to teach? Assuming the students have the natural aptitudes as well as the educated minds and the required language proficiency, the school should concentrate on teaching them the skills of rapid assimilation and accurate communication. It should also advise them about additional courses they may need to take in other faculties (for example, courses on economics, political institutions, international law, history, or even scientific or technical subjects) to supplement their previous education. In the interpreters' school the emphasis should be on developing mental grasp and agility, on creating an awareness of the thought processes involved in both direct oral communication, and communication across a language barrier—rather than on mechanistic transposition and automatic vocabulary drills, which produce unintelligent and often unintelligible reproduction of the original message. That is why the good European schools devote a great deal of time and energy to teaching consecutive interpretation first of all. This trains mind and memory in grasping the message, analysing it and only then in conveying it faithfully and clearly, as no amount of simultaneous interpretation can do. I was impressed, at the Sorbonne school, by the careful gradation of "consecutive" exercises in which the students' range of comprehension and skill is slowly built up; and by the passage over to simultaneous, with careful coverage of the various mental processes and practical skills involved, rather than the happy random hours of booth practice which are still the mainstay of the curriculum in far too many schools. "Ce qu'il faut leur apprendre surtout," one of the professors told me, bolstering this up by a series of vivid examples, "ce n'est pas comment rendre le terme, mais comment imaginer, vivre la situation." The results I had a chance to see were striking enough to make me wish I were back in school.

3. Contacts with practising interpreters

Apart from high admission standards, a factor in the success of the best schools is the close link they have with practising interpreters. Not only are these schools thoroughly familiar with the current demands of the work, but they have a feeling for how students respond and can also bring them into direct contact with the real thing by taking them to live conferences, and by training them on suitable, up-to-the-minute material which keeps the students on their toes. This is the only way to produce graduate interpreters who can perform on a par with many an experienced old hand.

It is not too long a process; depending on standards of admission, and the intensity of the course, a year down to as little as six months seems a reasonable average. The experience of the London Working Party is of special interest in this connection. (*See* Appendix B.)

Although interpretation is a profession that requires, from its

entrants, a certain range of knowledge and maturity of mind, it is far from kind to the mature in years. The physical and mental stresses are intense; they are only now beginning to be studied. It is also work which requires unusual alertness and stamina. A number of interpeters are coming to believe that their best years lie between the ages of approximately 25 and 45. This is therefore an excellent "gateway" profession, and may help give a head start to young reporters, writers, diplomats, lawyers, college teachers, scientists and artists. It combines quite well with certain other occupations, such as journalism, teaching, writing, translating—and even housewifery (married women interpreters are, according to at least one study, among the allegedly happiest and most stable members of this motley crowd).

Interpreting is thus at times an absorbing, challenging and exhilarating avocation, at others a murderously inhuman serfdom, whose frustrations have to be worked off in other creative directions. It is still young enough to be opening up new trails, and to provide ample material for further study and analysis. It still carries within itself unresolved paradoxes; evidence may be found in comparing for instance, the suave remark of a past AIIC president: "Notre métier . . . nous offre une diversité d'informations et une ampleur d'expériences humaines sans pareil," with a series of less circumspect statements reported by *Newsweek* (March 15, 1965) which led to some anguished yelps and a flurry of denials.

But above the din and the music, it still remains true that interpretation is a tool of vast potential usefulness; and that, in a bilingual country such as Canada, wider familiarity with the prerequisites is necessary to bring the potential to fulfilment.

Caractéristiques du futur interprète

Seuls ceux qui connaissent déjà à fond les langues qu'ils désirent pratiquer professionnellement peuvent envisager de devenir interprètes. La parfaite maîtrise d'une langue exige que l'on se soit pénétré des traditions du pays où elle est parlée, de son histoire et de sa littérature, de la façon de penser, de vivre et de réagir de ses habitants; style, rhétorique, humour, idiotismes, clichés, accent et argot courant ne doivent plus avoir de secret pour celui qui se destine à l'interprétation. Cette connaissance doit être profonde, c'est-à-dire celle du linguiste et non du polyglotte ; aussi les interprètes de conférence utilisent-ils rarement plus de trois langues comme langues de travail.

