

RUSSIA

↑ HISTORY

The history of interpreting in Russia can be broken down into periods consistent with the various stages in the development of the Russian language: the Old Rus' period (9th – 14th century); the Tsardom of Russia, or Muscovy (15th – 17th century); the age of Peter the Great and the subsequent formative period of modern Russian (18th – 19th century); and the Soviet period (20th century).

Old Rus' period

In 864 Cyril and Methodius, the two Greek monks known as the Apostles of the Slavs, were sent by the Byzantine Emperor to spread Christianity among Slavic peoples. They started by creating an alphabet, later to be called Cyrillic, and used it to translate several religious texts from Greek to Old Church Slavonic. It is then that Old Rus' is considered to have acquired a script and a literature, with a resulting need for translations.

Russian princes are known to have used interpreters' services in negotiations with Mongol khans who ruled over Rus' during the Tatar-Mongol 'Yoke' period (1243–1480). Prince Ivan

Kalita of Moscow, who conducted extensive trade with the Golden Horde, had a great need for interpreters. The word for ‘interpreter’ used then, *tolmach*, is of Tatar origin. Initially the *tolmaches* were Golden Horde soldiers who spoke Russian and lived among civilian Tatars in Tatar Sloboda, a settlement along the road leading from Moscow to the Golden Horde. The *tolmaches* acted exclusively as interpreters and were hired for ambassadorial missions, negotiations, feasts, and the like. Later on, interpreters of Tatar origin were joined by Russians who had learned the Tatar language (Semenets & Panasyev 1991).

Tsardom of Russia, or Muscovy

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Moscow district of Zamoskvorechye became home to Tolmatskaya Sloboda, a compact settlement of interpreters working from and into all the various languages needed at the royal court. The first documented mention of interpreting as an occupation was made in the sixteenth century, when several reports referred to payment for interpreters’ services. Historical documents also mention the *dyaks* (high-ranking officials) Dmitry Gerasimov, Vlasy Viskovaty and Ivan Viskovaty, who were both fluent in several foreign languages and shone as diplomats under Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Their unique skills and activity contributed greatly to Russia’s close relations with many nations.

Translators and interpreters in Muscovy formed a special category of civil servants on the staff of all the government agencies that were in contact with foreigners. A special role in the history of interpretation in Russia was played by *Posolsky Prikaz*, the government’s central diplomatic office, which existed from 1549 to 1720 (see Kunenkov 2012). Its responsibilities included foreign affairs, ransom and exchange of prisoners, as well as the management of some south-eastern territories and certain categories of the ‘service class’ (persons bound by military obligations). Ivan Viskovaty was the first chief of *Posolsky Prikaz*, from 1549 to 1570. According to a report dated 1689, the agency’s staff included 22 translators and 17 interpreters, working into and from Greek, Latin, Swedish, Dutch, English, Italian, Armenian, Tatar, Turkish, Kalmyk, Nogai, Khiva, Persian and Mongolian.

In the seventeenth century, as the Russian state attained a more prominent international status, the duties of *Posolsky Prikaz* and its staff were expanded considerably (Kunenkov 2012). The agency was now in charge of steering Russia’s foreign policy and of everyday diplomatic functions, such as sending ambassadors abroad, receiving and taking leave of foreign missions, drafting diplomatic documents, correspondence, negotiations and, starting from the early eighteenth century, appointment and supervision of Russia’s permanent diplomatic staff abroad.

Embassy staff interpreters often conducted negotiations on behalf of their ambassadors with the authorities of other countries. In addition, interpreters acted as couriers, delivering documents from *Posolsky Prikaz* to other agencies or cities. Before being taken on, translators and interpreters had to pass a language examination and swear loyalty to the monarch. Between 1645 and 1682, *Posolsky Prikaz* maintained positions for 84 translators and 185 interpreters. Each interpreter had to know at least two languages. The agency trained its own personnel, enrolling young men as apprentices to experienced employees who taught them languages and the intricacies of their job (see Voevoda 2009).

The translators and interpreters for Western languages were mostly European prisoners of war, whereas Oriental languages were handled by men of Eastern origin, including Tatars from Kazan, Astrakhan and other areas. Interpreters also included members of former noble families and boyars’ sons rescued from Tatar, Turkish, Persian, Kalmyk or, less frequently, Polish or Swedish captivity. From 1646, all interpreters employed by *Posolsky Prikaz* had to be (or become) Orthodox Christians. Unlike translators, many interpreters worked with a combination of Western and Oriental languages.

Peter the Great and the formative period of modern Russian

In 1720 Posolsky Prikaz was disbanded and replaced with the College of Foreign Affairs (see Farafonova et al. 1998). Peter the Great's political reform broadened the country's economic and cultural ties with European nations, generating a demand for translation of texts on science and technology as well as fiction. The literary standard of Russian began to take shape at the time, enriched not least by translation.

