

THE CIAP BULLETIN INTERPRETASIA

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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

You may wonder how interpreters and the conference business are doing in these times of economic and financial crisis throughout Asia. In this issue of INTERPRETASIA, the CIAP Bulletin, we look at the effects of the crisis on the conference market and the situation of conference interpretation.

We are not on the way out yet, despite the advent of computer translation, as Salma Tejpar-Dang's article in this issue tells you. In fact, interpretation is an important part of the convention business and Socorro Botero-Browning's article looks at how interpreters cooperate with others in the business. Our venues' article covers Bangkok, a fascinating convention venue which now, in the year of the "Amazing Thailand" campaign and low prices, is even more attractive.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue.

The Editors

EDITORS:

J. P. Allain
S. Tejpar-Dang

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

Charn Issara Tower 4/F
942/127 Rama IV Road
Bangkok 10500, Thailand
Tel. 662 2678135
Fax. 662 2675164
<http://www.khx.com.hk/ciap>

ECONOMIC CRISIS HITS CONFERENCE MARKET

The economic crisis that has ravaged large parts of Asia since July 1997 has also spread to the conference industry and affected the livelihood of many people who work in that sector, including interpreters. We look at the situation in three of the most seriously affected countries: Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

Korea - ups and downs

In December 1997, as the extent of the economic crisis became more apparent, conference interpreters began to wonder how it would affect their profession. Most private companies, as well as the public sector, had to find ways to economise and it was inevitable that international conferences, training programmes and other non-indispensable meetings were the first to be axed. "Belt-tightening" became the buzzword in Korea.

Most conference organisers put off decisions until they knew in which direction the government would move. By April 1998, business had started to pick up, but the only large multilingual conference that took place then was held without for-



foreign interpreters, meaning that Korean interpreters had to interpret in relay, which is far from ideal. The more than doubling of the US dollar/Won exchange rate made the cost of hiring interpreters from abroad prohibitive for local organisers.

However, as companies have had to renegotiate previously concluded agreements with foreign firms, there is more need for interpreters at such negotiations. Since May 1998 there has been an increase in demand for interpretation at



G. Koh, Mayor of Seoul (centre) and H.C. Jung, president, Korea Crime Prevention Foundation at a reception during the 12th World Criminology Congress, Seoul, August 1998.

management and administration courses, and for in-house interpretation assignments. This has meant contracts of one month or longer for individual interpreters. President Kim Dae-Jung has strongly encouraged foreign investors to take advantage of the excellent investment opportunities Korea now offers. Investment missions are coming to Korea in large groups and creating numerous job opportunities for interpreters.

During the month of the World Cup there was a considerable demand for French-Korean interpretation in

(contd. on page 2)

the TV broadcasting market, which was previously almost exclusively English-Korean.

Despite the present crisis, Korea is gearing up for other challenges: The next ASEM Summit is scheduled to take place in Seoul in the year 2000, and the 2002 World Cup will be jointly hosted by Korea and Japan. A new international convention centre is presently under construction in Seoul and should be ready for the ASEM Summit in 2000. Seoul hopes to become a "Mecca" for international conferences and conventions. Korea, lacking in natural resources, needs to find new ways of adding value and has decided to promote the international conference and convention sector.



Dr. Noi Intarawatana, Chulalongkorn University (left), and CIAP interpreters at the International Association of Universities Assembly, Bangkok, November 1997.

Thailand - still attractive

In the Land of Smiles, even before the IMF-imposed austerity, the government took one of its first economic measures by cancelling virtually all the non-essential conferences, seminars and meetings that it normally sponsors and instructing departments to reduce travel to meetings drastically.

As far as conference interpretation is concerned, there is no real Thai-foreign language interpretation market, since Thai is a rarely used conference language. However, many international conferences take place in Thailand, using other languages. As a result of the financial crunch suffered by government departments and private companies alike, some of these conferences were either cancelled or their costs reduced by cutting out interpretation and other expenses. This meant that participants simply had to make do with English as a lingua franca.

In this country, as in Korea, CIAP has made great efforts to enable the organiser to reduce costs in local currency to an acceptable level. Some conference organisers have resorted to limiting the number of languages in which they would have normally offered interpretation.

