

INTERPRETING IN ICELAND

End-of-degree Coursework

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

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1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of this project is to study how the profession of interpreter develops in Iceland. The reason why I've decided "Interpreting in Iceland" to be the subject of my project comes from both, my interest in Interpretation and my fascination about Iceland.

After two years of studying Translation and Interpretation at the *Universitat Pompeu Fabra* in Barcelona, I've realized about how fascinating the profession of interpreter is: demanding, interesting, exhausting, etc. Interpreters play a big role though they seem to be invisible and my impression is that the profession itself is not very well known by society in general. When I mention I'm working on a project about Interpretation most people don't know what I'm talking about or get confused with Translation.

Iceland is a fascinating country. During the last seven years I've lived between this island in the North Atlantic Sea and Spain. My interest in both, Iceland and Interpreting, plus a personal curiosity in knowing the situation of the country regarding this matter and how the future looks like, are excuses more than good for me to plunge into this project.

Starting it from scratch is not easy. When I first thought about it there were several things that came into my mind to convince me it was a good idea to move on.

One of them is the fact of Iceland being a small country (in the sense of scarcely populated with approximately 320.000 inhabitants). How necessary would interpreters be in such a small society?

Even though small, Iceland is a progressive modern European society with a high standard of living and a high level of technology and education. My curiosity comes in knowing how developed the profession in the country is and the educational opportunities within the field.

Icelandic is spoken only in Iceland and is the official language of the country. The fact of being a language spoken by approximately 320.000 people in a developed, highly educated society, does it mean more opportunities for Icelandic speaking people regarding interpretation services?

The location of the island between Europe and North America is also an interesting point in the sense of being a developed country between two developed continents where future opportunities regarding business and international conferences could take place.

Even though Iceland's economy collapsed in 2008 and crisis is being severe with the country,

there has been a high rate of migration during the last ten years. How would newcomers manage to communicate regarding legal issues, for instance, without speaking the language?

The process of Iceland joining the European Union has started. Right now Iceland is a candidate country. In case they would join, the need of Icelandic speaking interpreters would probably increase.

Those are the questions I ask to myself when starting this project and I will try to go through most of them in the following pages. My plan about how to work on it includes doing some research through internet, libraries, publications and institutions working on the field. I will also try to contact professional interpreters, teachers, etc. and interview them either by phone, email or by meeting them in person.

The essay is divided in five parts. The first one is a short introduction to the country to explain the main facts about Iceland's society, economy, history, etc. The second one is a close look into its educational system and an explanation of the programmes offered by the University related to Interpretation. The third part is an study of the need of interpretation services in the country and the institutions offering those services. The fourth one deals with the issue of Iceland joining the European Union and the last one attempts to be a conclusion of all the aspects mentioned before.

2. ABOUT ICELAND

2.1. General facts

Iceland is a European island country located in the northern Atlantic Ocean, between Norway and Greenland. It has an area of 39,769 sq mi (103,000 sq km). Iceland's population in June 2011 was 318.452* of which the vast majority or around 2/3 lives in the capital, Reykjavik, and surrounding areas. The official language in the country is Icelandic.

Iceland was the last European country to be settled, mostly by Norsemen in the 9th and 10th centuries. They came mainly from Norway and elsewhere in Scandinavia, and from the Norse settlements in the British Isles, from where a Celtic element was also introduced. The language and culture of Iceland were predominantly Scandinavian from the outset, but there are traces of Celtic influence in some of the ancient poetry, in some personal names and in the appearance of present-day Icelanders.

Iceland is a republic, has a written constitution and a parliamentary form of government.

The president is elected by direct popular vote for a term of four years, with no term limit. Most executive power rests with the Government, which is elected separately from the presidential elections every four years.

In environmental terms, the country is unique. It is large (about the same surface area as Ireland) but is sparsely populated, with only 3 persons per km² living mostly along the coast. The interior of the country is not populated. It contains stunning contrasts being largely an arctic desert, punctuated with mountains, glaciers, volcanoes and waterfalls. Most of the vegetation and agricultural areas are in the lowlands close to the coastline.

* Statistics Iceland, 2011

2.2. Economy

Iceland achieved an impressive economic record the last decade, with one of the highest consistent growth rates in the world and low inflation and unemployment. The basic sectors in the Icelandic economy are various services (accounting for 57% of GDP in 2009), manufacturing industries, construction and utilities (23.4% of GDP), and fisheries (6.3% of GDP).*

Public ownership has been systematically phased down by privatization and the main role of the public sector is in energy, health, education and social welfare. The export base is relatively narrow and largely based on natural resources, namely fisheries, energy intensive industries, and tourism and these industries are predominantly occupied by small and medium-sized businesses.

At the end of 2008, however, Iceland was in the headlines of the international press for unenviable reasons. In the wake of the global financial crisis, Iceland's three largest private banks experienced major liquidity problems and were, within the space of a few days, taken into government administration.

