



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 10 of 13)



Role:	Chief of Language Services
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	8 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Justine Ndongo-Keller describes various roles within the Language Services Department at the ICTR, clarifying differences among interpreters, translators and reviewers. She stresses the importance of effective, high-quality translation for the Tribunal's overall success, as well as the significance of review in the translation process. An original member of the language services team, Ndongo-Keller also provides a perspective on the department's evolution. She comments on the personal toll to individuals in language services from extensive exposure to materials about the genocide.

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Part 10

- 00:00 Donald J Horowitz: Are there any standards, professional standards that are applied to the work of the, of the Language Section? And if so, could you tell us about those?**
- 00:13 We have – there’s a minimum that is expected from a translator and interpreter. Those who cannot perform, we put in place an improvement plan to see how we can help them improve their performance.
- 00:33 We've had one or two desperate cases whereby there was nothing we could do but as a whole, you know, we've been able to bring whoever was really having difficulties at the beginning because it's, it's new material, it's new stuff.
- 00:51 This is legal material. We all had to adapt, you know, to adjust. Most of the time people have really tried, you know, and come up to a certain level that is acceptable. We have evaluation sheets for translators, for interpreters.
- 01:08 I can give you people a sample, you know, to see how they are evaluated and you will see that even the evaluation for the Kinyarwanda is different from, from the, the evaluation sheet from English translator or French translators – because it's translation but into three different languages.
- 01:27 And the way these languages are – how, how can I say this? These languages are – let me say perform, you know, the way the translators will have to, to work with these languages is different. You will see that with the French translation, accuracy is rated 35% because word phrasing is very important. The presentation is very important.
- 01:54 You know French people, with the famous, famous Academie Francaise. Whereas the English is more to the task, you know, the meaning, you know, we, you, you, you don't have time to be wasting with all these, yeah. So, so you'll see that accuracy with us is 35%, presentation 20%. English translation accuracy is 40%, presentation is somewhere around 15, you know.
- 02:22 So it differs with the language. And Kinyarwanda will be 45% because we want to be sure that whatever is written is really what is said because we don't have the means to verify but we have the revisers who will tell us that at this level, it can only be 45% to be sure that whatever is coming in French is exactly what is written in Kinyarwanda.
- 02:45 So we have those rating sheets to do the evaluation.
- 02:49 DJH: And any language has its own sort of idioms.**
- 02:52 Yes.
- 02:53 DJH: And do you try to do idiomatic translation as well as interpretation?**

- 02:58 Yes, yes. That is what I always tell to the newcomers, those who join the group, is that you need to be able to understand exactly what the speaker is saying in, you know, the, the, the, your language – because if I’m working into French and you keep asking, “But what is it? What are they saying?” then there’s a problem. There’s no communication.
- 03:27 You need to be able to understand what the speaker is saying in your language without having to break your head, you know, trying to, to read, you know, between the lines or trying to, to find out what the person is saying because it has to be clear enough for you to understand.
- 03:44 DJH: You mentioned the other day that there were national and interna-, that there were international standards for interpreting, things of that sort (___). You’re obviously well aware of those and I assume that you apply those as, as appropriate.**
- 03:57 Yeah. Yeah, we do. But we have the UN rules that apply, you know, across the line for all UN language services. Then we have all our international organization to which we all most, you know, translator interpreters, they belong – what, you know, set rules that we try to follow. But we work with sister organization like UNESCO, like, especially UNON in Nairobi.
- 04:26 Whenever we need people and you know, we’re stuck, you know there’s somebody like with Italian and we don’t have Italian here. A witness come like about a month ago, we had a witness speaking Italian. We had to bring some people from Nairobi so we ask UNON, they, they loan.
- 04:43 DJH: Ask UNON?**
- 04:44 UNON is the United Nation Organization – it, it’s, it’s the, the regional UN office in Africa.
- 04:55 DJH: Okay.**
- 04:56 Yes. In Africa which –but in there you have UNEP, the enviro-, environment, United Nation Environment Program. You have Habitat, you have many UN organization, you know, housed in that UN setting, you know. You have many UN regional offices. There’s one in Bangkok for Asia. The, the other one is in Vienna for Europe. There’s one in Geneva. Then there’s one in Nairobi and the New, New York headquarters.
- 05:32 DJH: Okay, and so you brought in somebody who knew Italian (___) . . .**
- 05:35 From Nairobi. From UN Nairobi.
- 05:37 DJH: Okay. And if there’s another language you would seek out . . .**
- 05:39 Yeah, yes, so we exchange also with ICC, with ICTY, you know. I went to test some people for ICC when they were recruiting. They brought me in for a week, so we tested the

candidates with them and then, you know, say these are the people you can employ. So we train some people in the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

06:01 I was there for two months to do, to train some interpreters and translator, to be, and that was interesting because we did – because it's the same setting; these are criminal tribunals. We did some training with the, the, the local language which is Krio. Krio.

06:23 DJH: Oh, creole.

06:24 Krio is K-R-I-O. It's a kind of Creole of English that they speak over there. And funny enough, we speak exactly the same Krio in, in Cameroon. We call it pidgin English, pidgin English. So I, I was able to train some people in the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown as well.