On the other hand, with a sixty per cent drop in the value of the Thai currency since July 1997, Thailand has become a much cheaper conference venue for outsiders, as opposed to local organisers. When a foreign organisation or company pays most of the conference costs, holding

the event in Thailand or another ASEAN country can actually be very cost effective. However, since international conferences or conventions are usually planned years ahead,

it will take time for this cost advantage to show in the number of meetings held in the Land of Smiles.

Indonesia - repairing a broken image

The financial fracas that spread through the region like a tornado hit Indonesia with a vengeance. The violence that erupted in May 1998 and ended with the downfall of President Suharto led to a dramatic drop in tourism and convention visitors in the whole of Indonesia, although the political turmoil was mainly restricted to Jakarta. This was due in part to inaccurate media reporting of events and to ignorance about the size and diversity

of Indonesia and partly to the fact that many international flights land in Jakarta first, even if the final destination of passengers is Bali or some other part of Indonesia's huge archipelago.

A major international conference which was to be held in Bali in June was called off only ten days before its opening. The local organisers, who were also the main sponsors, were willing to go ahead with the event but, when news about riots spread through the world media, so many foreign participants cancelled that the organisers were forced to give in. In a crisis it is the frequency of meetings and number of participants which decline first. Interpreters, like other service

providers who had been hired for this and other events, lost many days of work and preparation.

Indonesia has not recovered yet from the aftershocks of rioting and the major political changes that are still taking place. Yet Indonesians are not looking back but ahead to brighter prospects. Business will pick up again, albeit perhaps not this year. When it does, Indonesia will offer marvellous conference opportunities, as its islands are so diverse and scattered and the country has such excellent facilities. □

**Choi S. Jungwha
and Jean-Pierre Allain**

WILL COMPUTERS MAKE INTERPRETERS REDUNDANT?

Software researchers have always dreamt of the day when computers will replace humans in instantaneously translating written texts from one language into another and even interpreting at conferences. Machine translation was initially used to electronically convert 'foreign languages' (from the Anglophone perspective) into English. Electronic dictionaries have been developed and, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence, various agencies of the United States government now use computers to provide a crude English version of articles in other languages. The European Union also uses machines to do basic translations of technical texts in any one of its 15 member states' languages. But

the machine version still has to be given to human translators for editing before being checked again by experts in the field.

Technological progress has spawned translation tools that are available on the Web, such as Globalink's *Power Translator* and Alta Vista's *Babelfish*, but so far these tools can only do literal, rough translations for uncomplicated sentence structures. They still lack associative intelligence which enables humans to understand a series of words and phrases, so that it is difficult for a computer to make sense of a sentence that deviates from the standard 'subject-predicate-object' structure. Meaningful translation requires an understanding of the context plus the ability to

grasp the subtlety and nuances of a message contained in carefully chosen words. Furthermore, when a word has several possible meanings, a computer relies on luck to hit upon the right one. Here is an example of a short paragraph translated from English into French and back into English with Alta Vista's *Babelfish* programme.

English original: *Nothing, of course, has changed. France is still faced with the same old problems. They will not go away simply because its football team won the World Cup; and they are likely to resurface once the party is over.*

French machine version: *Rien, naturellement, n'a changé. La France est encore confrontée aux mêmes vieux problèmes. Ils ne partiront pas simplement parce que sa équipe du football a gagné la tasse du monde; et ils sont susceptibles de reblanchir une fois que la partie plus de.*

Re-translated by the same programme into English: *Nothing, naturally, changed. France is still confronted with the same old men problems. They will not leave simply because its team of football gained the cup of the world; and they are likely to whiten again once that the part more. (sic).*

Clearly, translation is not the mere transposition of words from one language to another. After all, language reflects the creativity of the human race and was invented by people, not computers. Although electronic translators may be useful to see whether a text is worth translating by picking out the key words, professional translators who know both languages are still indispensable.

As for interpretation, where the message is conveyed orally, the use of machines is still at a very primitive stage. In addition to the problems encountered in written translation, the computer would have to recognize the spoken word and its inflections. It would be impossible for computers to interpret at a

When the stars are out, they are visible, but when the lights are out, they are invisible. When I wind up my watch, I start it, but when I wind up my work, I end it. Languages are far from logical. How could a computer make sense of that?

conference, where each speaker has an individual style, made even more distinctive by the accent.

