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# INTERVIEW WITH PASCALL RILLOF, EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION (ENPSIT)

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**Pascal Rilof** (1964) is sector co-ordinator public service interpreting and translation for Flanders and Brussels, Belgium, at the Kruispunt Migratie-Integratie (Junction Migration-Integration). He is the initiator of the *European Public Service Interpreting and Translation Network* (ENPSIT), and a member of the Critical Link International board of directors and its European representative. Previously, he co-ordinated the Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service for 9 years. He was a member of the board of the Belgian Federal Consultative Body for Community Interpreting and Translation (“Cofetis”) and he chairs the Flemish Circle of Community Interpretation and Translation Services for Quality Improvement.

## C.V.G. How would you define/ describe Public Service Interpreting and Translation?

*P.R PSIT is one of the organized ways to make service encounters in our superdiverse communities work.*

*PSI is transmitting messages between a speaker ‘A’ to a speaker ‘B’ (or more than two speakers), conveying as accurately and unbiasedly as possible each of the speaker’s message(s) to the other. At least one of the speakers is a public service provider, and at least one of the other speakers is his or her client. Service provider and client speak different languages.*

*PST is quite similar. But the message is written. And there’s not always a dialogue (in the strict sense of the word). I distinguish between two major types of PST. One is the translation of official documents (acts, driver’s licenses, identity papers, diploma’s etc.). The other type is translating information and communication between the service provider(s) (organization) and the allophone client(s). Then, we speak of documents as: letters, appointment notifications, medical reports, (domestic) regulations, folders (supporting health and prevention campaigns, explaining vaccination etc.), guidelines (dialysis guidelines for patients etc.).*

*On the whole, PSIT is a rational and structured effort to make communication between service providers like teachers, doctors and nurses, social workers, etc. and parents, patients, clients, who do not or only to an extent, speak each other's languages, function to a degree that is similar to service settings with speakers of the same language.*

**C.V.G What do you think about the different names used (community interpreting, PSIT, intercultural mediation...)?**

*P.R. It is always an illusion to think that you can capture a multi-faceted reality in one single name. But at the same time, we have to. For, if we don't agree on terminology, discussions will lead us astray.*

*In your previous question, you asked me what PSIT was. I had the immediate inclination to say PSIT, or community interpreting and translation, or social interpreting and translation (sociaal tolken en vertalen), as we say where I come from, or, or, or ... And my French speaking Belgian brothers and sisters would add 'interpretation en milieu social'. So, when we talk about our profession and its needs, we lose a lot of time introducing ourselves ... Too long and ... trains don't wait ... ;-)*

*Most of us interpreting and translation folk – in our particular field – agree that we need a professional attitude, we have to be accurate, maintain an ethical code and that each interpreting and translation 'encounter' should be either neutral, unbiased or at least fair to each of the participants. Now, that is. In the past, it hasn't always been like that. And of course, there still are cowboys. But us Indians outnumber them, if you will. Up to us to chuck them out ...with clear standards, adequate training and accreditation as our casing sticks ...*

*But when it comes to the fields we are active in, suddenly we all are the sole possessors of Columbus's egg. That, while we're more or less in the same ball game and merely playing on mutually unfamiliar terrains.*

*For me, the medical, legal, public, community, social etc. interpreters are one breed, one family. Just as the translator in these fields are.*

*(Inter)cultural mediators, when they interpret, are public service interpreters and should get the same training and accreditation conditions and boundaries. When they are in their role of culture brokers, or advocates, they do something else. And that something else pertains to another profession with other competencies, where other training and accreditation is required.*

**C.V.G Why? Could you specify?**

*P.R. Ah, you caught me red handed, beating about the bush, as it might have seemed. You want some straight answers, right?*

*Having a common denominator and then specializations to diversify would help.*

*The community, public, medical, social, legal and - if you wish – the interpreter in school contexts, juvenile support programs, welfare settings, local authority administration contexts, elderly homes (as we will have more and more in the decades to come), asylum and migration settings and such, is doing one and the same thing: interpreting between public,*

*semi-public and social organizations and their 'target public' – their clients. And, technically, most configurations they work in are triads.*

*So, we have one hat that fits us all. The name of the hat could be 'community interpreting' or 'PSI', depending on how you define 'a public service'. But perhaps we should organize a contest. Whoever finds the most suitable term, gets a full year interpreting contract in our field! Can your magazine organize that and pick up the bill? (;-))*