As a result of Peter's reforms, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of an aristocratic class that spoke European languages as fluently as they spoke their mother tongue or, sometimes, even better. Whereas Peter the Great himself did not speak French, the principal language of eighteenth-century (and, later, nineteenth-century) diplomacy, and was accompanied by interpreters, international contacts were generally handled by members of the aristocracy serving in the diplomatic corps or in the military. As all of them spoke fluent French, they had no need for interpreters, which is probably why no names of outstanding interpreters in nineteenth-century Russia are known. Even so, it was then that the fundamental principles and rules of professional translation and interpreting were laid down.

Soviet period

In the 1920s and the 1930s, interpreting at official negotiations was done by employees of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, most of them former diplomats of tsarist Russia. Until the mid-twentieth century, consecutive interpreting remained the only option available for meetings and talks.

It is believed that the first experiment with simultaneous interpreting was carried out in the Soviet Union in 1928, during the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. The weekly *Krasnaya Niva* published photographs that year, in which interpreters are seen sitting in armchairs in front of the rostrum. Each of them has a bulky contraption around the neck to support a microphone, but no earphones. The interpreters listened directly to the speaker and translated simultaneously (see Gofman 1963).

The first specially equipped booths and earphones appeared at the thirteenth plenary meeting of the Communist International's Executive Committee, held in the USSR in 1933. The interpreters listened to the speakers through earphones. In Leningrad, simultaneous interpreting was first used at the International Congress of Physiology in 1935. Academician Ivan Pavlov's welcome address was interpreted simultaneously into French, English and German. After that, simultaneous interpreting was used occasionally at meetings of the Communist International's Executive Committee.

Interpreters played an enormous role in World War Two. Apart from interrogating prisoners and obtaining military intelligence, they were crucial to diplomatic negotiations among the Allies. After the war, a sizeable group of Soviet interpreters worked at the NUREMBERG TRIAL, where Russian was one of the working languages along with English, French and German (e.g. Stupnikova 2003). It was not until the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials that the term 'simultaneous interpreter' came into use in the USSR.

Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union opened up more opportunities to refine the practice and organization of simultaneous interpreting on a large scale, starting with the Nineteenth Congress in 1952. Fixed, ventilated, soundproof booths were installed in the Kremlin specially for the event. They were used to interpret speeches from Russian into other languages. However, interpreting of foreign speeches into Russian was consecutive, performed by an interpreter standing next to the speaker at the rostrum. The system was used in both directions at all subsequent Communist Party congresses and other conferences

and forums with foreign participation. It was based on RELAY INTERPRETING, Russian being the pivot language.

Apart from foreign languages, simultaneous interpreting was also done into other languages of the Soviet Union at sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet. The equipment installed in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses could accommodate up to 29 languages.

For many decades Soviet interpreter training developed in isolation behind the Iron Curtain. Students were not allowed to go abroad to practise their skills, and no native speakers from abroad were allowed to teach local students. There were few, if any, opportunities for direct communication with foreigners. Despite these limitations, a strong pedagogical tradition emerged, developing some unique teaching methods and producing numerous top-quality interpreters.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the USSR gave massive support to developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America whose leaders had proclaimed plans to build socialist societies. Much of that support consisted in supplies of armaments and military hardware, followed by engineers and instructors. As few of these spoke foreign languages, they were accompanied by interpreters, most of them graduates of the Military Institute of Foreign Languages (now the Military University) or the Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages (now Moscow State Linguistic University), two of the Soviet Union's major training centres for translators and interpreters. The Military Institute was famous for having designed some very efficient methods of accelerated interpreter training, and for the great variety of languages it taught (up to 30), including some 'rare' languages like Khmer, Albanian and Amharic.

The Soviet educational approach aimed, as is still the case in Russia today, at training versatile professionals capable of both translation and interpreting. Moreover, students are taught foreign language skills in parallel with translation and interpreting, all in the framework of a single university curriculum. Simultaneous interpreting, however, has always been taught as an optional or postgraduate course.

Russian scholars teaching in these institutions have made considerable contributions to the theory of interpreting. The main representatives of what has been referred to as the SOVIET SCHOOL of interpreting studies are Ghelly CHERNOV, Anatoly Shiryaev (1979) and Rurik Minyar-Beloruichev (1969a, 1980).

With Soviet–US relations central to twentieth-century history, a number of English/Russian interpreters at the summit meetings of USSR and US leaders became media personalities known far beyond their professional circle, some of whom also published their MEMOIRS. Among them are Valentin Berezhkov and Oleg Troyanovsky, who worked with Iosif Stalin; Viktor Sukhodrev, who interpreted for Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev; and Pavel Palazhchenko, Mikhail Gorbachev's interpreter (see Palazchenko 1997).

By the early twenty-first century, some 150 Russian universities were enrolling students in interpreter training programmes, and the demand for professional interpreters in Russia continues to rise. Now as before, most degrees certify their holder's ability to both translate and interpret consecutively, from and into a foreign language.

SVETLANA BURLYAY, IGOR MATYUSHIN AND DMITRY YERMOLOVICH

SACAJAWEA

Sacajawea was a Shoshoni (also spelled Shoshone) woman associated with the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery expedition of 1804–6 from St. Louis, Missouri, to the mouth of