

# Efsli Summer School Italia, Siena

TEKSTI JA KUVAT KATI KEKKONEN

**5.** – 7.7.2010 an international group of interpreters gathered to Siena to study interpreting techniques in international conferences and, eventually, much more. Language of the training was International Signing (IS) and partly because of this we also learnt how international signing has developed over the past 30 years, what IS actually is, where it exists, how it varies and what makes it so special.

## Trainers

Our wonderful trainers came from the USA; **Bill Moody**, a freelancer interpreter who has been interpreting in 16 countries in international conferences using IS over the past 30 years. He took part in the first IS interpretation trial in 1977 WFD Conference in Copenhagen. **Carol-lee Aquiline**, a deaf translator and interpreter who has been a General Secretary of the WFD almost 10 years. She has been involved in a great vari-

ety of international settings concerning sign languages, interpreting, research, education, Deaf rights. This lady knows many sign languages, including Finnish!

## Where I started

For me the reason to take part in the Efsli Summer School was mostly curiosity and, of course, interest in international settings in any area. My contacts to deaf people from foreign countries were practically zero before this training, so international signing was also a very new thing for me. During first two hours of the training we all gave a short presentation of ourselves using IS. When we were told what we were supposed to do I hardly understood but after a few minutes I found myself in front of 20 interpreters from all over the Europe telling my "interpreter-story" in IS. I felt amazing; trying to copy all the signs I had seen others using during those first two hours of the training, to visualize everything and then act it out!

## Overview of the topic

Even if the theme of the training was "Interpreting in international conferences", the most important things I got from the training were to learn IS, improve my English and to socialise with deaf and hearing interpreters. The most interesting things concerning interpreting were the complicated demos of relay interpreting among several hearing and deaf sign language interpreters as well as spoken language interpreters which we saw and got to practice. It was also very enlightening to see how deaf interpreter should be fed in relay interpreting settings by Bill's and Carol-lee's short demo. Ethical issues also led to good conversation with both consumers and interpreters point of views, thanks to our versatile group of interpreters.

Training included a lot of detailed hints for preparing, for example how to be a part of an international interpreter group etc. In this article I concentrate on the things which touched closest me as an inexperienced international signer and interpreter. My personal goal now with IS is to learn how to use space and mind-pictures more in Finnish sign language rather than actually interpret into IS. Any International training also improves spoken English skills, which I wish will become stronger my third working language in near future.

## International Signing

Both of our trainers underlined the sentence; "IS is not a language like national sign languages are with their native signers." IS is a visual based way of communicating. Carol-lee pointed out that you have to know and value your national sign language before starting to use IS. IS changes depending with whom you are talking to or



*Kati after training*

where you are using it. Among deaf signers, IS copies signs from the language that is spoken in particular country.

Besides collecting international signs during training, I also got some hints how to manage with such a limited vocabulary I have in IS:

1) *Visualize* as much as you can, IS must be acted out. Bill Moody referred to **Carol Padden** who writes: "The biggest mystery of IS is knowing which signs of your own language will work and which ones you must borrow from another sign languages" That was a problem for me when I realised that some Finnish signs actually are internationally understandable. From my short experience, the movement and the place of the Finnish sign can be "international", usually just handshape should be switched for a more simple one.

In every international conversation with deaf signers there will be signs "born" and "life" just in that one interaction/conference/event. 2) *Copy as much as possible* when taking part in conversation, use common experiences and personalize.

We also had some "hands on" practices during the training. Those familiar with IS and equipped with good or native English skills were interpreting from conference-English into IS. I felt like I had to struggle with the conference-English source spoken by Swedish consultant as her 3. language, so I settled with practicing my English and interpreted from English to Finnish sign language. During that practice I noticed that from interpreters point of view IS definitely makes your interpretation more understandable and visual. You have to 3) *break the messages down into the essentials* in IS interpreting.

Bill Moody's example-demo for IS interpreting showed me that IS will certainly force an interpreter to 4) *go straight to the heart of the message*. Bill Moody said that one of the important things we interpreters can learn from IS is that you can't cheat - you have to go for the meaning! When interpreting into IS you must be careful



*Efsli board member Marinella Salami, trainers Bill Moody and Carol-lee Aquiline*

of register though. In every situation you can't act it out too strongly!

### **Interpreting in International Conferences**

From ethical point of view we had good conversation about interpreters' role in massive international conferences; it changes from the normally strict role to rather supporting to the deaf client. Interpreters' role as relaying cultures comes more important in these settings. Interpreter can be more of a co-worker, rather than just an interpreter. Carol-lee's experience was that the interpreter should empower deaf and hearing in their interaction, build bridges, add extra to the interpretation if deaf and hearing are not communicating with each other. If the interpreter has more understanding of the interpreting situation, they should at least tell the deaf client why interaction is not happening. We also received a lot of important hints of interpreting techniques in international conferences. There can be three or four interpreters before you as a national sign language interpreter. From ethical point of view I noticed that you can make some adjustments to your interpretation. You shouldn't throw all the problems caused by

relay interpreting to the deaf client. Adjustments are possible when you have received good preparing materials or you have some previous knowledge on that matter. Carol-lee pointed out that it's rather EXPANDING the message to make it more understandable than ADDING something into it.

### **Finally**

After all the travelling I did this summer around Europe, meeting lots of new faces and sometimes trying to manage without a common language, I definitely noticed a difference between deaf and hearing attitudes towards cross-language interaction. It's so obvious when communicating in IS, trying desperately to make a point to see deaf people taking the time, do whatever is necessary to finally have a common understanding. Sometimes when travelling in German spoken countries or even in Italy, I got hardly any response when trying to communicate in English (with lots of pointing and pantomime to make my point). Mostly people got rude and ignored me once and for all, like I didn't even exist. The open attitude towards international communication is a valuable lesson for us hearing people to learn. 🙌