The static capturing of thoughts on paper in a written text allows the reader to make repeated attempts to gain some idea of the contents. At a conference, however, ideas are exchanged on the fly, and a computer would be incapable of making any sense to the listener, leading to a total breakdown in communication.

Despite the progress of technology, it is safe to say that the interpreter's days are still far from numbered, and that the programmer's dream is still just that - a dream. □

Salma Tejpar-Dang

CONFERENCE VENUES



The new United Nations Convention Centre in Bangkok built along traditional Thai architectural lines.

BANGKOK

Few places in the world can offer visitors such an extraordinary combination of excitement, mystique and inspiration as Thailand. Siam, as the country was formerly known, is the only Southeast Asian country

never to have been colonised by Western powers and has therefore retained its unique eastern culture. It is famous for its exotic blend of glittering temples, beautiful scenery, delicious cuisine, excellent convention facilities and for its people's friendly hospitality.

Impressive growth over the past ten years has transformed the country from a predominantly agrarian society into a fast emerging

economic power. Thailand now has a successful business, social and commercial infrastructure and convention facilities. Yet it still retains its charm, character and appeal.

The strong influence of Buddhism, which teaches the merits of charitable and forgiving attitudes, humility and respect for others, ensures visitors a warm and friendly reception. Time honoured traditions continue to be practised with the same fervour as always. Its sobriquet of "Land of Smiles" is well deserved. It is also a real shoppers' paradise with elegant fashion boutiques of major designers, gold and jewellery shops galore, famous Thai handicrafts and modern electronic equipment.

Bangkok is well connected to the world, with more than 70 airlines flying to its International Airport, which recently opened a second international terminal. Bangkok's notorious traffic problems are lessening with a fast-expanding highway system and an elevated mass transit system. Telecommunications have been dramatically improved with the launch of Thailand's own satellite, the establishment of more than 25 land stations and an extensive net of fibre optic cables.

Hotels and convention facilities

The city boasts numerous large five-star and luxury hotels which regularly accommodate international conferences. Most conven-

tion hotels have a ballroom and several function or meeting rooms that can seat from 50 to 600 people and some even more. Many conferences also take place outside Bangkok, particularly in Pattaya, Phuket and Chiangmai, all of which have several excellent convention hotels, in addition to offering conference-goers a holiday destination.

BITEC, the Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre, is Thailand's latest and most advanced purpose-built exhibition and convention centre. Its design makes it one of the most user-friendly facilities in the whole region. The exhibition area covers 20,000 sq. metres accommodating 1,300 booths and has all the facilities needed. In addition, BITEC's multi-purpose convention and catering space of 1,860 sq. metres can seat up to 2,000 delegates or be subdivided into 3 smaller halls. There are another 15 meeting rooms ranging from 95 to 190 sq. metres. BITEC is located in the rapidly-developing suburb of Bangna, strategically located near major expressways, in beautiful landscaped surroundings.

The Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre (QSNCC) is a Thai architectural marvel, with a scenic lakeside setting, located on one of Bangkok's thoroughfares. The total floor area is 65,000 sq. metres, with a main plenary hall seating up to 5,000 delegates, which can be divided into three meeting rooms of 1,600 to 2,000 seats theatre style. There are four additional meeting rooms with 200 seat capacity, as well as plenty of office space. Among its features is a fully integrated satellite telecommunications system, one thousand direct telephone lines, ten booths with SI equipment in the main hall and 500 infrared receivers. The QSNCC was finished just in time for the 46th World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings in 1991.

The ESCAP Hall belongs to the United Nations but may also be rented for other conferences. Brand-new and modern, it is an architectural gem that has preserved the characteristic elegant building lines of Thailand. Its 1,400 sq. metres multi-purpose main hall can seat up to 900 delegates. The four other conference halls can comfortably seat 370, while an additional eight function rooms are available for smaller gatherings from 14 to 66 delegates. The ESCAP conference building is equipped with a modern simultaneous interpretation

system and ISO standard interpreter booths in all rooms.

The Bangkok Convention Centre (BCC) is the oldest of the city's convention venues. It lies conveniently between the airport and the city centre, just off the express-



Thailand has many beautiful beaches with turquoise waters close to famous convention venues.

way, within the Central Plaza complex, which includes the Central Plaza Hotel and a large shopping mall. It has a main auditorium with a seating capacity of 3,800, which can be subdivided into sections, and has six built-in SI booths, although these are not up to standard and are inconveniently located. In addition, there are ten other meeting rooms varying in capacity from 100 to 1,000 people. At the

moment, the BCC is being completely refurbished.

SI Equipment

None of these venues, except ESCAP, has its own simultaneous interpretation system, although some do have booths. This is not a drawback however, since there are reliable providers of quality equipment in Bangkok, such as Convention Organisers Co. Ltd. which owns state-of-the-art infrared equipment and booths, AVCOM Ltd. which provides modern infrared and radio-based equipment, as well as others. Most conference organisers prefer to rent the interpretation equipment separately, since they can tailor it exactly to their needs. The existing mobile equipment is generally of good quality and well-maintained,

which may not be the case with rarely used built-in equipment. For interpreters, too, it is often more convenient to work in mobile booths from where they can better see the delegates, rostrum and screen for slide and video presentations and communicate with the sound engineers. □

Jean-Pierre Allain

THE LINK BETWEEN CONFERENCE ORGANISER AND CONSULTANT INTERPRETER

Some useful hints to conference organisers and consultant interpreters on how to establish a sound, mutually beneficial relationship. The author's ideas are based on what she gleaned from the AIIC/NAS Training Seminar for Consultant interpreters held in Barcelona in January 1998, on various articles which have appeared in convention industry magazines and on her personal experience of years of recruiting teams of interpreters.

Points the Conference Organiser should keep in mind:

- Explain fully to the consultant interpreter *the objective of your meeting*. This will help him/her put together the best team to suit your needs.
- If you ask different sources for a cost estimate, make sure that you give all bidders *the same specifications*. Otherwise comparisons are not realistic. A quotation for two days is definitely cheaper than one for four; and to quote for five booths when in fact only three are needed can make a big difference.
- If you find a quotation obscure or too high,

do not simply reject it: *contact the consultant interpreter in search of clarification*. Share your difficulties with the consultant interpreter. He/she is prepared to help, to find a compromise, but needs to understand your problem.

- If you are renting the simultaneous interpretation equipment yourself but are not familiar with its operation, *ask the consultant interpreter for assistance*. CIAP consultant interpreters have lists of reliable equipment suppliers in the Asia Pacific area and can recommend a firm at no extra cost, since the interpreters' performance depends on the quality of the equipment and the skill of the sound engineers.

- If you decide to award the contract to another person, immediately *inform the consultant interpreter* who has given you a quote, so that he/she can release colleagues who had been provisionally booked for your job.

- *Trust your consultant interpreter.* The consultant interpreter is there to render a service, not to steal your business. Remember that the reputation of the interpreters and therefore their future business depends on the success of your meeting.

- Bear in mind that the *consultancy fee is not a commission*, but is remuneration for the work, time and effort put in by the consultant interpreter in the preparation of your project, plus actual expenses involved in the recruitment of colleagues.

Advice to the Consultant Interpreter:

- *Communicate effectively.* Lack of communication often causes more problems than actual discrepancy of opinion. Put everything in writing to avoid misunderstandings.

- When making a presentation or quotation *avoid using technical jargon*, usually only understood by professional interpreters.

- *Advise your client* regarding cheaper dates for travel, low season prices for hotels and airlines, best venues for conferences in your part of the world. *Advise clients; do not threaten them.*

- To seal the deal *prepare a contract* that is transparent and comprehensive, to avoid last-minute surprises which upset people. A written contract helps to support the smooth relationship between both parties.

- *Conduct a personal site inspection* of the meeting venue before the start of the conference to brief your team accordingly, and test the equipment before the opening session, and if possible, before the first meeting every day.