The collapse of the banking sector, which was very large relative to Iceland's economy, together with rapid depreciation of the Icelandic krona, brought about an unprecedented economic and financial crisis.

Iceland's clean energy, its marine resources, strong infrastructure and well-educated workforce, provide a firm basis to overcome the current economic difficulties and implement necessary reforms.

* Iceland.is, 2011

2.3. The language: Icelandic

Icelandic is the national language and is believed to have changed very little from the original tongue spoken by the Norse settlers.

Icelandic is one of the Nordic languages, which are a sub-group of the Germanic languages (Germanic languages are traditionally divided into North Germanic, i.e. the Nordic languages, West Germanic, i.e. High and Low German including Dutch-Flemish, English and Frisian, and East Germanic, i.e. Gothic, which is now dead).

The Germanic languages are in the family of Indo-European languages together with the Celtic, Slavonic, Baltic, Romance, Greek, Albanian, Armenian and Indo-Iranian languages, in addition to several language groups which are now dead. Accordingly, Icelandic is more or less related to all these languages. Linguistically it is most closely related to Faroese and Norwegian.

Resistance to change is one of the characteristics of the Icelandic language, which explains the fact that a 12th-century text is still easy to read for a modern Icelander. However, Icelandic has undergone considerable change in its phonetics. Another characteristic of the language is its uniformity, i.e. absence of dialects.

Like the old Indo-European languages, Icelandic has a complicated grammar.

In the country, English and Danish are widely spoken and understood. German and French are taught in grammar school and other upper secondary level schools, so many can speak these languages.

2.4. Migration

In 1994, foreign nationals were 1.7% of the total population of Iceland. This proportion had risen to 6% by year-end 2006. Icelandic employers' demand for workers explains this increase for the most part, making the employment participation of foreign nationals much greater in Iceland than in many other countries. At the beginning of 2007, about 10% of the workforce in Iceland was foreign nationals. A proportion of those who come to Iceland choose to settle here permanently. A decade ago, approximately 160 people were granted Icelandic citizenship annually. In 2005, this number had risen to 730.*

The EEA agreement, which came into effect in 1994, opened the way for the free right of employment and right of residence of workers, the free transfer of funds within the EEA, mutual access to internal markets and the transfer of social rights. It also opened the way for the over-

seas expansion of Icelandic companies, and the exportations of intellect and workers to other countries. With the enlargement of the European Union, the number of nations enjoying these mutual rights increases. It must also be pointed out that a Nordic agreement came into effect in 1983, which provided Nordic citizens with the right to work within the Nordic region without a special work permit.

Research into emigration trends has shown that people are most likely to emigrate in early adulthood. The majority of people who come to Iceland are either single or cohabitants with very young children. Once the age of 30 has been reached, emigration numbers generally drop sharply. This indicates that families with children in school are generally less likely to emigrate than families with very young children. The majority of those who emigrated to Iceland in 2005 were in their 20s and, at the same time, the number of children under the age of 5 entering the country was quite high. In 2005, the age distribution of foreign men who moved to Iceland, however, was different, as there were an unusually high number of men in late middle age. The explanation may be found in the temporary demand for labour for the construction of power plants and large industry plants.

* Ministry of Social Affairs, 2007.

2.5. Comments

Several of the facts mentioned above are important to understand the development of this project about Interpreting in Iceland. The economic record achieved before the 2008 crisis helped providing an excellent educational system making it possible to offer a whole programme in Interpretation within the country. The healthy economy brought the need of new employees and therefore the rate of immigration in the country increased considerably. This larger amount of immigrants from different countries brings new opportunities for interpreters. The language, Icelandic, being a difficult one not spoken anywhere else in the world, affects the language combinations for interpreting and could be something to keep in mind should Iceland join the EU. The country's location between Europe and North America could make of it an important place where to hold International conferences.

3. HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN ICELAND

On this chapter I would like to focus on the importance of education in Iceland and the high level of it. The purpose of it is to explain the steps to follow to be able to become an interpreter in the country. I will start with a short introduction to the educational system, emphasizing on the tertiary education. Afterwards, I will explain the requirements needed and the programmes offered for those who wish to study Interpretation.

3.1. Introduction

With a population of only 320.000 inhabitants, the country has seven universities where to follow a career and in 2010 more than 56 thousand people aged 16-74 had completed tertiary education, which is more than one out of every four inhabitants in Iceland.* Literacy has been universal in Iceland since the end of the eighteenth century.

In 1907 school attendance was made obligatory for all children aged 10-14. It was an education free of charge and a legal right of every kid.

The foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911 marks the beginning of the modern Icelandic system of higher education. This first national university was founded by merging three professional schools established during the previous century: a school of theology, a school of medicine and a law school, and establishing a new faculty of arts. Before that time, Icelandic students had almost exclusively travelled to Denmark for their higher education.

