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Good afternoon, my name is Silvana Pavlovska, of Melbourne, the proprietor of International Interpreting Agency, which is a national provider of interpreting and translation services and training services.

My presentation topic today is, The significance of training for translators and interpreters – from the perspective of a language services provider. In the time available, I will concentrate mainly on court and legal work, which is just one of several areas of interpreting where specialist training and experience is so important.

It is quite obvious, from statistical and anecdotal evidence, that some sections of Australia's society, because of their language and ethnic background, are not receiving all the equal rights that an English-speaking person takes for granted.

One example on a regular basis is the significance of not having sufficiently trained and experienced interpreters available for court hearings, police investigations and associated lawyers' interviews – and this, in a country that expresses its pride in a sense of justice and equality for everyone.

But what does this mean in terms of numbers of people affected?

Well, in Victoria alone, a small but nonetheless important percentage of Magistrate's Court hearings have been dismissed because a qualified and trained interpreter was not available.

Statistics are not readily available, but in Melbourne's Magistrate's Court alone, according to the Department of Justice:

- About 1 per cent of people who come to court require the assistance of an interpreter.
- Roughly 2 per cent of cases are adjourned, mainly because of short notice of request for interpreters.
- The number of interpreters used each day in the main court can vary between two and more than 15. On average, the Magistrates Court engages more than 160 interpreters each month and more than 2000 a year.

The department tells me those numbers are very approximate. And that is just the Magistrate's Court, and does not include the higher courts or civil courts, or other courts and tribunals such as the Family Court.

Some people may not think two in 100 Magistrate's Court cases is significant. But it certainly is to those involved and to the justice system overall. And our profession must regard it as significant as well.

To use an age-old saying, justice needs to be seen to be done. Society is being short-changed and we as professionals should be concerned.

Interpreters and translators must receive, and be required to receive, adequate professional training and qualifications, and continuous follow-up professional training and personal development.

We personally, and our professional industry, have a responsibility to society in this regard, and I am by no means the first person to say this.

In 1997, Peter Day Consulting, in a paper on regulating the interpreting and translating profession, said (and I quote): “The areas of work in which incompetent or inaccurate I&T services may have the greatest potential for substantial risks to persons are considered to be in the legal and health sectors. All other areas of interpreting, however, presumably involve potential risks, including economic and material disadvantage, due to the inherent vulnerability of the LOTE person (or indeed English-speaking I & T consumers) when using interpreting and translating services”. End quote.

The paper mentioned consumers being subjected to (quote) “incompetent, dishonest, unjust, and fraudulent I & T services”. (end quote). Such a comment should be viewed by our profession with shame and embarrassment.

In a multicultural society such as Australia, language should never be a barrier to accessing information and services. But it has been, and continues to be. It is a huge challenge which the I & T profession must take on.

I hope in this presentation to persuade you that synergies can be created by the profession stepping up its game – to forge a greater reputation and role for itself in providing society with what it obviously needs and wants. The significance of training for translators and interpreters is deep and widespread.

Why is it so important for interpreters and translators to have proper professional training and what are the consequences of them not being trained? That is, the positive and negative consequences for themselves and the community at large?

Interpreters improve outcomes and the quality of life for people who do not speak English well, or at all. With the use of trained and qualified interpreters, all Australians can communicate effectively in English – which is a basic need if those from language backgrounds other than English are to fulfil their own personal potential and contribute to community and country.

Let me give some more statistics to highlight the size of the challenge. In Victoria:

- More than one million people speak a language other than English at home.

- About 24 per cent of Victoria's population were born overseas.
- Nearly 44 per cent have a parent who was born overseas.
- Victorians come from more than 200 countries and speak more than 230 languages and dialects.
- Victoria is the most multicultural state in Australia.

In any multicultural society, language should never be a barrier to accessing information and services.

