

One Trial - Four Languages

The Pioneers of Interpreting at Nuremberg



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One trial – four languages The interpreters at the Nuremberg Trials

The interpreters and their work at the Nuremberg Trials against leading Nazi perpetrators are the focal point of the presentation.

The Nuremberg Trials were a historically significant event, one that laid the foundation of international criminal justice as we know it today. The trials also witnessed the breakthrough of another phenomenon that has been shaping international economic and political relations ever since, the art of simultaneous interpreting.

Whereas the legal aspects of the trials have been researched and analysed from many different viewpoints, the contribution of the interpreters without whom the four-language proceedings of 1945 would not have been possible, has always remained in the background..

The Main Trial against Nazi war criminals held in Nuremberg from 1945 to 1946 was conducted in English, French, Russian and German. At the time the technique of simultaneous interpretation was still in the experimental phase, yet the interpreters were able to use this as the breakthrough to communication among the participants in the working languages of the Tribunal. In addition to the Main Trial the interpreters facilitated communication among judges, prosecutors, defence counsel, defendants and witnesses in twelve subsequent trials until 1949. The presentation highlights the biographies of some of those interpreters who were present in Nuremberg, in text and photographs, inasmuch as it is possible to reconstruct these seventy years on.