

Interpreting at the main Nuremberg Trial (1945–1946) and its Impact on Conference Interpreters' Professionalization

Jesús Baigorri-Jalón

ABSTRACT

Der Beitrag untersucht die Rolle der Nürnberger Prozesse für die Professionalisierung von Dolmetschern auf internationalen Konferenzen. Die Entscheidung der Alliierten zur Strafverfolgung von NS-Kriegsverbrechern erforderte das erste Mal in der Geschichte den umfassenden und lang andauernden Einsatz von Simultanübersetzung. Das große internationale Interesse an dem Tribunal und die Notwendigkeit, die simultane mündliche Übersetzung von Ansprachen, Aussagen und Gerichtsdokumenten in die vier offiziellen Gerichtssprachen zu gewährleisten, schärfte bei Nutzern, Berichterstatern und Übersetzern gleichermaßen den Blick für die gewachsenen Anforderungen an Übersetzungen. Die Nürnberger Prozesse wurden damit ungewollt zu einer Ausbildungsstätte für Übersetzer, da die Mehrzahl von ihnen ihre Kenntnisse während ihrer Tätigkeit in Nürnberg erwarben, und verhalfen der Simultanübersetzung zum Durchbruch, was sich auch darin zeigt, dass die Vereinten Nationen sie unmittelbar im Anschluss übernahmen. Dieser Prozess ging mit einer steigenden Zahl weiblicher Übersetzer einher, worin sich bereits die spätere Feminisierung des Berufs ankündigt.

*... the interpreters twittering unhappily in their glass box like cage-birds kept awake by a bright light, feeding the microphones with French and Russian and English versions of the proceedings for the spectators' earphones ...*¹

1 R. West, *A Train of Powder*. New York 1955, p. 7.

Introduction

The following pages focus on how the main Nuremberg trial (1945–1946) contributed to delineate some of the features of the profession of interpreter, whose *field* and *habitus* were little known by most of the people in the courtroom, including many of the interpreters themselves, before the trial began.² I will present some of the lines of research from which the issue can be approached. My main primary sources are the proceedings' verbatim records and quotes from interpreters and monitors about their work. Secondary sources include memoirs written by interpreters or by users of their services. General history books on the trial usually make few references, if any, to the interpreting system and to the interpreters, following an age-long tradition which takes for granted that communication among people who cannot understand each other simply happens, as if language barriers did not exist.

In this multidisciplinary volume, it seems appropriate to clarify a few points. An interpreter is a person who reliably translates speech orally or into sign language for parties unable to communicate with each other. Oral translation can be performed in the following modalities: a) consecutive: interpreters translate once speakers have finished their speeches (in full or in segments); b) *chuchotage*: interpreters (with no technical devices) whisper in the target user's ear the translation of the source speech while it is being uttered; c) simultaneous: interpreters translate instantaneously using headphones (for the incoming speech) and microphones (for the outgoing translation) while speakers are talking; and d) sight translation: interpreters translate orally a text written in the source language simultaneously into the target language. All the modalities – including sometimes the reading aloud by interpreters of pre-translated texts to avoid back translation – coexisted at the Nuremberg trial, although simultaneous, quite a novelty at that time, was the most frequently used in the hearings and also in the private deliberations of the judges – in this case, the German booth was not necessary.

Interpreting at courts had been used in history for centuries (from Spanish Inquisition tribunals to Spanish colonial *Audiencias* or the London courts, *inter alia*),³ though never before with the political scope or the media impact it had at Nuremberg. Multilingual military justice also had precedents. Even if the post-World War I (WWI) Leipzig trials

2 For an application of Bourdieu's concepts to Translation and Interpreting Studies, see: M. Inghilleri, The Sociology of Bourdieu and the Construction of the 'Object' in Translation and Interpreting Studies, in: *The Translator* 11 (2015) 2, pp. 125-145.

3 Respectively, Sarmiento-Pérez (M. Sarmiento-Pérez, Interpreting for the Inquisition, in: K. Takeda and J. Baigorri-Jalón (eds.), *New Insights in the History of Interpreting*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2016, pp. 47-74) on Inquisition; Alonso/Baigorri/Payàs (I. Alonso and J. Baigorri and G. Payàs, *Nahuatlatsos y familias de intérpretes en el México colonial*, in: 1611. *Revista de Historia de la Traducción* 2 (2008), <http://www.traduccionliteraria.org/1611/art/alonso-baigorri-payas.htm> (accessed on 10 June 2016) on *Audiencias*; and MacFarlane (K. MacFarlane, *Understanding Justice. Criminal Courtroom Interpreting in eighteenth-century London and twentieth-century Toronto*, in: *TTR (traduction, terminologie, redaction)*, XX (2007) 2, pp. 271-299) on 18th-century London courts.