Il est en outre indispensable que le futur interprète possède des notions suffisantes sur un certain nombre de sujets tels que l'histoire, la géographie, les sciences, l'économie politique, le droit, la procédure parlementaire, l'organisation de la vie internationale, etc. En effet, l'interprète doit être en mesure de suivre un débat sur n'importe quelle matière ; qui dit suivre ne dit pas nécessairement connaître, mais implique la faculté de s'adapter au sujet ; l'interprétation exige, en effet, une très grande disponibilité d'esprit.

Capable d'analyser et de comprendre rapidement les idées de l'orateur, l'interprète doit aussi posséder la vivacité d'esprit et l'éloquence qui lui permettront de les transposer instantanément. Chacune de ces deux particularités est assez répandue, mais il est rare qu'elles soient réunies chez une même personne ; c'est ce qui explique que le nombre des interprètes professionnels reste faible par rapport au nombre des linguistes.

*Extracts from *L'Interprète de conférence : son rôle, sa formation* (Paris, November 1964).

Interpréter suppose la maîtrise d'un vocabulaire étendu et très différent d'une conférence à l'autre. Si, pour certaines conférences, l'interprète doit apprendre une terminologie spéciale, ce qui nécessite un effort renouvelé de mémorisation, il lui arrive à tout moment d'avoir à rechercher un terme ou une expression au fond de sa mémoire, il doit donc disposer d'un "bagage" très complet.

Autant d'impératifs intellectuels, auxquels s'ajoutent des impératifs caractériels : solidité du système nerveux, faculté de se détendre ; le métier comporte de longues périodes de concentration et de tension, et quelle que soit la durée de la séance, l'inattention est interdite à l'interprète. Il lui faut pouvoir ensuite récupérer, se remettre en disponibilité. [1]

Il devra également faire preuve, outre de la discrétion professionnelle de règle formelle et absolue, de discrétion vis-à-vis de ses collègues, de patience, de sens de la mesure, de sens d'équipe. S'il est probablement superflu de préciser que la conscience professionnelle de l'interprète lui enjoint d'observer une scrupuleuse fidélité et objectivité à l'égard de chaque orateur, il faut par contre rappeler qu'une certaine assurance est nécessaire. Il ne lui suffit pas d'être sûr de son interprétation, il doit également inspirer confiance : l'interprète est tenu d'observer une complète neutralité intellectuelle dans l'exercice de ses fonctions, mais il doit savoir persuader, autant que son modèle, mesurer ses gestes et sa voix, préciser sa diction, en un mot "passer la rampe".

Formation

Ces impératifs définis, reste à découvrir les personnes qui y répondent et à leur ouvrir les portes de la profession ; mais il faut aussi, avant qu'ils ne soient trop engagés, ouvrir les yeux de ceux qui auraient des qualités autres que celles dont l'expérience révèle qu'elles sont indispensables à l'exercice satisfaisant de la profession. L'extension des besoins et le développement concomitant de la demande, ainsi que l'attrait qu'exerce aujourd'hui ce métier, ont tout naturellement posé la question du recrutement et, pour certains, de la formation complémentaire nécessaire.

Le candidat interprète, qu'il vienne d'une autre profession ou qu'il soit étudiant, sera d'autant mieux armé pour aborder la carrière, qu'il aura reçu une formation universitaire ou exercé une profession qui lui auront appris à raisonner avec rigueur et l'auront ainsi préparé à comprendre la pensée d'autrui. En effet, les questions traitées dans bien des conférences — scientifiques, techniques, économiques ou autres — seront si diverses et si précises qu'il ne pourra se familiariser qu'avec la terminologie et des rudiments et qu'il lui faudra tabler sur sa capacité de suivre le raisonnement quel qu'il soit.

Un futur interprète a donc tout intérêt à suivre des études supérieures, universitaires, techniques, etc. Ce faisant, il s'ouvre également d'autres voies : il peut avoir à exercer un second métier, en particulier pendant la période creuse de ses débuts, ou encore il peut s'apercevoir que sa capacité de devenir interprète ne se

confirme pas : on peut satisfaire aux épreuves d'aptitude permettant d'être admis aux cours d'interprétation, mais ce n'est, en effet, qu'en fin de formation technique d'interprète de conférence que s'avère si l'on est vraiment fait pour le métier.

