

# Foreword

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**Interpreting in the 21st Century: Challenges and opportunities**

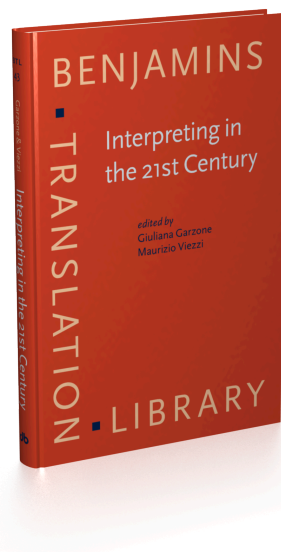
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The First Forlì Conference on interpreting studies in November 2000 is a milestone in the history of Italian interpretation research. If the contributions to the Trieste Symposium in 1986 came predominantly from interpreting scholars working outside Italy, fifteen years later the balance has been decidedly redressed. Much water has flowed under many institutional bridges. Interpreting and translation studies are now autonomous academic disciplines. There are now in Italy two full professorships of interpreting studies with the prospect of more to come in the near future. A dozen or so associate professorships and roughly the same number of research assistants promise to carry interpreting research well into the future.

Institutional recognition of the importance of interpreting studies is vital. Interpreting staff on short-term contracts rarely have the opportunity to defend and assert the needs of interpreting pedagogy and interpreting research in an academic context which has frequently, hitherto, hovered between hostility and indifference in most of Europe. It is comforting to reflect that Italy might well be right out in the forefront in this field.

Conference interpreting no longer holds uncontested sway either in the lecture hall or in the researcher's study. Its very specific requirements continue to be respected and investigated but other new and exciting opportunities have opened up prompted by the energy and initiative of some of the conference participants. A Eurocentric view of interpretation has been overtaken by events. There will, thanks to the EU, always be a need for conference interpreting from and into the official languages of all EU members, but by 2010 there will almost certainly be more EU citizens with Arabic, Hindi, Turkish or Urdu as their mother tongue than citizens with Estonian or Slovene. May we be certain that they will master the official EU languages to an extent enabling them to benefit to the full from their civic rights? By no means. In their dealings with the state, in courts of law and in hospitals or surgeries, they will have the right to demand expert, not improvised linguistic assistance.

The conference speakers underline what form the social demands for language services may, in future, take. The salad bowl has already, in Europe, replaced the melting pot as a model of integration. If the Trieste conference in 1986 fundamentally took stock of the state of health of conference interpreting, Forlì 2000 casts its net wider into the third millennium.