Guidelines for technicians

Purpose: To assist technicians who deal with simultaneous interpreting on an occasional basis to better apprehend the very specific problems involved in providing optimum service to both interpreters and delegates.

Technical Committee.
Publié December 1, 1999 Mis à jour December 2, 2015

General Introduction

Experience has shown that not infrequently conference interpreters have to rely on the services of technicians who, though their technical knowledge and skill are often considerable, have never worked in this very particular environment.

General

(Those readers who are already familiar with simultaneous interpreting should skip this section.)

Simultaneous interpreters are a small, highly professional body, to whom the very highest standards of sound quality are a prerequisite for their extremely exacting task.

While they do require the equivalent Hi-Fi sound, they also need special headphones of a type seldom proposed to Hi-Fi addicts, enabling them to monitor their own speech continually. (However, some recent lightweight, "hear-through" Sennheiser and Walkman headphones have been a very close approximation to the conference interpreter's ideal).

Although they are obliged to work in a team, they are individual human beings, and therefore require separate volume controls for their headsets (we have noted that many technical services, particularly in national TV services, appear to think that two or more interpreters can work in a team with a single volume control).

While interpreters may appear inflexible to you, please remember that they require the very highest audio quality; thus their impatience with any shortcomings is only too understandable since it is liable to prevent them from grasping an essential point and hence from doing a professional job.

Basic Dos and Donts

Please do:

Equipment

1. Provide interpreters with one headset each.
2. Provide interpreters with one volume and one tone control each.
3. Provide interpreters with special interpreters' headphones (AKG 10 type).

Booths

4. Ensure that interpreters are provided with soundproof booths situated in an area well away from sources of noise.
5. Situate the booths to ensure maximum visibility of speakers, screen etc.
6. Provide interpreters with adequate working surface (50 cm depth over entire width of booth).
7. Provide each interpreter with adequate lighting of working surface.
8. Provide each interpreter with a comfortable, functional chair.

Sound

9. Ensure not only that the sound received by interpreters is of sufficient volume, but that an adequate reserve (about 30%) is available.
10. Ensure that sound received by interpreters is undistorted. (This involves continual checking on your part, using earphones, particularly after a change in speaker).

    N.B.: The most frequent causes of distorted sound are:
    a. Saturation of pre-amplifier and
    b. Excessive Bass.

11. Ensure that only one delegate's microphone is open at a time, except when a rapid exchange necessitates two.
12. In large halls, where the use of a public address or speech reinforcement system is unavoidable, it should be set at the minimum level, failing which not only will delegates be unable to hear the simultaneous interpretation but there will also be a risk of feedback from loudspeakers to microphone.

In general, public address systems are operated at too high a level.

Please don't:

Attempt to the feed/video satellite input sound to interpreters via a loudspeaker/microphone connection. The result will be unusable for the interpreter, even if **you** think you can hear what is being said. Take the trouble to match the impedances enabling you to feed straight into the interpreters' pre-amplifiers.

More detailed information can be found in two ISO standards on Interpreters Booths which the AIIC Technical Committee was instrumental in bringing about (ISO 2603-1983 for Built-in Facilities and ISO 4043-1981 for Mobile Booths). These publications may be obtained from ISO or from your National Standards Agency.

A separate Standard on Conference Systems is also under preparation, to be published by the IEC.