

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since I was a child I have been studying music, but when I was in my first year at university I understood that I could not go on following both of my careers, interpretation and music at the highest levels. I chose with few hesitations the path of languages and interpreting because I had always felt and known that was my way. At times I happened to wonder if all the years I spent in studying music could still have a connection to the life I had chosen. And I realised that my music education had taught me one of the most precious lessons of my life.

Everything has its time. There is a time to sow and a time to reap. Life sets its tempo like the conductor of an orchestra, and just as any musician playing an instrument in an orchestra you must adapt to and follow that steady rhythm in order to create the magic.

We are living in a time of unprecedented change in every aspect of our lives, and sometimes we all may find ourselves struggling to reshape our rhythms and leave our comfort in order to fit new circumstances. Every transition entails a period of uncertainty and unpredictability, which often sadly brings to mistrust, suspicion, worry towards the other, the unexpected, the different. The profession of interpreters is evolving too, and interpreting students hear it every day: the means we have, the tools we use, the way we will work – all of this is changing and posing countless challenges for us. However, maybe the outcome of a challenge is somehow written in the way you look at it. We can see all of this as a threat or as a chance. Those who dare will find a way, those who refrain will only find excuses.

Think about it: artificial intelligence can be seen either as the end of human interpreters or as a tool to strengthen professionals. Technology and assisting tools can be either evil means to numb our brains or a way to hone our performances and serve better our audience, which is the ultimate aim of any interpretation. Remote interpreting can be the end of travels and meetings or the space for new opportunities. Interpreters could be able to work for webinars, virtual meetings and video conferences that take place in distant locations and in events where they would usually have not been hired for, thus expanding the ways they work and improving their productive time too. It is in the way you look at it! Weren't we told that simultaneous interpretation was perceived as a downfall towards robot-like interpreters as it was arising just some decades ago?

For young people as well, being a student today is a privilege. We can learn from senior interpreters the foundations and secrets of this job while at the same time we can count on our aptitude for and familiarity with information and communication technologies.

We have at our disposal a greater array of tools and resources than any other interpreter in the past. We have endless possibilities to study, learn, practise, and improve our skills. We all have a great potential and the tools to make it thrive. But there is no shortcut to success; there is the hard and bumpy road of hard work, eased only by the inspiring taste of passion and dedication.

The debate on this change often bends towards what we stand to lose, but the interpreting profession will by no means disappear because of innovation, it will simply change and evolve. Most of these innovations will turn in our favour, since they will make interpreting feasible where it was not in the past and make interpreters' services more available than ever before.

Still, the meaning of what interpreters do, the essence of who they are will never change: they will always be there to make people come together, know and understand one another, talk, and even diverge and disagree. We can do that by standing next to those people or from within a booth or even from another city with a screen and a microphone only. Interpreters will always be there to be a chance, a bridge, a hand that reaches out.

That is our future, but it is our present too: it is what interpreters already do and have always done. And the only way to pick up the baton and live that future is to prepare for it today, since our future does not belong to any other one than us. We prepare for it by living the moment we are given, and doing what we have to do today. We need to be able to adapt to this change, keep our eyes and minds open to feel the underlying vibrations of our world, and follow its tempo not to get left behind.

We need to be open to being taught, directed, and corrected. We need to believe in the beauty of our dreams, in the spark that enlightened us when we decided which direction we wanted to take, and in the fire in our belly that we feel in the booths when the mic button lights up.

We need to set our goal in order to turn our dream from an illusion into a path, and walk that way with discipline and perseverance to get to our destination.

We cannot settle for second best because life is worth the courage to truly be ourselves. We must not strive for what is good. We must strive for what is best.

Everything has its time and this is ours, this is the time for us to step in and play our part, because "the future belongs to those who prepare for it today."¹

¹ Malcolm X.