(1921) were “pronounced a failure”⁴ or a “farce”,⁵ those proceedings were in Jackson’s mind when he gave his opening speech at Nuremberg: “Either the victors must judge the vanquished or we must leave the defeated to judge themselves. After the first World War, we learned the futility of the latter course”.⁶

More immediate precedents to the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal (IMT) were the trials that took place in the World War II (WWII) context. For nationals of the European Axis countries, excluding those conducted in the Soviet Union,⁷ there were 2,116 known military tribunal hearings of lower-level defendants.⁸ Tobia has shown how British authorities established a pool of interpreters,⁹ which reached the figure of 1,520 in October 1945, just before the beginning of the Nuremberg trial. Recruited among liaison soldiers who knew the relevant languages, with little or no training, and with no previous “operational rules” or “professional code of practice”, they ended up, with the help of a Master Interpreter, as “a nucleus of a professional group of court interpreters”.¹⁰ All told, more than 5,000 Nazis were condemned by all the Allied war crimes tribunals taken together, with 806 death sentences.¹¹

The IMT that took place at Nuremberg between November 1945 and October 1946 responds to the need felt by WWII Allied Powers that justice had to be done expeditiously while respecting due process.¹² The linguistic challenges involved were daunting, as Jus-

4 Cadogan quoted in: E.S. Borgwardt, Re-examining Nuremberg as a New Deal Institution: Politics, Culture and the Limits of Law in Generating Human Rights Norms, in: *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 23 (2005) 2, pp. 400-462, p. 428.

5 *Masquerade* in French, A. Wieviorka, Le procès de Nuremberg. Rennes 1995, p. 10. As far as language services are concerned, interpreting was provided for British witnesses giving evidence at the Leipzig court (C. Mullins, *The Leipzig Trials: An Account of the War Criminals’ Trials and a Study of German Mentality*, London 1921, p. 48).

6 R. Jackson, Opening Statement of the Trial, 21 November, 1945, in: *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal. Volume II. Proceedings: 11/14/1945-11/30/1945*. [Official text in the English language.] Nuremberg 1947, pp. 98-102, <https://www.roberthjackson.org/speech-and-writing/opening-statement-before-the-international-military-tribunal/> (accessed on 10 June 2016).

7 For the 1943 Kharkov trials, see: G. Dawson, *Judgment Before Nuremberg. The Holocaust in the Ukraine and the First Nazi War Crimes Trial*, New York 2012.

8 Borgwardt, Re-examining Nuremberg, p. 448.

9 S. Tobia, *Crime and Judgement. Interpreters/Translators in British War Crime Trials, 1945–1949*, in: *The Translator*, 6 (2010) 2, pp. 275-293, p. 282.

10 *Ibid.*, 291-292.

11 Borgwardt, Re-examining Nuremberg, p. 448.

12 The Nuremberg main trial as a turning point in the history of interpreting has been studied, among others, by D. Bowen and M. Bowen, *The Nuremberg trials (Communication through translation)*, in: *Meta* 30 (1985) 1, pp. 74-77; A. Koch, *Übersetzen und Dolmetschen im ersten Nürnberger Kriegsverbrecherprozeß, in Lebende Sprachen*, 37 (1992) 1, pp. 1-7; I. Kurz, *Simultandolmetschen als Gegenstand der interdisziplinären Forschung*, Wien 1996; F. Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, Ottawa 1998 for the most complete monograph on the subject, and J. Baigorri-Jalón, *Conference Interpreting: From Modern Times to Space Technology*, in: *Interpreting* 4 (1999) 1, pp. 29-40; J. Baigorri-Jalón, *De Paris a Nuremberg. Naissance de l’interprétation de Conférence [From Paris to Nuremberg. The birth of conference interpreting]*, H. Mikkelsen and B. Olsen (trans.), Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2014/2000. Corpataux and Behr (M. Corpataux, and M. Behr, *Die Nürnberger Prozesse aus der Sicht der Dolmetscher Richard Sonnenfeldt und Siegfried Ramler*, München 2006) have studied the profile of two interpreters who participated in the pre-trial and the trial; and Behr and Corpataux (M. Behr, and M. Corpataux, *Die Nürnberger Prozesse. Zur Bedeutung der Dolmetscher für die Prozesse und der Prozesse für die Dolmetscher*, München 2006) have focused on the significance of interpreting for the Nuremberg trial and of the trial for interpreters, four of whose biographies are presented.

tice Jackson (US) recognized in a statement made on August 12, 1945, while discussing the War Trial Agreement:

*This requires a trial rendered into four languages –German, Russian, French, and English. This will be a dreary business, and there is no use trying to dodge that fact. It is a tedious prospect for me and for representatives of all the governments which will engage in it.*¹³

Participants in the proceedings came from the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, France and Germany, among many other countries. Since they spoke different languages (mainly English, Russian, French and German), they required a viable solution to the communication barrier. The IMT Charter provided:

Art. 16 (c) A preliminary examination of a Defendant and his Trial shall be conducted in, or translated into, a language which the Defendant understands.

*Art. 25. All official documents shall be produced, and all court proceedings conducted, in English, French and Russian, and in the language of the Defendant. So much of the record and of the proceedings may also be translated into the language of any country in which the Tribunal is sitting, as the Tribunal is sitting, as the Tribunal considers desirable in the interests of the justice and public opinion.*¹⁴

The IMT was followed by twelve subsequent proceedings (1946–1949) against corporate or individual suspects of collaboration with the Nazi regime (judges, doctors, companies, etc.). Interpreting in those proceedings was limited to English and German.

The delineation of conference – not court – interpreting as a profession can be traced back to the interwar period between WWI and WWII.¹⁵ The features of a still embryonic professional status in those years were: the establishment of functional rules (working conditions, professional fees), a solid academic background (Antoine Velleman would eventually create the specialized School of Translation and Interpreting in Geneva in 1941), and a professional code of ethics (attitude at work, professional secret).¹⁶ Whether or not that served as a meaningful inspiration for the IMT is uncertain, since the recruitment of interpreters for the trial was done quite hurriedly, first at the Pentagon, then at various places in Europe, and finally at Nuremberg.¹⁷ In many cases, not only among

13 Justice Jackson, Statement on War Trials Agreement, 12 August 1945, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/imt_jack02.asp (accessed on: 10 June 2016).

