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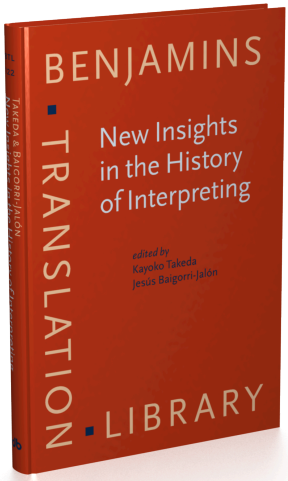

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CHAPTER 7

The use of photographs as historical sources, a case study

Early simultaneous interpreting at the United Nations

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This chapter presents a case study of how photographs can offer different angles of the dynamics involved in a complex observable event or series of events. As shown in previous research, photographs can only be valid historical sources if we are able to interpret them, and that requires the observer's active participation and the use of additional sources, such as written or oral records. I analyze eight United Nations (UN) official photographs as part of the founding narrative of simultaneous interpreting (SI) history. After introducing the theoretical and methodological background, I present the historical context of SI at the UN. The analysis of the photographs focuses on (1) the SI equipment, (2) the interpreters, and (3) the users of their services.

Keywords: photographs as historical sources, simultaneous interpreting, United Nations interpreters

1. Theoretical and methodological approach

Photographs are objects that can perform many functions, from pieces of art to marketing tools, from private family mementos to public forensic records, from illustrations in popular magazines to evidences in scientific work, to name but a few. The aim of this chapter is to provide a practical example of how photographs can be used as primary historical sources, in this case to document the initial stages of SI at the UN, through images of: (1) those who performed the interpreting work, (2) the technical equipment, and (3) the users of the interpreting services, either the public in general or other language experts.

As pointed out by various authors (Brothers 1997; Díaz-Barrado 2012; De las Heras 2012; Kossoy 2014), photographs are valid historical records. However, although photos are one of the most precious primary sources to know the

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past, they have been only timidly used in historical research, probably due to an entrenched historical tradition that considered written documents as the only reliable sources to rebuild history. As Tagg (1993: 65) would say, photos "are never 'evidence' of history; they are themselves the historical." The photos analyzed in this chapter help, in my view, to better explain and understand a specific episode in the history of the interpreting profession, and also to bring to life the memory of its practitioners, their fingerprints so to say. This line of research, which has interpreting as its object of analysis, stems from a previous article on iconography of interpreters in colonial times (Alonso-Araguás and Baigorri-Jalón 2004) and is inspired by a recent book edited by Fernández-Ocampo and Wolf (2014) and by comments I made on a UN photo (Baigorri-Jalón 2015: 21–22).

Photographs do not necessarily represent a univocal collective consciousness (Brothers 1997: 30). They should rather be taken as "a source of multiple collective memories and therefore components of history as a creative process," serving "the imagination of historians" and feeding "their creative instincts" (Brenne and Hardt 1999: 7). In that context, the idea that "[m]emory works radially, that is to say with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event" (Berger 1980: 60) should be taken into consideration.

> As sites of memory, photographic images (whether digital or analogue) offer not a view on history but, as mnemic devices, are perceptual phenomena upon which a historical representation may be constructed. Social memory is interfered with by photography precisely because of its affective and subjective status.
>
> (Bate 2010: 255–256)

No matter how stimulating photographs may be for viewers, historians are aware that they do not contain sufficient information to fully rebuild historical events. Although it seems difficult to refute the condition of a photograph as "a reliable trace of the visible and the 'real,'" "an image on its own is not automatically proof of anything" (Ritchin 2013: 8, 48). So the question of whether or not truth is embedded in each image complicates its use as a historical source. It is widely assumed that photographs are mere representations of objects or people, but although "we *know* that the photograph is a construction … we persist in *believing* that it is a truth" (Laxton 2008: 97).

Interpreting photographs is, thus, a complex process that depends largely on knowing the context they depict (Sekula 2003: 445). Even if "in semiotic terms, we can easily read the basic denotations of old photographs, without any historical knowledge we are deprived of their historical 'connotations'" (Bate 2004: 11). That is one reason why captions are an "essential component of photographs" (Benjamin 1980/1931: 215), although a caption cannot "resolve all its potential meanings" (Ritchin 2013: 50). The meaning of any photograph depends on the

context in which the photograph was taken, but also on the place and moment in which it was or is observed by a given viewer. Photographic images should not then be seen here as objects of a passive but an active "consumption," which requires an exercise of guessing and "filling in" (Laxton 2008: 95–96). Photographs would indeed have forensic value, but a combination of denotation (what we see) and connotation (what that implies for the viewer) allows to dispel the idea of apparent denotative "purity" of images (Faulkner 2008: 104).

Coming to the issue of source criticism, the remark made by Di Bello (2008: 143) that "[h]istory, like photography, is never a neutral or unproblematic representation of the past" seems quite appropriate. Researchers should, in my view, approach photographic sources with "the same methodological rigour" we apply to "other historical artefacts" (Brothers 1997: 16). Curiously enough, "this type of critical analysis is rarely done on photographic documents" (Parinet 1996: 485).

