From Kabul to Rome: A look back on the AIIC training of trainers workshop

The chance to study with fellow teachers of interpreting from some 8 countries was worth the long trip. Going back home with new ideas for the classroom was the reward.

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Ever eager to learn, I applied and received a sponsorship from AIIC to attend the Rome AIIC Training of Trainers Seminar in January of 2013. I currently work as Country Advisor/Interpreter with HQ ISAF: NATO in Kabul and also train future interpreters at the Ghalib Institute of Higher Education, a private university in the same city. I saw this opportunity as a way to improve, especially in the classroom. What followed was a new – and memorable – experience.

The long trip to Rome started at the Italian embassy in Kabul. Getting a visa to enter the EU, as many of you will know, is not an easy process. But thanks to AIIC Training and the association’s secretariat, I got my visa with time to spare for a journey that seemed to take me halfway around the world with all the flight connections I had to make. Fortunately I was able to arrive in Rome a day early and have a rest before the seminar began.

On the first morning I met my fellow ‘students’, all interpreters and trainers from various countries (UK, Russia, Germany, Italy, France, Argentina, Belgium and the US) – an interesting mix that added a lot to the workshop.

Over the next day and a half we discussed the different phases of skill acquisition, including active listening, focused concentration, ability to analyze and follow logic, appropriate speeches, identifying the structure of a speech, self-training and communication. And we examined various strategies for introducing these skills in class.

Within this framework we also concentrated on the importance of initial classes and on how to deal with the transition to note-taking, and later on to simultaneous.

Another main focus of the workshop was speech-making as it is something a lot of trainers struggle with in their classes. Interpreting really is speech-making in a sense and thus a skill students should learn. During one session we were asked to draft a speech based on an article (the same for all), which the trainer supplied. Then we all read our efforts to the group. We learned how quickly a good, well-structured speech can be drafted. Mine was about my own country: “Afghanistan racing to defuse population bomb.”

The seminar was very beneficial for me as I can apply what I learned when working with student interpreters in Afghanistan. In fact, I began to do exactly that in the first class I gave after my return, with good results and positive feedback.
Of course we didn’t spend all our time in the classroom. After the seminar, I had a chance to visit some of the most interesting places in Rome: Vatican City, Villa Borghese, the Coliseum, St. Peter’s Basilica, Piazza di Spagna and the Pantheon, among others. I was left with enduring images of the city’s past and present through its architecture, churches, sculpture, painting, etc. Since childhood, I have been interested Rome and as a young boy its history was one my favorite subjects at school; for me history was and continues to be an outlet toward the world.

Thanks again to the teachers and course organizers for helping this Afghan interpreter and trainer to improve. I hope AIIC will offer more such courses in the future so that others can benefit as I did, for my experience made it clear that in a post-conflict zone like Afghanistan, interpreters and trainers can benefit greatly from international seminars like this one.

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