14 Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 1: Charter of the International Military Tribunal, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/imtconst.asp> (accessed on 10 June 2016)

15 For an in-depth analysis of the first research case study on interwar conference interpreters (J. Sanz, *Le travail et les aptitudes des interprètes parlementaires*, in: *Analys d'Orientació Professional* 4 (1930) 4, pp. 303–318); see: F. Pöchhacker, *Los estudios de interpretación, enfocados desde el Sur*, in: J.J. Amigo Extremera (ed.), *Traducimos desde el sur. Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Ibérica de Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación: Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 23-25 de enero de 2013*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2015, pp. 27–38.

16 J. Baigorri Jalón, *En torno a Antoine Velleman, fundador de la Escuela de Ginebra*, in: *Parallèles* 20 (1998), pp. 9–30; J. Baigorri Jalón, *Conference Interpreting in the First International Labor Conference in Washington, D. C., 1919*, in: *Meta* 50 (2005) 3, pp. 987–996.

17 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, p. 40–50.

the Western allies but also in the USSR,¹⁸ the candidates had never interpreted at all, let alone in simultaneous mode.¹⁹

All in all, interpreting at Nuremberg should then be perceived as a socially relevant “applied” occupation, which had not been previously learnt by the overwhelming majority of its practitioners. Using the terms proposed by Parsons in his entry on “Professions”,²⁰ although the “intellectual component” was an absolutely essential ingredient for the interpreting function, it was mainly the “skills” element which was the most visible and audible, due to the constant exposure of interpreters’ to their multiple end-users. Rudvin provides a good summary of the literature and the *status quaestionis* of interpreting and professional identity,²¹ by drawing on approaches from other disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology or psychology. I believe the sociological approach proposed, among others, by Parsons, Boltanski and Abbott brings to the fore the study of work and its links with professional life in “jurisdictions”:²² “who served them, where they came from, how the market was created, how conflict shaped participants”.²³ These points may be relevant for our case study, characterized by the full-scale use of simultaneous interpreting. The formation of the simultaneous interpreters’ teams at Nuremberg was not hampered by internal circumstances,²⁴ in the sense that competition from the relatively well-established group of seasoned consecutive conference interpreters did not take place. That would happen soon at the UN, with the form of an epic battle.²⁵ The external circumstances²⁶ were favorable at Nuremberg: a military tribunal which moved according to a clear hierarchy, a sense of urgency, and the introduction of a (mostly) alien technical equipment.²⁷

The simultaneous interpreters’ working conditions at the IMT were regulated as follows, according to Steer, Head of the interpreting service at Nuremberg after colonel Dostert’s departure for the UN in New York in April 1946:

- 18 Stupnikova, Tat’jana, Nièego krome Pravdy [Tutta la verità nient’altro che la verità. Il processo di Norimberga con gli occhi d’un interprete russa], C. Panfili (trans.), Rome 2014, p. 34.
- 19 Only Haakon Chevalier and Edouard Roditi had simultaneous interpreting experience, see: W. Keiser, *Genèse de la profession et précurseurs de l’AIIIC (1918–1953)*, in : AIIIC Groupe Histoire Naissance d’une profession. Les soixante premières années de l’Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIIC), Geneva 2013, pp. 12-57, p.16).
- 20 T. Parsons, Professions, in: D.L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, vol. 12, New York 1968, pp. 536-547, p. 536.
- 21 M. Rudvin, *Interpreting and professional identity*, in: H. Mikkelsen and R. Jourdenais (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, London/New York 2015, pp. 432-446.
- 22 Parsons, Professions; L. Boltanski, *L’espace positionnel: multiplicité des positions institutionnelles et habitus de classe*, in: *Revue française de sociologie* 14 (1973) 1, pp. 3-26; and A. Abbott, *The System of Professions. An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*, Chicago/London 1988.
- 23 Abbott, *The System of Professions*, p. 325.
- 24 J. Boéri, *Key Internal Players in the Development of the Interpreting Profession*, in: H. Mikkelsen and R. Jourdenais (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, London/New York 2015, pp. 29-44.
- 25 J. Baigorri-Jalón, *Interpreters at the United Nations: A History*, Anne Barr (trans.), Salamanca 2004.
- 26 S. García-Beyaert, *Key External Players in the Development of the Profession*, in: H. Mikkelsen and R. Jourdenais (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, London/ New York 2015, pp. 45-61.
- 27 The IMT Court Interpreting Branch was placed under the Translation Division Director, always an American.

*I had three separate teams of interpreters. One team would be in the courtroom interpreting, the second team would be in the room off to the side listening in case they had to be inserted in the courtroom and the third team would be off completely for the day.*²⁸

A French booth interpreter, Marie-France Skuncke, describes the procedure in detail:

*The interpreters' work was regulated like clockwork. Three teams A-B-C, each with twelve interpreters. Four booths: English, Russian, German, French. In each booth, three interpreters, each interpreting into his or her mother tongue from one of three other working languages. A typical day: morning, team A, 45 minutes in the booth, during which time team B was listening to the proceedings in room 606, behind the courtroom. Mid-morning, team change, B goes to booth, A to room 606. The hearing breaks at noon. Same scenario in the afternoon. On that day, team C was resting. Every day, two of the three teams were working. In this way, the interpreters had one or two rest days per week, plus the weekends. It should be noted that some interpreters – not necessarily members of the simultaneous team – interpreted the questioning of the defendants outside of the regular hearings of the Tribunal.*²⁹

Approaches to interpreting at the IMT

Actual interpreting at the IMT can be approached from many perspectives. Four are proposed briefly in the following pages: discourse analysis, ethical and professional issues, the sociological picture of interpreters and the technical challenge.