It's not as though Australia has only recently become so multicultural and the challenges this poses has come to the fore in government or community debate. Back in 1975, a report to the Federal Government by Andrew Jakubowicz and Berenice Buckley, titled "Migrants and the Legal System" stated (and I quote): "Competent interpreting is not merely an ability to speak a language, however fluently, but is an acquired skill with specialisation needed in appropriate areas, together with a strict code of ethics" End quote. The report added that this was of particular importance in legal matters.

Despite many recommendations put forward by various reports over the years, I believe there is evidence to show that the situation today remains only partially better than it was 30 or more years ago.

The respected Professor Sandra Hale, of the University of Western Sydney, in a publication this year titled "The Discourse of Court Interpreting", notes that the main avenue through which most people enter the interpreting and translation profession in Australia is by sitting a generalist NAATI exam, with no specialist interpreter training required.

Professor Hale says that despite recommendations in a number of reports that a university degree should be the minimum qualification for professional interpreters, this is not the current state of affairs – the entry level for TAFE courses does not exclusively require possession of a degree. Candidates who have completed secondary studies and NAATI accreditation can be admitted to the courses offered.

NAATI itself does not conduct any specialist exam for legal interpreting.

The Victorian Government in a recent paper outlining its policy on the use of interpreters, makes reference to NAATI-accredited professional interpreters but does not mention the use of trained interpreters anywhere in its publication.

I find that most surprising, because NAATI accreditation alone does not ensure the competence of an interpreter, in the legal or any other field.

Here in Western Australia, the Government's Language Services Policy issued in 2008, requires government agencies to (and I quote) "develop policies, programs and services that are equally accessible to all Western Australians to implement strategies that are responsive to their diverse clientele." (end quote). The document makes reference to the use of a competent interpreter or translator. And it defines a competent interpreter as someone who has NAATI accreditation or who has obtained a formal qualification in I & T from an accredited tertiary institution.

In my view, interpreters and translators must undertake suitable ongoing training to keep up with linguistic and interpreting and translating skills, so they can remain competent professionals. They must learn to be good communicators, not simply good linguists, because our whole job depends on our ability to provide personal communication. This training must include a module on effective face-to-face communication.

Many conscientious practitioners welcome adequate training opportunities. They believe there should be more training available, because they are required to interpret in a wide variety of situations.

In particular, interpreting in the medical field (including psychiatric) and in legal matters such as police investigations, courts, child protection cases, lawyer interview, etc, requires a very high level of interpersonal communications skills as well as linguistic accuracy.

One of the qualifying principles of the Galbally Report of 1978 to the Federal Government – that is 32 years ago – was that (and I quote) "all members of our society must have equal opportunities to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services" (end quote) The Report's recommendations were accepted by the government and in 1981 it asked the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs to evaluate the effectiveness and implementation of the report's recommendations. That review concluded that a lack of qualified interpreters and translators was hindering the development of the profession and noted there was a shortage of training courses.

The publication Lawyers Weekly in an article in April this year titled "Justice Lost in Translation" stated (and I quote): "Non-English speakers, indigenous people and those who are speech or hearing impaired, are being disadvantaged in the Victorian civil justice system due to an inability to access interpreters." (end quote). The Lawyers Weekly said a report by the Law Institute of Victoria commented that people who have difficulties communicating in English face substantial obstacles that jeopardise their access to justice in the civil system. The chairman of the Access to Justice Committee, Mark Woods, was quoted as saying, "It's hard to win a dispute if you can't understand what is being said."

The Law Institute's report estimated that at least 30,000 Victorians may require the assistance of an interpreter for the approximately 80,000 civil disputes that arise each year.

According to the report's findings, one of the main difficulties in accessing interpreters is the prevalence of unmet demand for civil interpreting services. This is where people or organisations seek, but do not receive, interpreting services, either because an interpreter is not available, or because the person in need is unable to afford or access funded interpreting services. The report recommended the creation of a fund to provide interpreters for those involved in Victorian civil court proceedings.

