

REVIEW

INTERPRETING EXPERIENCE FROM THE PAST *Interpreting Through History*. Ildikó HORVÁTH, Małgorzata TRYUK, Alina PELEA eds. International Review of Studies in Applied Modern Languages. Special Issue 2017. Cluj-Napoca: A publication of the Department of Applied Modern Languages and the Centre for Language Industries, 2017.

Interpreting Through History is a special issue of the International Review of Studies in Applied Modern Languages (RIELMA), within the framework of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting Consortium, edited by Ildikó Horvath, Małgorzata Tryuk and Alina Pelea. It takes readers on a journey through the broadly-constructed history of interpreting, encompassing manifold, intriguing and singular, local histories of interpreting and interpreters in different times and territories. The starting point for this journey is a question posed by the editors of this special issue of RIELMA: “Why spend time contemplating the past when we are constantly dealing with the problems of the present and busy preparing for the not-too-distant future?” (8). In the collected papers, distinguished scholars and practicing interpreters offer insightful analyses of the origins and developments of interpreting, its social perception and also many personal experiences and views on the profession; the issue also includes a reprint of a review of the history of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). Overall, the role of interpreter, interpreting and the history of the profession are examined from the constructive approach of learning from the study of past developments and personal experiences, in order to better face the current and future challenges in this constantly developing profession.

The history of interpreting is marked a particular event, of great significance for the pro-

fession and for the world: the Nuremberg trials, where simultaneous interpreting was used for the first time. This is the History, with a capital “h”, which is widely known to scholars, professionals and even young students of interpretation. However, the first part of the RIELMA special issue, entitled *Histories*, reveals the intricate and unknown past stories of Hungarian, Polish, Japanese, Turkish and Romanian interpreting and its pedagogy. The development of interpreting is here presented as an inherent element of world development, depicted through different times and in different geographical regions.

András Fáber’s article (11) opens the doors to the history of Hungarian interpreting, which have often remained closed to many due to the scarcity of sources and inaccessibility of the Hungarian language. The chapter touches on an interesting topic: how interpreters’ ego influences the development of the profession. The author argues that the naturally timid character of the first Hungarian conference interpreters and a difficult political situation gave the profession a touch of mystery and made the studies even more fascinating. Apart from providing a new point of view on the social status of interpreter, the chapter offers intricate and often enigmatic stories of individual Hungarian interpreters, such as János Elbert, who were victims of *politikai gyilkosság*, political murder. The dangers and the consequences of handling information that interpreters had access to during the Soviet era are clear.

The burning need for interpretation in connection with a particular country’s dramatic history is also reflected in Małgorzata Tryuk’s study of the origin of conference interpreting in Poland (27). The simultaneous interpreting technique and the attendant equipment were both developed through an urgent experiment, when Nazi criminal trials took place before



the National Supreme Tribunal and during the International Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace, both events that took place in Poland. The chapter documents parallel efforts conducted by the National Radiophone Enterprise, which was commissioned to build a simultaneous interpreting system for five languages with 5.000 receiver points. It also describes the remarkable job done by lawyers, language teachers, journalists and university professors who suddenly found themselves in a booth. As a result of these events the profession of conference interpreting and further training developed in Poland.

The presentation of interpreter training in East Germany and Hungary is introduced in the following chapter by Izabella Nyári (39). Here, historical, political and social contexts are again shown to have played an important role, influencing interpreter training between 1949 and 1989. The political transition and the influence of its participants were crucial to the development of both systems of interpreter training under socialism, which are intriguing especially from the ideological point of view.

Ideology and the conflict between the world powers in the aftermath of World War II led to the establishment of the interpreting profession in Japan, as Deborah Giustini explores in her chapter (50). She reveals how the interpreter training model actually developed in the country of the B language of first Japanese interpreters, namely in the United States. This first generation of Japanese-English interpreters were trained to assist Japanese business groups travelling to the US, seeking to benefit from the productivity program launched by the US as a means of supporting Japan after the second World War. The description of this pedagogical model together with its implications will no doubt be inspirational for future pedagogical reflection that involves training of bi-active interpreters or B language training.

The following chapter, written by Lale Arslan Özcan (61), is also based to a large extent on the experiences of the pioneers of the interpreting profession, this time in Turkey. This very detailed historical perspective on the origin and development of interpreting includes

the emergence of the first schools, such as the Business Administration Institute, the first conference with simultaneous interpreting and the emergence of the first university Department of Translation and Interpreting in Turkey, at Hacettepe University. Finally, it dwells on how what was initially “improvisation” and a “side job” turned into a fully-fledged profession. Elvin Abbasbeyli (77) next offers a chapter that reaches even further back into the history of interpreting in Turkey, examining the times when the Ottoman Empire reached the gates of Europe and its sultans felt the need to use the services of *drogmans*, polyglots who enabled fluent communication.