Il est également fort utile, à l'élève comme à l'interprète formé, de connaître ou de pratiquer la profession-soeur du linguiste : la traduction. Il peut ainsi approfondir ses connaissances linguistiques, sémantiques et philologiques et affiner sa faculté d'analyser et de transmettre le discours.

Mais il doit savoir qu'on ne peut, sans rencontrer des difficultés considérables, pratiquer ces deux disciplines en alternance trop rapprochée, au cours d'une même conférence. Les démarches intellectuelles, le rythme de transposition, sont très différents, voire opposés.

Débouchés

Le nombre de candidats attirés par la profession est très disproportionné par rapport aux débouchés qui s'offrent à eux.

La profession aura toujours besoin de nouveaux éléments, en raison du développement constant des relations internationales, mais il est certain que seuls les interprètes professionnels pleinement qualifiés réussiront à s'affirmer. Si la qualité moyenne s'abaissait, les organisateurs de conférences préféreraient probablement se passer d'interprétation, plutôt que de disposer de services médiocres, d'une utilité contestable lorsqu'ils ne sont pas néfastes.

Les conférences à trois langues étant aujourd'hui les plus fréquentes, il est sage pour le candidat de n'envisager la carrière que si la langue maternelle s'assortit de deux autres langues qu'il connaît à fond. En dehors du cas, fort rare, du bilingue, qui possède à un degré égal de perfection deux langues maternelles, dont il pourra user dans des conditions d'équivalence absolue, il n'y a pas de place sur le marché actuel pour un candidat qui ne connaîtrait qu'une seule langue outre la sienne propre.

En règle générale, les langues de travail des interprètes qui désirent exercer en Europe occidentale doivent comprendre l'anglais ou le français, ou mieux encore les deux ; et sur le continent américain, l'anglais et l'espagnol. Certaines combinaisons linguistiques se trouvent rarement réunies chez un même interprète ; si elles sont précieuses, elles ne sont cependant pas forcément suffisantes : ainsi la combinaison russe-espagnol (utile à l'ONU et dans les institutions spécialisées) n'est profitable que si elle est complétée par l'anglais ou le français ; de même que la combinaison néerlandais-italien (utile dans les Communautés européennes) doit être complétée par une autre langue, par exemple le français. La connaissance de langues telles que l'arabe, le chinois ou le japonais présente un intérêt encore restreint, mais qui ne peut manquer de croître.

Les conférences techniques devenant de plus en plus nombreuses, une certaine compétence dans un sujet déterminé s'ajoute utilement aux connaissances linguistiques (médecine, physique, biologie, etc.). . .

Le futur interprète se demandera probablement avec quelque ironie, après avoir lu ce qui précède, si ses aînés se targuent de posséder eux-mêmes le large éventail de qualités qu'on lui demande de posséder. Qu'il se rassure : la description de tant de caractéristiques si variées n'implique pas la perfection dans chacune d'entre elles ; mais l'expérience enseigne qu'à des degrés divers, elles sont toutes nécessaires et que leur valeur vient précisément de leur conjonction.

1. The Linguists' Club Working Party, which was started in 1938, is the oldest conference interpreters' training centre in Europe.
2. It is guided by an Advisory Committee consisting of professional conference interpreters, all members of AIIC* and LACI*, under the chairmanship of A.T. Pilley (who for the past 25 years has acted as consultant for the training and recruiting of interpreters for the Foreign Office and other government departments in the United Kingdom and abroad).
3. The Working Party carefully avoids the fault seemingly inherent in the teaching at most conventional interpreters' schools, i.e. the confusion between the teaching of languages and the teaching of the interpreting technique.
4. Since experience has shown that selection is at least as important as training, entry into the Working Party is governed by a rigorous aptitude test where capacity to interpret is carefully assessed by a jury of experienced conference interpreters. Only applicants who know two or more of the standard conference languages at the requisite standard are accepted.
5. Persons are admitted who in addition to their linguistic skill have an adequate background of general education, knowledge of world affairs and the necessary temperament. They are drawn from other professions, chiefly broadcasting, journalism, teaching, law and the international civil service, and their ages usually range from 25 to 45. Working Party members are not students in the ordinary sense of the term and they normally have other occupations; thus the Working Party holds its meetings in the evening. The course is restricted to six or eight persons at a time and lasts three months to one year.
6. Teachers at the Working Party are without exception themselves practising conference interpreters. They take great care to teach the actual know-how of interpreting, concentrating on

*AIIC - Association internationale des interprètes de conférence
LACI - London Association of Conference Interpreters

practice rather than theory. Every meeting follows as closely as possible the pattern of an international conference or committee meeting.