The series of photographs in this study can be seen as a dynamic sequence (Burke 2001: 187–188), which may be articulated in a coherent narrative, with "an unavoidable discursivity" (Baker 2005: 125), even if "there is the problem of representing a dynamic sequence in the form of a static scene, in other words of using space to replace time" (Burke 2001: 143). Photographs "are *texts* inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse,' but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself: the 'photographic text' is thus the site of a complex 'intertextuality'" (Burgin 1982: 144). The fact that an organization such as the UN has kept in its archives, among many other records, the iconographic heritage of its interpreters would be a proof of their social recognition. As pointed out by Hall (2001: 89), the constitution of an archive implies the presence of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, where the whole apparatus of history – periods, key figures and works, tendencies, shifts, breaks, ruptures – slips silently into place. That whole "apparatus of history" emerges from the photographs presented in this case study and from others on interpreters that can be found at the UN archives. Researching the whole collection would allow to build an iconographic biography of UN interpreters. I argue that the photographs specifically analyzed here contribute to map a phenomenon which meant a shift or even a rupture, led by some key figures, in the historical evolution – or sociogenesis – of the interpreting profession. The newly established UN was a test bed for SI as a permanent interpreting mode.

The sequence followed in the chapter will start by briefly putting SI in context before turning to the photographs' analysis in the following order: (1) the technical revolution (wiring, microphones and booths); (2) the interpreters; and (3) the consequences SI had for other language services. A few discussion points will be offered as concluding remarks.

2. Simultaneous interpreting at the United Nations: The context

Simultaneous interpreting had been used since the late 1920s at the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva (Baigorri-Jalón 2014/2000), but the immediate inspiration for using that interpreting mode at the UN came directly from the experience at the Nuremberg main trial (1945–1946), and in fact it was the same person, Léon Dostert, who introduced the SI system both at Nuremberg and at the United Nations, as a result of a technological invention originally patented as the Filene-Finlay system (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 57–60). The UN Charter established five official languages (Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) – Arabic would be added much later – so permanent translation and interpretation services among those languages had to be provided, although at the initial stages of the Organization, and according to the rules of procedure of various bodies, the target languages were only English and French, the two working languages. After a series of tests that began in 1946, SI was adopted as the standard interpreting mode at the end of the 1947 General Assembly session, as a method that, compared with consecutive interpreting, would save the Organization a lot of time.

> Under the system of consecutive interpretation, we are taking three speeches per meeting. All these speeches are, of course, prepared. It would considerably facilitate operations, if we could have simultaneous interpretation at the very earliest possible time, so as to prevent this general debate from running on for another two weeks.
> (UN File S-0922, Box 2, file 2, *unpublished sources item 1*, 2 October 1947)

The instruction from the UN Secretary-General came soon:

> …the Secretary-General now wants arrangements made for the installation of simultaneous interpretation equipment at Flushing Meadow to cover all five official languages. I have today given the necessary instructions to proceed on this installation…
> (UN File S-0922, Box 2, file 2, *unpublished sources item 2*, 30 September 1947)

The tests were successful in the eyes of a specific committee charged with the task of undertaking the UN decision-making process on that matter. In the assessment of the initial experiments, the fact that the time needed for interpretation was reduced considerably was an essential factor for the decision-makers – ultimately Member States –, who based their judgment more on financial considerations than on perceived interpretation quality. However, consecutive interpreting did not disappear officially from meeting rooms until 1971. Until that date, delegates attending the Security Council were entitled to ask for consecutive interpretation after listening to the simultaneous – with the need to assign double teams –, but delegates never used that right throughout those years.

> …all requests for an extension of the [SI] system have been put forward on the grounds of saving time, and not of convenience. In fact, objections have been made on the grounds of inconvenience in debate and inevitable lowering of standards of quality of the translations.
>
> (UN File S-0922, Box 2, file 2, *unpublished sources item 3*, undated (originally underlined))

One may wonder on what grounds the UN management would base that idea of identifying SI with a loss of quality, but a plausible hypothesis would be that innovation was seen with suspicion by managers, users and consecutive interpreters alike. Be it as it may, the consequences of the decision were huge, and not just for the daily procedure of the UN meetings and the delegates' mindset, but also for the adoption of new and increasingly sophisticated technology and, in turn, for a decisive shift in the interpreting profession's profile and working conditions. In that context, the UN would become an institution of crucial importance in the field of interpreting as a center of dominant discourse formation and power (Harvey 2001: 195). Its influence would be felt well beyond the Organization even though the total number of staff interpreters around 1950 was only over 60, including the consecutive and the simultaneous teams. The proportion of female interpreters was still 22%, much higher than at the League of Nations but still below the figures reached in future decades (UN doc. ST/AFS/0S8:70–71).

3. Looking past the photographs

I will analyze briefly a series of eight United Nations official photographs dated between 1946 and 1948, the initial years of the UN (founded at the San Francisco Conference in 1945), which provide early images related to SI. By choosing these photos – only a small fraction of the photos devoted to interpreting and interpreters kept at the UN archive –, I am taking position on a particular view of how an event or a succession of them is represented in photographs, as artifacts which often reproduce other artifacts. The black and white photos were commissioned by the UN Department of Public Information, possibly to disseminate the Organization's wide range of activities and to keep a record of its institutional memory, that is, with the eyes put in the future. They are thus part of an "institutional" photographic archive (Parinet 1996: 482). Institutional photographs are taken by photographers from different backgrounds, "whose work is most often done anonymously" (Parinet 1996: 483), so the photographer's mark is usually absent from the majority of the photographs presented here. Photos are identified with a symbol, usually a number, although occasionally we can find in the caption

a name or initials, attributable to the photographer or to personnel in the photographic unit. That anonymity in authorship also applied and applies to the work of UN translators and interpreters.

