

András Fáber



High school and university teacher, journalist, editor of various journals and radio programmes, literary translator, specialist translator, interpreter. These to mention just some of the things András Fáber has done. It seems hard to synthesize the essence of someone's work, about whom a whole thesis has been written. Put numerically: 74 years, 4 languages, interpreting 15 Hungarian presidents and prime ministers, and an innumerable amount of translating and interpreting work covering 6 pages of Curriculum Vitae. However, I would like to try to expand on the life achievements of this talented polymath as translator and interpreter, based on the following interview I had with him.

1. Why did you choose interpreting as your profession and what have been the milestones in your career?

I chose this profession for many reasons. Firstly, interpreting is a mediation process; it brings together people and cultures. In my opinion, today alienation is a global problem. The mobility of people has increased and many of them find it difficult to be integrated into another culture – they have a sense of loss. An interpreter can help to overcome these problems.

Furthermore, I have been learning languages since my early childhood; besides Hungarian I learned French as a native from my French governess, and later, during my school years I started to learn German and English as well. Since no Western languages were taught at school between 1950 and 1960, I had to learn these three languages from private tutors (I even had to conceal that I was having French lessons!). Bilingualism and the existence of other languages and cultures were just a part of my life. I have always been interested in languages and cultures and in my family there was a tradition of learning other languages.

Another reason for becoming an interpreter was financial. To tell the truth, when my two sons were born, I worked as an editor, I taught languages, I taught at the university as well, but these jobs did not pay that well. At this time the idea came to me that I should try interpreting – this was in the 1980s when I started to work as an interpreter. Obviously, money was not the main reason for choosing interpreting. This profession also fits my personal characteristics. To be a good interpreter you need logic, accuracy, clarity, and knowledge of the source and target language cultures... Interpreting also shares some skills with theatre – I had an aunt, Blanka Péchy who was a famous actress – I have always been attracted to theatre, I am not afraid of public appearance.

2. Do you consider yourself foremost an interpreter or a translator?

In my opinion one can be an interpreter and a translator at the same time, but each profession requires a different type of personality. For an interpreter, translation is a great hobby; it improves accuracy and reliability. Whereas the interpreter seeks the optimum – sometimes it is simply not possible to find the exact expression, the translator is a perfectionist – he won't rest until he does find the best expression. In Hungary, interpreters are usually translators as well and I think for interpreters translating can be really useful. Personally, I like both of these professions and I could not choose which I prefer. For me the most important thing is to create a high quality piece of work – whether it be translating or interpreting. Quality has always been a buzzword for me during my career.

3. What is the most difficult aspect of being an interpreter?

Interpreting as a profession has changed a lot in the recent years. We might say that the interpreter has changed from being an intellectual to having become more of a skilled worker. When I started to work as an interpreter very few people did interpreting and it was a kind of “elite profession” offering higher recognition, pay and social status. Today it is more of a “profession of the masses”, the interpreter does not need a particular personality but rather he is expected mainly just to be able to perform steadily. However, it is almost impossible to perform at a consistent level all the time and there are always tricky situations to resolve.

4. What is the best thing about being an interpreter?

I believe that the human race reached its current level of development because people began cooperating with each other. The interpreter helps people to understand each other, to come to know each other’s point of view. Competition is one of the keywords of modern society, however in my opinion cooperation should be emphasized more. This is the reason why I like interpreting as a profession – I can promote the cooperation between people who otherwise would not cooperate.

5. What was the greatest challenge for you in your interpreting career?

For me, the greatest challenge as an interpreter was, when in 1989 I was interpreting for one of the most significant live political debate programmes on the French Antenne 2 TV Channel. Imre Pozsgay, who almost became the President of Hungary, visited Paris and three French journalists interviewed him for an hour and a half. My colleague and I interpreted him into French and 20 million people watched the broadcast. It was the second most successful broadcast in the history of the TV channel and I think I also contributed to its success.

Another thing I would like to add is that there is no easy job for an interpreter. I interpreted for many politicians, ministers, sovereigns; these are naturally great experiences, however for me the highest honour was always to interpret for geniuses: Nobel Prize winners, scientists or philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida or Roland Barthes.

6. What are you currently working on?

I recently translated some 18th century French lyrics for the Budapest Festival Orchestra and finished the translation of a contract, which was a challenge because of its legal terminology. I also translated a novel by Raymond Radiguet (20th century French novelist) for a composer who wants to compose an opera based on it. Now I will hopefully get the approval of a French publisher to translate a book by a Nobel Prize winning writer.

I am also currently working on interpreting jobs; sometimes in the European Union. Most recently I interpreted in Hungary at the farewell reception for the former French Ambassador to Hungary, and when the new Ambassador received his credential.

7. What is your message for early-stage translators and interpreters?

Do not run away crying after the first failure. When someone is an interpreter, there are always bad moments – that is why interpreters need to have good levels of stress and failure tolerance. Success and failure have to be an experience, not an emotion. Today it is not easy to find a job as a translator or interpreter – there is high competition. But as Mihály Vörösmarty, the Hungarian poet said “[...] who does not despair/ Will never be lost”.

Written by: Dorottya Tamási

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