A fundamental principle of the Icelandic education system is that everyone shall have equal access to education irrespective of sex, economic status, geographic location, religion, and cultural or social background. This principle is stated in the Constitution of the Icelandic Republic as well as in the various laws pertaining to the different educational levels. Education is compulsory (primary and lower secondary education) from age six through age sixteen, i.e. for ten years. Emphasis is placed on providing the opportunity for upper secondary education for all and everyone has the legal right to enter school at that school level, irrespective of results at the end of compulsory schooling.

One of the aims of educational policy in Iceland in recent decades has been to raise the general level of education.

School levels in Iceland are four: Pre-primary, compulsory (single structure - primary and lower secondary education), upper-secondary and higher education. Municipalities are responsible for the operation of pre-primary and compulsory schools, whereas the operation of upper secondary schools and higher education institutions is the responsibility of the State. All education comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Education in Iceland has traditionally been organized within the public sector, and there are relatively few private institutions in the school system. Almost all private schools receive public funding.

The higher education level in Iceland comprises seven higher education institutions.

* Statistics Iceland, 2010

3.2. Types of higher education institutions

At present there are seven higher education institutions in Iceland. Four higher education institutions are operated by the state, while private parties with state support operate three institutions. Institutions of higher education vary in the extent to which they engage in research and the number of programmes of study offered. The higher education institutions can also be categorized into four groups according to their specialization: two agricultural institutions, one academy of arts and four institutions offering a wide ranges of studies. Other differences include the number of enrolled students, the mix of programmes offered, and the level of education and research activity.

Four institutions of seven at the higher education level operate outside the capital and its vicinity. Apart from these institutions, all other institutions at this level are located in Reykjavík.

The institutions are:*

- Háskólinn á Akureyri (University of Akureyri). Public.
- Háskólinn á Bifröst (Bifröst University). Private.
- Háskólinn á Reykjavík (Reykjavík University). Private.
- Háskóli Íslands (University of Iceland). Public.
- Hólaskóli, Háskólinn á Hólum (Hólar University College).
- Landbúnaðarháskóli Íslands (The Agricultural University of Iceland). Public.
- Listaháskóli Íslands (Iceland Academy of the Arts). Private.

* Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011.

3.3. Admission requirements

As a main rule, students enrolling in higher education institution must have completed matriculation examination or equivalent study. Higher education institutions can accept students who possess equivalent level of maturity and knowledge as assessed by the respective higher education institution. The Higher Education Act allows higher education institutions to set specific admission requirements for students enrolling in study at higher education level.

Students enrol in studies at second cycle (Master's studies) shall have completed a Bachelor's degree or equivalent three year study at higher education level. Students are expected to enrol in a study programme that is based on learning outcomes which they have acquired during studies at first cycle.

To enter a postgraduate programme a first university degree (B.A., B.S. or B.Ed. degree) in the area of study is required. In some master's programmes the admission requirement is a B.A./B.Sc. degree with a 7.25 grade average on a scale of 1 to 10 (the highest grade is 10). Admission is based on selection by the respective faculties.

Registration fees for public institutions are approx. ISK46,000 (277 EUR according to exchange rate on the 10th of June 2011 by Íslandsbanki) for each academic year, and the fee is the same for all fields of study.

As a general rule, studies at the higher education level in Iceland are divided into three degree programmes:

A bachelor's degree, which normally takes three to four years to complete (180 –240 ECTS credits). Bachelor's degree provides access to further studies at level 3 and 4, or Master's and Candidates' study programmes. Still, higher education institutions and departments can demand certain minimum grades for access to level 3 and 4 studies.

A 60 to 120 credit master's degree (MA, MSc, MBA, MEd, MPaed, etc.) with a duration of one to two years. Full workload in one year normally corresponds to 60 credits. Admission requirements are final examination from level 2 or equivalent. First class grade* is usually required.

A doctoral degree, with a duration of three years.

* Most higher education institutions classify grades as follows:

Grade	Classification
9.0 – 10	Distinction (Honours)
7.25 – 8.99	First Class
6.0 – 7.24	Second Class
5.0 – 5.99	Third Class

* University of Iceland, 2011.

3.4. Interpretation programmes offered at high level education

The University of Iceland offers two different programmes related to Interpretation:

- Applied conference Interpreting. Postgraduate Diploma, 60 ECTS.
- Conference Interpreting. Master's, 120 ECTS.

Both of them are offered by the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies.

3.4.1. *Applied conference Interpreting*

The name of the qualification and title conferred is a Postgraduate Diploma (whose level of qualification is one year at second cycle of higher education).

60 ECTS need to be completed to gain the qualification and the official length of the programme is full time study for one academic years.

The admission requirements are: a first university degree, with a grade average of at least 7.25 (First class), or at least 5 years work experience as a translator/interpreter. All applicants are required to take an aptitude test.

The mandatory courses offered for the year 2011- 2012 are:

- Interpreting theory
- Consecutive Interpreting I
- Conference Interpreting I A/B languages
- Consecutive Interpreting II
- Conference Interpreting II A/B languages
- European translation

Apart from the mandatory ones, there are a series of restrictive elective courses for the students to choose in order to complete the 60 ECTS:

- Language usage and expression
- Danish system of governance, history and culture
- Language use and presentation: English
- Political systems, history and culture: English
- Language usage: French
- Language usage and expression: Spanish

- Language usage and expression: German
- Political systems, history and culture: German
- Political systems, history and culture: Spanish

3.4.2. *Conference Interpreting*

The name of the qualification and title conferred is Master's degree (whose level of qualification is two years at second cycle of higher education).

120 ECTS need to be completed to gain the qualification. The MA–Thesis is 30 ECTS and the official length of the programme is full time study for two academic years.

The admission requirements are: a first university degree, with a grade average of at least 7.25 (First class). All applicants are required to take an aptitude test.

The mandatory courses offered for the year 2011- 2012 are:

- Grammar and writing
- Interpreting techniques
- Interpreting theory
- Consecutive Interpreting I
- Conference Interpreting I A/B languages
- Consecutive Interpreting II
- Conference Interpreting II A/B languages
- Consecutive Interpreting III
- Conference Interpreting III A/C languages
- Conference Interpreting IV A/C languages
- MA project in Conference Interpreting
- European translation

Apart from the mandatory ones, there are a series of restrictive elective courses for the students to choose in order to complete the 120 ECTS:

- Language usage and expression
- Danish system of governance, history and culture
- Language use and presentation: English
- Political Systems, History and Culture: English
- Language usage: French
- Political Systems, History and Culture: French

- Language usage and expression: Spanish
- Political Systems, History and Culture: Spanish
- Language usage and expression: German
- Political Systems, History and Culture: German

As shown here both programmes are totally focused in Interpretation.

I had a phone chat with Gauti Kristmannsson (certified translator and interpreter, senior lecturer at the University of Iceland and responsible of the study programme). According to him, the Diploma programme is devised for students with interpreting experience and the Master's programme is recommended for newcomers. We talked about several aspects related to Interpretation in Iceland. Gauti explained that both programmes are new in the country. Autumn 2011 will be the first time they are offered and the first time they will take place. He admits the creation of them comes from the need of qualified interpreters in the European Union after Iceland starting the process of joining it. There is an actual demand of interpreters as there is no need to wait for the country to join (in case they do). The European Council already opened negotiations with Iceland and according to rule number 9 of the Rules of Procedure of the EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee:

“Members may address meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in an available official language of the European Union or in Icelandic. Translation and interpretation will be provided on the basis of decisions of the Bureau of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, and in accordance with the internal rules of the European Parliament.”*

We talked about how the market in the country has grown due to reasons like globalization, bank's collapse or court cases. There is a demand for it but still lack of trained and educated professionals. Community interpretation is very common in the country though there are lots of interpreters practising it that are not trained or qualified as such (we will see it in the next chapter). It is a solution born out of the need of it. Conference interpretation is done and Gauti explains that it often takes place from Icelandic into English. There is an association called the Association of Certified Court Interpreters and Translators. Those who want to become certified interpreters and translators need to pass an examination. It's a hard one that needs preparation and the failure rate is high.

* Bureau of the European Parliament, 2010.

3.5. Comments

I would like to highlight the importance of education in Iceland and the efforts made by the state and institutions in order to make education accessible for everyone. It's surprising not only the

number of high level institutions existing in the country but also the facilities provided and the amount of branches of study and specialization. I must admit I was marvelled to discover that a whole programme in Interpretation is offered. It is possible that facts like Icelandic being a language spoken by only 300.000 thousand people in the world, the high level of education, Iceland being a modern and developed country or its “strategic” position between Europe and North America, make it possible or necessary to offer a programme like this.

4. THE NEED OF INTERPRETERS IN ICELAND

Once we know the steps to follow to become an interpreter I would like to study the actual need of interpretation services within the country and the institutions that provide those services in order to see what kind of interpretation is more common in the country.

After analysing it, I’ve found out that the demand for interpreters in Iceland could be divided in two main groups: interpretation for migrants and interpretation in conferences, meetings and other related issues.

4.1. Interpretation for migrants

As mentioned in the first chapter of this project, Iceland is a country with a high rate of immigrants, specially during the last 10 years. In the year 1995 the percentage of foreign citizens was 1.8% and in 2011 it had risen to 6.6%.* Nationalities of newcomers differ widely though in January 2008 there were 68% coming from countries in Europe other than the Nordic countries, 15% from Asia, 7% from Nordic countries and 6% from America and 1% from Oceania Thailand and South America.*

The fact of Icelandic being such a difficult language makes it hard for the immigrants to learn it though the country is making a great effort to provide Icelandic courses and facilitate the learning of it. The University of Iceland, for example, offers a very interesting course online for free.