7. Members of the Working Party are introduced to the rules and mores of the profession and are frequently given the opportunity to attend conferences and to work in "dead" booths. At peak conference periods they are sometimes integrated in actual teams and asked to interpret "live".
8. Over 90 per cent of those admitted as full members of the Working Party make the grade and become conference interpreters. This compares with what is believed to be well below 5 per cent at most of the conventional schools (i.e. 5 per cent of the total at entry). This wide disparity is due to the difference of approach; those who register at the conventional interpreters' schools are at first not taught interpreting at all but only translating and background subjects; only a very small minority subsequently qualifies for training at the advanced interpreting classes or seminars. That minority includes many distinguished interpreters, but one wonders what has happened to the majority.
9. The Working Party is among the first few training centres which have supplied new entrants to the profession. It has since the war produced 31 members of AIIC and/or LACI. As may be seen from the AIIC report on schools, 1963, the Working Party's AIIC record compares favourably with that of the conventional schools. The figure of 31 must be seen in the context of what is almost certainly the smallest liberal profession in the world: at the time of writing there are less than 40 qualified conference interpreters in the U.K. There are nine permanent posts for interpreters in the whole country; the majority of practising interpreters are free-lance.
10. The Working Party system in a more streamlined form has been applied by A.T. Pilley for the training of parliamentary interpreters for the Ceylon House of Representatives (1955), the Singapore Legislative Assembly and the Malayan Parliament (1957). The same system has been commissioned for the Basutoland Parliament in 1965 and discussions are in progress for its introduction for the Parliaments of India, Northern Nigeria and Hong Kong in 1966-1967. (cf. White Paper No. L.A.20 of 1957 on *Languages in the Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates*).
11. In view of its restricted and highly specialized nature, a training group of the Working Party type cannot possibly be a viable proposition financially. It can only function if it is either a) subsidized, or b) grafted on to an existing teaching establishment. In the case of the Working Party itself the cost is shared between its members and the Linguists' Club.
12. It is considered that one of the basic "vices" of the conventional school method is that the school, in order to pay its way, to meet the expenses of rent, teachers, secretariat and overheads, is compelled to admit scores, indeed hundreds, of

students, many of whom are young and inexperienced and the vast majority of whom do not, in any case, possess the gifts and qualities which would enable them one day to become international conference interpreters.

13. It would appear that many establishments, instead of calling themselves "School of Translating and Interpreting" or even "School of Modern Languages" adopt as title the misnomer "Interpreters School" for reasons of prestige, publicity or financial profit.

14. But it is satisfactory to note that at least one enlightened and progressive school in France has implemented the AIIC recommendation that mature persons of the right calibre be admitted to the advanced class or seminar without first spending one, two or three years in the preliminary classes. It is hoped that many more will follow that encouraging example.

March, 1965

A.T. Pilley
Director of the Linguists' Club

Recruitment, Training and Working Conditions*

. . . To take selection first, we have found that the candidate, besides having a thorough knowledge of at least three languages (one of which he must speak fluently, correctly and clearly) must be a person who either through a college education, or by some other means, has acquired a good general knowledge of the matters that he will be dealing with. Here at the United Nations, for instance, he must understand matters economic, political, diplomatic, legal, colonial, social, cultural and so on. It is not enough for him to know the languages; he must be sufficiently intelligent and educated to grasp and assimilate what delegates and experts of all kinds are talking about.

Even a candidate who has the basic linguistic and general knowledge may not make an interpreter. The only way to find whether he will is to try to train him, at least for a few weeks. A good candidate may learn to interpret in a few hours, or may take a few weeks at, say, four hours a day. If a candidate is not performing reasonably well, after about thirty hours training of this kind, he is unlikely ever to succeed. If he is, then it is just a matter of giving him practice, in whatever specialty field he is going to work so that he can develop self-assurance, fluency and versatility.