I am using here only a very limited amount of photos dealing with the topic at hand, while being aware of the triple selection involved: (1) the UN photographic archive, as any other archive, selects what its managers consider worth preserving, and includes a number of negatives and paper copies which exceeds by far the some 130 digitized photos of various dates and contents related to interpreters contained in the UN Multimedia photo gallery page (http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/gallery.jsp?query=legacy%3Ay&startat=0&sf=arrival_date), (2) among all the photographic holdings, I have been able to see only a limited number of photographs, and (3) only a small fraction of those are used in this chapter. None of them seem to have been the object of intentionally subversive technical manipulation.

Photos 1 to 6 have been digitized at a professional printer's from the paper copies supplied by the UN Photo Unit (now UN Multimedia), Department of Public Information, in New York, from original negatives (Photo 4 is now available in digital format at http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/gallery.jsp?query=interpreter), and Photos 7 and 8 have been taken directly from the digital database. These photographs come with different types of captions: from a simple numeric symbol to a more detailed explanation of the photo's subject. Even if the photographs do not belong to a specific series, taken together, in chronological order, they can be seen as signposts to map the path of early SI. The various instances or events reflected on them can be seen, in my view, as a theme, a sort of documentary series, which allows for a more coherent narrative than an isolated image. In the selection of the photographs I have tried to include those with interpreters, equipment and users of interpreting services. My additional comments on the photos, of variable length depending on each instance, intend to help understand them in their context and also to suggest further related research.

Most of the photographs in this chapter touch, directly or indirectly, upon the technical aspects of the SI revolution. In that context, a certain parallelism can be established between photography as "a product and witness of industrial revolution whose consequences have marked the social and political struggles of the twentieth century" (Brenne and Hardt 1999: 2) and the technological advances brought about by the installation of this innovative interpreting equipment in the 1940s. If an instantaneous photograph does not exist, as all "are time exposures, of shorter or longer duration" (Szarkowski 2003: 101), the same would apply to SI, since there is always a time-lag between the original speaker's utterance and that of the interpreter, putting into question the idea of true simultaneity.

From the historical perspective, these UN photographs are reliable primary sources, duly stored and cataloged. The main general criticism that can be made about them refers to their lack of spontaneity, which results in a static visual narrative. Most of them were taken by photographers while people on the picture knew the photo was being shot, so when interpreters are the subject, they appear posing rather than at work. The photographic medium, as I have said, is as artificial as any other record, so criticism could be based on the photographer's composition, even though photographers do not have full control over the resulting image. Interpreting and interpreters were the targets of UN photographers because they were newsworthy: they were associated with a technical innovation which prompted reactions of awe and marvel when interpreters' photos and biographical sketches reached the public through the press. In turn, the feeling of being a *rara avis* (their critics called them *parrots*), as echoed by newspapers, nurtured in some of those characters a narcissistic ego.

3.1 The simultaneous revolution: Equipment

The changes in equipment will be articulated along two major elements: the sound transmission system from the original speaker to the interpreters' headsets and then, once translated into the respective target languages – sometimes through the use of relay –, to the users' headsets; and the booths as the physical space where interpreters carry out the language transfer process.

3.1.1 *"Wireless wiring": The instant communication symbol*

Benedikt's following quotation on cyberspace can be also applied to the revolutionary changes brought about by the SI mode as implemented in the UN's early days:

> …the major step being taken here, technologically, is the transition, wherever advantageous, from information transported physically, and thus against inertia and friction, to information transported electrically along wires, and thus effectively without resistance or delay. Add to this the ability to store information electromagnetically … and we see yet another significant and evolutionary step in dematerializing the medium and conquering – as they say – space and time.
>
> (Benedikt 1991: 9)

A similar figure of speech on the conquest of space and time was used by Baigorri-Jalón (1999) in his description of the revolutionary changes entailed by *in situ* and remote simultaneous modes as the two ends of a process that had begun in the 1920s and is still on-going. SI helps overcome the time – and to a certain extent also the space – factor, thanks to the use of electrical wiring that connects the various actors involved in the interpreted event, via microphones and headsets.

Following Benedikt's comments, one may add that in the SI system friction and inertia are transferred to the interpreters' brains and their synapses, where resistance, delays and other shortcomings may occur while processing the apparently smooth flow of speech through wireless signals. Friction between input in one language and immediate output into another is indeed the crux of the balance that simultaneous interpreters had – and have – to find in their performance (see Gile 2009: 157–190).

Photo 1. Mr. E. P. Cisneros of Cuba; Mr. Wu Teh-Yuh, China. Economic and Employment Commission, 22 January 1947. UN Official Photo 3687

Photo 1 can be seen as an audio-portrait – its legend could be "individuals wearing headphones" (Gill 2004, referring to photographs of the 1980s). The two diplomats on the picture, from Cuba and China, are interacting – presumably in English, which was displacing French as leading language of diplomacy – not about issues pertaining to the commission whose meeting they were attending, but rather about how to operate the SI receiver, perhaps wondering if their maneuvers with the knobs in the contraption would really produce a message in all UN languages. It seems that the Cuban delegate was much more actively interested, or less conversant than his Chinese counterpart, in the functioning of the sound apparatus. The photographer (anonymous) caught the two characters in a quite spontaneous situation, although we cannot say for sure that they were unaware of being photographed.

The headphones were only receivers and came from the United States Transmission Corps, and the wireless transmission signal for SI used radio frequency bands the US Navy was not using, thus showing that military technology often precedes other civil uses. Headphones were hung around users' necks – the strap contained the aerial – and they weighed just over a pound. Thanks to the wireless sound transmission, delegates could continue listening to the proceedings of the meeting even if they had to leave briefly the conference room. At the moment when the photo was taken, the meeting had not started, so no sound could actually be heard through any of the channels. It is interesting to note that the two delegates seem to be wearing the headphones in a very natural manner. One of the claims made around that time by consecutive interpreters to oppose the simultaneous mode was that diplomats would refuse to wear headphones to avoid looking as participants in a telephone operators' conference (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 55, 71). This photograph seems to prove those interpreters wrong.

Photo 2. UN 6618. Visitors to the United Nations interim headquarters at Lake Success follow discussion in the Economic and Social Council Chamber with the aid of portable wireless simultaneous interpretation sets. Each set consists of a pair of earphones and a miniature radio receiver, with a dial, which makes it possible to select any of the five official languages. Lake Success, New York, 31 July 1947

The anonymous photographer took a general view of a group of visitors properly attired for the occasion. They appear listening to the speaker or the interpreter

who was on air at that moment through headphones whose functioning surely required some basic operation instructions given by sound technicians at the entrance of the conference room (Baigorri-Jalón 2015: 21–22). Their attentive look could be an instinctive response to pose for the photograph. Present-day viewers may wonder if they were more interested in following the proceedings of an economic and social body during their brief visit or simply in the unique opportunity to test the innovative devices that allowed them to hear the same speech in different languages. Their reaction after experiencing the interpreting system would possibly be one of admiration, as if they had witnessed a marvel produced by unseen anonymous people, the interpreters, almost identifiable with machines. The press referred to interpreters as "mental wizards and linguistic virtuosi" (Iglauer *Harper's Magazine*, April 1947: 296), or "real word wizards" (*The New York Times*, October 3, 1948: 10). Consecutive interpreters saw in anonymity, seclusion in booths and assimilation to machines their strongest arguments to oppose the simultaneous mode.

Photograph 3 was taken in Paris, venue of the 3rd General Assembly session (1948), where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. The photographer would carry his duty of reducing a three-dimensional object to a two-dimensional one, and of providing an aseptic forensic image for the record that would prove the interpreting apparatus existed and was ready to be installed at the *Palais de Chaillot* in Paris. In fact, there are photos of the same device from other angles – UN official photos numbers 11635, 11636, and 11637 – which, combined, would add that third dimension. The photographer would be seen here as a notary public who conveys what is registered by the camera (Gómez-Isla 2006: 104).

Meetings outside the UN headquarters entailed in those days the need to transport the technical equipment as well as the interpreters and other staff. The apparatus used on that occasion in Paris had to be "shipped by boat leaving New York by 17 August 1948," after removing it "from both Council Chambers by 9 August," so "simultaneous interpretation will not be available in either Council Chamber as from that date." However, the usual "facilities will of course be provided for consecutive interpretation" (UN File S-0922, Box 3, file 11, *unpublished sources item 1*, 27 July 1948). This record shows the shortage of technical equipment in the early days of SI at the UN, as well as the Organization's readiness to replace the recently approved simultaneous mode with well-entrenched consecutive interpreting. Regarding the interpreters who worked at the General Assembly session in Paris, Geneva was a convenient source of human resources: "If ECE holds two meetings daily during the Assembly we will take five of the Geneva interpreters to Paris" (UN File S-0922, Box 3, file 11, *unpublished sources item 2*, 30 June 1948).

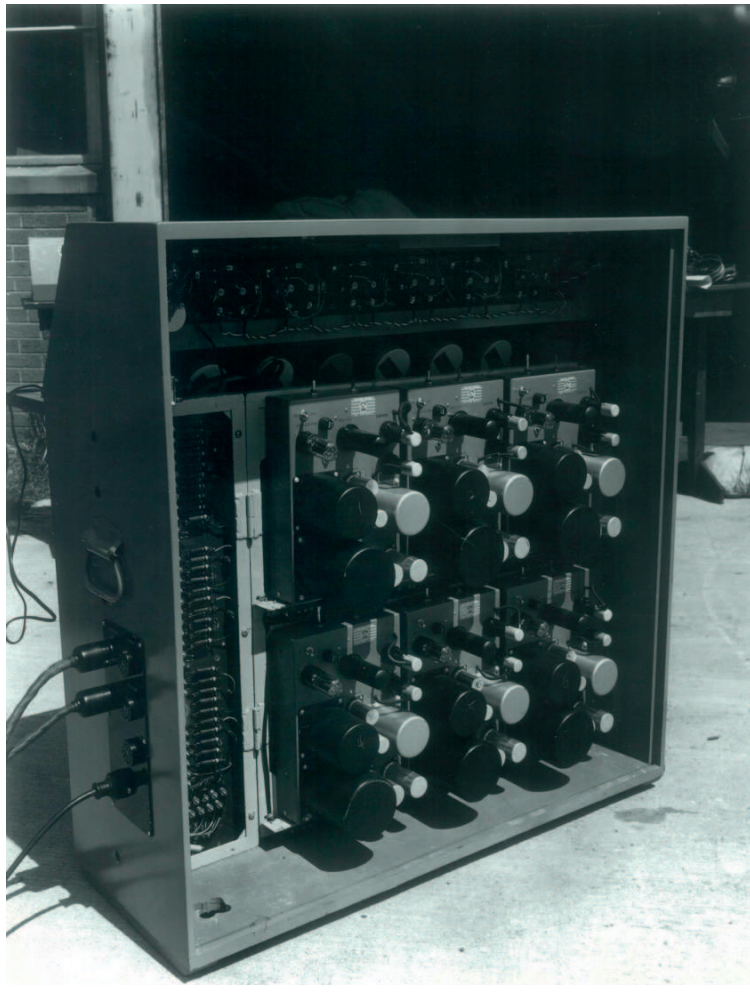

Photo 3. U.N. moves to Paris its simultaneous interpretation equipment. UN 11638. Rear view of portable control console, with amplifier mounting frame closed. Official United Nations Photo. Department of Public Information. (Undated 1948)

This – at first sight – unattractive image can be approached from the perspective that in photography what is left outside the frame can be considered as non-existent (Díaz-Barrado 2012: 146), and that photographs can be attributed a dual function: "first, to reinforce what is present in the photographs as images and second to refer beyond the object and the image in a mutually reinforcing sign system" (Edwards 2002: 72). In that context, the lifeless and dull object in this "industrial" photograph – not exempt of a picturesque touch – represents the actual "black box" of polyphonic communication. But it can also be looked at,

with an imaginative, almost ethnographic perspective, not just as the ignition mechanism that allowed the flow of polyglot speeches to happen, but also as an allegory where the physical cables and circuits would symbolize the interpreters' neuronal synapses needed to perform the multilingual connections. In Latour's social terms, the black box would be the *intermediary*, that is, "what transports meaning without transformation," whereas interpreters would be the *mediators*, who "transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry" so that material objects would also be *participants* in the course of action (Latour 2005: 39, 71). If a photo can be seen as a ventriloquist that speaks in a different way depending on the viewer (Debray 1992: 58), one can imagine the diverse or even opposed views different people concerned with the device could have of such an image. The photo would thus constitute a site of intellectual dispute (Harvey and Knox 2014: 4), where the material mirror requires the "mediating agency of human consciousness" (Joyce and Bennett 2010: 5).

Colonel Dostert, the organizer of the SI experiment at Nuremberg and then at the UN, could see this photo with the eyes of a visionary. His romantic view of technology, inspired by a sort of scientific Utopia, would lead him to see in that device the embryo of a machine that would replace the human brain. By the time this photograph was taken in Paris, Dostert was halfway between the UN and Georgetown University, where in the following years, at the height of the Cold War, he would pursue research on machine translation through a series of algorithms that enabled simple translations from Russian into English. SI would redefine for him the dimensions of time and, to a lesser extent, of space. However, when it came to the necessary participation of pioneer interpreters in the early SI tests, Dostert's advice, as referred by one of them, was:

> Don't be afraid. Keep calm. Remember, you have to tell the story; your client is supposed not to have heard or understood the original delivery. Say what you have understood. Don't panic; just do your job. (Pervushin 1989: 69)

Those are instructions that no machine would be able to process.

In the context of the second industrial revolution – the environment where the technical advances visible in the picture fit –, the electrical engineers' challenge would be that of providing sound lines, wiring, frequency ranges, etc. to all the posts in the conference room. It seems clear that industry had an influence in scientific research – IBM registered the Filene-Finlay SI system patent in 1931 –, but inventions were demand-driven: in this case by the UN, and previously by the ILO, the League of Nations and the Nuremberg main trial.

The typical consecutive interpreter would associate this device with "apocalypse now" or in the very near future. Their initial corporate reaction was to despise the "machine," short of destroying it, as Luddites would have done. Consecutive interpreters probably thought simultaneous interpreters were betraying their past,

contributing to the commodification of their tasks, and recklessly destroying the profession as they knew it. They would identify the new system with a loss of quality in interpreting, due *inter alia* to technical problems, as those experienced at the Paris General Assembly.

> For the second time a meeting of the First Committee has had to be suspended because of the defective performance of the wireless head sets (*sic*) used for simultaneous interpretation. At this morning's meeting of the First Committee Channel #2, conducting the translation into English, was out of order and the Chairman was obliged to suspend the meeting for ten minutes.
>
> Through the kindness of the Chinese delegation, the interpretation into Chinese was discontinued and the interpretation into English was placed on Channel #6. No further translation into Chinese was possible by reason of this change of Channels, for the rest of the morning meeting.
>
> (UN File S-0922, Box 3, File 11, *unpublished sources item 3*, 1 October 1948)

But quite likely the consecutive interpreters' true fear was that they would lose the upper hand and that eventually, unable to absorb innovation, their professional career would be at stake. That is why a real "guerrilla warfare" broke out between the two groups of interpreters (consecutive and simultaneous) (Iglauer 1947: 298). A non-equilibrium state ensued and they were either eliminated or in most cases assimilated by the simultaneous mode. Consecutive interpreters claimed that SI deprived delegates of the "time to think" they enjoyed with "their" consecutive mode, although they soon abandoned this argument. One may wonder whether they were moved mainly by corporate interest or also by their sincere evaluation of simultaneous speed as a sort of anesthesia that invited oblivion while the slowness of consecutive allowed for memory. Or whether their arguments could be taken as a theoretical position in favor of the "sense-for-sense" they associated with consecutive *versus* the "word-for-word," or "parrot-like" as they would say, outcome they attributed to the simultaneous mode. The reality was that once the new technology became entrenched, it showed "absolute advantage over their earlier competitors" (Maynard 1997: 76). As I have said, this did not mean the complete replacement or the end of the consecutive mode.

