

Technical Standards in Interpreting

AIIC Turkey was established in January 2006 at the AIIC General Assembly in Brussels as AIIC's newest region and decided to focus its energy on professional development and communication with stakeholders in collaboration with the national association of conference interpreters in Turkey, the BKTD (www.bktd.org).

The need for professional development in the challenging environment of a conference interpreter is self-evident. Although professional development can be realized through individual effort, a comprehensive effort undertaken by the professional community based on years of local and AIIC experience offers better potential for a wider coverage of issues and interpreters. Professional development is important because good interpreters are a product of extensive training and continuous professional development. On the other hand, training and professionalism, alone, do not ensure high quality professional interpretation services because interpreters need the input and cooperation of PCOs and technical service providers for a thorough preparation and the smooth running of interpretation service. Therefore, communication with these stakeholders must also be stressed.

As part of the Region's efforts to communicate with stakeholders, AIIC Turkey and the BKTD organized meetings in Ankara and Istanbul on 8-9 September 2006 to discuss the importance of technical standards in interpreting. Our keynote speaker was Didier Hespel who is Head of Meeting Infrastructure at DG SCIC and an AIIC colleague. The target audience was technical service providers providing mobile booths since most venues in Turkey do not have built-in booths and rely on these providers for technical infrastructure. A promising outcome of the events was the initiative taken by technical service providers to form a national association of their own in order to develop technical standards in interpreting.

While this dialog with technical service providers for mobile booths was encouraging for us, it was also important to ensure that existing and future conference centers complied with international standards. Therefore, AIIC and BKTD members visited the Chamber of Architects to explore ways of disseminating a message about standards to architects involved in the construction of convention centers. The Chamber has over 30,000 members and agreed to include news and articles about conference interpreting in its regular bulletins. Since there are six conference centers to be built in Istanbul alone, we hope to make use of this channel to communicate our message on standards.

The last stop during our visits was the Lutfi Kirdar Convention Center in Istanbul which has been the venue to many international events such as the UN Habitat meeting in 1996, the NATO Summit in 2004 and the Union of Architects Conference in 2005. The Center has two main halls – one in the main building and one in the annex - as well as a number of smaller rooms with built-in booths. The main hall in the main building was originally planned to accommodate 12 booths which were later reduced to six by tearing down walls between booths to provide sufficient space for the interpreters. Although this adjustment provided ample space, it did nothing to improve visibility of the stage because booths are located on the mezzanine level at 90 degree angles to the stage.

For some years, the BKTD has been writing letters to the Convention Center requesting monitors in booths since there was no plan for rebuilding them. Although we did not get our monitors, these repeated efforts had the effect of making management more aware of the need for improving built-in booths. As a result, when the management decided to use existing booths as part of new meeting rooms on the mezzanine level, they decided to build new booths at the back of the hall with a direct vision of the stage, albeit from a distance. Our visit coincided with the beginning of construction and we were able to convince the management to build four booths according to ISO 2603 (for built-in booths) instead of six booths according to ISO 4043 (mobile booths). Since our visit, construction has begun and we await the results of our efforts.

It must be noted here that the rehabilitation of existing conference centers prove to be quite difficult since funds must be secured specifically for this purpose. However, there is a better chance of success with convention centers to be built or under construction. Therefore, as the AIIC Region, our efforts will be more focused on new projects in Turkey. In this effort, the contacts and dialog with the Chamber of Architects will prove essential, not to mention the BKTD's official application to the Turkish Standards Institute to convert ISO 2603 and ISO 4043 into Turkish standards.

During our visit to the Lutfi Kirdar Convention Center, we found out that the reason for using ISO 4043 instead of ISO 2603 was lack of access to the ISO 2603 standards. Since our visit, the convention center (as well as the technical service providers) has been provided with the original ISO standards as well as their Turkish translations. More often than not, problems with technical infrastructure result from a lack of communication with stakeholders. On the face of it, this might seem to be an easy hurdle to overcome, although in reality it requires a lot of time and effort.

Turkey has well trained professional interpreters as well as good technical companies, but we realize that irrespective of the level of development in a given market, there is always room for improvement, be this to provide professional development to new interpreters, disseminate messages to stakeholders or accommodate new technologies. (After all, who would have ever thought of remote interpreting 20 years ago!)

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