The final *history* focuses on the interpreting profession in a nearly territory with many rulers: Transylvania. Renata Georgescu and Călin Felezeu (88) study the intricate communication made possible by sixteenth-century interpreters at the crossroads of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, Russia and Poland. This historical approach provides some crucial insight, allowing readers to learn and benefit from the rich heritage of the profession. The urgent, political need of communication is here again portrayed as central to the development of interpreting.

The second part of the RIELMA special issue, entitled *Interpretations*, presents interpreting in modern circumstances through little-known aspects related to the role of the interpreter. War interpreting and sign language interpreting have become modern institutionalized professions. The main characteristics of interpreting in conflict zones are presented by Irene Villalba Güemes, Susana Álvarez Álvarez and Margarita Caballero Domínguez (99). Their chapter studies the differences between military interpreters, local interpreters and “fixers” which are crucial to understanding the constraints of and possible political influence on the profession, but also inspiring to provide training for local interpreters in conflict zones. The story of Yaroub Ali, an Iraqi interpreter and refugee, completes the analysis.

Sign language interpreting is presented by Carolyn Ball in the following chapter (115), which focuses on the history of the profession in the United States. Research on sign language has



led to the establishment of innovative policies and groundbreaking programs. Deaf education and regulatory aspects of the development of the profession complete previous articles, where the political circumstances were generating the need for interpreting. Here, the reader can see how the interpreting profession can influence different policies. It is inspiring for professionals in countries where such legal regulations are scarce but needed.

Robert M. Ingram continues by describing significant changes in the field of sign language (125). His text is a personal and professional memoir of a pioneer and the father of the Interlingual / Intercultural Model of Signed Language Interpreting. The development of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics, in general, and discursive analysis, communication models and general translation theory, in particular, provided for a Great Paradigm Shift from medical / rehabilitation into the Interlingual / Intercultural model.

Intercultural and multilingual communication is entrenched in the everyday practice of an interpreter. The third part of the book, entitled *The Interpreter*, allows the reader to take a look at interpreting from the very personal point of view of an individual. The analysis of a fictional interpreter, in this case, the main character of *A Heart So White* by Javier Marías, proposed by María Dolores Rodríguez Melchor (135) focuses on the interpreter as observer. The interpreter described in Marías' book, who intervenes in a conversation between high level politicians, violates the Code of Ethics, thus there is no doubt that the character is fictional. However, the analyzed scene pinpoints an essential element of the interpreter's participative observation.

Being an active observer who decodes mental models in order to find correspondences in a target language is achieved through training. Tímea Ferencz describes the interpreter as learner, proposing Kato Lomb's Theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as applied to interpreting (144). The author underlines that although Lomb's SLA theory does not relate directly to interpreter training it could be used to improve various elements crucial in interpreting, such as working on a differences between

registers, taking advantage of opportunities found in everyday circumstances that will cater for better recognition of differences and similarities between interpreted languages and finally developing one's own transfer strategies in the case of idiomatic expressions.

An important and distinctive element conveyed through training is the debate on interpreters' visibility. Iulia Bobăilă and Alina Pelea take part in this discussion in the last chapter of the third part of the RIELMA special issue (159). The authors analyze various parameters of the interpreter's work, such as physical presence, distinct voice, influence and status recognition. Probably, this last element leads to the most ardent discussions. Ranging from the South American *Malinche*, through the Ottoman *Drogmans* to modern interpreters, the authors describe the status of the interpreter and perception of the interpreter's role. Interpreters have recently become more audible, thanks to the development of new technologies, but less visible while working in the booth or in remote interpreting. Even if the interpreter must be as invisible as "a piece of furniture" (as recommended by Strudza, quoted by the authors on p. 171), the profession as a whole should strive for the visibility to be able provide a high quality service and attract younger generations.

The fourth part of the special issue is a reprint from *Birth of a Profession* produced by the International Association of Conference Interpreters, focusing on the evolution of conference interpreting (177). The book then ends with a number of reviews of publications on the recent history of interpreting (195).

This special issue of the International Review of Studies in Applied Modern Languages —*Interpreting Through History* is a valuable contribution to the history and pedagogy of interpretation. Not only does it offer valuable historical analysis of different geographical zones and times of development of the profession, it also touches upon very specific problems, such as interpreting in war zones, the situation of local interpreters in conflicts, the pedagogy of sign language interpreting, its intrinsic relation with modern linguistics, and the perception of the profession, to name just a few. The issue



thus comprises a relevant collection of different perspectives and analysis of interpreting and can serve as a worthy starting point for further pedagogical, linguistic or social research. In sum, in four languages (English, French, German and Spanish), it describes various developments and

challenges of the field and asks questions about the future of a profession that was born as a result of an urgent (often political) need to communicate, a basic necessity of human societies.

Alicja M. OKONIEWSKA