As regards salaries, much depends on the nature of the subject matter of the speeches and the status and requirements of the persons for whom the interpreter works. If the subject matter is complicated and the listeners are persons of some education and eminence, the interpreter will have to be a correspondingly educated person, who will command a fairly high salary. Our interpreters are fairly high up in the professional category, comparable in status and remuneration to economists, lawyers and so on in the substantive departments. . . .

Finally, regarding conditions of work, it is difficult to be very specific as so much depends on local conditions and the number and

*Extracts from a letter by D. Hogg, Chief of the Interpretation Section, United Nations, to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Singapore (25 February, 1957).

nature of meetings to be served. But, in general, it may be said that an interpreter can be expected to interpret for about three-quarters of a working week, say, seven or eight half-day meetings in a five-day working week, provided that the booth that he works in is properly lit and ventilated. Over a long period this may prove rather too much from the health point of view. . . .

Appendix D

On Establishing an Interpretation Service
Evidence given by A.T. Pilley*

Question [the Speaker]: . . . Your first suggestion then is to try to get . . . a panel of free-lance workers. That is one suggestion. Is there an alternative? If it is not possible to find free-lancing interpreters in sufficient numbers what is the next solution? . . . In Canada they have what they call a Bureau of Translation which is called upon to supply translators and interpreters whenever needed by a department. . . . Supposing this idea of a Bureau is developed, do you think that it could also be a source from which the Assembly can draw its interpreters?

Answer [A.T. Pilley]: I am afraid my answer to that question is emphatically - No. It is completely out of the question. I am sorry to be so brutally frank. The reason is that translating and interpreting are completely different disciplines. Very often a first-class translator is no good at interpretation and vice versa. An interpreter who is a master of speech may not even be able to spell correctly; but quite apart from the basic background knowledge, if he has a quick wit and a dynamic personality he will not be the sort of man who will like sitting down and doing written translations.

Experience in England, France, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium has shown that translating and interpreting are two completely different jobs. Many of those who have tried to combine the two (and many have tried to do so) have come a cropper. In other words, the field is so restricted. Many people in England do not even realize what a conference interpreter is. They go to a translation bureau to look for one; the bureau sends someone, say an excellent French-English translator; he goes into the booth but he cannot even open his mouth, or he makes a terrible mess because the two jobs are completely different. A translator will sit down, write a sentence, feel doubtful about a word, cross it out; he will always be seeking the most elegant word. The job of an interpreter is different—it is to get the

*Singapore Legislative Assembly, Debates, 1957, Sessional Paper No. LA 20. Report from the Select Committee on Languages in the Legislative Assembly Debates, pp.77 ff.

meaning across quickly. It may be that the word he has chosen to convey this meaning is not the best, but it may be exactly the word which will convey the meaning more quickly. He has to do this very quickly and has to have a very quick wit. Supposing the speaker coughs and the interpreter misses a vital word; he must be sufficiently quick-witted and honest to do one of two things—either to guess the word and weave it in, or to say into the microphone, "I am sorry, I have missed the last sentence but it was probably such and such." Now a translator cannot do that. He is much too plodding; he works in depth, while an interpreter works at speed. They are two completely different disciplines. In the United Nations none of the translators interpret and none of the interpreters translate. . . .

Question [the Speaker]: But do you not think that an interpreter can so adapt himself that he can sit in an office and do translation work?