There are long-term consequences of having untrained interpreters. These were highlighted in a report in the Sydney Morning Herald early this year. It said jurors consider witnesses less convincing if their interpreter constantly searched for the right words. Alarming, it quoted the New South Wales Bar Association's junior vice-president, Phillip Boulten, as saying some jurors were suspicious of people who used interpreters – that jurors saw interpreters as a prop or an opportunity to gain time for thinking.

Boulten said using interpreters often created confusion and complications. And he added (I quote): “The interpreter needs to understand the nuances of the English question and interpret that accordingly. Sometimes that is better achieved by some (interpreters) than others. Sometimes the interpreter takes it upon themselves to interpret quite liberally, rather than literally.” (end quote)

The newspaper report also said that such is the negative impact of poor interpreters, that the government body that employs them has suggested it is time for specialist training.

I say, Hooray to that – more interpreters getting more training is long overdue.

In New South Wales, about 40 interpreters work in a courtroom every day and their services are required about 10,000 times a year. Court interpreters have to be qualified to a minimum of Level 3 under the national accreditation scheme. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that Professor Sandra Hale of the University of Western Sydney, had said interpreters did not have to study interpreting or learn about the pitfalls of appearing in court.

Professor Hale said, (and I quote): “We will have an army of unqualified, untrained people. If such people do not obtain training, the profession and society will be affected adversely. A good professional interpreting and translation industry in Australia should have the flow-on effect of helping society to integrate better and benefit its citizens.” (end quote)

So, what are the consequences of not having enough trained interpreters?

Using under-qualified and untrained interpreters and translators will lead to lower standards of service, lowering the reputation of the profession, create mistrust in I & T services, and eventually ruin the language services business – and will cause unnecessary spending and waste of funds on the part of government services and private enterprise.

And there would be a high number of court cases not heard or dismissed.

How do interpreters get sufficient training, and what should it cover?

Let me summarise our approach at International Interpreting Agency.

We provide current and relevant training and preparatory programs in any language and at any NAATI accreditation level and recognition, aimed at current and future practitioners, to:

- Develop and maintain existing skills
- Upgrade their NAATI accreditation levels
- Help those who want a fulfilling professional career and who would benefit from acquiring essential skills towards NAATI accreditation and beyond.

The training includes courses and workshops covering a wide range of topics. We offer advice regarding the appropriate selection of programs to best meet an individual's requirements. Just four very important programs cover:

- Listening and comprehension skills for interpreters, which are among the most critical skills – an interpreter cannot live without them.
- Memory retention and note taking – what you can't do without when you have learnt to listen and comprehend.
- Ethics and professional aspects of I & T that refer to professional conduct and how to deal with difficult situations; and
- The theory, practice and techniques of translation.

My view is that training, and in particular professional development training, is a necessary component for competent and professional practitioners, to enable them to expand their knowledge and skills. In my experience, when we provide competent and highly trained staff, we have responded to our clients' needs successfully.

Our staff and contractors are required to have highly developed skills in interpreting and translation as well as the experience to be able to function in the different contexts in which they must work.

They are expected to have prior university training and/or TAFE training and have NAATI accreditation in languages that are NAATI accredited. They are also expected to have extensive experience and expertise in particular areas of interest to them, and

to undergo continuing professional development in line with the AUSIT Code of Ethics.

How many of you here today have had formal training and education in interpreting and/or translation?

Was it beneficial? How useful was it to you?

What things did you not do that you think you should have?

Were there some things you did that were less useful or helpful, or do you think something in your courses led you along the wrong path?

Please think about those questions and give me your thought after I've concluded my presentation.

Any qualification and training for any profession or trade has a use-by date. Many people have put that at about five years, no matter what you study and practice. For example, medicine, law, teaching, accountancy, industry trades – you name it, there is a necessary refresher course available. Would anyone not agree that the roads would be safer if drivers brushed up their skills, say every 10 years?

It's not just because we all pick up bad habits. It's also because there is always something new to learn.

There must be professional development in addition to training. We will be able to refresh our knowledge and skills, and apply them usefully and productively. Nothing ever stands still and no one ever stops learning.

