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EDITORIAL

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Asia-Pacific cities like Shanghai and Bangkok have become popular conference venues because they offer not only good value for money but also the necessary facilities.

Given Asian conference industry professionals' awareness of the need to pay the closest attention to detail when organising a conference, the lead article in this issue of *Interpretasia* focuses on the critical importance of having an experienced consultant interpreter on the conference team. Clients will only return to a venue if they are fully satisfied with all the services provided at an international conference, particularly interpretation. At the same time, there is a clear distinction between interpretation and translation, as highlighted in Nathan Bierma's story on Nicole Kidman's recent movie, "The Interpreter".

Working conditions are constantly improving. Singapore recently installed permanent simultaneous interpretation booths for its multilingual parliament, which only goes to show: there is always room for improvement.

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HEDGING YOUR BETS

by Manuel Pastor

There are two questions conference organisers often ask a consultant interpreter:

Can I get local interpreters?
and

What contingency measures have you taken to cover for unforeseen events?

These are valid questions in a region like the Asia-Pacific, which extends north to south from Mongolia to New Zealand and east to west from Japan to Pakistan. These huge distances make the region unique in terms of availability of interpreters and contingency planning.

In such a challenging context, there are many factors to consider when organising interpretation services for a multilingual conference. A consultant interpreter (CI) can provide conference organisers with an invaluable service not only in setting up the most appropriate



team of interpreters for the conference but also making sure that Murphy's Law is covered by contingency planning.



The author working in a Spanish-English booth at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok

Can I get 'local' interpreters?

There is no simple answer to this question. There are professional interpreters based in countries of the Asia-Pacific region, but generally not enough to make up a full team. For example, you can find a handful of professional Thai-English conference interpreters in Thailand, or Chinese-English professionals in China, but for other language combinations you would have to look to other countries of the region or to Europe and the USA. This implies that the cost of interpretation services for a meeting in Asia-Pacific frequently has to include airfares, daily subsistence allowances and travel time allowance for the interpreters on a team.

There is a big difference between professional conference interpreters and language assistants, language aids or expatriate English teachers living in Asia, who may speak a foreign language very well and be 'local'. A perfect command of languages is only a prerequisite for simultaneous or consecutive interpretation. To access the profession these days, in-

terpreters must have a university degree in conference interpreting, vast general knowledge, which can be acquired by experience or study, a quick mind, an ability to understand other people's accents, and the capacity to work under pressure and deliver the entire message coherently. Languages are the tools of the profession but they alone do not make a professional conference interpreter. Even though concert pianists have two hands and ten fingers, they must first learn to use them to produce music and then perform with an orchestra. Similarly, a professional interpreter learns how to use his/her linguistic skills to perfection before (s)he can be recruited to work at an interna-

tional conference. Most so-called 'locals' may have the fingers but not the skills and the practice.

There are few people who have such qualifications and fewer still who live in Asia-Pacific, which is a small conference market compared to Europe. It is therefore almost impossible to constitute a team of only 'local' interpreters for an international conference in Asia-Pacific, if we understand 'local' to mean interpreters living in the same city as the conference venue. When CIAP associates organise teams of interpreters, they apply the AIC principles of professionalism: all other factors being equal, professional interpreters will be sourced from the city, country or region closest to the

Brussels or Geneva, it is relatively easy to find a replacement in the same city on the very same day. In the Asia-Pacific region it's not that simple, because of the short supply of qualified interpreters. A CIAP CI will therefore always try to have some interpreters on the team who have more than one 'active' language to ensure that, should a member of the team drop out because of an emergency, another interpreter can stand in for that colleague at least for a while.

Conference interpretation is team work. The quality of work of each interpreter on the team reflects on that of the others. When Chinese, Japanese, Korean or other Asian languages are interpreted into French, Spanish, German or

other European languages – and vice versa – 'relay' is used. This means Chinese is interpreted into English and the English translation is then interpreted into Spanish, for instance. Good quality relay is essential for the original message to be correctly conveyed into the other languages. The experienced CI will make a special effort to recruit the best interpreters when re-



The interpreters and Int'l Olympic Committee staff at the 2005 General Assembly, S'pore

conference location. This will ensure the lowest possible cost and highest possible professionalism. It is not always true that you get what you pay for. Sometimes, you pay much more than peanuts, and you still get monkeys, albeit 'locals'.