1. Discourse analysis

Spoken language is not a clear-cut substance from which a seamless sequence of meaning can be automatically transferred into another language as in arithmetical calculation. Interpreters faced an enormous variety of original speeches, from those full of typical legal jargon and formulaic expressions to statements made by participants from all walks of life on all kinds of topics, with many national and regional accents, and with language registers from various social classes and groups. Oral interpreting also involves non-verbal elements, from body language to eye contact, from gestures to the management of pauses and silences. It should be stressed that procedures followed in court – even in one with a mixture of legal traditions – are usually based on pieces of written evidence – hence, the importance of the translation section – that was present in many of the oral phases of the trial. In fact, the Nuremberg Trial meant the triumph of the written over

28 Steer, quoted by W. Ford, Athens man recounts his role interpreting the Nuremberg Trials, in: Athens Banner-Herald, 25 August 2002, http://onlineathens.com/stories/082502/ath_20020825035.shtml#1 (accessed on 10 June 2016).

29 M.-F. Skuncke, Tout a commencé à Nuremberg..., in: Parallèles 11 (1989), p. 6, quoted in: Baigorri-Jalón, From Paris to Nuremberg, p. 233.

the oral mode: the prosecution and counsel usually read their speeches.³⁰ Since “the reading of a document in open court would automatically solve the translation problem”, a good deal “of the Nuremberg trial was consequently devoted to a numbing protocol that seemed to highlight less the malignancy of the defendants than the ingenuity of IBM”, as Douglas ironically states.³¹ Interpreters at the IMT also took part in the revision of the written transcriptions of their recorded performances,³² so their job was an amalgam of oral and written functions.³³

Interpreters at the IMT were listened to by the original speakers (defendants, witnesses and legal experts), other language specialists (such as verbatim reporters and translators), and the public in general. That direct exposure, where stage fright associated to public speaking was compounded by the element of simultaneity, was only mitigated by very primitive booths and by the surveillance carried out by interpreters’ monitors on speech density, mostly associated with speed of delivery. Monitors, members of the Translation Division, also supervised interpreters’ accuracy and the functioning of the sound equipment, and facilitated communication between the court and the interpreters (for instance, the provision of documents which were to be read out for translation).³⁴

A specialized lexicon emerged among interpreters and translators,³⁵ not only in their preparatory stage but also through their practice during the trial. The mixture of legal backgrounds among lawyers, prosecutors and judges (basically the Roman and the common law traditions) made interpreters’ tasks more difficult, since an almost mathematical equivalence between expressions and concepts, some of which were being coined at the court, was not always possible among languages. So interpreting statements, argumentations, etc. required not just a merely semantic approach but also pragmatic strategies to achieve a delicate balance between the transmission of sense and the preservation of the “word-for-word” scheme that many users had in mind as the equivalent of a good translation. This was all the more important since the words translated by interpreters were often charged with forensic value and had a potential impact on the proceedings and eventually on the judgment. To give just one example, in German the expression *Ja* at the beginning of an answer is a kind of hedge while the speaker is thinking what to say. An immediate translation as *Yes* could have unjustified and undesired legal consequences, so monitor Uiberall instructed interpreters to translate it as *Well* or something to that effect.³⁶

30 Wiewiorka, *Le procès de Nuremberg*, p. 43.

31 L. Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment. Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust*. New Haven/London 2001, p. 18.

32 S. Ramler, *Origins and challenges of simultaneous interpretation the Nuremberg Trials experience*, in: D. Lindberg Hammond (ed.) *Languages at Crossroads: Proceedings of the 29th Annual Conference of the American Translators Association*, Seattle, WA, October 12-16 1988, Medford 1988, p. 439.

33 Interpreting and translation were separate professions at the League of Nations and later at the UN.

34 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, 77 et seq.

35 Two interpreters, Chevalier and MacIntosh, co-authored a terminology (See: L.D. Egbert and H.M. Chevalier and C. D. MacIntosh, *Glossary of Legal Terms: English-French, French-English*, Nuremberg 1946.

36 Baigorri-Jalón, *From Paris to Nuremberg*, p. 226.

The potential ambivalence of words was made even more complex by the meaning some terms had acquired under the Nazi regime³⁷ and by the speakers' deliberate use of ambiguous expressions. Ramler, one of the interpreters, refers to the controversial meaning attributed to words like *Endlösung* or *erfassen* under the Nazi regime, which allowed defendants to challenge sometimes prosecutors' arguments, as when Göring said that "final solution" ("annihilation") should be translated as "total solution".³⁸ That led interpreters at times to the rather strange position of having to interpret discussions on their own translations' accuracy.³⁹

Speed of delivery was indeed a problem for interpreters. Yellow and red lights were installed at the podiums from which the various participants spoke as a safety net designed by organizers and monitors to keep speed under control. Practice along the proceedings allowed interpreters to cope with increasingly fast speakers,⁴⁰ but the constraints caused by the speed interpreters could handle had an impact on the oratorical styles and the spontaneity of speakers: "... I have been informed by the interpreters that I have been speaking at a great speed this morning, so I shall try to temper the speed".⁴¹

