The profession of conference interpreter is clearly defined at international and national level. The following definitions are taken from EU competition notices, from institutional websites of the European institutions and from the Technical Standard adopted in September 2015 by Italy’s National Standardisation Office.

Conference interpreters ensure a faithful interpretation of the discussions that take place in meetings of various kinds. Interpreters are required to prepare on the themes of the meetings and to study their terminology.

Conference interpreters deal exclusively with oral communication: they convey a message from one language to another in a natural manner, adopting the way of speaking, tone and convictions of the speaker and speaking in the first person.

The interpreter analyzes in real time what is said by the participants in order to identify the content, concepts, communicative intentions, formal characteristics and linguistic register of speeches; and he/she produces utterances in the target language and culture according to the characteristics of the communicative situation (role and function of the participants, subject matter, objective pursued).

The job of the conference interpreter calls for exceptional adaptability (frequent meetings and on different topics, irregular hours), the ability to understand a variety of - often complex - problems, to react rapidly to changing circumstances and to communicate effectively. Interpreters must be able to work under pressure, both independently and in groups, and to adapt to a multicultural working environment. Throughout their career they must perfect their skills, also with regard to new technologies.

Some terminology to better understand the work of the interpreter:

**Language pair**: the languages that conference interpreters use in their work. The working languages are divided into "active" languages and "passive" languages and are defined below as languages "A", "B" or "C".

‘A’ **Language**: the main language (mother tongue or another exactly equivalent language), of which
the interpreter has a complete command and into which he/she interprets from all working languages, both simultaneously and in consecutive.

'B' Language: a language, of which the interpreter has a complete command, without it being his/her primary language, and from which and into which he/she interprets from the “A” language, simultaneously and in consecutive.

'C' Language: language from which the interpreter interprets and of which he/she has full comprehension.

Simultaneous interpretation:

Simultaneous interpretation takes place simultaneously with the speaker's utterances. The interpreter works in a soundproof booth with at least one colleague. In the meeting hall the speaker speaks into the microphone, the interpreter receives the sound through headphones and translates the speech with a minimum time lag - the so called décalage - speaking into a microphone. In this mode of interpreting, the high concentration, density of information, speech rate and cognitive processing require the interpreters to work in shifts of 20/30 minutes. In certain communicative situations, other technological tools may be used, provided that the quality of the interpretation is not compromised.

Consecutive interpretation:

Interpretation begins after the speaker has finished speaking.

The interpreter sits with the delegates, listens to the speech and, finally, interprets it into another language, usually taking notes. Consecutive interpreting is important for some types of meeting (e.g. highly technical conferences, business lunches, smaller groups). During the speech, the interpreter, present among the participants, listens, analyzes, memorises what is being said, possibly taking notes, and then interprets into the target language. Expert interpreters are able to reproduce with great accuracy speeches of 10 minutes or more.

Chuchotage: Whispered simultaneous interpretation.

The interpreter is standing or sitting next to the delegates and interprets talking directly to them. Whispered interpretation can be used only for a small number of delegates who are sitting or standing very close to each other. This technique is used in bilateral meetings or in very small groups.

To conclude:

Conference interpreters provide their services in the public and private sector, at meetings, conferences and conventions of a political, economic, legal, financial, scientific, cultural, religious nature as well as in the media and broadcasting world. They may work as freelancers or staff interpreters of a national or international organization.

For those who want to know more see the relevant pages of the Directorate General Interpretation of the European Commission http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/what-is-conference-in ... or the pages of AIIC World http://aiic.net/interpreting - Explained

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Recommended citation format:
