

CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES FOR ESTONIAN COURT INTERPRETERS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

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For introduction a brief overview of the Estonian court system and the work of court interpreters-translators is given.

1. In the years of regained independence the very first continuing education course for Estonian court interpreters was organized by the University of Tartu in the spring term of 2006 in the framework of the Open University in-service courses. The participants were 11 interpreters from the courts of Southern Estonia. The course of 30 hours provided an overview of general issues of the standards of conduct, the role of court interpreters, the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities with respective canons using as basic textbooks Holly Mikkelson (2000) "Introduction to Court Interpreting", St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester, UK and Mira Kadrič (2006) "Dolmetschen bei Gericht", Wien. Also, several other materials to acquaint the participants with the work of court interpreters in the USA and European countries were used. Consecutive interpreting with note-taking and simultaneous interpreting together with public speaking skills occupied the major part of the course. Speeches for interpretation were prepared by the teachers (Mall Tamm and Siiri Raitar) and the participants whose speeches closely reflected their work situations in criminal, civil, administrative and circuit courts. At the end of the course a simulated court session was carried out allowing each participant to play the role of a judge, a prosecutor, etc. and act as an interpreter.
2. The success of the pilot course and positive feed-back from the participants resulted in the order from the Ministry of Justice to teach two more groups (60 hrs, 27 people) of court interpreters from Northern Estonian courts in the spring term of 2007. The course had a similar but perfected structure with a higher degree of integration of the participants. A. Muršak with a long-term experience of tutoring new court interpreters assisted in the teaching process introducing important aspects of practical work.
3. In the autumn term of 2008 a course of 24 hours for sign language court interpreters was organized at the university by the Department of Special Education which also trains Estonian sign language interpreters. Regina Paabo, the Chairman of the Estonian Society for Sign Language Interpreters and a lecturer of the department, conducted a course using our theoretical materials and paying attention to the sign language terminology necessary for the work in courts.

4. In the spring of 2008 the Southern Estonian Police Prefecture organized “The Day of Interpreters” in Tartu and invited Siiri Raitar and Mall Tamm to deliver a short course. Major attention was paid to the Code of Ethics of police interpreters and teaching consecutive interpretation with note-taking.

To conclude:

- a) the experience of teaching at the above-mentioned courses makes us think of establishing a more permanent unit of teaching court interpreters at the University of Tartu as in Estonia court interpreters start work without any training, there is no system of qualification examinations, no educational institution training court interpreters-translators;
- b) the Estonian court and police interpreters are not organized, they have no professional association and the Estonian Association of Interpreters and Translators (since 1992) has been reluctant to have a section for legal interpreters in their ranks;
- c) beside giving positive feed-back participants also appreciated the opportunity of meeting their colleagues and developing mutual contacts;
- d) all in all 38 full-time court interpreters (working in the combination Estonian-Russian-Estonian) from the total of 45 posts could have a continuing professional development opportunity at the University of Tartu and freelance sign language interpreters could perfect their skills.