2. Ethical and professional issues

Interpreters' neutrality at the court was a *sine qua non*. Interpreters had been screened at Nuremberg, after previous selection processes, and their performance was public for all the audience to hear. However, the interpreters' personal background no doubt affected them in a decisive manner, for instance when they had to interpret the suspected perpetrators of crimes whose impact had disrupted directly or indirectly their lives. Their choice between an accurate rendition of the speeches and their own memory of pain entailed a complex array of feelings, including post-traumatic stress. Some direct or indirect victims of the Nazi regime, like Peter Less, could do it:

It wasn't easy [to maintain neutrality]. You were sitting in the same room with the people who probably killed your parents, but you could not let your feelings interfere with your

37 K. Werner, *Zwischen Neutralität und Propaganda – Französisch-Dolmetscher im Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin 2014.

38 Ramler (1988: 439) says that in the Nazi context *erfassen* could mean "seize" physically instead of "register" as in conducting a survey of a population. Koch (1992: 5-6) refers to the way in which Göring played with the meaning of terms such as "final solution" or "liberation of the Rhine" during Jackson's cross-interrogation.

39 Ramler, *Origins and challenges of simultaneous interpretation*, p. 439.

40 Quoting monitor Peter Uiberall and French-booth interpreter Elisabeth Heyward in: Baigorri-Jalón, *From Paris to Nuremberg*, p. 233. For the role of practice in coping with "cognitive overload" caused by speed, see: B. Moser-Mercer, *Simultaneous interpreting: Cognitive potential and limitations*, in: *Interpreting* 5 (2000) 2, pp. 83-94.

41 Mr. Alderman (US prosecution), 10 December 1945, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/12-10-45.asp> (accessed on 10 June 2016). Alderman had expressed earlier (23 November 1945) the positive role of simultaneous interpreting as a time-saving arrangement: "I think many of us have underestimated the contribution of this interpreting system to this Trial. We all see how it has speeded the proceeding", <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/11-23-45.asp> (accessed on 10 June 2016).

*job. You swore to interpret as faithfully as possible, to put the speaker's idea into the listener's head. So we did.*⁴²

Others, like Armand Jacobovitch or Margrete Abrahams, could not, and were transferred to the written translation service.⁴³

Although the work schedule functioned as clockwork (Skuncke *supra*), the interpreters' workload was asymmetric, among booths and within each booth. The proceedings records show that there were many more statements in German and English than in French or Russian. So the German and the English booths were not as busy as the other two, and in a given booth the interpreters who translated from French or Russian would work less than their booth colleagues.⁴⁴ Besides, the interpreters' earnings, length of contract and perks were different, depending on their background and on the Allied power that had recruited them.⁴⁵

In the case of the Soviet team, interpreters reported to their own supervisors, so they were always fearful of the undesirable consequences that an interpreting mistake might have for them,⁴⁶ particularly when dealing with delicate issues for the Soviet regime, such as the Katyn massacre. Stupnikova describes how the Russian team opted for self-censorship as a face-saving strategy, for instance translating *NSDAP* always as an acronym, to avoid being heard by their principals associating the word Nazism with Socialism.⁴⁷

If quality standards are a significant measure of professional performance, it seems that not all users or observers were equally satisfied. Judge Lawrence assessed quite positively the procedure:

*So efficient was this system – although it sometimes broke down – and so expert were the interpreters that cross-examination, where speed is of considerable importance was carried on as fast, or nearly as fast, as in an English Court, and it will be readily understood that to undertake such a trial in four languages without some such system would have been interminable. Great care was taken to get an accurate record by checking back from the shorthand notes against the electrical sound recording of the words spoken.*⁴⁸

Defendant Hans Fritzsche “developed during the course of the trial the greatest admiration for their [the interpreters’] attainments”.⁴⁹ Conversely, Judge Birkett was quite harsh on interpreters:

42 English-booth interpreter Peter Less, interviewed by Gesse in: T. Gesse (n.d.), Lunch with a legend, in: aiic.net, 20 January 2005, <http://aiic.net/page/1665> (accessed on 10 June 2016).

43 Keiser, *Genèse de la profession*, p. 17.

44 Stupnikova, *Tutta la verità*, p. 282.

45 Koch, *Übersetzen und Dolmetschen*, p. 2; Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, 121 *et seq.*

46 Stupnikova, *Tutta la verità*, p. 274.

47 Stupnikova, *Tutta la verità*, p. 264. For face-saving strategies, see: C. Monacelli, *Self-Preservation in Simultaneous Interpreting: Surviving the Role*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2009, p. 5.

48 G. Lawrence (Lord Justice), *The Nuremberg Trial*, in: G. Mettraux (ed.) *Perspectives on the Nuremberg Trial*. Oxford/New York 2008, pp. 290-298, p. 291.

49 H. Fritzsche, *The Sword in the Scales*. London 1953, p. 8.

Justice Birkett enjoyed exercising his talent for invective against the interpreters. A speech in the vigorous, masculine Russian of the prosecutor, Rudenko, had been rendered into English by an effete interpreter whom Birkett complained sounded like 'a "refayned" decaying cleric, a latecomer in making an apology at the vicarage garden party rather than the prosecutor of major war crimes.' Gruff German generals were interpreted by young women with chirpy little voices, diminishing the power of the witnesses' testimony. On one occasion, after the aristocratic Erwin Lahousen had been interpreted by a barely educated German-American, Birkett asked, "And what language was that?" "Brooklynese," Steer answered.⁵⁰

Senior Soviet correspondent Mikhail Dolgoplov's opinion was even harsher on the Soviet team: The "overwhelming majority" of Soviet interpreters (...) were incompetent at their jobs, and "everyone is talking about this."⁵¹

Participants at Nuremberg belonged to different professions, particularly those from the legal field, so their perception of interpreters' competence may have been based on their respective organizational and associational norms.