Answer [A.T. Pilley]: Yes, it is more than likely that an interpreter can adapt himself to translate . . . but frankly I think you are on the wrong track. I think that your best chance of success is to look through a panel of university teachers, very bright third- or fourth-year undergraduates, lawyers and journalists, people active in these professions who have a lot of experience in public affairs and are accustomed to the problems discussed in the Parliament. In England, for example, one of the 20 interpreters is an authoress, two work full time for the British Broadcasting Corporation but take time off to do interpretation, and one is a barrister who occasionally likes to interpret for a conference. Those are the type of people you need, men of substance, not secretaries or even translators who may be good only at written work. The sort of men that you must look for are radio people, journalists, lawyers and teachers, not youngsters but men with poise and eloquence if you like, men of the parliamentarian type. I said so to the Clerk of the House of Representatives in Colombo. He thought that I was exaggerating a bit. He advertised in the universities and other places and received some 90 applicants and reduced the list to 30. He said to me "We have many tribunals and courts and we have Tamil, Singhalese and English interpreters for the courts." I told him that I thought it was most unlikely that a court interpreter would make a conference interpreter. He also said: "We have also translation bureaux and many translators." I said, "Try out the applicants, I do not think that it is impossible to get a good interpreter from among them but I would be surprised if you do." Well, in the event, not one court interpreter or translator survived the test. The four who did were two journalists, a teacher and a man from Radio Colombo, and the two who finally turned out to be the best, on a level in quality with UN interpreters, were the man from Radio Colombo (who is in news and radio broadcasting) and one of the journalists. The third successful candidate, very good and intelligent, later became a Member of the new Ceylon Parliament. Those are the type of people who will make the grade. . . . Human beings and social problems are the same the world over, so I see no reason why you can succeed in Singapore where they have failed in London and Geneva. . . .

Question [the Speaker]: I suppose arising out of that part of the training will be the compilation of what may be termed a glossary of technical terms?

Answer [A.T. Pilley]: That curiously enough is only a minor problem. It is important but fortunately it is technically easy to solve. What they can do is work out a glossary of parliamentary terms with the help of the Clerk; they can do that within a few days. . . . It is very easy. Free-lance interpreters, for example, have to do a big variety of subjects, but they learn the different terminology easily. My own programme has included conferences on navigation, with words like mobile cranes, hatchways, automatic elevators and fork-lift trucks. I have also covered conferences on rubber in Ceylon, the Wheat Council, safety in mines for the Miners' Federation, metal boxes, a big hospital federation in Lisbon. The problem is one of detail and it is not very important—you merely have to spend a few hours or days getting familiar with the words. It is not the crux of the problem. A man with sufficient mental calibre can learn the words easily.

Question [the Speaker]: The point has been raised, what is the remedy if a difficult speaker is not audible or speaks too fast?. . .

Answer [A.T. Pilley]: Yes. That is one of the more unfortunate problems of the profession. . . . The only way to overcome it (and it is not a very satisfactory way) is to install a red light on the Speaker's table; an interpreter who is in trouble presses a switch, the red light is put on, the Speaker realizes the trouble and directs the speaker to speak into the mike. With a good chairman it may work but . . . in fact, we have almost given up the red-light system. What happens is this. The speaker on the rostrum is going too fast or is speaking away from the microphone; the interpreter presses the switch; the red light comes on but the speaker, thinking that the chairman is informing him that he has only one minute left, speaks faster still!

Question [the Speaker]: The red light is placed on the rostrum?

Answer [A.T. Pilley]: Yes. And if we put it near the chairman, he may put a book over it so he does not see it. . . . But, of course, you must be prepared for this—even when you have first-class interpreters (which is an absolutely open question) your proceedings will be spoiled to some extent by speakers who, although they may be professional and trained, may sometimes speak too quickly or are a bit confused; then the interpreter is lost and that in turn means that the assemblymen depending on him . . . will miss something. So you must not think that even with a perfect team you will get perfect interpreting service. . . . Even at the United Nations or at highest-level conferences employing first-class interpreters, things can and do go wrong. . . .

I. *Aim and Scope*

Article 1

a) This code sets forth rules of professional conduct for members of the Association.
b) The provisions of the code are binding upon members. Members are expected to assist the Council in enforcing them.
c) Disciplinary measures contained in the Constitution may be taken against any member guilty of unprofessional conduct under the code.

II. *Code of Ethics*

Article 2

a) Members of the Association shall be subject to strict professional secrecy. This applies to all persons and all information gathered in the course of non-public meetings attended in a professional capacity.
b) No member shall derive personal profit or advantage from any confidential information acquired while acting in a professional capacity.

Article 3

Members of the Association shall refrain from accepting conference engagements they do not feel qualified to undertake. Acceptance shall be regarded as guaranteeing a high professional standard of interpreting.