- *Do not antagonize other service providers.* Remember that for the conference organiser you are not more important than the hotel or F&B manager, the ground transportation company, the PA engineers, etc. You are all part of a great machinery set in motion to make the meeting a success.

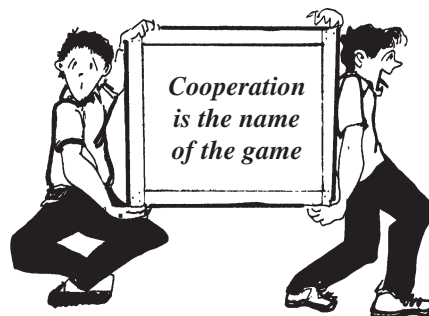
Ideas for both parties:

- *Try to establish a direct, open and personal relationship.* Aim at starting the relationship with a face to face meeting: half an hour of personal meeting usually clarifies what would take weeks to establish by fax or telephone.

- *Carry out a post-meeting evaluation.* For this, there is no better way than asking the delegates.

- *Follow up the relationship* to facilitate further cooperation in the future.

Socorro Botero-Browning



INTERPRETATION TEAMS ORGANISED BY CIAP RECENTLY

Singapore	Europe East Asia Economic Summit - WEF
Hanoi	UNICEF Conference on the 20/20 Initiative
Seoul	Intelligent Transport Systems
Shanghai	Pacific Rim Forum
Beijing	World Leprosy Congress
Seoul	12th World Criminology Congress
Taipei	INTA 22 New Towns Associations
Pattaya	FAO Tropical Fruit Consultation
HongKong	International Equestrian Federation Assembly
HongKong	Credit Suisse First Boston Investment Conference
HongKong	International Conference on Heritage and Education
Bangkok	IUHF International Congress of Housing Banks
Manila	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council Session
HongKong	HongKong-Japan Business Cooperation Committee
HongKong	TRAFFIC ASIA - International Symposium on Endangered Species
HongKong	Fourth International Conference on Manufacturing Technology

Visit us at <http://www.khx.com.hk/ciap>

CIAP CONSULTANT INTERPRETERS

BANGKOK

Jean-Pierre Allain

Tel 662-2678135 Fax 662-2675164
Email <allain@loxinfo.co.th>

DELHI

Laurence Bastit

Tel/Fax 91-11-6234379 or
Tel/Fax 91-11-6492886

HONGKONG

Socorro B. Browning

Tel 852-28385852 Fax 852-28385849
Email <bobro80@hotmail.com>

Catherine Pouget-Alderton

Tel 852-26975114 Fax 852-26963491
Email <pouald@netvigator.com>

PENANG

Jean-Pierre Allain

Tel 604-8901136 Fax 604-8908457
Email <jpallain@tm.net.my>

SEOUL

Choi S. Jungwha

Tel 822-9635356 Fax 822-9638780
Email <jwchoi@maincc.hufs.ac.kr>

SINGAPORE

Grace Ting

Tel 65-4728765 Fax 65-4728850
Email <loting@singnet.com.sg>

SYDNEY

Manuel Pastor

Tel 612-99603549 Fax 612-99603878
Email <adan@anternet.com.au>

TOKYO

Hélène Hesske

Tel & Fax 813-32371342
Email <homato406@hotmail.com>

Yuko Matsuoka

Tel 813-34700612 Fax 813-34750931
Email <yukmat@gol.com>

VANCOUVER

Salma Tejpar-Dang

Tel 1-604-9256017 Fax 1-604-9256016
Email <stdang@netcom.ca>

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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 2,500 members in 70 countries and is recognised by the United Nations, the World Bank, Nato, the European Community and many business organisations as the only representative of professional interpreters and the authoritative voice on matters of conference interpreting.

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

ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONALE DES
INTERPRETES DE CONFERENCE

aiic

INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS

*AIIC Secretariat, 10 Ave. de Sécheron, 1202 Geneva
Switzerland, Tel 41-22-9081540, Fax 41-22-7324151*

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. CIAP was established in 1990 to provide conference interpretation services to the growing conference industry in the region.

Its members advise conference organisers on language requirements, choice of conference venues, technical equipment, seating arrangements and so on, and recruit teams of interpreters suited to the needs of a conference.

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.*