3. A brief sociological picture

Interpreters at Nuremberg had been recruited to work at a trial which was expected to be much shorter than what it finally was. So they approached the job as a temporary or accidental assignment, a mere hiatus in life. Rather than members of a profession whose profile would be more clearly defined after the establishment in 1953 of the *Association internationale des interprètes de conférence* (AIIC), which assimilated interpreting to a liberal profession, they could be seen as para- or proto-professionals. They were in most cases the product of migration and exile experiences derived from the cataclysms of the first half of the 20th century, including the Nazi regime. A noticeable point to be made is the significant increase in the proportion of women interpreters at the IMT,⁵² as a result of a variety of educational, sociological and demographic factors, some of them related to the WWII effort. Figures of female interpreters vary depending on the various compilations: according to Gaiba,⁵³ the proportion would be around 35% of the total, while Behr states that "roughly half of them were women".⁵⁴ Although, as Behr says, some interpreters are still virtually unknown, my own count would place the figure in the vicinity of 20%, which coincides with the proportion of women on the first UN teams.⁵⁵

50 J. Persico, *Nuremberg. Infamy on Trial*, New York 1994, pp. 263-264.

51 Quoted by F. Hirsch, *The Soviets at Nuremberg: International Law, Propaganda, and the Making of the Postwar Order*, in: *The American Historical Review* 113 (2008) 3, pp. 701-730, here p. 723.

52 H. Schiller Wartenberg, *Simultaneous interpreters: A good profession for women?*, in: H.Z. Lopata, K.D. Henson (eds.), *Unusual Occupations*, Stanford, CT 2000, pp. 151-167.

53 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*.

54 M. Behr, *Nuremberg Trial*, in: F. Pöchhacker, (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies*. London/New York 2015, pp. 288-289, 288.

55 Baigorri-Jalón, *Interpreters at the United Nations*.

Be it as it may, the truth is that Nuremberg marked a sea change in the proportion of women compared with their insignificant presence at the League of Nations.⁵⁶

Research on the interpreters' social origins results in a mosaic of characters and personalities.⁵⁷ Hugh Wolfe Frank, a German Jew who had escaped to England in the late 1930s, was considered by many as one of the best interpreters at the IMT, so he was granted his request to interpret the final statements made by the defendants into English and the judges' sentences into German.⁵⁸ Pre-trial interpreters Sonnenfeldt, Priceman or Ramler⁵⁹ also had to leave Germany or Austria. Edith Simon Coliver was a German-Jewish refugee in the United States,⁶⁰ and Evgenia Rosoff in a concentration camp.⁶¹

Judge Birkett provides a caricature image, in all likelihood made up of separate pieces coming from various interpreters:

*... Norman Birkett, the British Alternate member of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal Bench, (...) viewed translators as a race apart touchy, vain, unaccountable, full of vagaries, puffed up with self-importance of the most explosive kind, inexpressibly egotistical, and, as a rule, violent opponents of soap and sunlight' (quoted in Hyde 1964: 521).*⁶²

All interpreters shared a good command of at least two languages, but they had very different credentials, from academia to aristocracy and from military service to journalism. Here are four brief references to interpreters, one from each booth:

Evgenia Rosoff, a French citizen of Polish origin, had been interned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp,⁶³ where she may have played the role of spontaneous interpreter, as many polyglot prisoners did.⁶⁴ She would later become a UN interpreter.

56 Baigorri-Jalón, *From Paris to Nuremberg*, p. 143 et seq.

57 W. Keiser, *L'interprétation de conférence en tant que profession et les précurseurs de l'Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC) 1918–1953*, in: *Meta*, 49 (2004) 3, pp. 576–608, p. 579–580.

58 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, p. 138–139.

59 R. W. Sonnenfeldt, *Witness to Nuremberg. The chief American interpreter at the War Crimes Trial* (German edition, 2002), New York 2006; J. Baigorri Jalón, *Mark Priceman: cosmopolita de Esperantia*, in: *Sendebarr* 14 (2003), pp. 127–139 or S. Ramler, *Nuremberg and Beyond*. Honolulu 2009.

60 Borgwardt, *Re-examining Nuremberg*, p. 410.

61 See testimonies from interpreters (Sonnenfeldt, *Witness to Nuremberg*; E. Handrich, *La résistance... pourquoi? Souvenirs des deux guerres et de déportation à Buchenwald, 1914–1918 et 1939–1945*, Paris 2006; Ramler, *Nuremberg and Beyond*; Stupnikova, *Tutta la verità*), their relatives (Richmond Mouillot, *Armand Jacobovitch's granddaughter*, see: M. Richmond Mouillot, *A Fifty-Year Silence: Love, War, and a Ruined House in France*, New York 2015) or their services' users from, among others, the legal profession (F. Biddle, *In Brief Authority*, New York 1962; T. Taylor, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials. A Personal Memoir*. New York 1992; T. Dodd, *The Nurnberg Trials*, in: G. Mettraux (ed.) *Perspectives on the Nuremberg Trial*. Oxford/New York 2008, pp. 190–199) or from the press (West, *A Train of Powder*; J. Flanner, *Janet Flanner's World. Uncollected Writings, 1932–1975*. New York 1981).

