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The Changing Face of Translation and Interpreting

FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES TRADUCTEURS
La voix des associations de traducteurs, d’interprètes et de terminologues à travers le monde

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRANSLATORS
The voice of associations of translators, interpreters and terminologists around the world

✉ Siège/Registered Office: REGUS, 57 rue d’Amsterdam, 75008 Paris, France
☎ +(33) 1 533 21 755 | ☏ +(33) 1 533 21 732 | secretariat@fit-ift.org | www.fit-ift.org

Young colleagues at ABRATES Congress; Nuremberg Interpreters; Jeremy Borland (SLIANZ/NZSTI) at Christchurch earthquake briefing
The time has again come to celebrate the Feast of Saint Jerome – International Translation Day. The International Federation of Translators' chosen theme for this year is:

The Changing Face of Translation and Interpreting

highlighting the dynamic nature of our profession. Effective crisis communication and cross-cultural understanding have been sustained and mitigated by us throughout the ages, only the tools have changed: from fountain pens to typewriters to speech recognition; from index cards to electronic dictionaries and the knowledge highway; from the Filene-Finlay simultaneous system used in Nuremberg trials to telephone and video remote interpreting. We are yet to discover the tools that will help us in the future.

As the world changes, so do many aspects of our work. Graduates today can barely believe the working conditions of their predecessors only 30 years ago. Today a wealth of information lies at our fingertips. A plethora of tools enable us to translate faster and more consistently. We can consult networks of colleagues all over the world without leaving our desks.

For clients, too, translation has changed. No longer do they battle to find a local translator to meet their needs – professional associations all over the world have directories of members waiting to assist. Thanks to communication over time zones, clients can send out carefully drafted texts before leaving the office in the evening and have the translation waiting on their desk with their morning coffee. They can balance costs and target a specific audience over different projects simply by using translators in different parts of the world. They can negotiate with clients on the other side of the world or consult a doctor on the other side of the country, all thanks to the availability of expert telephone interpreters. They can even run a text through a machine translation program and get an immediate, variable idea of what it is about.

Technology has been disruptive and presents new challenges, and unimagined opportunities. Speed, cost and volume are just some of the variables affected, but by no means the only ones. Practitioners can work smarter and harness change by adapting to changing roles, learning new skills and mastering new tools.
Although at heart, our essential role is still the same.

• The role of translators and interpreters has not changed since the time of St Jerome: to enable communication.
• Quality remains the touchstone of any assignment and still depends on the skill and experience of the translator or interpreter and selecting the right person or increasingly the right team for the job.
• Translators still craft each text to fit its purpose.
• Clients still need to brief the translator or interpreter, clearly explaining their needs.
• Translators still keep themselves fresh, up-to-date and on the ball through continuing professional development, including learning new technology.

What will the face of translation and interpreting look like in the future?

For millennia, living, breathing translators and interpreters have embodied unparalleled linguistic skills, specialised training, professional conduct and overarching passion for their work. The best equipment can help them do an even better job, but cannot get to the heart and soul of a text or the nuance of negotiations. Let International Translation Day 2015 be a celebration of the great advances that have been made in translation and interpreting, and most importantly, celebrate the individuals who are the beating heart of this profession. For they have made the global village not just a possibility but also a reality. A connected, communication highway that runs across time zones, languages and continents, a universe full of past, present and future possibilities.

Please join us in celebrating the changing face of translation and interpreting on International Translation Day, 30 September 2015.