There are several institutions that provide, among others, interpretation services for this group of society.

* Statistics Iceland, 2011.

* Statistics Iceland, 2009.

4.1.1. *Alþjóðaseturs (Intercultural Center)*

The primary objective of the Intercultural Center is to provide a forum for a multicultural society in Iceland. The Intercultural Center promotes a dynamic interaction between people of different origins and cultural backgrounds. It works systematically to prevent prejudice in society by providing extensive educational programmes, introductions to different societies, cultural events and by creating an inclusive forum where those of Icelandic origin interact with those who have come to Iceland from abroad. The Intercultural Center is an advocate for the rights of migrants and everyone of non-Icelandic descent.

The Center provides foreigners with information about employment, moving to Iceland, health issues, schools and education, permits, courses in Icelandic, etc.

Interpreters of The Intercultural Center are almost 300 in total, with command of approximately 60 languages.

The center is based in Reykjavík.

I had the chance to talk, separately, with two interpreters that work for the Intercultural Center: Ylfa Rún Jörundsdóttir and Daniela Miranda.

Ylfa Rún Jörundsdóttir works as an interpreter (Icelandic-Spanish) for the Intercultural Center and also as a freelance interpreter. She makes a living from it. Ylfa spent some time in Mexico where she learnt Spanish and she is finishing her degree in Translation Studies (60 ECTS) at the University of Iceland. Ylfa came back from Mexico in the year 1999 and she started working as an interpreter for an agency called “Nýbúi”. She admits there were not many interpreters by then and not much work for her at that moment. In the year 2003 she started working for the Intercultural Center and the amount of work she has had since then has been different every year. 2007, for instance, was a good year with up to four interpretation services per day. One year later, economic crisis in Iceland came and the amount of work dropped considerably. She is mainly interpreting for immigrants from South America in medical, legal and school related issues. Ylfa is aware of the need of professional interpreters in the country. She reckons there are lots of people working in Iceland as interpreters though they do not have the education for it and, in her opinion, there is lack of professionalism. This is the reason why she wants to move on with her studies and get an education to become a professional interpreter. She is planning to study Conference Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. The Intercultural Center occasionally offers short courses for their interpreters. Ylfa thinks there are good opportunities for her as a professional interpreter in the close future.

Daniela Miranda works as an interpreter for the Intercultural Center and for Intercultural Iceland. Her mother tongue is Spanish but she has lived in Iceland for 6 years. She moved to the country without speaking a single word of the language and now she speaks it fluently. Daniela holds a degree in Interpretation by the Instituto Superior de Intérpretes y Traductores (Interpreters' and Translators' Institute for Higher Education) in Mexico city. She is working as an interpreter from Icelandic to Spanish but she also speaks French, English and Portuguese. She is mainly interpreting for people from Colombia, Cuba and Dominica doing chiefly liaison interpretation related to medical or educational matters. Daniela admits it would not be possible to live out of the income she gets as an interpreter, not because of the wages (which she says they are good) but because of the frequency of it. She has an average of 7 services per month lasting for about 30 minutes.

Conversations with Ylfa and Daniela were very interesting and helped me understand the kind of service offered by the Intercultural Center. Both are working as interpreters for immigrants and both mentioned that they do it mainly in medical, legal or educational (meetings with teachers for example) issues. Daniela has never done any conference interpreting in Iceland and Ylfa did it in one occasion.

4.1.2. Intercultural Ísland (Intercultural Iceland)

Intercultural Iceland is an independent Center which specializes in intercultural consultation and education, as well as European co-operation and interpretation services.

The Intercultural education consist of a variety of seminars and courses conducted by specialists or persons with extensive experience in the field.

Consultation concerns schools, public offices, businesses and individuals, among other concerning intercultural education, communication and prejudices. They also provide migrants with information about Icelandic society and its public institutions.

They co-operate with Icelandic and European organizations, which are active in the research and development of new projects in the field of intercultural education, intercultural society and migration.

The translation and interpretation services consists of 120 people speaking over 63 languages. Interpreters perform simultaneous interpretations and text translations in multiple languages. All the have several years of experience as such.

The center is based in Reykjavík.

I had a chat with Angelica Cantú, translator, interpreter and teacher of Spanish language at the continuing education level. She has also worked as a consultant for migrants in Iceland for many years. She was born in Mexico and has lived in Iceland for more than 20 years. She works for Intercultural Iceland. We talked about the interpretation services offered by the Center. Angelica mentions they have more than 156 interpreters that cover around 60 languages working in all kind of issues: medical, legal, educational, conferences, state visits, etc. Intercultural Iceland works in cooperation with the government of Iceland in order to fulfil the need of services in the country. When asked if their interpreters have an education in interpretation, Angelica reckons that approximately 10% of them hold a University Diploma in Interpretation. Angelica informs me about the criteria followed by the center in order to hire interpreters. Firstly, very good skills in both their mother tongue and Icelandic are required. Next they need to attend a compulsory 72 hours course provided by Intercultural Iceland. Those who pass the course will have the chance to work as interpreters. They also need to attend refresher courses to update their knowledge (between 6 and 7 of them per year). The languages that are required the most at the moment are Polish and Lithuanian.