62 R. Morris, *The gum syndrome: predicaments in court interpreting*, in: *Forensic Linguistics*, 6 (1999) 1, pp. 6–29, pp. 8–9.

63 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, 144–145. She spells the name as Keyserlingh.

64 M. Tryuk, *Interpreting in Nazi concentration camps during World War II*, in: *Interpreting*, 12 (2010) 2, pp. 125–145; M. Tryuk, *'You say nothing; I will interpret.'* *Interpreting in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp*, in: D. Asimakoulas and M. Rogers (eds.) *Translation and Opposition*, Bristol 2011; and M. Wolf, *'German speakers, step*

George Vassiltchikov, who would also become a UN interpreter, is described by a friend from aristocratic circles as follows:

*Prince George Vassiltchikov was a twenty-eight-year-old Russian émigré who like most Russian noblemen had been brought up by French, German, and British nannies and was equally fluent in all four languages. First exiled in Lithuania and then in France, he served in the French resistance during the war. And after the liberation his linguistic skills brought him to the attention of the military authorities establishing the Nuremberg trials, of which he became one of a team that pioneered the system of instantaneous interpretation. (...) his intelligence, culture, and wit remained unmarred by his tremendous stutter in four languages. The marvel about Georgie, however, was that as soon as he began to speak into a microphone, the stutter totally disappeared (...).*⁶⁵

Klaus de Kayserlingk, a German-American qualified lawyer, who interpreted English into German, possibly on loan from US government agencies,⁶⁶ was the son of the former imperial military attaché in St. Petersburg, and he considered his interpreter status was lower than what he deserved: “Er war Volljurist und als Dolmetscher zu niedrig plaziert”.⁶⁷

Énver Mamedov, the son of a teacher, was a polyglot since childhood (his grandmother taught him Italian and French, and he learned German from his nanny). He later acquired English. From his press attaché post at the Soviet embassy in Rome he was recruited to interpret at Nuremberg, and he later held press-related jobs in the USSR.⁶⁸

The technical challenge

The interpreters' *modus operandi* in the 1920s and 1930s was overwhelmingly consecutive interpreting, while the simultaneous mode was used only exceptionally at the International Labor Organization (ILO)⁶⁹ and the Comintern⁷⁰. Without the previous simultaneous tests and experience – the Filene-Finlay equipment used at the ILO was patented in 1931 by IBM as “simultaneous translation system” –, the decision-makers at Nuremberg would not have been able to opt in favor of the simultaneous mode at colonel Dostert's suggestion.⁷¹ Simultaneous interpreting required the use of equipment

forward! Surviving through interpreting in Nazi concentration camps, in: *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 8 (2013) 1, pp. 1-22; M. Wolf (ed.), *Interpreting in Nazi Concentration Camps*. New York 2016.

65 F. du Plessix Gray, *Them: A Memoir of Parents*. New York 2006, p. 333.

66 Gaiba, *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation*, 141.

67 R. M.W. Kempner, *Ankläger einer Epoche. Lebenserinnerungen*, Frankfurt 1983, pp. 221-222.

68 M. Rybalkina, *Die sowjetischen Dolmetscher bei den Nürnberger Prozessen*, in: D. Andres and M. Behr (eds.), *Interpretes Mundi, Deuter der Welt*, München 2011, pp. 11-28, pp. 21-24.

69 Baigorri-Jalón, *From paris to Nuremberg*.

70 S. Chernov, *At the Dawn of Simultaneous Interpreting in the USSR: Filling some Gaps in History*, in: K. Takeda and J. Baigorri-Jalón (eds.), *New Insights in the History of Interpreting*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2016, pp. 135-166.

71 In the parallel military trials of Japanese suspected war criminals by the US occupying authorities, the idea of simultaneous interpreting was discarded as an impossible endeavor due to the linguistic distance between Japanese and English, K. Takeda, *Interpreting the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. A Sociopolitical Analysis*, Ottawa 2010.

with which an overwhelming majority of participants, including interpreters, were unacquainted.⁷² So technology had a significant impact on the interpreters – who learned the job while performing it – and on the users. Interpreters had to adapt to the conditions imposed by the system (headphones, microphones) and by the always delicate balance they could accomplish in their own performance, which, supervised by their monitors, often slowed down or brought to a stop the proceedings.

Technical problems arose. The interpretation booths were not closed, so interpreters “were clearly audible from the witness box and cause considerable disturbance”,⁷³ but the opposite was also the case: interpreters were disturbed by the noise in the courtroom, including the voices from the adjacent booths. That is why they spoke softly into the microphones, one per booth, which had to be passed from one interpreter to the next one when the original speaker’s language changed. Interruptions of the proceedings due to technical difficulties with the wiring in the interpreting system are recorded throughout the trial (entries 20.02.1946; 05.03.1946; 24.04.1946; 04.07. 1946 (twice); 05.08.1946). On March 19, 1946, Russian was coming “again” through the French channel, so the President of the Tribunal asked all participants to be careful when walking inside the courtroom because “it has not been possible to bury these cables so as to make them altogether safe”.⁷⁴