Who is suitable for training? Someone who has done brilliantly at university may not be able to grasp concepts of interpreting and translation. **And what about enthusiasm?** So you know someone who wants to be a court interpreter – but have they ever gone and sat in a courtroom all day and listened and observed what goes on?

It is very important to be able to apply formal training to real-life situations and learn from that.

And we cannot ignore the generation gap, and learn from younger people how language is always evolving, such as a swing away from formal to less formal communication, in speech and writing. Accept that the trainer has an opportunity to learn from the trainee.

Of course, there are plusses and dangers in that. As a profession whose currency is language, we must be on guard against an obvious trend of allowing standards to fall. You see it and hear it in the media every day. Modern does not necessarily translate into better or correct.

Let the texters and twitterers communicate in as few letters and words as they see fit. But there has to be correctness and standards in the real world of speaking and writing. Sloppy use of words and grammar is NOT acceptable. Yes, it **IS** important to know the right way to use it and **its**, and **it's** as in **it-apostrophe-S**. If YOU think that is important, then you must also think that training is important – otherwise our professional standards will fall and communication will not be effective and successful.

Training is important, not least because of its positive long-term consequences, which may not necessarily be apparent at the start of the process.

The benefits of good training are enormous, just like any education. One benefit that is sometimes overlooked or played down is the ability to pass on knowledge and skills you have acquired to the people you are interpreting for – and to your work colleagues, the profession, the community in general.

You put yourself in a position to have better and more work opportunities, which will yield financial benefits, greater professional kudos, better public perception and recognition of the profession.

Training provides wider benefits to the translation and interpreting profession and this will benefit the multicultural society, which in turn benefits all Australian society.
Does not the public interest benefit from a better and fairer administration of justice?

The I &T profession, through its professional bodies, is likely to be more involved in matters concerning the profession and work towards gaining more respect and confidence from business and government, as well as the community at large.

And at the personal level, my company benefits from an improved reputation because it can provide a consistently high quality of services to its clientele.

As they say, everyone's a winner.

Well, you have heard much of what I think about the need for more training, and I've quoted the views of some eminent people who have spent much more time researching the issues than I have.

But before concluding, I would like to mention some valuable comments I received when preparing this presentation – from someone well credentialed to make a contribution. I refer to Mr. Adolfo Gentile, a former Chair of the NAATI Board and a former Associate Professor at Deakin University in Victoria. He was a member of the Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal. He therefore has vast knowledge and experience in matters of interpreting and translation.

I asked him a series of questions and he was kind enough to put much thought into his responses.

I think it would be valuable to read them to you in the form of edited quotes:

I'll begin his quotes:

“Firstly, let me say that I cannot make categorical statements about trained interpreters because the distinction I can make through my work on the tribunals is accredited versus non-accredited – except in the few cases where my former students have come to the tribunals to interpret.

“My experience leads to the following: the ones who are accredited are more likely to have a firm grasp of their role, their competence is better and there are fewer problems in techniques – for example asking clarifying questions of the speaker before interpreting; continuing to interpret when the member is speaking to the adviser, without needing to be reminded; using the first person; keeping a professional demeanour; speaking clearly and audibly; asking for a break if necessary; and so on.”

Mr Gentile continues, and I quote:

“The tribunals ask for Level 3 or above as a general rule. Of course, for certain languages it is not possible to get them. There is a clear competence divide between Level 2 accredited and Level 3 accredited, as you would expect. In this kind of environment it is a risk management issue driven by the imperatives of having to deal with the case and the risks involved in misinterpretations where so much is at stake. It is not an option to put it in the bottom drawer until a trained or accredited interpreter materialises. Tribunal members are aware that they must ask the same questions in a number of ways, so as to minimise any potential misunderstandings when the interpreter is not accredited at the right level.”

End quote

That concludes my presentation, and I think we have some time left if you wish to ask some questions, or answer those I put to you about your thoughts and experiences about training.