15 years of the AIIC Webzine/Part 3: The history of modern-day conference interp

Testimonials, interviews, books and videos touching on the development of interpreting over the last 100 years occupy a place of distinction on the AIIC website.

Luigi LUCCARELLI.
Published: August 25, 2015 Last updated: August 22, 2016

On a recent trip to Geneva to attend the July 2015 meeting of the AIIC Advisory Board I purchased a copy of Naissance d’une profession, a book commemorating AIIC’s first 60 years prepared by our own History of the Profession Group (more about that later). Going through it during the dog days of August I felt anew a fascination with our collective past and a certain pride of heritage.

Since its inception, Communicate!/The AIIC Webzine has published articles touching on the development of modern-day conference interpretation; fifty pages are now tagged “professional history”. The following selection aims to cover as many time periods and parts of the globe as possible without being comprehensive. It also offers an excellent journey through the AIIC Webzine.

Personal accounts

Patricia Vander Elst: The Nuremberg Trial. “With the ink of my degree scarcely dry, I set out for Nuremberg. It was my first job and, though I did not know it at the time, also my biggest. I went into it with the innocent enthusiasm of my 21 years, looking forward to the freedom from home, the glamour of a foreign assignment and the lure of the unknown. Four months later, the Trial over, I left: ten years older, a great deal wiser, and, indeed, an interpreter.”

Marie-France Skuncke: Tout a commencé à Nuremberg... “Replaçons-nous en 1945. L'interprétation simultanée en était à ses balbutiements. André Kaminker, l'un des grands et rares interprètes de l’entre-deux-guerres, avait inventé le système de la ‘traduction simultanée’ en interprétant en 1934, pour la radio française, le premier grand discours d’Hitler à Nuremberg (déjà!).”
Photo: Nuremberg. Interpreters can be seen in the "aquarium" at top right

Wadi Keiser: (1) *Mon Congrès de Vienne*. “(M)on ‘Congrès de Vienne’, celui qui m'a marqué le plus, fut une conférence européenne des partis socialistes se tenant du 3 au 7 juin 1948, à un moment crucial pour le mouvement socialiste international” (2) Reminiscences of post-WWII conference interpreting: International unions. “The founding conference of the ICFTU took place in London at the end of December 1949. I happened to work at the preparatory conference in Geneva in the spring of that year.”


Ruth Hall: Some memorable moments: “The profession, as such, was scarcely known… I was greeted as a kind of being from outer space, with newspaper articles headlined ‘Ruth Makes a Living Just Talking’ or ‘Ruth Talks Her Way Around the World’ in the Australian press.”

Christopher Thiery: How It all started. “According to the programme, I am supposed to speak on behalf of the founders of AIIC. Needless to say, I hold no mandate for such an exercise, not even from Ruth Hall who is also here today. Fortunately when the President invited me to say a few words, he added: ‘A reminder of how it all started would do no harm’.”

Interviews

Tanya Gesse with Peter Less: “He attended the Geneva School of Conference Interpretation and, in 1946, interpreted at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. Less, whose mother, father, sister, and grandmother were killed by the Nazis, had to sit in the courtroom and interpret for some of the masterminds responsible for these atrocities. How could he do it?”

Books. book reviews and videos

Anne-Marie Widlund-Fantini: Presentation of Danica Seleskovitch: an exceptional life. “Paris, Berlin, Belgrade, Washington: the life and career as a conference interpreter of Danica Seleskovitch, known to many as just Danica (pronounced Danitsa), encompass eighty years of the twentieth century. She was an exceptional interpreter, a charismatic teacher, an original researcher, and also an attentive witness to the momentous events of her time, seen from the privileged observation post afforded to her by her profession.”

Communicate Team: Review of Interpreters at the United Nations: A History by Jesús Baigorri. “A timely reminder of the role played by interpreters in the history of The United Nations, that most international of all international organisations.”

Ruth Morris: Justice in Four Languages or "Interpreters and Mistresses" - “Review of "The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial" by Francesca Gaiba, 1998…. Some of the book's thumbnail sketches of Nuremberg interpreters contain fascinating insights into the foibles and experiences of those ‘strange creatures’ who performed this seemingly ‘impossible’ feat.”


Country Profiles

Duangtip Surintatip: Interpretation in Thailand: Past and present. “Although Thailand is a relative newcomer to conference interpretation, consecutive and escort interpreting was recorded as early as the Ayudhya period (1350 -1767) when the kingdom rose to become the centre of Southeast Asia.”

Masaomi Kondo: Genesis of the Japan association for interpretation studies (JAIS). “Basically I have two things to tell you. One is that there was a predecessor to JAIS, namely the Interpreting Research Association of Japan (IRAJ). The second is an explanation of why there was little research on interpreting in Japan prior to these bodies, which in turn calls for an explanation of why it is that the interpreting profession suffers from low esteem in Japan.”

Andrew Dawrant & Jiang Hong: Conference interpreting in mainland China. “An overview of
the development of conference interpreting in the world's largest developing country, and a glance at the joys - and challenges - of working as conference interpreters in a rapidly changing China at the start of the 21st century.”


Après la disparition de Wadi Keiser, le dernier des membres du GTH, en juillet 2008, Gisela Siebourg et Monique Ducroux ont repris le flambeau et se sont retrouvées devant une tâche beaucoup plus considérable que prévu... Depuis le printemps 2011, le Groupe a bénéficié de la collaboration d’Anne-Marie Widlund-Fantini et de Christopher Thiéry et s’est fixé pour objectif de présenter le fruit de ses travaux pour le 60e anniversaire de l’Association en novembre 2013.

Also in this series

Part 1: Quality issues and new technologies
Part 2: Training in consecutive and consultant interpreters

Recommended citation format: