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Editorial

This new decade will hopefully hail lots of positives for the profession of translators and interpreters and maybe even bring improvements in working conditions. The first issue of 2020 is dedicated, in the main, to interpreting, with articles about and from interpreters working here and abroad. Mary Phelan fills us in on latest developments in interpreting in Ireland, and a review of her latest publication on interpreting in times past also features.

Interpreting news from Austria demonstrates the need for solidarity amongst professionals while Tara Russell’s report from the BDU Conference reports on trends in our industry – something all of us, and in particular freelancers, need to keep a very firm eye on. Amongst the most salient are GDPR, in all its aspects, Neural Machine Translation – resulting in post-editing resulting in possible move from rates per word or page to hourly rates – and LSPs changing hands – it appears investors see value in buying and selling translation companies.

Loads of articles from all over in the ‘Worth-A-Click’ feature – highly recommended reading, particularly the link to an article about Denmark cancelling a contract with a large LSP for data protection violations.

ITIA’s first CPD event takes place in April, with a literary translation workshop by Rachel McNicholl – places are already filling up so book soon in order to avoid disappointment!

Anne Larchet

Editor
Community Interpreting in Ireland: An Update

The ITIA has highlighted ongoing issues around interpreter provision many times over the last two decades in the ITIA Bulletin and in submissions to various government bodies. Basically, the situation is simple: there is no properly accredited training course in Ireland for spoken language interpreters working in garda stations, the courts, healthcare, social protection, international protection, or on SafePass and other training courses. Nor is there any test to establish if interpreters can interpret competently. Most interpreting is outsourced to translation companies which compete against each other to provide interpreters. Rates of pay are at an all-time low and travel costs often not reimbursed. There may well be some very competent individuals working as interpreters but overall the situation is very worrying, and it is highly unlikely that all interpreters are competent or even aware of ethical issues such as confidentiality, impartiality and professionalism.

Professor Anne MacFarlane from the University of Limerick headed up an HSE (Health Service Executive) working group (of which I was a member) to develop a model for the implementation of trained interpreters. The report, published in 2018, examined levers and barriers for interpreting in healthcare and recommended awareness raising about the potential clinical risks associated with working with interpreters who have not been trained or tested. It suggested that the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (IHREC 2014) could be a lever to encourage interpreter provision. What is this duty? Basically, it obliges public bodies such as the HSE to actively promote equality, protect human rights and eliminate discrimination.

Finally, the working group highlighted the need for more research to tackle knowledge gaps about interpreter provision in healthcare.

Two years later, there are few signs of change. The question of access to medical interpreters continues to be a bit of a mystery. Apparently, medical card holders who have limited English proficiency can be allocated an interpreter in public hospitals if they request such a service. Sarah Gallagher has a really interesting article on medical interpreter provision in the Medical Independent (11 September 2019). It’s worth a read to learn about interpreter provision and about doctors’ different attitudes with some keen to work with ‘professional’ interpreters while others are happy to work with family members and friends. While many of us would be concerned at data protection issues and confidentiality, Gallagher quotes a legal expert who suggests that if patients give their permission there is no problem with family members and friends taking on the role of interpreter. But what if patients don’t have a choice, and have to make do with someone who happens to be present who speaks their language? That is a long way from actively promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. You can read the full article at https://tinyurl.com/v8rmudb

(cont.)
New requirement for SafePass interpreters
In October 2019 Solas Further Education and Training decided that all interpreters who work on SafePass courses must be members of the ITIA. SafePass courses are one-day courses that start at 8 a.m. and finish at 5 p.m. with a test at the end of the day. The tutors who give the courses work with lengthy PowerPoint presentations which are not shared with the interpreters although the tutors do meet with the interpreters before each course to go through the content. Three members of the ITIA executive committee met with Solas officials in November 2019 to discuss how the work of interpreters could be facilitated by, for example, providing glossaries to interpreters, having videos subtitled and translating tests. We await a decision on these suggestions. Independent tutors and companies that provide interpreters to work in this specialised area must now ensure that they are ITIA members. This is a welcome development, although we continue to be concerned at the lack of training and testing for this cohort of interpreters.

http://www.solas.ie

The Office of Government Procurement is currently working on a new framework tender for interpreting services to be provided across a number of settings. Translation companies will tender for work and the successful companies will then tender for particular contracts. This round of procurement will be very important for interpreter provision over the coming years.

Mary Phelan
1. Describe yourself professionally in a few lines.

AIIC conference interpreter (ES<>EN) and interpreter trainer at NUIG’s MA in Conference Interpreting. Occasional voiceover artist. Former development and solidarity worker. Recently – and unexpectedly! – beginning a parallel career as back-up vocalist and music arranger.

2. When and why did you decide on a career in translating/interpreting?

I moved to Ireland to learn English when I was 18 and discovered that I had a flair for it. I met my husband and decided to stay and study for my BA degree in History and Geography from a Spanish university while living here - but only after spending a year in Paris studying French. I did not know about interpreting at the time; I just knew I enjoyed learning languages!

My first working years were spent teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Ireland. I enjoyed it but I was not interested in furthering my training to become a fulltime secondary school teacher. During the years I was studying and teaching, I was also a volunteer in Amnesty International. I have always been interested in human rights and I was particularly drawn to Latin America, due to its cultural links with Spain. I was fascinated with its cultural movements and its struggles for justice. In post Franco Spain, artists and activists from movements such as Nueva Canción Chilena were still a huge source of inspiration for certain people of my generation. Travelling to Latin America was always on my mind, so in my early thirties I decided to spend a year and a half in Chile and the Dominican Republic as a development worker. This was to be my single most important career move. My job title in Chile was “interpreter” and as such, I was the link between an environmental expedition / youth development organisation from the UK and the local authorities and media. I soon realised I had discovered my calling! I loved every minute of it. In the Dominican Republic, my role was more strictly that of a development worker, but I was often called upon to interpret for the organisation’s funders (English speaking) and the local project management team, local communities, local authorities, etc. I just loved both – interpreting and development / solidarity work.

Back in Ireland, I searched for an MA in conference interpreting. This was early 1999 and I soon discovered there was none in Ireland. However, as luck will have it, during my search, one university language department led me to another and found that the first MA in conference interpreting was due to begin in DCU in Sept 1999. I enrolled and I have been working as a freelance conference interpreter ever since.

My work in Latin America also opened up another career opportunity in the field of solidarity – my other passion - and in April 2000 I got a job as Information Officer in the Latin America Solidarity Centre in Dublin, where I worked as Information officer until Sept 2003, when I became the organisation’s Coordinator until 2014.

So, for 14 years I combined both careers. Eventually, in 2014 it became too much work and I decided to focus on interpreting only. In 2016 I took up the post of part time interpreter trainer in NUIG. Another job I love!
3. Name the most important thing you did that helped you launch your career.

Doing an MA in Conference Interpreting was no doubt the most important career decision I made. As soon as I graduated, DCU Language Service (which at the time used to take on conference interpreting work) contacted me in order to include me in their pool of freelance conference interpreters and soon after I started to get work from DCU.LS and from other Ireland based agencies. Later, word of mouth and colleague’s recommendations brought me to the attention of other agencies outside Ireland.

Years later, becoming an AIIC member gave me another career boost, since it opened doors to new clients and it gave me the opportunity to work with AIIC colleagues more often, leading to more work from word of mouth.

4. How important are training and qualifications for a career in translating/interpreting.

In my case, hugely important. However, becoming a professional conference interpreter with no formal conference interpreting training - even though unusual - is not unheard of. But it does require finding yourself in the right circumstances: a market lacking in interpreters or a mentor willing to train you in, for example. In any case, highly developed language skills and nerves of steel are a must!

5. How do you find clients?

Word of mouth, mostly. Also, featuring in the AIIC professional members’ directory is a source of work. Colleagues and agencies use it to find local AIIC interpreters when organising conferences for their clients outside their own country.

I have at times approached agencies outside Ireland but with very little result.

6. Do you think it is necessary to specialise?

Conference interpreters could not possibly specialise - as in focusing on one sector only - as they would not find enough work. Variety, such is the nature of interpreting for the private market and – as far as I am concerned – it is what makes it exciting!

However, at times clients require previous experience before they hire an interpreter. When that is the case, the interpreter might find herself / himself working regularly for clients in that particular sector, hence “specialising” to a point.

7. What is your favourite type of text/assignment?

I love interpreting for human rights / solidarity / social justice workers, trade unionist and activists. I am lucky enough to have contacts in that sector in Ireland thanks to the years I worked in the Latin America Solidarity Centre.

Another very enjoyable type of assignment is anything to do with culture. More specifically, I thoroughly enjoy working at the Irish Spanish and Latin American (ISLA) literary festival organised annually by the Instituto Cervantes in Dublin.

I also love meetings with a social element to them: urbanism, eco-tourism, inclusiveness, minority languages…. Not only do I love those topics, but also delegates attending these meetings are normally passionate about what they do and they afford me the opportunity to learn about innovative, creative and forward-looking initiatives which at times challenge the way I think.

8. What is the best/worst thing about being a translator/interpreter?

What I love most about being an interpreter is the variety of assignments, which means we are constantly challenged to learn more and to improve our language skills. We never stop learning!

Also very enjoyable is the opportunity to work both from home (preparing and researching the conferences) and outside, as part of a team. I thoroughly enjoy the collegiality and teamwork. I think I am very lucky to work in Ireland, where – the market being small – I get to work regularly with the same colleagues, which makes for a tight, friendly and supportive team. However, I also find working with new colleagues in other markets exciting, and I have made good friends outside Ireland. So far, I have only had positive experiences with everyone I have worked with.
Last but not least, I love the fact that interpreting gives me access to different people, different initiatives, different concerns, different struggles, different world views, different realities… I consider myself to be in a very privileged position when clients are happy with my performance and appreciate my work, bearing in mind that they might have had to trust me with delicate, important or confidential matters.

The worst thing about being a conference interpreter in a small market such as Ireland is the fluctuating nature of the work and the fact that you must either have many other clients abroad or have an alternative income, much as I love - and have loved - my other jobs.

“Interpreters must combine interpreting with other careers (translating is an obvious choice) or have clients outside Ireland”

9. Is it possible to have a good standard of living?

Working only in Ireland it is not possible to have a good standard of living from conference interpreting alone. At least not every year. Interpreters must combine interpreting with other careers (translating is an obvious choice) or have clients outside Ireland, such as the EU institutions or interpreting agencies / recruiting colleagues based in other countries. The nature of the career is global so you need a passport to earn a good living.

10. What advice would you give someone thinking of embarking on a career as a translator/interpreter?

Build strong language skills and deepen your knowledge of the culture(s) linked to your working languages.

Get training as an interpreter. Those who succeed without training are few and far between.

The MA in conference interpreting in NUIG is currently the only course of its kind in Ireland and the only MA in the world where you can do conference interpreting with Irish as part of the language combinations. The MA in NUIG has a memorandum of understanding with the EU institutions with whom it works in close cooperation in the delivery of the classes. The EU also supports the NUIG’s MA trainers in the development of their skills. For example, I consider myself lucky to have attended the EU Commission’s Training for Trainers course – a programme very few people have done.

Collegiality, professionality and networking will bring your career much further than any campaign to introduce yourself to agencies, as word of mouth and colleagues’ recommendations are the main source of work in the private market.

If you are interested in working for the EU institutions, find out the current EU language needs and apply yourself to learning (some of) those languages. Interpreters with Gaelic as a mother tongue are currently in very short supply there, for example.

Be prepared for a lifetime of learning. Having a curious mind is a must.

Finally… be prepared to enjoy it!
Court interpreting is a well-regulated profession in Austria. A law actually stipulates the rates that legal interpreters get for their services at hearings, trials, investigative examinations, or asylum proceedings. The rates are indexed – and this is where Austria’s court interpreters had reason to go on strike on 17 September 2019: Although the cost-of-living index went up by 22.6%, rates have not been increased since the last rate adjustment in 2007. In fact, general budget cuts in 2014 led to a rate reduction of nearly 60%. With this lack of attractiveness, young interpreters opt for other interpreting careers and cannot be convinced that it is worth sitting for the fairly tough certification test, which must be taken before they can call themselves “allgemein beeidete und gerichtlich zertifizierte Dolmetscher” – a title protected by law in Austria. In consequence, the total number of court interpreters has shrunk from 1500 a decade ago to a mere 720 this year. It should also be mentioned that the average age of court interpreters in Austria is 50 plus. Add to this the flow of migrants that have poured into the country and need language assistance in their asylum and judicial procedures, for which hardly any qualified interpreters are available qualified for their (in Austria) lesser-used languages. The budget cuts also reduced the administrative staff of courts, which means that court interpreters (who also translate for the courts as part of their certified competences) must sometimes wait for months and even years to get their hard-earned remuneration. Against this background, the ÖVGD (Austrian Association of Court Interpreters) put the plan to vote at the last AGM in March 2019 and was supported by members in its project to stage a country-wide strike on 17 September.

The judges’ association was asked for their support by not scheduling hearings or trials on 17 September where language assistance would be needed and agreed to cooperate as fully as possible. Posters were printed and sent to all court houses with the request to put them up in prominent locations. Flyers were sent to every member of the association asking them to distribute them in front of courthouses. The media were alerted and reacted with surprising enthusiasm featuring interviews with ÖVGD officers on all channels and at prime times. A so-called “information meeting” was held at Vienna’s main criminal court where a former minister of justice and two members of parliament spoke out in support of the claims that Austria’s court interpreters have submitted to the minister of justice.

Let’s keep our fingers crossed that all this action and solidarity will lead to tangible results – meaning more cash in our pockets!

Liese Katschinka, Member of the ÖVGD Board
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https://tinyurl.com/uyqgeda
BDÜ conference: ‘Translating and Interpreting 4.0 – New Ways in the Digital Age’

Germany’s largest association for translators and interpreters, the BDÜ, held its 3rd international conference last November in the impressive World Conference Centre in Bonn. More than 1,000 participants from 25 countries attended the three-day event, which featured over 100 presentations, panel discussions and workshops in English or German.

In view of the conference title, it’s no surprise that the hot topics for the weekend were NMT (neural machine translation), artificial intelligence, big data and data privacy.

In Friday’s keynote speech, Florika Fink-Hooijer described the innovations under way at the European Commission’s General Directorate for Interpreting, which include a digital toolbox, virtual interpreting and voice recognition services.

SDL’s Daniel Brockmann traced the rise of machine translation from its humble beginnings as a rule-based system in the 1990s to today’s neural machine translation approach adopted by products like DeepL. NMT systems are considered to yield better-quality results than rule-based systems and are being integrated in CAT tools like Studio. However, there are still problems with consistency and coherence.

The view that the rise of NMT will require new skills from translators who will need to keep their eyes peeled for ‘devil in the detail’ errors was echoed by Saturday’s keynote speaker, Slator’s Florian Faas. NMT and post-editing are expected to prompt a move from a word price to an hourly price. Another major industry trend is that of market consolidation, as venture capitalists and private equity firms discover there’s money to be made in buying and selling translation firms (the global translation industry was valued at USD 23.2bn in 2018). For now, our industry is still heavily fragmented, with 73% of market players accounted for by small agencies, freelancers and internal language departments. But we can expect LSPs to change hands more frequently going forward.

Intellectual copyright and data privacy

The question of intellectual copyright was discussed by a panel comprising representatives from the BDÜ, tech and industry. The tech providers adopt a laissez-faire approach, arguing that they merely offer the tools and technology and that it’s up to the stakeholders in the translation process to develop business models that address copyright matters. This issue is likely to resurface as more translators offer post-editing of machine-translated texts as a service, and further efforts will be needed to obtain a satisfactory outcome.

Data privacy is an especially relevant topic since the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation was issued in 2018. John O’Shea outlined FIT Europe’s work on developing common European GDPR guidelines for the translation industry, which involves creating a model processing agreement to tackle problematic areas of data protection.

Further trends include complex tenders for projects too large to be handled by solo language professionals, and clients adopting new business models to work only with corporations instead of self-employed individuals for liability reasons. This concerted move to shift liability onto the supplier is accompanied by price pressure on many freelance colleagues. Last but not least, there appears to be a disconnect between tech firms playing fast and loose with big data on the one hand while individuals and sole traders are increasingly squeezed by data privacy concerns on the other. Plenty of food for thought as the new decade commences!

Tara Russell
The extent and duration of interpreter provision for Irish speakers appearing in court in the long nineteenth century have long been a conundrum. In 1737 the Administration of Justice (Language) Act stipulated that all legal proceedings in Ireland should take place in English, thus placing Irish speakers at a huge disadvantage, obliging them to communicate through others, and treating them as foreigners in their own country. Gradually, over time, legislation was passed to allow the grand juries, forerunners of county councils, to employ salaried interpreters. Drawing on extensive research on grand jury records held at national and local level, supplemented by records of correspondence with the Chief Secretary’s Office in Dublin Castle, this book provides definitive answers on where, when, and until when, Irish language court interpreters were employed. Contemporaneous newspaper court reports are used to illustrate how exactly the system worked in practice and to explore official, primarily negative, attitudes towards Irish speakers. The famous Maamtrasna murder trials, where, most unusually for such a serious case, a police constable acted as court interpreter, are discussed. The book explains the appointment process for interpreters, discusses ethical issues that arose in court, and includes microhistories of some 90 interpreters.

Mary Phelan’s interest in interpreting is on full display in her latest publication by Four Courts Press which gives us a brief overview:

Annette Schiller, member of the ITIA Executive Committee and Chair of FIT Europe and Ralf Lemster, Vice-President of the BDÜ, the German Federal Association of Translators and Interpreters, the largest professional association in Germany, met with Director General of EMPL (Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion), European Commission, Joost Korte, in Brussels in late November 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to outline the work and objectives of FIT Europe and the BDÜ, highlighting in particular the fact that the vast majority of translators and interpreters are genuine freelancers. The topic of pensions within the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights was discussed from the point of view of freelancers as was the European A1 form (previously E101, E103) (theoretically) required when travelling abroad on business trips within the EU and which provides confirmation of the payment of social contributions in the home Member State. This was an excellent opportunity for opening up communication and raising awareness of the nature of our profession. Our thanks to Dr Hubert Koch for setting up this high-level meeting.

Link to Irish Independent review of Mary Phelan’s new book on interpreting in the Irish courts: https://tinyurl.com/wdq37h
The workshop will combine text-based work and practical aspects of the profession. The morning session will be devoted to text-related issues:

- comparing different published English language translations of the same sample text (no knowledge of source language required)
- looking at typical challenges in terms of cultural or technical knowledge
- translating historical vs contemporary writers
- working with editors and proofreaders

The afternoon session will focus on practical aspects of the profession:

- how to get started / how to progress
- rights and permissions
- publishing outlets
- networking and CPD opportunities
- balancing time, money and love of translation

There will be Q&A throughout the day.

Fee: EUR 60 for ITIA members/ EUR 90 non-members

Date: Saturday, 25th April 2020. 11.00-16.00. Light lunch and networking included.

Rachel McNicholl, freelance translator and editor, will be giving a workshop on Literary Translation on Saturday, 25th April at the IWC, 19 Parnell Square.

Rachel McNicholl is a freelance translator and editor based in Dublin. She studied French, German and Italian for BA and has an MA in German Language and Literature. She has worked at home and abroad in research, teaching, journalism and publishing.

Rachel’s literary translations have appeared in journals and anthologies including The Stinging Fly, Manoa, No Man’s Land, Best European Fiction and The Short Story Project. Her translation of Nadja Spiegel’s short-story collection sometimes i lie and sometimes i don’t was published by Dalkey Archive Press in 2015. Her most recent publication, co-translated with Sinéad Crowe, is The Storyteller, a novel by German-Lebanese author Pierre Jarawan (World Editions, 2019).

Rachel was awarded a PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant by PEN America in 2016 and a Literature Bursary by the Irish Arts Council in 2014.
Since 2010, Literature Ireland and the Trinity Centre for Literary and Cultural Translation have run an annual translator-in-residence programme. Together, we have hosted literary translators from Argentina, Brazil, China, Japan, Russia and Turkey. The residency targets a specific language territory each year and German was the language chosen for 2020.

In January, we were delighted to welcome translator Anna-Nina Kroll as our first German translator-in-residence. Anna-Nina is currently translating Donal Ryan’s From a Low and Quiet Sea which will be published by Diogenes, Zurich, in 2021.

On Monday, 24 February, we will be hosting an evening with Anna-Nina and writer Donal Ryan, for a discussion about how Anna-Nina approaches her translation of his work, with a particular focus on From a Low and Quiet Sea. The event will take place at 6pm at Trinity Centre for Literary and Cultural Translation (36 Fenian Street, Dublin 2). All are welcome and admission is free. Booking is essential: for more information, email info@literatureireland.com or littrans@tcd.ie

Anna-Nina Kroll studied Literary Translation at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf and she has been working as a full-time literary translator since 2012. She has translated the work of many international writers, including Irish writers Donal Ryan and Anna Burns. She has translated all of Donal Ryan’s work (The Thing about December, The Spinning Heart and All We Shall Know). Her translation of Milkman by Anna Burns will be published at the end of February by Tropen Verlag Berlin.
EU Commission’s DGT was left with a lot of egg on their faces when third party test takers for the TRAD19 Contract met with a range of platform technical problems and had to resit the test at considerable expense to the tenderers. Ooops!

What’s HOT

Prime Minister’s Questions in the House of Commons provided historic sign language interpretation at the beginning of February in a bid to make parliamentary proceedings ‘accessible to everyone’. The sign language interpretation is being provided by the House of Commons on a trial basis on Parliament’s website.

What’s NOT

This article shows how our Dutch interpreter colleagues withdrew their labour to highlight unfair working conditions

https://tinyurl.com/w636yty

Following up on the Danish article in ITIA Bulletin 2019/4, this highlights how poor contract performance by translation corporations in Denmark leads to cancellation – something that could be learnt in Ireland!

https://tinyurl.com/seupoef

This article informs on conditions for freelancers in California, and response from ATA

https://tinyurl.com/w7humcm

Court case in Ireland highlights the necessity for Certified Legal Translators

https://tinyurl.com/uvd3dkx

English is the world’s dominant scientific language, yet it has no word for the distinctive smell of cockroaches.

https://tinyurl.com/yx42n5ud
New Members

Joining the ITIA

New Associate Members

Natalia Egan
Russian to English
English to Russian

Bogdan Grecu
Romanian to English
English to Romanian

Bogna Podlewskata-Dufaj
English to Polish
Polish to English

Naoto Nishio
Japanese to English
English to Japanese

Kristine Matusa
Latvian to English
English to Latvian
Russian to English
English to Russian

Ekaterina Koneva
English to Russian
Russian to English

Piotr Lesinski
English to Polish
Polish to English

The Irish Translators’ & Interpreters’ Association is pleased to welcome new members to the association. We currently have the following categories of membership:

• Professional
• Associate
• Student
• Honorary

Professional Membership is awarded to translators or interpreters who meet the strict criteria of the ITIA based on qualification and level of experience. Applicants must also achieve a PASS in the annual Professional Membership Examination (translator or interpreter) set by the ITIA.

Associate Membership may be granted to holders of a third-level qualification in translation and/or interpreting and/or languages or to holders of a third-level qualification with relevant experience.

Student Membership is available to persons undertaking undergraduate studies in any discipline or those undertaking postgraduate studies in translation and interpreting.

Honorary Membership is awarded by the ITIA AGM to persons in Ireland or abroad who have distinguished themselves in the field of translation and interpreting.
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ITIA Bulletin

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