A collateral consequence of the conspicuous presence of the equipment in the courtroom may have been the formation among users of the idea that only mechanical devices (“the system”), not human brains, were behind the flow of words that reached them through the headphones, despite the interpreters’ high visibility and audibility in the room. Here are some examples from the records: “I expect to read the pertinent parts of the documents into the system so that they will go into the transcript of record”;⁷⁵ “(...) we have ruled over and over again that documents of which we do not take judicial notice must be read so that they will go through the interpreting system and will be interpreted into German to the German counsel”;⁷⁶ “Since the interpreting system does not include this language [Dutch], I propose that he speak in the German language, which he knows well”.⁷⁷

These references show a certain identification of the interpreting task with a mechanical function carried out by machines. In this context, it is not surprising that colonel

72 See: R. Morris, *Technologies and the Worlds of Interpreting*, in: J. Rosenhouse; Y. Gitay and D. Porush (eds.), *Future and Communication. The Role of Scientific and Technical Communication and Translation in Technology Development and Transfer*. San Francisco/London/Bethesda 1997, pp. 177-184.

73 F. Rainer, *My internment and testimony at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial. The account of Friedrich Rainer, Austrian Nazi*, Lewiston, NY 2006, p. 64.

74 References from <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt> (accessed 10 June 2016).

75 Mr. Alderman, US prosecution, 23 November 1945, Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 2, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/11-23-45.asp> (accessed 10 June 2016).

76 President of the Tribunal, 31 January 1946, Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 6, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/01-31-46.asp> (accessed 10 June 2016).

77 Mr. Faure, Deputy French prosecutor, 2 February 1946 Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol. 6, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/02-02-46.asp> (accessed 10 June 2016).

Dostert, the organizer of the simultaneous interpreting arrangements both at Nuremberg and at the UN, would launch early in the 1950s a pioneering project of machine translation between English and Russian at Georgetown University, a remote precedent of today's *Google Translate*.

It has been said that the fact that some of the defendants—specifically the most visible representative of the Nazi regime, Göring – had a good knowledge of English gave them an advantage over their monolingual prosecutors, particularly during the cross-examination stage, because supposedly they would have more “time to think” their answer since they already understood the original question in English. This line of reasoning seems logical for the consecutive mode, but it is difficult to accept for simultaneous, where the original and the interpreted speeches overlapped and finished almost at the same time, even in the English <> German combination.

Final remarks

Several paradoxes can be identified concerning the decisive role played by the Nuremberg IMT as an event which helped to advance professionalization of conference simultaneous interpreting.

Many of the IMT interpreters had no previous interpreting experience, either in consecutive or in simultaneous, so they acquired their professional skills while practicing in the proceedings, namely, playing it by ear in the most literal meaning of the expression. The selection tests were based firstly on the fluency candidates showed in the two languages involved and, only afterwards, on the ability to automatically respond in one language to the oral stimuli in the other. Since no previous training was required, the premise was that interpreting skills were innate, so interpreters were thought to be born not made.⁷⁸ Practice and professionalization went hand in hand in interpreting, so the Nuremberg courtroom was for interpreters what a teaching hospital for the medical profession, with a particular feature: at Nuremberg there were no senior doctors familiarized with the methods or technology that were being applied.⁷⁹

Strictly speaking, they were court interpreters and not conference interpreters: however, the simultaneous mode was adopted by the UN while the Nuremberg trial was still ongoing and then also at other international institutions and conference settings, in a favorable post-WWII environment, rather than at multilingual courts. The new simultaneous interpreting paradigm did not completely replace the previous one, but Nuremberg meant a fresh and decisive phase in the gradual establishment of common professional norms that would eventually turn into a set of values and performance standards among

78 See: J. Mackintosh, *Interpreters are Made, not Born*, in: *Interpreting* 4 (1999) 4, pp. 67-80.

79 Abbott has referred to the role the worksite played in the origin of professions like social work, librarianship or teaching, in: Abbott, *The System of Professions*, p. 80.

future conference interpreters.⁸⁰ The Nuremberg IMT's impact on court interpreters was much more noticeable in the following years in international courts, assimilated to conference interpreting settings and serviced by conference interpreters, than in ordinary national courts, whose interpreters are often still battling for social and professional recognition.⁸¹

Although a common work plan applied to all the Nuremberg interpreters, their working and living conditions varied widely among the different teams and even within each team, depending on the country which had hired them. When individual interpreters on the team get a different pay, have a different status and a different degree of professional independence, the conclusion is that Nuremberg was an important step in the dynamically-negotiated process associated with the definition of professional identity and professionalization,⁸² but not the finish line.

Not all Nuremberg interpreters continued in the profession, but many were young and would see in simultaneous conference interpreting, attractive career prospects: a handsome salary, comfortable working conditions, traveling opportunities, social status. The few who had been trained as consecutive interpreters in a university framework (the Geneva School) would eventually become professional simultaneous (conference) interpreters or instructors at the interpreting schools that flourished in the early 1950s. Nuremberg saw the beginning of an increasing feminization of the profession, a trend which would further develop at the UN, at the immediate subsequent proceedings at Nuremberg and in other international organizations and conference settings.⁸³

80 E. Diriker, *De-/Re-Contextualizing Conference Interpreting: Interpreters in the Ivory Tower?* Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2004, p. 25.

81 H. Mikkelsen, *Community interpreting: An emerging profession*. In *Interpreting 1* (1996) 1, pp. 125-129; Rudvin, *Interpreting and professional identity*.

82 *Ibid.*, 432.

83 Keiser, *Genèse de la profession*, pp. 17-18.