*Why not 'close contact interpreting'? (;-))*

*Perhaps community interpreting seems most adequate, for the community is the broader context where everything happens, also service provision. PSI, which is most to my liking, would exclude service encounters that are not always considered 'public', for example, service encounters with lawyers, the notary, services of NGO's that are not state-sponsored ...*

*For translation largely the same rationale goes. It's important not to leave translation to oblivion!*

**C.V.G How do you feel about including in PSIT aspects of medical, legal, administrative , educative T&I? And the different fields? And what about including translation and not only interpreting? Is it necessary?**

*P.R. Yes, to summarize what I've answered to your previous question, all these settings and others that I have enumerated pertain to the same 'collection' of activities. They have in common that they disclose fundamental democratic rights to all inhabitants. And therefore, they are organized or co-organized or funded or co-funded by public authorities. Fundamental rights, as the right to develop ourselves (schools), to health (health care), to welfare and well-being, etc.*

*And yes, translation should be included. In fact, all that helps us communicate more adequately in these service settings should be included, also pictograms, icons, video-images, language and translation software ...*

**C.V.G You know that there is a committee working on ISO standards for Community Interpreting/PSI. Do you think this is a further and necessary step? How can this help to the professionalization of PSIT?**

*P.R. Yes, I'm a member of the Belgian standardization institute (NBN) that, for Belgium, looks at these ISO standards and contributes. So, from that perspective I'm looking at the ISO for community interpreting now. And I do think that it's an important, necessary and crucial step. If through the ISO we can agree on what the core of our profession and quality care is, we will have a common framework that defines us. We will know who we are and what we strive for. And, when we ourselves know, it will be easier to tell others, policy makers first of all, who we are, what we want, why we want what we want and why it makes sense that we want it.*

**C.V.G What can you say about the evolution of PSIT since 1995 when the first Critical Link conference took place?**

*P.R. It's been a slow process. Only now some policy makers, politicians, are starting to see that in these superdiverse times, the language gap needs to be bridged. Critical Link has been of a huge importance in rising that awareness. Critical Link has also evolved from being a Canadian organization to being an international one.*

*I'll show you with a concrete example from reality that Critical Link's role is crucial. I was allowed to present a paper on PSIT and the need for policy on PSIT in Europe, at EU level. That was in June 2013. There, in Toronto, I've also been able to check interest. Most of the people attending my paper session were European professionals. And I also got to speak with a representative from the European Commission itself. All this helped me initiate the European PSIT Network in October 2013, with 30 members in October and slightly over 50 now (February 2014). This Network is talking to the EU now. And apparently, members of the European Parliament and Commission are willing to listen to what the Network has to say.*

*So now, we have this Network that in April 2014 – during the Alacalá PSIT conference – will turn itself into a formal organization.*

*But it was in 1995, if I'm not mistaken, that there was a conference in Strasbourg that resulted in 'The Strasbourg Declaration', stating the need for community interpreting, training, testing, accreditation. It was also then, or around that time, that Babelea was founded.*

*In 2008, there was another European conference in Brussels, organized by the FOSOVET (the Belgian Federal Organization for Social Interpreting and Translation). We then adopted a text: the political recommendations of the social translation and interpreting sector.*

*In 2011, the European Commission's Directorate General of Interpretation published a report on PSIT and its needs, of the European Language Council's Special Interest Group on PSI.*

*And after that, now, there's our European PSIT Network. I believe that joint action between our Network, the European Language Council and in particular the Directorate General Interpretation, and also DG Translation, is already rocking the boat. Apparently, Commissioner Vassiliou (Multilingualism is one of the domains she's responsible for) is willing to take action.*

**C.V.G Do you think the current economic crisis has had (is having) an impact on the professionalization of the PSIT ? Why?**

*The crisis is clearly still having an impact. Far too often, the communication gap and PSIT as one of the important solutions, is not picked up. Or, if it is picked up, too little funding is made available. I see four important reasons. One of them is the crisis.*

*One important reason is that often the professional PSIT field itself is not sufficiently organized to pull enough weight or even to be noticed. On top of that, PSIT is not sexy enough for politicians to stick their necks out for. If we can't prove that we are providing solutions and if we don't provide that proof in unison, no-one will listen. To quote a politician I once talked to: "If you can't show us that you stop people from dying, there's nothing I'll be able to do for you." I don't know about the dying part, but he definitely has a*

*point in the 'If you don't show us' part. We need to elaborate a case file of our situation 'as is', locate the gaps and, from that, establish the future, the situation 'to be'.*

