



Press Release

International Translation Day 2007

Don't Shoot the Messenger!

It always pays to hire professional translators and interpreters to get the job done right.
And it's extremely important not to shoot them.

"... At his outburst the chamber erupted, and despite attempts by high-ranking diplomats to extract an apology, Mr Berlusconi refused to oblige ... Not surprisingly, there was also an attempt to shift blame to the translator – or interpreter, in this case. 'My joke wasn't meant to be offensive,' an AP dispatch reports Berlusconi saying. 'It was an ironic joke, perhaps the translation wasn't done in the ironic sense'."

"... 'The president was joking,' [a Kremlin spokesman] told the BBC: 'Russian is a very complicated language, sometimes it is very sensitive from the point of view of phrasing. I don't think that the proper translation is able to reflect the meaning of the joke'."

These familiar stories are two among many: it is a time-honoured tradition for political gaffes to be put down to the translator or interpreter to save face. Few people are taken in; the translators patiently shrug their shoulders, and life goes on.

But history is already littered with the corpses of translator-martyrs, and the language professions are becoming increasingly dangerous. There are parts of the world where translators and interpreters literally risk death simply by doing their job. Some 261 translators and interpreters died in Iraq in 2006, and more in Afghanistan. Elsewhere, translators have been jailed for their work, and received death threats for daring to translate the works of authors such as Salman Rushdie. One was murdered.

Translation is a risky business. Translators and interpreters bear an enormous responsibility in carrying messages between languages and cultures, and problems getting the word across can spell disaster on all sides. For without such experts – translators, interpreters, terminologists – our globalised world would be an uncomprehending place indeed.

From the embedded translator in the battle zone to the interpreter whispering in the ear of a visiting dignitary to the specialist translating the owner's manual for your next car or subtitling a news report, the work of the language professions is present in every part of the globe, in every walk of life. Everyone, everywhere, is increasingly dependent on the services of those who make language their business. And the savviest leaders are already aware that the messenger is no fall guy, simply there to take the flak when things go wrong. They know that the language professional is to be celebrated, to be welcomed for insightful comments and questions that lead to messages – text and speech – whose clarity and impact do credit to their organisation's image.

The International Federation of Translators' choice of *Don't Shoot the Messenger!* as the theme for International Translation Day 2007 is intended to draw attention to the hazards faced by translators, and also by those who believe that professional language services are an unnecessary option. Using a professional means you can be sure of putting across your message in full, no matter what language you use.

The International Federation of Translators is the world federation of professional associations bringing together translators, interpreters and terminologists. It has 80 members in over 60 countries and thus represents over 60 000 professionals.

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