Interpreting in the News

Updates on endangered languages and community interpreting, a day in the life of an EU interpreter and tidbits on this interpreting life.

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Endangered languages

After reading Nancy’s Rivenburgh’s article on media coverage of endangered languages, you may be thinking of doing a search to see what else is available on the internet. I did exactly that and here is a sampling of what came up.

- UNESCO’s culture sector is a source of information on cultural diversity, tangible and intangible world cultural heritage, and more. The [page on endangered languages](https://www.unesco.org/en/our-work/endangered-languages) informs us that “Over 50% of the world’s 6000 languages are endangered.”
- “Within the framework of its Endangered Languages Programme, UNESCO has entered into partnership with Discovery Communications, Inc. and the [UN Works Programme](https://www.unworks.org) to produce a series of short-form programs on various endangered languages throughout the world.” [Read more](https://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-topics/endangered-languages/) about this collaborative effort and the vignettes it created on nine endangered languages from Scotland, Sweden, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Argentina and India.
- [The Foundation for Endangered Languages](http://www.endangeredlanguages.com) aims “to raise awareness of endangered languages, both inside and outside the communities where they are spoken.” It also sponsors an annual conference.
- Terralingua “supports the integrated protection, maintenance and restoration of the world's biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity — known as *biocultural* diversity.” It also maintains an [Internet Resources List on Language Endangerment, Survival and Revitalization](https://www.terralingua.org/)
- [Yourdictionary.com](https://www.yourdictionary.com) offers statistics on the number of endangered languages by country and other information.
- “Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages,” by Mark Abley has been the object of two reviews in *The Guardian*. In the first, Chris Lavers notes that “Abley sets out to explore some of the world's bullied languages and bring back news of their plight (similar tactics worked for the giant panda, after all).” In the second, Samantha Ellis comments that “In his forceful and humane book, Mark Abley listens to some of the world's endangered languages, wondering what it means 'to feel the language of [one's] childhood melting away.'”

A day in the life

At BBC News Online you can find “[Photo journal: Breaking down the EU language barrier.](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/europe)”, a series of nine photographs on the life of an interpreter at the EU with commentary by fellow-interpreter Philip Gratier, a veteran of 30 years in Brussels.
Community interpreting

If communication is of the essence, then community interpreting is of the highest importance. All of us in the community of interpreters should promote its advancement and professionalization. You might want to check out these sites:

- The Critical Link - Un maillon essential. Find out more about this laudable initiative so well introduced by Maria Rosaria Buri in this issue.
- Testing Community Interpreters, a theory, a model and a pleas for research by Helga Niska may be a bit old, but it is certainly not dated
- This page on the Wake Forest University website offers some useful links to codes of ethics and thoughts on the same. We admit that seeing AIIC’s name mentioned brings a smile to our face.

Why qualified interpreters are so important

My google news alert on interpreters generates a multitude of items on court interpreting (usually about the lack of qualified interpreters for certain languages or the scarcity of funds to pay for services) from local papers in the United States. This one from Arkansas’ Hope Star quotes the state’s Chief Justice-elect as having said: “Our Hispanic population is growing, and for these people to have meaningful access to our courts, they need to be heard. We need to have proper interpreters.”

Thanks to Business Day, here is one from South Africa addressing the problem of incompetent interpreters causing mistrials.

And the same goes for translators

“In Yanan… the local government's public relations office is translated as the ‘social intercourse section’. In Jiangmen in Guangdong, a food centre is charmingly, if not accurately, known as ‘delicate food street’.” Read more in the Standard’s Batty translation no laughing matter in China.

Organisation matters or the pitfalls of relay

The “cjv” in cjvlang.com refers to Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese, and in effect the website is dedicated to these three languages. The Perils of Translating via a Third Language examines the interpretation at a conference on revitalizing tourism held in Hong Kong. The author outlines some of his specific objections and adds: “The reason for these peculiar errors lies in the interpreting arrangements. Translation between Japanese and English was exclusively via Chinese. In other words, when a speech was given in English, a Chinese interpreter first translated it into Chinese, and it was then translated into Japanese by a different Chinese interpreter!” Note: what the author refers to as an “anchor” or “hub” is what we usually refer to as a “pivot”. And the problem might lie deeper than in just the choice of the pivot language.

Keep young juggling languages

Canadian researchers have concluded that growing up speaking two languages keeps one’s brain nimble and quick. The study was published in Psychology and Aging, but we heard about it through xinhuanet.com.
Recommended citation format: