

Questions asked in relation to Liisa Laakso-Tammisto's presentation at the EULITA Conference 2018 in Sofia on "A reality check: the work of LITs in the real world"

1) Is there a general understanding in Finland what the difference between a translator and an interpreter is?

I would say the difference is clear but sometimes the terms 'to translate' and 'to interpret' are used carelessly, even in circles that should be aware of the difference. At court, you might hear someone say "please let the interpreter translate".

2) Are there any legal translator rate surveys in Finland by translation associations?

SKTL performs regular rate surveys. However, the latest is not quite recent. SKTL also organises training in pricing, based on official statistics published by Statistics Finland and similar sources. Another organisation, the Union KAJ also trains their members in this respect.

3) Does Finnish law provide for sanctions in cases of poor performance by interpreters and are they implemented in reality – striking off, even prison sentence?

I have no information on interpreters being prosecuted. However, there are public complaints in the media about the quality of interpreters, especially in immigration issues, and in these contexts, the quality of interpretation may constitute a human rights issue. However, this may also be one way of channelling the general dissatisfaction with the immigration processes or with the entire phenomenon of immigration. It must be admitted, though, that interpreters with even a decent quality level are not always available. Bad quality can be struck off simply by not contacting the bad interpreter.

4) Does the Finnish register allow both individual LTIs and companies/agencies to be registered? If so how are qualifications checked?

The registers (authorised translators and legal interpreters) are strictly on an individual basis. Qualifications are based on the exams taken so it needs to be the individuals that are registered – agencies cannot take tests.

5) Have you been invited by the national standards organisation to participate in the work on the ISO standards? Are you consultants or perhaps a mirror committee?

Yes, we have been invited to participate along with other interested parties or trade organisations and, for example, the Prime Minister's Office (responsible for government translations and vocabulary work, among other issues). We have been invited (or allowed to participate) through a terminology organisation which, in turn, cooperates with the national standards body. Perhaps we are consultants. I would not know if we could be defined as a mirror committee since we have a permanent role in all standardisation issues in our particular field, not just in individual projects.

6) Shouldn't the Confidentiality Undertaking (pledge) be drafted by the lawyers themselves or legal practitioners potentially using interpretation services?

I think the confidentiality undertaking is built in the role of the interpreters. Those in the newly established register given an undertaking when getting registered, and therefore it is a state-regulated undertaking.

7) On your picture regarding the sitting position of an interpreter in a court room, who is the person located between the interpreter and a witness?

Normally, the party (accused or injured party, as the case may be) sits between the interpreter and the lawyer of the party.

8) Can you elaborate on sworn/authorised, etc. translators' specific roles?

According to the Finnish legislation, the authorised translator produces translations that are legally valid unless otherwise proven. These translations are, as I think in any country, used by the authorities to substitute for national documents to the same effect: for example, a foreign birth certificate translated by an authorised translator allows the person to be recorded in Finnish population registers, and vice versa. I think the specific role is quite simple: to produce documents that have a legal validity in a language other than the one in which the original was drafted. In this sense, the authorised translator has the responsibility of an official for the legality of his/her actions, in other words, subject to the liability for a public act.

9) When you say interpreters get 80% of lawyers' pay does it mean that they are permanent Court staff? How is this percentage otherwise calculated?

This information came from my Norwegian informant. The percentage is based on a decision by their Ministry of Justice. I do not think a set fee level is enough to turn interpreters into court staff; the government regulates the lawyers' fees as well, but they are definitely independent professionals not attached to the courts; on the contrary, they must be neutral and not dependent on the court! So are interpreters, most of them freelancers or self-employed professionals.

10) Can we introduce a "health warning" for interpretation use in court? EULITA's Vade Mecum can serve as a good start for all of us!

I think interpreter organisations have done a good job in defining the good working conditions in conference settings. In fact, when the annex building of the Finnish parliament was constructed, SKTL was able to influence the booth settings and have a say on the layout of the interpreting facilities in the general architecture. I see no reason why good physical working conditions should not apply to court interpreting, too! Weeks long processes can be tough on the interpreters' health – especially as the hearings may be long with only brief breaks when the court needs them. :)