4.1.3. Jafnréttishús (Equality Center)

The mission of the Equality Center is to overcome any obstacles in the society that would slow down the integration process of immigrants in Iceland. It emphasizes the importance of dialog between different cultures as the first step in the integration process.

The Equality Center is involved in different kinds of educational activity and counselling service for immigrants as well as Icelanders and creates a field for dialog between different cultures to accomplish its mission.

Their services are directed at immigrants in Iceland, Icelanders interested in multi cultural society, public institutions like schools, health institutions, social institutions etc. and the private sector, both companies and individuals.

The Equality Center offers extensive interpretation service and courses on how to use interpreters more efficiently.

The center is based in Hafnarfjörður.

4.1.4. Túlkaþjónusta, landspítali (interpretation services at the hospital)

According to the Patient's Rights Act no. 74/1997, *"In the case of patients who do not speak Icelandic or use sign language shall be guaranteed the interpretation of the information in this article"*.^{*} Language difficulties shall not prevent the exchange of information between the individual and the health care employee. The right to information is one of the fundamental rights of patients.

The hospital works in cooperation with the Intercultural Iceland (ICI) Center in order to provide interpreters when needed.

Among the regulations applied concerning interpretation services it is said that the decision for the acquisition of the ICI services should come from the nursing department, chief physician or the head of the emergency response.

It also states that harmonised rules of procedure as regards interpreter services shall be established for patients who do not understand Icelandic.

To simplify communications and to prevent misunderstandings between health care workers and patients, various forms, educational material and instructions shall be translated into foreign languages.

Definitions shall be prepared for the principal terms used in health care services.

Regulations also fix the price to charge. I found it interesting to include it here:

- Standard interview (two-hour call-out) -
6.426 ISK (38 EUR approx.^{*})
- Emergency response in the evening, night, or call-out without notice -
12.851 ISK (77 EUR approx.^{*})
- Phone Interpretation of health care and the patient back to health worker -
3.373 ISK (20 EUR approx.^{*})
- Telephone messages only from healthcare e to the patient -
1.445 ISK (8 EUR approx.^{*})

^{*} Parliament, 1997.

^{*} according to exchange rate on the 10th of June 2011 by Íslandsbanki (1 EUR=166.19 ISK)

4.2. Interpretation in conferences

There are several companies in Iceland that organize both national and international conferences in the country. They provide professional support, advice and services related to every aspect of it, including translation and interpretation services.

The country has also a big variety of halls and conference rooms where to hold the events and two new conference halls have opened their doors within the last year.

4.2.1. Event organizers: Iceland Convention & Incentive Bureau (IC&IB)

IC&IB is the official marketing organization on the convention and incentive market. Its role is to market Iceland as a quality destination for conferences, incentive travel and corporate events on behalf of its members.

IC&IB offers impartial information on facilities and services, organization of inspection visits, supplies offers to conference planners and provides information about suppliers of services for conferences and incentive travel in Iceland.

Among the suppliers they mention in their web page there are several companies organizing conferences and venues (Atlantik, Iceland Travel, Snaeland Grimsson, Iceland Pro Travel, Congress Reykjavík, Iceland Congress, Nordic Visitor, Terra Nova, Reykjavik Incentives, Practical, Meeting Iceland, Mountaineers, Iceland Rovers and Your Host in Iceland) and several hotels offering halls and function rooms. All together make it a wide offer of facilities.

4.2.2. New opportunities

During 2011 two new conference halls will be inaugurated: HARPA and HOF. The first one is in the capital, Reykjavík, and the second one is located in the capital of the north, Akureyri.

4.2.2.1. HARPA, Tónlistar og Ráðstefnuhúsið í Reykjavík (HARPA, Reykjavík Concert Hall and Conference Center)

Harpa will be inaugurated on the 20th of August 2011 although its doors are open to the public since May 2011 and concerts and events are already taking place in this new Center. Harpa marries the most important classical music and performance venue in the country with an international conference Center. It will offer a diverse range of performances, from classical to contemporary, and it will be home to the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and The Icelandic Opera. Harpa will also serve as a tourism and business hub, providing flexible facilities for programs and international events.

Regarding facilities, Harpa offers conference and concert halls, exhibitions spaces, meeting rooms and catering facilities.

The building has several halls where both conferences and concerts can take place. The main one, the concert hall called Eldborg, can accommodate 1,600 seated guests and it has booths for interpretation (3 at each side of the hall). There is another conference hall that can accommodate 750 guests and counts with booths for interpretation (6 at each side).*

On the chat I had with Gauti Kristmannsson we also talked about the facilities existing in the country for interpretation. It's often necessary to rent mobile booths for simultaneous interpretation since most of the conference halls do not have them. When mentioning Harpa, Gauti explained that he had had an expert from the EU evaluating the interpretation booths in the new building. The expert said the booths are not up to the standard. They have not been built following the guidelines of the ISO Standard 2603 on built-in simultaneous interpretation booths. And the same happens with the other conference halls existing in the country.

* Congress.is, 2011.

4.2.2.2. HOF, Menningarhúsi (HOF, Cultural and Conference Center)

Hof is a cultural building designed for music and other performing arts, as well as great facilities for conferences and meetings, receptions, parties and exhibitions. The building has two larger conference auditoriums and a comprehensive restaurant service. Hof has first-class facilities for events of various kinds and the best available technical equipment. The building was opened in August 2010.

The main auditorium seats 500 people. The seats are fastened to an inclined floor in the tradition of cinema theatres. The auditorium has a modern sound system, lighting equipment, technical booths, film projectors, telemeeting equipment, wireless Internet connection, DVD players and interpretation facilities. The auditorium has a large stage that can be adapted to the needs of users each time.

The side auditorium is a multiuse facility seating up to 200 people on a flat floor, providing many kinds of set-up possibilities. A stage can be placed in the auditorium if desired; meetings can be held there as well as conferences or parties. The auditorium has a modern sound system and lighting equipment, wireless Internet connection, telemeeting equipment, a DVD player, overhead projectors and a screen.

I had a chat with Heiðrún Grétarsdóttir, project manager of the Conferences area in HOF. When asking about interpretation facilities or services in the building she mentioned they are still working on it. HOF was opened in August 2010 and still not many conferences have taken place in the building. She showed me the main auditorium and though it is planned they will have them, interpretation booths were not available yet.

4.2.3. Comments

On the one hand Iceland offers a big variety of halls and function rooms where to host conferences, as well as companies organizing the events. On the other, it seems like most of them do not have the equipment required for conference interpretation or if they have it is not good enough to hold certain events (like EU's meetings).

The country is well located between Europe and North America and could be a good place where to host international conferences. The inauguration of both buildings offers new facilities and therefore new opportunities in that field. The island is just two hours flight from London and four from New York and the country is attractive and small enough to afford ease and comfort in planning, yet cosmopolitan enough to offer expertise in the execution of any meeting or conference. We could also add the bonus of excellent dining, leisure and recreation.

Since both buildings are new and have just been inaugurated there is still a lot that needs to be developed. In my opinion, if work and effort is taken in the right direction promoting and organising events and conferences at an international level, it could bring lots of new opportunities for interpreters, not only into Icelandic but also into other languages.

An article published on the 3rd of June 2011 both in Morgunblaðið (the local newspaper) and in Icelandreview.com (an English-language magazine about Iceland) states that:

*“Iceland is included in a list compiled by Great Hotels of the World of places that are predicted to become popular as destinations for conferences and group activity tours in 2011 and in the coming years. The Ministry of Industry and Travel expects growth in this sector after a slight recession following the banking collapse in 2008, mbl.is reports. According to Great Hotels of the World, Iceland has many advantages for such trips, mentioning warm pools, volcanoes, glaciers, ravines, highland SUV tours, dog sledding tours and a rich cultural life, in addition to prime conference facilities”.**

Therefore, everything points at Iceland having a great potential in the matter.

* Icelandreview.com, 2011.

5. ICELAND AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

After the economic collapse in 2008, Iceland reconsidered its position in the EU and on the 16th of July 2009 the country applied for membership. Until then Iceland had been a participant in the Schengen agreement. On the 17th of June 2010 the European Council opened negotiations with Iceland. Now the country is a candidate one.

Whether Iceland will finally join or not will come to light in the following years but a “possible” membership affects the country in many ways including Interpretation.

The EU is a truly multilingual entity and linguistic diversity aims to ensure understanding between the institutions and citizens. When joining, each country stipulates which language(s) it wants declared as official languages of the EU, and then the complete list of official languages is agreed by EU governments. Therefore, each EU enlargement is a linguistic and cultural enlargement.

This means that in case Iceland joins there will be a demand of Icelandic speaking interpreters in the Union. But it is not really necessary to wait until they join (in case they do). The whole process is long and all the previous negotiations already need interpretation services. According to rule number 9 among the Rules of Procedure of the EU-Iceland Joint Parliamentary Committee:

“Members may address meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in an available official language of the European Union or in Icelandic. Translation and interpretation will be provided on the basis of decisions of the Bureau of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, and in accordance with the internal rules of the European Parliament.”*

Therefore it is obvious that the need is already there and it will grow in the case of a final membership. Giving everyone at the table a voice in their own language is a fundamental requirement of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. In many cases, the legal acts resulting from discussions will have an immediate and direct effect on people’s lives. The Union thinks there should be no obstacle to understanding and putting views in meetings. The citizens of Europe should not have to be represented in Brussels by their best linguists but by their best experts. The Interpretation services in the Union will make sure they understand each other.

