

In Memory of Francesco Straniero Sergio (4.3.1959 - 18.7.2011)

Students at the Trieste Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators who decided to take the Russian interpreting course did so not because they thought that a knowledge of Russian is a pressing requirement of the market – that all-powerful presence which has transformed itself from a ‘system’ into ideology – but because of Francesco. He possessed the special sensitivity of a man, a teacher and a scholar who made his students reflect by asking them – and himself – a simple question: “Who am I and what am I doing in this booth with a microphone and headset?”. For Francesco, interpreting was never the mere transfer of information or simple communication, for Francesco interpreting was a process of awareness, awareness of not just communicating something said by someone else in an unfamiliar language to those hanging onto his every word beyond the glass pane of the booth, but having to communicate a specific, unique, experience that cannot be divorced from that language. Languages are not just spoken but experienced. The transition from one language to another is indeed an extremely difficult if not impossible attempt to reconcile two realities, distant in their very nature, even when experienced in a single language. Interpreting is only a further very complex stage in this overall assumption.

Francesco possessed a natural gift of sensitivity confirmed over the years in his many scholarly findings. That is why his students adored him, because they realised that in order to become professional interpreters it was absolutely necessary to become “walking dictionaries” (as one of his closest friends once said) and to learn techniques and strategies to emerge from even the most

difficult moments unscathed, but they also realised that it was indeed important though not sufficient to transform into active life the meaning of what they had learnt.

Francesco was all that would seem obvious to anyone in the teaching profession. He certainly transferred knowledge, but also an awareness that knowledge is worth little if not 'translatable' in our daily lives. The many students who had the fortune to follow Francesco's teachings may not even have ended up working with Russian, or maybe they do so only occasionally, but all of them have learnt that listening to someone means first and foremost approaching their world with great delicacy, as it can never be totally possessed. The farther out of reach that world may seem, the more it needs to be listened to with humility and respect.

Thank you Francesco

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