Unforeseen events

Contingency planning is one of the most critical tasks of the consultant interpreter. Not only must the CI ensure that the interpreters hired have the right language combinations and professional qualifications for the conference, but also that the team has the required flexibility and adaptability to cover unforeseen circumstances. If an interpreter falls ill during a conference in

relay is required, a situation more frequent in Asia than in Europe. It therefore requires the recruiting skills of a CI who knows the interpreters in the region and who will exercise special care in recruiting the team best suited for the conference.

International conference organising requires professional input. Cover all your bases by asking someone who understands your market and who knows the professional interpreters in the Asia-Pacific region to recruit your team of interpreters. ■

Sydney CIAP associate, Manuel Pastor is currently the AIC Council member for Asia-Pacific.

INTERPRETERS, TRANSLATORS PLAY VITAL BUT DIFFERENT ROLES

by Nathan Bierma, www.nbierma.com/language

An interpreter is not the same as a translator. That's what the makers of *The Interpreter* learned as they made the first movie filmed at the United Nations in New York. "After they understood the difference between interpreters and translators, they stopped calling us translators," says Brigitte Andreassier-Pearl, the UN's Chief of Interpretation Services, who consulted with director Sidney Pollack and actress Nicole Kidman in the making of *The Interpreter*.

Interpreters are in charge of interpreting spoken communication as it happens on the UN floor. Translators work with written documents "Some of my best friends are translators, so there is no antagonism," Andreassier-Pearl says. "But we're called 'interpreters.' We do a different job. That's one thing I explained to Sidney Pollack, and it's one thing I hope the movie is going to spread around."

Prepared for the part

Kidman, cast as a UN interpreter who accidentally overhears a secret threat on an African president's life, had her definitions down when she spent a morning in the glass booth of the Security



The UN Security Council in session. The interpreters' booths, where Nicole Kidman acted in *The Interpreter*, are visible at the back (Photo: UN/DPI)

Council, studying the interpreters and asking them questions. "She wanted to know how long you have to wait before you start your sentence," Andreassier-Pearl said. "It's a split second. But it depends how fast the speaker is. And in some languages, you cannot plunge right in – you have to wait for the verb."

Kidman also asked Andreassier-Pearl the most common question interpreters get asked – what do you do if you don't know a word? "We always work in the context [of what's being said]," says Andreassier-Pearl. "You try to understand the meaning and express the idea; you find an idiomatic equivalent right away."

Multilingual job

The UN employs 113 interpreters and nearly as many freelancers. All of them are fluent in at least three languages. Each interpreter has what is

called her 'active' (or native) language, and two or three passive (non-native) languages. Interpreters are assigned to interpret from their passive languages into their active language. The UN uses six official languages – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

The job is a paradox – interpreters must remain utterly unnoticeable while serving as a vital link in international diplomacy. To make the job even more challenging, delegates are talking faster, Andreassier-Pearl says, thanks in part to time limits on speeches.

Occasionally, delegates file complaints with Andreassier-Pearl. "I always ask them to give precise and specific examples," Andreassier-Pearl says. "I don't [just] want to hear that the interpretation was bad in Room 2 on Wednesday morning. Interpreting is very easy to criticize, but it's very hard to do." ■

Adapted with permission from an article published on April 20, 2005 in the Chicago Tribune.



Actress Nicole Kidman in a scene from the movie *The Interpreter*

A MODEL MULTILINGUAL PARLIAMENT

by Lee Hui Huan

In 1959, when Singapore started its parliamentary system, modelled on the Westminster system, it housed its legislative assembly in an old mansion built by a rich Englishman who intended it to be his riverside villa. The ballroom was retrofitted to become the chamber where important legislation was passed and major policies affecting the lives of the entire population were debated and formulated. It became Parliament House when Singapore became an independent sovereign state in 1965.

The constitution of Singapore allows for any of its four official languages, English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, to be used in all parliamentary proceedings. Simultaneous interpretation (SI) is therefore provided for Chinese, Malay and Tamil when members of parliament (MPs) speak in English, and vice versa.

The SI booths in the old Parliament House were cleverly created in the attic, some 40 feet from the chamber floor. Although they offered a panoramic view of the chamber, the demeanour and body language of the ministers and MPs making their speeches could not be observed clearly from the booth.

In the early 1990s when the idea of building a new Parliament House was mooted, none of the local architects and engineers assigned to the project had any experience in designing a Parliament House. So they went on an extensive study tour to the USA, UK, Germany and Australia, where they gathered useful information on various aspects of design. However, none of the countries they visited practiced multilingualism in their parliaments. Hence, the design for SI booths was never even considered.

