

*“The Future Belongs to Those Who Prepare for It Today.” Malcolm X*

The sun has set and risen countless times. Based on this, we assume that it will continue to do so in the future. But is this actual knowledge or mere belief? According to British philosopher David Hume, there is no such thing as absolute certainty as far as the future is concerned. Even though his hypothesis is two hundred years old, it remains relevant today. We cannot know what the future holds; we can only prepare for it based on more or less likely predictions. The future as a whole and interpreting in specific have this nature of unpredictability in common. No matter how well we plan ahead, our lives can always take an utterly unexpected turn tomorrow. And not even the best preparations can ever fully prepare us for the difficulties we may encounter whilst interpreting. Thus, addressing the future of interpreting is an intricate task, interweaving two highly complex, unpredictable elements in this ever-changing world.

To talk about the future of interpreting, we first need to think about what it actually means to be an interpreter. In my case, it was an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a passion for languages that inspired me to pursue this career. With every new meaning I grasp and every foreign word I learn, I catch a glimpse of a foreign perspective on this colorful world. It is just what Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher, described when he said: “If we spoke a different language, we would perceive a somewhat different world.” However, it also makes us realize how easily languages can turn into invisible, seemingly insurmountable barriers. Words are much more powerful than we often give them credit for. It is only when they fail us and the bridges of communication crumble, that we acknowledge their power. I have tried more than once to properly explain “Kaiserschmarrn” to people who did not even know where exactly Austria was on the world map. Conversely, when people use “Fernweh” or “Wanderlust” in English, I am proud to be the native speaker of a language with such beautiful words. This is the essence of interpreting – treading the tightrope walk of mastering languages and diverse cultures, thus becoming the pillars of bridges between people and across borders.

Preparing for our future requires us to be flexible and willing to learn as individuals, language speakers and technology users. For instance, we will have to adapt the linguistic canon that both our educational and professional careers rest upon. It is unlikely for Indo-European languages to maintain their linguistic monopoly over Europe. Therefore, we may need to broaden our repertoire to Afro-Asian and Sino-Tibetan languages, such as Arabic and Mandarin. The rapid change in the global language landscape also impacts our daily language use. To be more specific, we will need to carefully adopt certain neologisms under the premise of respecting both the originality of each language and the ongoing sociocultural developments

of our world. On top of that, we cannot afford to shut new technologies out. Tablets and phones may soon replace pens and notepads for consecutive interpreting. Remote interpreting may become more popular than face-to-face interpreting. And laptops have already become vital tools in the booth and beyond, replacing paper piles and physical folders. Universities need to take this into account when training aspiring interpreters and when working on didactic methods or new software. Veteran interpreters may need to learn from younger generations and leave tried and tested practices behind. Interpreting in the future will be more dynamic, interdisciplinary and multi-faceted than ever before. We will need to learn how to reconcile old knowledge and strategies with new technologies and sociocultural circumstances.

However, technological developments and globalization can be both a blessing and a curse for interpreters. Often, our role is underestimated. More than once have I been asked about the relevance of my future profession. After all, almost everyone knows English to some extent and many already rely on tools like Google Translate. But as language professionals, we have to keep building bridges when people trample on our supposedly irrelevant, multilingual heads. No technology or artificial intelligence to date is able to comprehend meanings that are buried under or hidden behind the words that are actually spoken. We foster cultural and linguistic understanding in a way no lingua franca can, while safeguarding the diversity of the languages of our world. Beyond serving as the bedrock of communication between major powers and languages in international institutions, we can also lend our voices and expertise to those who are silenced or misunderstood – namely indigenous people, refugees and people with disabilities. With globalization and digitalization speeding up, armed conflicts taking place more visibly and the number of climate refugees growing, transcending tangible as well as intangible borders has become more vital than ever. This might even force us to reevaluate our roles as interpreters. Are we really just vessels for a strangers' words? Or are we hybrid beings – experts in various fields, interpreters, translators and cultural mediators with a moral obligation amidst paperwork and technological gadgets? As interpreters, we are more than just good multitaskers and polyglots. We foster communication, share knowledge and help the world grow a little closer together. If we do not forget this and are ready to adapt to linguistic shifts and new technologies, we will be prepared for the future, regardless of its unpredictability. In an interconnected world, the future belongs to those who build bridges, not borders.