Article 4

a) Members shall refuse any employment or position which might prejudice the dignity of the profession or conflict with the observance of professional secrecy.

b) Members shall refrain from any activities likely to bring discredit on the profession, including all forms of personal publicity.

Article 5

a) Members of the Association pledge their unfailing support to their colleagues and to the profession as a whole.
b) Any difficulty of a professional nature arising between two or more members may be referred to the Council for arbitration.

Article 6

Members of the Association shall refuse working conditions not in accordance with those laid down by the Association.

III. *Working Conditions*

A. General

Article 7

In the interests of good interpreting, members of the Association shall:
a) Satisfy themselves that they can see and hear properly and that adequate provision is made for their comfort;
b) Advise against simultaneous interpretation without booth if approached to do so under conditions not consistent with a high standard of interpreting;
c) Not work alone in a booth without relief;
d) Undertake to do whispered interpretation only under exceptional circumstances and for a maximum of two listeners;
e) Try to see to it that interpreting teams are made up in such a way as to avoid regular use of relays.

B. Free-lance Interpreters

1. Conference engagements

Article 8

a) Members of the Association shall not accept any conference engagement without acquainting themselves fully with the terms beforehand; the Letter of Appointment shall be used in the form drawn up by the Association, or other appropriate form, for non-governmental conferences.
b) When members are engaged as interpreters they may perform no other conference duties.

Article 9

a) Members shall declare a professional domicile. No other may be used for professional purposes.

b) The Executive Secretary shall be notified without delay of any change of professional domicile. Such changes may be made for a period of not less than six months.

Article 10

Members of the Association may request to be released from a conference engagement only if they are able to:
a) give sufficient notice
b) show good cause
c) propose a substitute acceptable to the conference organizer.

2. Fees

Article 11

a) A minimum scale of fees is kept by the Association and is appended to the code.
b) The fees are based on a daily rate. A full day's fee shall be payable for each day or fraction thereof covered by the conference engagement.
c) Interpreting fees are quoted in U.S. dollars. The fees shall be transferable to the interpreter's country of domicile.
d) Members of the Association engaged to work on the same team shall be paid at the same rate.

Article 12

a) Fees shall be due for the entire period covered by the conference engagement, including Sundays and other non-working days.
b) Fees shall be payable in full without deduction in respect of tax or commission.

Article 13

Members of the Association may give their services free of charge, provided they pay their own travel and subsistence expenses. (The Council may occasionally waive this provision).

Appendix F — Specimen Letter to Participants in a Conference Using Simultaneous Interpretation*

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided at the .....(title of conference) in ..... (languages). In order to ensure that this method is successful in enabling delegates to understand and be understood, certain essential requirements must be borne in mind by all concerned. These requirements are quite different from those involved in translation; a translator reads first and then writes, adjusting his pace of work to the difficulty of the text. The interpreter *listens and talks* simultaneously at the pace dictated by the speaker.

Because of its simultaneous nature, interpretation is in its normal element only when statements are extemporaneous, that is when the speaker's delivery is consistent with the spoken language.

This is not the case when a speaker reads or recites a concise, literary text, which has been prepared in advance. A text of this sort, which is the product of long and careful drafting, cannot be adequately interpreted when read off without warning; it would more properly be handled as a written translation.

Nonetheless, to enable prepared texts to be interpreted, it is essential that the interpreters, like the speakers, be given an opportunity to acquaint themselves with their content prior to the congress, and do such preparatory work as may be necessary.

You are therefore requested to send us ..... copies of the text of your paper by ..... (date), *for communication to the interpreters*.

Since the rate of delivery for the purposes of interpretation must not exceed 10 lines per minute, your text must not exceed ..... lines, for which the time allotted to you at the rostrum will be .... minutes. The time taken over showing slides comes out of the allotted speaking time. If you intend to show slides your text should be shortened accordingly.

*From the *Practical Guide For Users of Conference Interpreting Services* published by the Union of International Associations (International Congress Science Series, Brussels, 1966), 22.

Anything longer than what is indicated above would require to be read too fast for proper understanding and interpretation. When addressing the meeting you are advised to do so in a style as far as possible approximating that of impromptu speech. The text of *this* address, in a clearly legible copy with wide spacing, should be given to the interpreters. A fuller, more elaborate text may be provided for inclusion in the published proceedings.