The newly arrived simultaneous interpreters would see in this machine and in the techniques it involved – acquired through hands-on experience – an opportunity to pioneer an experiment that was in the vanguard of progress and would lead to a promising professional career, at a time when post-WWII uncertainties were looming. They were adapting to a new environment, which in itself was an adaptation to the new needs: considerably shorter time for the same number of speeches. Probably only in retrospect can the SI revolution be seen as a breakthrough, whereas at the time when it was being tested or in its first stages it was seen with doubts as to its potential success.

Photo 4. United Nations Simultaneous Interpretation. Susanna Wieniawa of the Interpretation Division, Department of Conference and General Services, who interprets from French and Spanish into English. 29 March 1948, United Nations (Lake Success), New York. United Nations Photo #189118

The three previous photos in this chapter can be characterized by the absence – or the elliptical presence – of interpreters. Here, for the first time, a person, Ms. Wieniawa Dlugoszowska, is identified in the caption as an English booth interpreter, thus recognizing and naming a typified profession. She emerges in a medium close-up chiaroscuro, posing for the photographer – possibly one of the persons behind the initials KB/dmw, which appear in the caption of the printed copy –, simulating the act of interpreting. The frame chosen by the photographer offers only a partial view of one interpreting booth, omitting the other colleague(s) in the booth or those from the other four official languages. The photo can be seen as a classic bust portrait, with the additional element of the audio gear "worn" by the interpreter: headphones with an aerial for wireless connection and a conspicuous bulky microphone hanging from her neck. Definitely, a soundless audio-portrait, where the interpreter's hairdo could be the *punctum*, in Barthes's wording. From an interpreter's professional perspective, the photo can be seen, first of all, as an evidence of the interpreter's visibility, and secondly as an image of "a booth of one's own," to echo the Woolfian metaphor which represents the process of feminization that began with the wider use of the simultaneous mode and would continue for many years to come (Baigorri-Jalón 2003).

All sources, including photos, invite researchers to further explore their field of interest. "Part of the image is the history of the image itself" (Boulding 1961: 6). In the case of this photograph, the huge time gap between the only official image

available of the interpreter as a young woman and the moment when the photograph is being analyzed encouraged me to imagine beyond the photo and to try and fill that gap. Barthes (1980: 23, 30) speaks of *le retour du mort* (the return of the dead) in all photographs, where the subject becomes an object. Ms. Wieniawa's (Mrs. Vernon after marriage) obituary[1] led me to explore and contact various sources, including the UN archives in New York and Geneva, and the Human Resources Office at the UN Office in Geneva, via e-mail between July 31, 2014 and August 13, 2014. The most fruitful results came from my contact with the interpreter's son, Dr. Gervase Vernon, who has published a book on his grandmother where references to his mother are frequent (Vernon 2013).[2]

3.1.2 *Booths: The vanishing point and the* punctum

Photograph 5 shows interpreters' booths, as "fish tanks" with various members in them, posing for the occasion and focusing their gaze on the photographer. They do not appear actually interpreting, but ready to perform in one of the meetings where SI was being used as a novelty. The picture was taken in November 1946. The major Nuremberg trial had finished a few weeks earlier. The composition of the photograph shows a series of lines – the ones on the ceiling and those marked by the furniture, particularly the edge of the table on the foreground – that converge, in a one-line perspective, on a vanishing point that coincides with the second lady in the Russian booth. The man standing at the far right of the photo, outside the booths, is Léon Dostert. In Barthes's terms he would be the *punctum* in the picture (Barthes 1980: 49), capturing the attention of the viewer as a distracting, eccentric element which attracts our gaze in the otherwise orderly arrangement of interpreters in their respective booths. He can also be seen as the commissioner of a "nativity," that of the SI mode, as in old oil paintings. Dostert, as has been said, was the leader of the then revolutionary experiment in Nuremberg and at the UN and he acted as spokesperson on behalf of the SI team.

Some other points can be highlighted here. Booths are far from being soundproof, although some technical effort on that score is shown by the fact that, unlike those used in Nuremberg, they have roofs and they are covered with insulating tiles at the back. They are separated from the audience by glass panes, but the divisions

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1. Sussana VERNON obituary in *The Times* (August 8, 2011). http://announcements.thetimes.co.uk/obituaries/timesonline-uk/obituary-preview.aspx?n=susanna-vernon&pid=153001738&referrer=2282 [accessed July 28, 2014].

2. Mr. Vernon also provided me with a UN document (*Attestation*, see unpublished sources), which explains in detail Mrs. Vernon's language combination, her modalities of work (both consecutive and simultaneous) and her years of service at the UN (1946–1952).