*But that's not enough. If those who need us as an instrument – the public service providers and their organizations – don't speak out, then we will speak in vain. Consequently, public and social services need to be made aware. That's our job as well.*

*Once we are organized and we're backed up by the public and social services, we talk to the policy makers and aim at getting PSIT into legislation or at least in government approved regulations or guidelines. And that legislation must be translated into structural money.*

*And that's exactly where there's a bottleneck. Due to the crisis, an economic crisis that at the same time translates itself into 'assimilate or get out' ideology coming to the fore, countries that had already adopted PSIT, decide on budget cuts. In the Netherlands, for example, almost the entire budget for PSIT disappeared in 2013. In the UK, cowboy agencies believe you can continue to get away with dumping.*

*Wherever there is some political awareness, like in Flanders, where recently PSIT was integrated into legislation, training and certification, telephone PSI are structurally organized and funded, and the ministry of Integration is financing a webcam interpreting project, face-to-face interpreting and translation are heavily underfinanced and dependent on local government initiative. The rationale here is primordialily one of budget prioritization. And in times of crisis, PSIT is not first on the list.*

### **C.V.G How far we are from reaching professionalization in PSIT in a common European context? Which steps have been taken? Which steps should be taken?**

*P.R. This is a difficult question to answer. Sometimes I wish I were a fortune teller instead of a PSIT professional ;-). I believe there's a momentum, though. A number of events coincide:*

- *The new InDialog conference that took place in Berlin in November 2013. The yearly Alcalá conference, coming up in April 2014. A number of new conferences specifically on translation in the public realm, which to my knowledge is new. One of them is organized by the Directorate General for Translation in March 2014.*
- *An ISO standard for PSI or CI is in the making. That will empower us to speak beyond our regional and national frontiers and with one voice, to say: this is who we are and that's the quality you can count on if you work with us.*
- *The European PSIT Network has established contact with the EU and has active support in the Parliament and the Commission, at least from some Members of Parliament and of the Commission, and That's new.*
- *For the first time, there is not only active support from the EU, but also concrete action: the Directorate General for Interpretation of the Commission is hosting a repository – a digital cupboard with shelves. The European PSIT Network is labelling the shelves: a shelf for mission statements, a shelf for training and accreditation, one for working conditions and statutes and many more. The next step is to fill the shelves with content from press articles, mission statements, research, training protocols, codes of ethics... The final objective is to integrate all these materials into a case file.*

*A case file as a tool to build policy. It is quite a feat that by hosting the 'cupboard', the Commission has become an active partner.*

*The next step should get more stakeholders involved throughout Europe. Today we have members from 10 countries in our European PSIT Network. We need members from all 28 countries.*

*Then, we must bring together, analyze and eventually consolidate training and accreditation. Let's work from what we have. In the UK, at the University of Alcalá – an important pioneer in developing a Master's program for PSIT -, in Flanders, in France... But let's also learn from each other in a more extended Europe and world. Norway comes to mind, Critical Link 8 is at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh.*

*But training and accreditation are of little avail, if there's no structural funding to pay the professionals that have been trained and accredited with.*

**C.V.G. What do you consider would be the most appropriate measures to regularize the situation of the translator / interpreter in public services?**

*P.R. Legislation and funding that makes sure that:*

- *The right to access to public and social services for individuals is guaranteed.*
- *PSIT is formally recognized as an instrument for access to service provision, as an instrument facilitating integration, citizen mobility, and as an instrument to facilitate communication in immigration setting at the EU's borders.*
- *Training and accreditation are structurally organized.*
- *PSIT provision is funded and regulated by the EU and the governments of the member states.*
- *Working conditions and remuneration of the practitioners is such, that one can make a real living and enjoy social security.*

**C.V.G. Do you think the future of PSIT is conditioned by the inclusion of this area in recent technological advances? how can these affect (or are affecting) in PSIT development?**

*P.R. We have to stop thinking about PSI, PST, the use of pictograms and technology as separate universes. It's the integration of all of this into a package that will help public and social servants do their jobs in today's and tomorrow's world.*

*Webcam interpreting is part of the package, and so are apps like Google translate, myLanguage Free Translator and ICatcher. They will become better than they are now, in the future. And we'll have to learn where they can and where they absolutely cannot be used successfully. They won't replace the role of the practitioner but they will probably change it.*

*None of the tools mentioned is, by itself, the sole answer to the problem of the communication gap. But together – as one big tool box carrying a range of devices – they might work miracles.*

*And, if we don't embrace them, there's others who will ...*

C.V.G. Training programmes of different duration and kinds about topics related to PSIT are increasing. Do you think the same tendency is given in the job market? Do the graduate students find job opportunities? What do you think it should be done?.