When the draft design for the new Parliament House was revealed, there was no provision for SI booths. As the Resident Simultaneous Interpreter of Parliament House, I was asked for advice. In order to ensure that we would have useable facilities, I sought assistance from Jean-Pierre Allain, who was then AIIC Council member for Asia-Pacific and is currently Chairman of AIIC's Technical and Health Committee. He faxed me the ISO standards for booths, giving not only a diagram but also specific measurements. Armed with these specifications and some photographs of the SI booths in the newly built UN ESCAP headquarters in Bangkok where I had worked from time to time, I prepared a strong case for tailor-made booths to be built in Singapore's new Parliament House.

And so it was that when the new Parliament House was completed, we had three perfectly insulated SI booths, each with a 3-metre work bench, concealed wiring, a mounted equipment panel, and a commanding view of the chamber where the expressions, gestures

and body language of the MPs could be clearly seen.

Bookshelves are provided on both sides of the booth to store dictionaries and reference materials. Overhead lamps ensure that there is no shadow or reflection from the window. There are intercom connections between the booths, the Clerk's table and the control rooms. There is even enough space to place a couple of extra chairs for trainee interpreters to sit behind the professional interpreters, tune into all the channels on extra headsets, and learn the tricks of the trade from the more experienced old hands.

Thanks to this cooperation between AIIC professional interpreters in the Asia-Pacific region, Singapore's Parliament House is fully equipped to listen to and understand any foreign leader who may be invited to address members of parliament. It could easily serve as a model for other parliament houses in the region. ■

English-Chinese interpreter Lee Hui Huan is Head of Language Services for the Parliament of Singapore.



The author in one of the new Singapore parliament booths



Two members of the Canadian Stand staff and interpreters Jean-Pierre Allain and Jean-Luc Genion at a Seminar on e-Culture organised during the EXPO 2005, Aichi, Japan, June 2005

SOME INTERPRETATION TEAMS ORGANISED BY CIAP RECENTLY

2005

Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo	Jan	Forbes - Wi-fi in the 21st Century Workplace
Medan	Mar	Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (NRG4SD)
Singapore	Apr	WEF Asia Strategic Insight Roundtable (ASIR)
Tokyo	Apr	3R Initiative Ministerial Conference (Reduce, Recycle, Reuse)
Shanghai	May	48th Table Tennis World Championships & Assembly
Hong Kong	May	Global Chemical Fiber Feedstock Conference
Bangkok	Jun	IRF World Road Congress 2005
Siem Reap	Aug	IHRIP Seminar (Human Rights)
Chiba	Sep	Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Food Derived from Biotechnology

The interpreters at the International Network for Cultural Policies (INCP) Meeting, Shanghai, China, October 2004 ▼



▲ Interpreters and SI equipment staff at the NRG4SD Conference in Medan, Indonesia, March 2005

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WHAT IS AIIC?

Founded in 1953, AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence - International Association of Conference Interpreters) is the only worldwide association of professional conference interpreters. AIIC has over 2,600 members in 89 countries and is recognised by the United Nations, the World Bank, NATO, the European Union and many business organisations as the only representative of professional interpreters and the authoritative voice on matters of conference interpretation.

AIIC sets professional standards and working conditions accepted worldwide. Together with the International Organisation for Standardisation, AIIC's Technical and Health Committee has drawn up standards ISO 2603 for built-in booths and equipment for simultaneous interpretation and ISO 4043 for mobile booths for use in conference rooms without built-in facilities.

ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONALE DES
INTERPRETES DE CONFERENCE

aiic

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WHAT IS CIAP?

Conference Interpreters Asia Pacific (CIAP) is a network of consultant interpreters, all members of AIIC, who live and work in the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 1990, CIAP provides teams of conference interpreters for simultaneous and consecutive interpretation at meetings of all sizes.

Its members advise conference organisers on language requirements, choice of conference venues, technical requirements and even seating arrangements, and recruit teams of interpreters suited to the needs of a conference. CIAP also provides written translations of conference documents.

CIAP associates can provide simultaneous interpretation teams for English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and other languages.



CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS ASIA PACIFIC

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*There are CIAP Associates in several cities in Asia-Pacific. For the consultant interpreter nearest to you, please see the list of names and contact numbers provided in this issue.
Website: www.ciap.net*