Photo 5. Simultaneous interpretation at United Nations – United Nations interpreters in conference room equipped with simultaneous interpretation system which permits any one of the five official languages to be translated instantaneously and concurrently into the other four at meetings of commissions and committees held at United Nations Headquarters. Lake Success, New York, 18 November 1946. United Nations, UN 2995

among them are made with glass at the front and a curtain at the back. Since the series of booths could only be accessed from the conference room or the corridor through the English cubicle, interpreters had to cross their colleagues' booths to get to their posts or to leave them. From the whole interpreting team in that meeting, about one quarter are women, a confirmation of an earlier comment on the increasing feminization of the profession. Finally, it is worth reiterating that most of those interpreters had had only the short in-house training in SI immediately before they assumed their duties at the beginning of the General Assembly session in September that year. The woman over whom the vanishing point converges is Mrs. Mary Jaquith (Harin), one of the most senior members of the early UN interpreters' team (Baigorri Jalón 2004: 67–68).[3]

3. A photo of her from 1927 can be found at the Library of Congress online catalog (http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ggb2005018755/ [accessed August 22, 2014]).

3.2 The simultaneous revolution: Grey cells at work in fish tanks

Reference has already been made to various interpreters in the previous photographs. In this anonymous – the photographer's name is possibly behind the initials FCS that appear in the caption – and undated Photo 6 (ca. 1947), which looks like a close-up of the previous one, the Spanish booth in full is shown. Technical details of the booth can be seen here more neatly: the insulation tiles and a direct access to the booth through a door at the back, showing a design improvement towards an increasingly ergonomic working environment. The caption omits the names of the interpreters, inviting the viewer to imagine their biographies. The photographer, in an anthropologist's role, shows us the interpreters' physiognomy: their faces, whose gaze does not meet that of the spectator; the way they dress; their attention as an expression of their inner selves. Other sources inform us about the sociological origins of the interpreters on the initial UN simultaneous teams. Most of them were very young. They were not trained as interpreters. They

Photo 6. Now Hear This – In five languages. Highly-skilled United Nations interpreters instantaneously render a speech from English, French or Russian into Spanish. Other simultaneous interpreters in similar booths in U.N. meeting rooms, meanwhile, interpret the same speech into English, French, Chinese or Russian. Participants in the meetings are equipped with individual headsets and can listen in any of U.N. five official languages. FCS. UN official photo 7917

arrived at the job by happenstance: they happened to know the right languages and were able to cope with the unnatural exercise of listening and speaking at the same time. They had very little in-house training before their actual performance. And they did not necessarily consider interpreting as a stable profession, but rather as a temporary stage in their career. From the early teams, some interpreters ended up in UN management, others left the profession temporarily or for good due to various reasons, some others were transferred to other UN duty stations (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 87–115).

A typical association is made of SI with the time constraint between input speech in one language and output speech in another. As can be seen in this photograph, also space and air were limited, stirring up a feeling of claustrophobia rather than a desire to be inside the booth. The three interpreters emerge in a crowded cubicle, where they would be as unobtrusive and unnoticeable as possible for the users and the public in general. Their attire aims at going unnoticed among delegates also in the corridors. The photographer has framed the Spanish booth. The next booth to the right appears empty, perhaps because its service was not required in that particular meeting. But there are signs such as documents and water distributed to the booth that indicate a meeting is going on and we can assume that the interpreter on the left, Juan Rodríguez, a Puerto Rican veteran from WWII US army, is working. Next, from left to right, is Oscar Faura, a Peruvian who stayed in the interpretation section only for a short period and later became a delegate for his country. The third is Guido Gómez de Silva, a Mexican linguist who was a UN interpreter for seven years and later became chief of the terminology section – with one transfer to the UN Office in Nairobi – and then an interpreters' trainer and a free-lance interpreter for many years. None of them had previous interpreting training when they arrived in the UN. Working conditions would evolve with the increasing professionalization of SI. Interpreting shifts were determined on the basis of the first SI tests in the 1928 course at the ILO, where a 30-minute period appeared to be the threshold beyond which the quality of interpretation deteriorated dramatically. The development of other professional regulations, such as the number of meetings per week, working hours and shifts, resting time between meetings, etc., was an on-going process that lasted several decades, with some interesting events, like the 1974 "strike" by UN interpreters in New York, as accelerating factors (Baigorri-Jalón 2004: 87–115).

3.3 The consequences of the simultaneous revolution for other language services: The magnetic polarity of the recorded voices

Recording of speeches existed before the simultaneous mode was introduced, but simultaneity brought about enormous opportunities not only for the member states' delegates, who could follow the debates in their languages "live," but also for the press correspondents and for the language services personnel in charge of drafting the summary and the verbatim minutes. Among other UN bodies, the General Assembly and the Security Council were entitled to verbatim records, and the latter's rules of procedure provided that the record had to be available in paper the next morning after the meeting had taken place, even if it finished at midnight.

The existence of those recordings with the interpreters' voices would put into question the typical differentiation made between translators and interpreters on the basis of the nature of their final product – respectively written and oral (see also Pym, Chapter 10 in this volume). The interpreters' words, when recorded, would not vanish in the ether – *verba volant* – but would remain accessible for consultation and, duly revised, would end up printed in the documents – *scripta manent*. This would lead to an issue which would have great repercussions for interpreters' professional conduct: they would need to be more conscious that their words could be heard later on by supervisors and by colleagues from other sections (for instance, translators and verbatim reporters), who would often use them as raw material for their written texts.