* Bureau of the European Parliament, 2010.

6. CONCLUSIONS

On this project I have gone through the main aspects of Interpretation in Iceland: where and how to become an interpreter, services needed, institutions providing interpretation services and the outlook for the near future.

Iceland is a country that enjoyed a good economic status for several years turning it into a progressive modern European society with a high standard of living and a high level of technology and education. A developed country with wide opportunities for culture, learning and innovation, open to new inputs and with a very well prepared society. The importance of this comes to light when a country needs to adapt to new challenges modernity demands and this is, in my opinion, the case of Interpretation in the country. Iceland nowadays has most of the means needed for the profession to be developed but the country is still “learning“ about the importance of it and is finding the ways of letting it develop at its best. The island has the education, the organization and the institutions needed but lacks for professionalism, experience and some means (like booths for interpretation in most of the conference halls).

As seen in previous chapters the level of education in the country is very high and even not being very populated the educational opportunities for Icelanders are good and very wide. The University of Iceland is offering a new programme in Interpretation after observing a high demand of this services in the country and the near future opportunities in the sense of a likely increase of conferences taking place in the country and a likely higher number of Icelandic speaking interpreters needed in the case of Iceland joining the European Union. Until the moment, a vast number of those working as interpreters in the country do not have a degree in Interpretation or got it abroad. In the chat I had with Gauti Kristmannsson it was quite surprising for me to know that even only a few people had applied for the programme, it will still take place. When we think about the costs of a programme like this, the equipment required, etc. we could probably state that this can only be afforded in a country where they have the economic means for it (even though economy collapsed in 2008), the need of it (there is a lack of trained interpreters in the country) and the educational background to develop it (we already talked about the importance of education in Iceland).

When gone through the main services demanded in the country it turns out that the Interpretation offered is mainly related to medical, legal or school-related issues for newcomers that do not speak Icelandic. Therefore we could say that the main kind of interpretation taking place is Community Interpretation. The amount of languages covered by the institutions is amazing (more than 60 languages) and most of the interpreters practising it are migrants who learnt Icelandic and are working for other migrants of their same nationality that did not learn Icelandic. Than means that most of them are interpreting from Icelandic to their mother tongue. The majo-

rity of them do not have an education in Interpretation but experience and some training provided by the same institutions that hire them. This could lead to a lack of professionalism but the truth is that all the workers interviewed for this project are taking their job very seriously, are aware of the importance of giving a good service, practice a professional ethics code and want to go further in their education. This should not be seen as “because they have the experience they do not need an education for it“ but as “there is a demand for community interpretation, let’s do it the best way possible and train professionals in the field“. In my opinion this second way is the direction Interpretation in Iceland is pointing at the moment.

When we think about Conference Interpretation it seems like there is not a big amount of it going on. There are companies enough organizing events and conferences in the country as well as enough halls and function rooms where to hold them but not as much as it could be is being done. This could be because of several reasons. The first one is related to their language, Icelandic. A hard difficult one spoken only in Iceland. This fact plus the sense of modernity and high level of technology and education existing in the country has turned into a good level of English spoken by most of the population. Therefore part of the conferences take place directly in English with no need of interpretation services into Icelandic. The second reason could be a lack of habit, experience and trained interpreters for this kind of interpretation. There is not a “new generation” of interpreters in the country so far. Gauti Kristmannsson explained to me that the average age of them at the moment is over 50. A third reason would be related to the technical equipment needed. In the research done for this project interpretation booths have only been found in the main conference halls at the new Concert Hall and Conference Centre, HARPA (and they are not up to the standard). It does seem like the country is betting for this kind of events and trying to improve but there is still a lot that needs to be done in that sense.

As a result of the economic crisis in 2008 the country reconsidered its position in Europe and started the procedures to become a member of the European Union. The path is long and there is still a lot to be discussed but both, Iceland and the Union, need to be prepared in case they join. This means a lot for such a small country when we talk about interpretation. Not only a higher number of Icelandic speaking interpreters will be needed at the European Commission and Parliament once they join (if they do) but also during the whole process of it which is already taking place. New opportunities though.

It seems to me that Interpretation in Iceland is like a young teenager that still needs to grow, develop and mature. Is not a “baby“ with lack of experience and knowledge but is not either a grown-up yet. The country has the means, the need and the intention to develop it. They have been able to observe and realize about the situation of the profession in the country and are moving towards a better one. It looks like the future of Interpretation in Iceland is bright. Looking forward to it!

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