
THE INTERPRETER'S SIGNIFICANCE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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About the work of a translator: Four times a year, parliamentarians who speak German, French, Italian and Romansh gather in Bern for a regular parliamentary session. How do they find a common language? As one of the official simultaneous interpreters admits, it is quite difficult to find such a language, because it is necessary that each deputy fully understands what is happening. The work of an interpreter is associated with significant stress, but nothing can be done without it. "When I translated in Parliament for the first time, I was terribly nervous!" says Hans Martin Jörimann [External link](#), sitting in his booth overlooking the Swiss National Council, the great chamber of parliament. "I was stunned not so much by the speeches made by the deputies as by the context and specific professional jargon. It took me a long time to wade through this jungle of technical terms. But once you've done that, you can focus on who's talking and what. Once you understand how everything works, it becomes much easier."

The European Parliament is a unique legislative body, which probably has no analogues in the world. Its unusualness lies in its multinationality and multilingualism. Deputies from 28 countries speak 24 languages and are trying to find common ground by adopting common laws. Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic said: "One cannot do without interpreters in the EU. When first a Swede, then a Portuguese, and then a Finn speaks in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the deputies understand every word, although the speakers speak their native language. More than thirty simultaneous interpreters translate each parliamentary session into the 11 working languages currently used in the EU."

Official and working languages of the EU: In 1958, the first Regulation came out, designating the official languages of the EU. The first official and working languages of the European Union were Dutch, French, German and Italian. As stated on the website of the European Commission, there are two main characteristics of languages that have the status of official and working:

- documents are sent to any EU institution in any of these languages; the answer is also issued on any of them;
- EU regulations and other legislative acts, such as the Official Gazette, are published in the official and working languages.

So, what about difficulties? Simultaneous translation is certainly not for the faint of heart. "This is one of the most exhausting activities for the human brain," pointed out the famous translator David Bellos in his famous book *Is That A Fish in Your Ear* ("Do you have bananas in your ears?"). Many people compare the stress level of simultaneous interpreters with the psychological overload of air traffic controllers. Hans Martin Jörimann says that these are the moments when the speaker

decides to make a joke. Jokes are not funny. They are usually impossible to translate. You have to rephrase, but then, of course, all the humor is lost. We also don't like it when people use quotes. If you're not a genius, or you don't know these things by heart, or you can't find the right passage on the Internet at the speed of light, you have to say something like: **“Mr. X is quoting a fable”**. In response to a request to name the golden rule of simultaneous translation, Hans Martin Jorimann says that the personality of an interpreter must always take a step back. “Don't add your personal views and emotions and distort the original version”. This is not always possible. David Bellos tells in his book that at the Nuremberg trials, “the interpreter wept more than once when hearing the testimony of Rudolf Höss, deputy chief inspector of concentration camps in the SS Main Administrative Office”.

But what about the future? Will computers replace synchronists? Translation programs are improving every year, and speech recognition technologies have already advanced frighteningly far. Most translators watch what's going on and think, “C'mon! It will be another 20 years before computers can replace us”. Maybe this is so. But honestly, we don't know what's going to happen. Either English will become the lingua franca (which in any case will mean that we translators will be superfluous), or computer technology will develop so much that it can actually completely replace us.

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