*P.R. Insofar as training and training programs go, I've touched upon that in one of your previous questions, we need to establish what basis training and accreditation it at least takes to be able to work professionally.*

*Once that has been established, training programs can offer more, and should be stimulated to offer more, but they should not be allowed to offer less than that minimum program.*

*And: as long as governments – local, regional, national or EU – don't provide structural funding, job opportunities for public service interpreters and translators will be scarce or unstable.*

*I'm also in favor of providing strong continued training, through vocational and university programs, to direct public service interpreters to other opportunities – other fields within the profession (medical, legal) and beyond the strict limits of the profession (interpreting in business settings and conference interpreting, where appropriate). And perhaps even beyond that, for the world increasingly also needs other multilingual experts. The name of the game is: re-directing and expanding your profile through additional and specialized training and accreditation.*

**C.V.G. What is your opinion about funding and management of PSIT providers? Should it be in hands of the public institution or private companies?**

*P.R. PSIT, since it bridges the access gap to fundamental democratic rights, should be regulated and financed by governments. Democratic governments, that is. That is essential.*

*And then there are ways to organize and manage the services themselves.*

*Different options are possible.*

*In Belgium, PSIT providers are either - some – organized by local and regional governments and – most - by not for profit organizations subsidized by local or regional governments. I'm in favor of the not for profit strand, whether organized by governments themselves or by non-governmental organizations: when they are regulated to be efficient, cost-effective, in touch with the public and social services that use them, and bound by quality standards and fair remuneration of practitioners.*

*I'm no fan whatsoever of private constructs like British Rail: trains do not run on time and, though private, the cost for the tax payer is higher than before.*

*On the other hand I'm a realist. The EU and many member states increasingly work through tendering. It would be unwise to remain blind to this.*

*Whatever the model is and will be, as I said, the essence is that PSIT providers are regulated and that there's structural funding. There should be no room for cowboys that undermine quality through dumping schemes.*

**C.V.G. What types of training programs do you think it will provide the necessary skills to work in these areas ? Do you recommend any?**

*P.R. A number of steps or ingredients are necessary, before we can even talk of training.*

*First it is good practice to map the competencies required into a competency profile, with at least a detail elaboration of these competencies for PSI: processing spoken messages, reproducing spoken messages, deontological conduct and dealing with deontological conflicts. The competency profile, then, is the foundation to build a standard on. The standard will make the success factors – what learners need to do in order to perform successfully as an interpreter - of each competency explicit. And the training will build on that standard. Basic training should at least comprise: training in interpreting, note taking techniques and deontological conduct. A significant amount of basic training time should be invested in in-context practice. In-context here means that trainees practice through role plays in settings that are derived from reality: health, social work, schools, welfare etc. They do that under the accompaniment of interpreter trainers and experts or professionals from those service settings, so that they get to know these settings well.*

*In terms of duration, I would suggest that a basic training program should take 130 hours at the very least.*

**C.V.G. Do you agree with Prunč's comment that TIPSII has turned from the former Cinderella of Interpreting Studies into a quite respectable sister of Conference Interpreting?**

*We are moving in the right direction, but we're not perceived by all as the respectable sister quite yet. Getting organized at European and global level, proving why we are necessary, raise and ensure quality, the ISO initiative and conferences to share and consolidate knowhow lead to respectability. In our own right. Not just as the sister of someone else ;-)*

*It's for example a good decision of the University of Antwerp, Belgium, to confer for the first time an honorary doctorate to a researcher – and practitioner ! – from our field: Sandra Hale. This boosts up respectability of the our sector as a whole. As far as I know, it's the first time that in Europe such an honorary degree goes to community interpreting – or PSI, if you will.*

*And anyway, at this point we're not trying to fit into the little glass slipper, we're creating the shoes that befit our profession. Shoes that can stand a bit of mud ... ;-)*

**C.V.G. Do you have any other recommendations for people interested in training in this area?**

*P.R.*

- *Share knowhow, questions, doubts*
- *Find synergies between professionals: PSIT practitioners, providers, trainers, testers*
- *Learning should have in-context learning as its focus*



- *Combine or follow-up with more and other training: other interpreting, other translation niches, include technology, actively try and find out – already during training – what ‘the market’ needs*