A certain parallelism can be established between the *photograph* that retains an ephemeral moment and the *photographed*, an anonymous operator who supervises an apparatus that records a fleeting speech in a disc, achieving the reification of transient words. The photographer here has privileged the object over the person who operates it. Original speeches and their translated versions were recorded in sound archives that facilitated the drafting of the verbatim transcripts, the factual diplomatic reference for further discussions. For historical research, the moment in which interpreters' renditions are recorded for the first time in history is, strictly speaking, when researchers have a key primary source that allows them to compare the original and the interpreted speeches in various languages. That would equate textual material in Translation Studies, that is, a reliable objective source, whose accuracy would corroborate or question opinions expressed by the interpreters themselves or by administrators or users regarding quality issues. Sound archives recorded in magnetic format deteriorate with the passing of time and their preservation and custody poses a serious challenge for archivists. The exploitation for historical research of the old recordings of interpreted speeches held by the UN in its archives is still pending to the best of my knowledge.

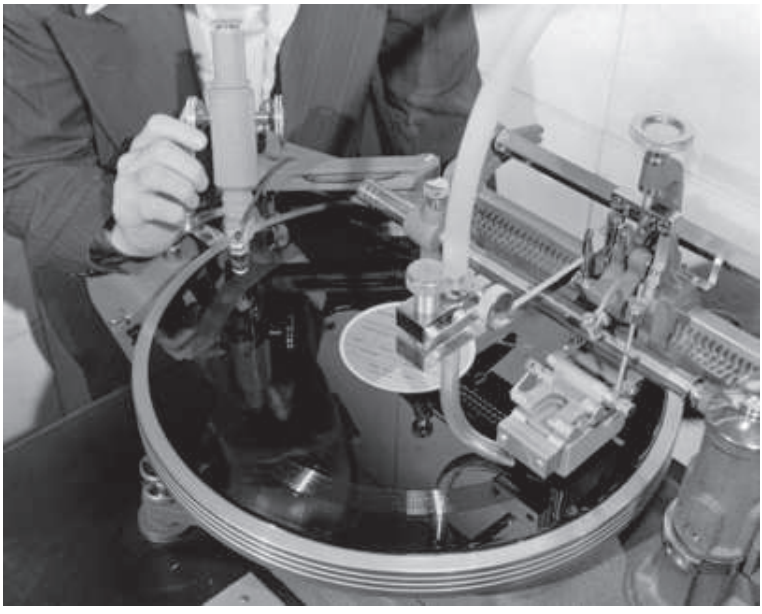

Photo 7. Birth of a United Nations Document. Precision, speed and accuracy are the hall-mark of the astounding mechanism, developed by the United Nations to record its multilingual proceedings. These behind-the-scene pictures show the life story of an official record, from the spoken word to the printed document. Although the note-takers must be able to pass the 200-words-a-minute test, human beings are only human – a man may be suddenly taken ill for instance, or simply miss a word in the heat of the debate. This is where the machine comes in. The automatic sound recording captures even the fastest spoken words, and the sound track may be referred to, if necessary, for checking purposes. 01 January 1948. United Nations, New York. Photo #111294

Verbatim reporters are the clearest symbol of the transfer between spoken and written word either directly or via the headphones – their linguistic "umbilical cord." When magnetic recordings were made available thanks to technological advances, verbatim reporters were able to check the words said by the original speaker and by the interpreter in order to complete their draft texts. Verbatim records were drafted by shorthand reporters or stenographers who took directly from speakers when they spoke their respective language or from simultaneous interpreters when the speaker used a language they did not know. Photo 8 focuses on the most visible part of the stenographers' action, their hands, either operating a machine or writing in shorthand on a notepad, so they are kept unidentified.

It is interesting to note that the initial SI tests in the 1920s were conceived as a two-stage process: a stenographer would take notes in the original language and the interpreter would sight translate in whispers into a microphone – a *hushaphone* – those

Photo 8. Birth of a United Nations Document. (…) … skilled fingers race silently over the keys of stenotype machines or the stenographers' pads. Every word is taken down on paper, both the original speech and its interpretation. The men and women who do it are members of the most highly qualified corps of verbatim reporters, with many years of experience of international conferences, often with a League of Nations background. 01 January 1948. United Nations, New York. United Nations Photo #111293

notes. The assumption then was that interpreters would not be capable of translating directly from the oral speech but able to read stenographic notes (Baigorri-Jalón 2014/2000: 135–138). At the time of this photograph, it was stenographers who needed to listen to the interpreters to take the notes of speeches delivered in languages foreign to them as the basis of their written records.

4. Concluding remarks

As researchers in the history of interpreting, we observe photos from the past like astronomers look in the sky and see events that happened a long time ago, but whose consequences are still felt. Irrespective of the original target audience of the pictures, these photos allow us to trace a particular event, the introduction of the SI mode at the UN, a quite sudden process that occurred some seventy years ago and brought about a new working environment and new professional regulations which are largely still valid today. A technical revolution always gives rise

to resistance from the previously established professionals, and the simultaneous mode was no exception, as has been suggested in consecutive interpreters' views about changing working conditions and their real or perceived status.

By studying photos of simultaneous interpreters and their working environment in the early years of the UN, this chapter has shown how photographs have an impact on the way in which we approach the history of interpreting. It has also shown that photographic images – contrary to popular belief – do not speak for themselves. As material objects, they need to be situated in time and space through a detailed exploration of the context in which they were produced, that is, the complex relations among the photographer, the photographed and the audience, as well as the person or institution that commissioned the work. It is the historical researcher, with the historian's tools, who can carry out that task.

The particular event of the SI introduction at the UN points at an interesting field of research where the technologies involved in photography, simultaneous equipment and recording devices provide an excellent material and industrial iconography, which can only be enriched by further research projects. These should include as their object of analysis not only photographs from public archives but also those stored in private collections still unexplored.

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