Promoting interpretation in Sweden

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Elisabet TISELIUS. Published: May 24, 2004 Last updated: December 5, 2015

AIIC members in Sweden commemorated the association’s 50th anniversary with a seminar on interpretation and communication. Björn von Sydow, the speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, was presented with a special award in recognition of his efforts to promote the use of interpretation to give more citizens access to the parliamentary body’s debates.

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Fredrik Lindström, well-known in Sweden for his TV-show on language issues, presented the keynote address on "Communication without Borders". Denis Delbourg, the French ambassador to Sweden, then took the floor to examine communication between different languages.

Next AIIC member Maria Hemph-Moran introduced and presented the award. As Mr. von Sydow was unable to attend the event, his press officer Anna Wieslander accepted it on his behalf.

David Jones addressed the gathering on working conditions for simultaneous interpretation, and the morning was concluded with a panel debate on conferences and communication.

Participants were given the opportunity to try their hand at simultaneous in a booth provided exclusively for this purpose by Informationsteknik. In addition to this karaoke interpreting in the lobby, an exhibit on the profession and a slideshow on interpreting in today’s world were organised. Computers were available so that visitors could explore the AIIC website.

Björn von Sydow expressed his gratitude in an official letter, stating that "the award has inspired me to intensify my work with language issues in the Riksdag. I know that this issue touches a lot of people. The language seminars we have held have been very popular."

On the Riksdag’s homepage, Speaker von Sydow writes in his monthly newsletter for January:

A government body must bear in mind that all its documentation is in the public domain, and that the mass media and the voters expect us to justify our actions. Openness, transparency and accessibility are the cornerstones of our democracy and should permeate the work of the Riksdag.

In this respect, I was surprised and gratified as well as honoured to find myself the recipient of the award granted by the Swedish section of the International Association of Conference Interpreters in
recognition of my efforts to make the international work done by the Ridsdag accessible to the Swedish people via interpreting and web casting. Many people on the Riksdag staff have had a hand in achieving this openness and they should feel that the honour accrues to them as well.

We have a tendency to overestimate our ability to express ourselves in a foreign language, particularly in English. At work and elsewhere we must be aware that nuance falls by the wayside when we are not speaking our native tongue. Nuance includes detail, doubt and, not least, humour! It is a prerequisite for advancing international cooperation that we have an in depth understanding of one another.

Language is also going to be a very important aspect of the work that the government and the parties represented in the Riksdag are now embarking upon with the revision of the Swedish Constitution. In this context I believe we have something to learn from one of the goals expressed in the EU Convention, which aims to prepare the future of the European Union: to formulate the constitution in a way that is simple and clear for the benefit of all.

Photos by Per Westergård.

The French ambassador to Sweden, Denis Delbourg, expressed his appreciation of interpreters who, in his words, practice a profession crucial to his own.

Maria Hemph-Moran presenting the award, designed by AIIC member and designer, Isabelle Mouchet, to the Speaker's press officer Anna Wieslander.

English translation by Linda Schenck

Recommended citation format: