Technical standards in interpreting: at work in Turkey

Recently the Turkish Region of AIIC, in collaboration with the BKTD, our national association of conference interpreters, decided to focus attention on professional development and communication with other stakeholders. The reasons are clear: good training and professionalism alone do not ensure high quality service; pre-conference coordination and proper equipment are essential to our work. Thus communication with equipment suppliers and professional conference organisers (PCOs) is important. A collective effort offers a better chance of success.

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This campaign got underway with meetings in Ankara and Istanbul on 8-9 September 2006 to discuss the importance of technical standards in interpreting. Our keynote speaker was Didier Hespel, Head of Meeting Infrastructure at DG SCIC and an AIIC colleague. The target audience was equipment companies providing mobile booths and sound systems for the majority of meeting venues in Turkey, which do not have built-in facilities. A promising outcome was the initiative taken by these companies to form a national association of their own in order to better communicate on the matters under discussion.

While this dialogue with providers of mobile equipment was encouraging, it was deemed equally important to ensure that existing and future conference centers comply with international standards. AIIC and BKTD members visited the Chamber of Architects to explore ways of disseminating information on standards to architects involved in the design of convention centers. The Chamber, with over 30,000 members, agreed to include news and articles about conference interpreting in its bulletin. Since six conference centers are being planned for Istanbul alone, we hope to make fruitful use of this communication channel.

Our last stop was the Lutfi Kirdar Convention Center in Istanbul, the venue of many international events, including the UN Habitat meeting in 1996, the NATO Summit in 2004 and the Union of Architects Conference in 2005. The Center has two large halls - one in the main building and one in the annex - as well as a number of smaller rooms with built-in booths. The main building hall originally sported 12 small booths which were later remodeled into six decent-sized ones by tearing down adjoining walls. Although the greater space was welcome, the change did nothing to improve visibility as the booths are located on the mezzanine level at a 90 degree angle to the stage.

For some years the BKTD has been writing letters to the Convention Center requesting monitors in the absence of any plan to rebuild these booths. Although we did not get our monitors, our repeated efforts had the effect of making management more aware of the need for improvements. As a result, when they decided to incorporate the space occupied by the existing booths into new meeting rooms on the mezzanine level, they also decided to build new booths at the back of the main hall. Although...
a bit far from the stage, they will have a clear, direct view. Our visit coincided with the beginning of
construction and we were able to convince the management to build four booths fully compliant
with ISO 2603 (built-in booths) instead of six booths in accordance with ISO 4043 (mobile booths).
Construction has begun and we await the results.

It must be noted that the remodeling of existing conference centers is always problematic since funds
must be secured specifically for the purpose. The chances of success are better with convention
centers being designed or under construction. Therefore our future efforts will go in that direction.
Our budding contacts with the Chamber of Architects will prove essential, not to mention the
BKTD's official application to the Turkish Standards Institute to make ISO 2603 and 4043 national
standards.

During our visit to the Lutfi Kirdar Convention Center, we found out that the reason they originally
opted for ISO 4043 instead of 2603 was lack of access to the latter. Since our visit, both convention
center and technical service providers have been given copies of the original ISO standards as well
as their Turkish translations.

More often than not, problems with technical infrastructure result from a lack of communication
with stakeholders. On the face of it, this might seem to be an easy hurdle to overcome. In reality it
requires a lot of time and effort - but positive results are satisfying for a long time thereafter.

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