If you do not wish to write out your address in full, and prefer to use notes or to speak from memory, there are no special requirements regarding your rate of delivery. It may however be useful to let the interpreters have as full as possible an outline of what you intend to say.

In sending your texts, please indicate if possible any *terms or bibliographical references* which might further assist the interpreter in his work.

It should be noted that where a speaker departs from his text, the interpreters base their translation on the spoken word. Unscripted statements can be adequately interpreted provided they are spoken distinctly.

It will not be possible to provide interpretation for written statements when their content has not been communicated to the interpreters beforehand. This applies equally to scripted comments during discussion. Inasmuch as they are not extemporaneous, they must be treated as written communications.

Chapter I

1. Epilogue to McGill University's brief to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

2. Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, *The Planning of International Meetings* (Oxford, 1957), a handbook published under the joint auspices of UNESCO and WHO, says: "Before going into detail, we shall clarify the meaning that the words 'translation' and 'interpretation' have acquired in the rather specialized terminology of international organizations. The word 'translation' should be restricted to written communications. The word 'interpretation' on the other hand should be used when referring to the extemporaneous verbal rendering in another language of a spoken or written statement."

Chapter III

1. W. Keiser, an outstanding interpreter, writes in a letter from Brussels dated 14 November, 1965: ". . . in the last two years, the UN and its Specialized Agencies have probably been overtaken, in the number of interpreters employed per annum, by the group of organizations belonging to what is commonly called L'Europe des Six, i.e. the Common Market Organization, Euratom, the Coal and Steel Community. . . . Of these, the first-named alone had no less than 17,500 interpreter-days in 1964, with an average of some 120 interpreters working there practically every working week all through the year (permanent staff plus free lances). It is also in this circuit that there still are a considerable number of permanent jobs available."

2. *See* n.2, Chap.I.

Chapter IV

1. L'Association internationale des interprètes de conférence, "Rapport du Président de l'AIIC à l'Assemblée de 1963" (Paris, 3 mars 1963; mimeo).
2. AIIC, paper DA/9/08 (1958).
3. *Ibid.*
4. The author owes the description of language "ways" to a distinguished colleague, A. T. Pilley of London—as explained *inter alia* in his pamphlet, *The Techniques of International Conference Interpreting* (Institute of Linguists, London, 1960).
5. AIIC, "Rapport du Président, 1963."
6. *Ibid.*
7. Article 3. *See* Appendix E.
8. Union of International Associations, *Practical Guide for Users of Conference Interpreting Services* (International Congress Science Series, Brussels, 1966).

Chapter V

1. This may seem a cavalier way of writing off an unusual page of history; there is, however, a good deal of literature on the subject. *See, e.g.*, Harold Nicholson, *Diplomacy* (3rd ed., London, 1963), Chap.X.
2. AIIC, *Plaquette d'orientation professionnelle* (Paris, 1964).
3. *See* Appendix D.
4. Obtainable from the AIIC Secretariat, 33 rue des Archives, Paris 4e.
5. AIIC (Paris, Nov., 1964).
6. Notably *Practical Guide for Users of Conference Interpreting Services*. *See* n.8, Chap.IV.
7. The American Association of Language Specialists; Executive Secretary, 1718 Eye Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, U.S.A.

Chapter VI

1. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Report*, Bk.I "The Official Languages" (Ottawa, 1967) states (p.6): "In fact, this phenomenon [an equal command of two languages] is so distinct as to have a special name, 'equilingualism'."
2. Letter to the author, 1966.

Chapter VII

1. *See* Appendix A.
2. For more details on this *see* T. Nilski, "Translators and Interpreters--Siblings or A Breed Apart?" in *Meta*, XII, no. 2 (June, 1967).
3. Letter to the author.

Appendix A

1. *See* very interesting report on occupational health hazards published by AIIC in 1963, based on articles by W. Keiser and E. Meister in *L'Interprète*, XVIII, no. 1 (February 1963), a periodical published in Geneva. In 1968-69, AIIC appointed a Committee on Health Matters which, in cooperation with medical specialists and WHO, is gathering material on the subject and submitting it to scientific tests.