Introduction

The ATA Conference held in New York City last October 2009, was an opportunity that I could not let pass as a translator/interpreter-in-training. Ever since I found out about the existence of such an important organization –the ATA- it became one of my personal and professional goals to attend as many conferences as I could. This was my first but hopefully not my last one.

Not only was it exciting to visit one of the most important cities in the world, but it was also rewarding and even fun to experience a different culture and weather with my friends, my professors and my colleagues. I only wish all T&I students could experience something like that at least once in their lives.

Highlights – The U.S. District Court

To me, the first remarkable aspect was the security of the building. They scanned our bags, our belts and even our shoes and coats. We had to leave our cell phones in custody at the lobby. Our cameras were taken as well.
We were able to appreciate interpreters in action during two in-progress trials. The first one had no interpreters because they were not needed, but it was so interesting to witness this trial because they were judging John Gotti’s son. I found out about the Gotti family years ago, so it was exciting to see a trial about the American mafia, Hollywood style.

In the second trial, a Central American *narco* was on trial. He needed an interpreter so we were able to listen to one of the interpreters talking about cell phone signals across the Rio Grande, at the American-Mexican border. The interpreter showed his mastery of the heavy and technical glossary involved. He was quick, clear and did not stumble at all. The tone of his voice was very pleasant too. Then his shift ended and a female interpreter came in to replace him, but it was clear she was not a native Spanish-speaker, so it was a little hard for her to go at the same pace, at least for the first five minutes.

We were able to visit the Interpreters office as well, where we saw the new and old equipment. We did not try the old equipment but the new one worked perfectly to me. It is important for the Court to have equipment in good conditions, since the trials they manage are generally from big cases. They cannot afford to lose a trial due to technical mistakes. To me, this is very important to have in mind; our job is important and sometimes essential for the development of our nations and even for the enforcement of the law.

**Highlights – The UN Head Quarters**

Visiting the UN headquarters was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my entire life. The interpreter Adrian Delgado gave us a V.I.P. tour around the building and we were able to take pictures almost everywhere. But what made me change my perspective on the job that an interpreter has to do at such
a level, was the fact that Adrian told us that it is not an impossible task.

It was rather surprising to see the interpreting booths; they turned out to be much smaller than anyone would have thought. The space for sitting was limited to two. The space for reference books and other material was extremely reduced, so there were notes on the wall. The equipment (headphones, mikes, etc) was obsolete and the visibility was not the best either. Who would think that this organization would have these kinds of problems?

However, Adrian struck me as a man who loves his job and is good at it. He has changed and trained his voice to the point of near-perfection. It is smooth and has the perfect pitch for a microphone. If there were such thing as a method interpreter, he would be a perfect example of one.

I always knew that modeling my voice should be one of my goals as an interpreter, but listening to a professional like him, made it clearer to me as to what an interpreter should sound like.

This visit opened my eyes to a new world. It may not be possible for me to apply for an interpreter position at the UN, but it may be possible for me to work as a translator, since they do not require translators to master three languages but only two. It would be such an honor to be selected as a member of this staff.

**Highlights - The 50th Annual ATA Conference**

I must confess I felt a little intimidated at first, due to my lack of knowledge of other languages. Almost all the translators and interpreters who attended this conference spoke at least three languages. But overall, it was an experience at a professional level, which will be etched in my mind forever.
The organization of such a great event showed that this organization is managed by professionals. I suppose they have been perfecting the art of organizing the conference throughout the years. This has enabled them to reach a professional level. It was not complicated to submit my payment and they immediately acknowledged receipt of it.

The registration process was another delight. They handed us all the information we needed at once, including the certificate of attendance. Most of the sessions were remarkably interesting and attractive, which at times made it difficult for me to choose which one to attend.

In general terms, I learned that this organization is serious and respectable. They really work to provide translators with the skills necessary to survive in this business, which is filled with people who are not formally trained for it.
Differences between the Ecuadorian/American Scenario

Sadly, even with the problem faced by the organizations we visited, the differences between Ecuador and The U.S. are still abysmal for translators and interpreters. Being a country that was colonized by many ethnic groups, the U.S. has always understood the need for interpreters much better than Ecuador, where people have always spoken the same language almost exclusively. Globalization has reached our little country, but there are many countries which are way ahead of us in that matter, so much so that it sometimes seems ridiculous.

When someone tries to hire you for any translation project, people still say: ‘It’s so easy my own kid could do it, in fact I would do it, but I don’t have the time.’ That is what I call ‘the slogan’ for people who are not used to working with professionals. I am sure there are a lot of under-educated people in The U.S. as well, but the largest organizations have learned the lesson already, and now consider our profession to be an important part of their development. Hopefully, this advanced thought will come to us shortly.

There are only two ways I can contribute to improving our Ecuadorian scenario. The first one that comes to mind is by ‘educating’ my clients and the people who surround me. It is not as easy as lecturing them, but there are subtle and polite ways to do it. Otherwise, no one would hire us. However, all my relatives and friends are now aware of the difference between translation and interpretation. I taught them and I
feel proud of it because some of them did not even know about my career before they heard me telling them what it was all about.

The second way to contribute is by improving my own work and my knowledge on a daily basis. Going to college is the first step, but the rest is up to my colleagues and me. That way, people will start to be more aware of our work and they will know that we are professionals and not newcomers.

**Competencies Acquired**

Many of the competencies established by the T&I school, are parallel to those acquired in this seminar. Visiting places of potential employment is on top of the list. Being able to see that there is a real opportunity to find job in these places—the UN, the Federal Court, etc- was certainly good news to me.

Another aspect that made me open my eyes to a more professional world, was to meet translators from all over the world, who have the same questions I have, who have the same problems I have and face the same responses from their clients too. So, I was not the only one!

Here at UEES, I have been taught that technology is there to make my life easier, but only few people here actually dare to make this true. In this seminar I was able to see that professional translators are a higher level in other countries. They have tamed technology and made it work for them. It could be pricey, but it is certainly worth every penny.