

Making history in Athens



Research-practitioners from the UK made a strong contribution to the efsli Conference in Greece's capital last month. **Paul Michaels** gives the lowdown on their highlights

Athens, Greece, was the setting for the 24th efsli (European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters) Conference and AGM on 9-11 September.

The event was aptly titled 'It's all Greek to me – Versatility in the sign language interpreting profession' and attracted 245 people from 28 countries (including over 20 delegates from the UK). We debated the issues faced by interpreters across the dramatically different situations and environments we interpret in, for clients from an extensive range of different backgrounds.

The scientific committee, led by Dr Marianne Hatzopoulou from Greece, had selected a rich mix of presentations,

workshops and posters to spur debate and learning. The UK had a strong presence, contributing seven of the 24 available sessions and highlighting the incredible research we are producing and disseminating and through which we are influencing the practice of sign language interpreters worldwide. The following review gives a flavour of the information shared from the presenters from the UK.

Dr Christopher Stone on versatility and career-long learning

Dr Christopher Stone opened the conference with his keynote presentation, entitled 'Versatility – being adaptable, flexible, resourceful, useful and changeable but still being professional'. Christopher earned his PhD in Sign Language Interpreting from the University of Bristol in 2006. He is currently in receipt of a Spencer Foundation grant for the project 'The development of Deaf legal discourse', which examines the use of ASL by Deaf lawyers. At this year's efsli AGM, he was formally elected to the Board, having been actively involved as a co-opted member for the last year.

In his presentation, Christopher explained that assessment and tests alone cannot make



Dr Christopher Stone's presentation

us good interpreters, whereas proper education is indispensable. After interpreting training, we must undertake specialised training in such domains as medical, legal and mental health, a process which ultimately improves knowledge and skills, and which is most definitely now expected of us as professionals. It is also vital that we continually reflect on our practice as we encounter new situations and face different demands. He left us with the thought that, once we've mastered the language, we are in a better position to consider the consequences of other actions.

Christopher also delivered a presentation on career longevity: 'But it's Chinese to the Greeks! Effective teaching of adaptive strategies for career-long learning'. In it, he revealed the findings of a pilot study involving student and graduate interpreters and looking at their perceptions of two core modules of a BA programme; 'Introduction to Interpreting'

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'The presentation on working in Islamic settings drew a crowd resulting in standing room only for many'

(BA year one) and 'Consecutive Interpreting' (BA year two). The study looked at how the modules prepared students for learning, developing flexibility and being adaptable within the programme and when they take on assignments after graduating, which affects the type of ongoing CPD required.

Yvonne Waddell on stand-by mode

Other valuable contributions from the UK came from Yvonne Waddell with her presentation, 'Stand-by mode – one of the strategies of the versatile interpreter'. Yvonne is close to completing a PhD from Edinburgh's



Athens, home to the Parthenon, was host to this year's efsli Conference

Heriot-Watt University on the examination of the discourse strategies used by hearing clinicians in interpreted interactions with Deaf BSL patients in mental health settings. She presented her findings, primarily from an ethnographic case study in mental health interpreting, which explained when and where stand-by mode occurs, who decides what happens in the interaction to require this shift and, finally, what prompts the interpreter to re-engage in interpreting. Some interpreters may feel uncomfortable in stand-by mode because they are there to interpret and may have ethical questions in such situations. Yvonne encouraged us to tailor our decision-making to the environment.

Professional supervision

Ali Hetherington and Omoyele Thomas delivered a workshop they had created with Lyn Chase (who was unfortunately unable to attend), entitled 'Professional supervision: Supporting self-reflection, ethical practice and increasing practitioner resilience'. Ali has 20 years' experience as a BSL/English interpreter and gained an MA from Manchester University in 2009. She is co-director of 360 Supervision and the Diploma in Supervision for sign language interpreters. Both Omoyele and Lyn have 14 years' experience as BSL/English interpreters and both recently qualified as part of the first cohort of RSLIs on the Diploma in Supervision. Lyn is an ASLI-approved mentor.

Chiming with the conference theme of looking at how we, as sign language interpreters, cope with the demands placed upon us in the situations in which we find ourselves working, Ali and Omoyele allowed workshop participants to think about the sources from which they get support and how accessing further support could help. They



also looked at the benefits of supervision, explored the various forms it can take (individual or group) and how to prepare for such sessions. Seeing Ali and Omoyele demonstrate a live supervision enabled participants to understand fully how this might work in practice. The difference between individual or group supervision, and how to access both, was also explained.

E-professionalism and social media

Brett Best enlightened us on her research on social media with a presentation titled 'E-Professionalism: Navigating the small world ethical culture of Facebook'. Brett is qualified to interpret in both BSL and ASL and, although based in the UK, she works internationally. She recently completed the EUMASLI degree from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh.

The way we interact face-to-face is different to the way we interact online, and Brett's presentation raised our awareness of the issues that this developing culture can present to us as interpreters. Social media can be a useful tool when promoting our services, especially as most of us are freelance and are therefore running our own business. However, Brett also encouraged us to be aware of the ethical considerations in



this domain, and said she hoped that further discussion on the use of social media by interpreters would influence standard conceptions of e-professionalism.

Working in Islamic settings

Another interesting presentation came from Tom DaLacey-Mould and Arusa Bint Abdul Ghani, who encouraged us to think beyond preconceptions with their presentation, 'It's all Arabic to me: Experiences of working in Islamic settings', which drew a crowd resulting in standing room only for many.

Arusa qualified as an interpreter in 2009 and has been invited by the Deaf Muslim support organisation, Al Isharah, to interpret on Deaf Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. This spurred her to set up Al Ghani Deaf Group, which provides access to Islamic information and practice in BSL. Tom qualified as an interpreter in 2012 and has been an active member of ASLI, NUBSLI, efsli and WASLI. He has presented on interpreting for the Deafblind community and has been working in Islamic settings since qualifying, starting by interpreting the Friday khutbah in a London Mosque and since then interpreting in a variety of Islamic settings including Quranic classes, conferences, workshops and fundraising events.

The media often portrays a view of Islam which is at odds with its religious teachings and it's therefore important for Deaf people to access the actual Islamic belief taught by scholars of the Quran and Hadith. There is almost no academic writing on interpreting in Islamic settings and therefore many interpreters are unsure of the strategies employed to navigate challenges and ensure successful interpretations. This presentation raised awareness of working in this specialist domain and encouraged us to consider exploring this area further.

Looking outward

Of course, conferences are not all work, work, work! Being at the efsli Conference always provides a fantastic opportunity to network with interpreters from the four corners of the globe, and this is usually best done at the gala dinner held on the Saturday night. It was at this dinner that Bibi DaLacey-Mould conducted the 'Saffle' (Special Attendance Fund (SAF) raffle) and auction to raise money to enable delegates from countries with inadequate means to be able to attend the conference. At this year's conference, the fantastic sum of over €1,200 was raised and this will help to ensure that the SAF delegates at next year's conference, like this year's, will be able to disseminate what they gleaned to people back home.

Why not make space in your diary to go to the efsli Conference in 2017, which will be in Toulouse, France, between 8-10 September next year. The conference, with the title 'What's Up Doc?', will focus on medical interpreting. You can follow the event on Facebook at 'efsli' or on Twitter at @efsli2017. I'll see you there!



For more information, go to www.efsli.org