

Translation and interpreting as infrastructure

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Few financial centres have a faculty of translation and interpreting a few minutes from their banks. The Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Geneva, heir to the École d'interprètes founded in 1941 by Antoine Velleman, trains translators and interpreters for international organisations, courts, conferences and companies.¹ The Nuremberg trials, where simultaneous interpreting established itself, validated the school's mission in its very first years.² This faculty, the presence of the international organisations and the conference market have made Geneva one of the world's leading centres of interpreting.

For the financial centre, this resource has everyday uses. Legal and financial translators translate contracts, prospectuses, annual reports, internal procedures and correspondence with the authorities. Interpreters, for their part, work in negotiations, arbitrations, general meetings and hearings. Geneva's sworn translators, authorised by the State, produce the certified translations that the international circulation of documents requires. The quality of this infrastructure is a discreet competitive advantage: a trader who needs a contract translated into Portuguese within forty-eight hours, a bank that must produce a file in German for FINMA or a law firm that needs a hearing interpreted in Arabic all find the necessary skills in Geneva.

Machine translation is transforming this profession without abolishing it. Current tools, which institutions use for sorting, monitoring and first drafts, translate routine documents in a few seconds with a quality sufficient for comprehension. They replace neither certified translation, nor fine legal translation, nor negotiation interpreting, where understanding intentions matters as much as understanding words. Geneva's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, which presents itself as a reference centre for automatic speech translation in limited domains, trains professionals able to use these tools and to correct their errors, a skill that will become the norm of the profession.³

1 Notes

1. University of Geneva, “L’École de traduction et d’interprétation fête ses 70 ans”, unige.ch, 2011: school founded in 1941 by Antoine Velleman, which became the ETI in 1972 and the University’s eighth faculty in 2011. ↩
2. University of Geneva, cited above, which mentions the role of the Nuremberg trial in the recognition of conference interpreting. ↩
3. University of Geneva, cited above, on the school’s position in automatic speech translation in limited domains. ↩

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