

# Report of the IPRS meeting in Ghent (Belgium)

July 14th and 15th, 2013

by Henk-Jan Eras

with the cooperation of Matthijs Bakker, Willem Boersma, Peter Grondel,  
Jacqueline Ritzen, Anja Stijnen and Wouter Zwijnenburg

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# Report of the 2013 IPRS meeting in Ghent, Sunday, 14th July (day one)

Venue: Artevelde University College, campus Kantienberg, L.01, Aula 4

Chair: **Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel**

## Agenda

1. **Opening**
2. **Randel Raison (USA): The status of electronic reporting in North America**
3. **Ayşe Yedekçi (Turkey): The limits of the applicability of new technologies to parliamentary reporting services: the case of Turkish Parliament**
4. **Eero Voutilainen (Finland): Rules of reporting: the principles of representing spoken discourse in the Records Office of the Finnish parliament**
5. **Workshops**

### **10 a.m. Opening – Day 1 (July 14th)**

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel**, coordinator for IPRS on the Intersteno Board, opens the session and welcomes all delegates. She pays tribute to **Ms Anna Jankowska-Wróbel**, who died in a car accident in June of this year. Ms Jankowska-Wróbel worked for the Polish Senate, and in that capacity attended several IPRS meetings. Ms Schwarz-van Poppel asks all participants to rise and observe a moment of silence in commemoration.

# The Status of Electronic Reporting in North America

*Randel Raison (USA)*

Ms Schwarz-van Poppel gives the floor to **Mr Randel Raison**, who is the president and founder of the International Alliance of Professional Reporters and Transcribers (IAPRT). Mr Raison maintains a large transcription facility located in Texas, that serves courthouses across the United States and Canada.

The original title of Mr Raison's presentation was "The state of electronic reporting", but he changed it into "The status of electronic reporting", because he realized that reporters are faced with permanent change, and the status of electronic reporting changes every day. His aim is to give an overview of the evolution in electronic court reporting and transcription in the United States and Canada.

Mr Raison starts off by presenting the International Alliance of Professional Reporters and Transcribers (IAPRT) to the audience. The purpose of IAPRT is to strengthen the role of professional court reporters through innovation. IAPRT is dedicated to developing and using the most state-of-the-art methods and technology for court reporting. Its members are not advocates of any particular system or method, but believe in the integration of all methods of making the record.

Court reporting business models and production models for court transcription vary substantially in North-America. The court record remains consistent, but the means and the processes to produce it are numerous. The use of court reporting technology has become standard in many courtrooms, specifically in the lower courts, in the last decade. Some of the jurisdictions started using digital court reporting in response to budget cuts and because of a shortage of stenographic court reporters.

Mr Raison lists the requirements that the court record has to meet. It must be fast, accurate, verifiable and inexpensive, and it must offer instant access. In addition, it must have the capacity to be transcribed by another person simultaneously, without highly specialized skills, like reading steno. Technologies that served in the past, can no longer stand the test, IAPRT members believe. It is no longer necessary to have someone who has honed his or her craft in stenography for ten years, to record a legal procedure. A digital recording equipment can be utilized and mastered in days or weeks. There are plenty of people who can cross disciplines, and transcribe a record from digital media as accurately, or more accurately, than a skilled stenographer can.

Moreover, simultaneous processes are necessary, Mr Raison argues. The old paradigm of one person being the master of all domains, does not work anymore. Mr Raison sees an analogy with the modern assembly line. Complex processes, reduced to manageable chunks or pieces of work, can be done by a less skilled and less costly work force, as opposed to a highly skilled and expensive work force that is required if one person combines all functions, for instance a court reporter starting with recording the proceedings, then

processing and transcribing the record, and finally proofreading and assembling the report.

Stenographers claim that you cannot do “real-time” with anything but stenography. In reply, Mr Raison mentions a couple of advantages of the audio recording. It is an instant record, that is 100% accurate, can be accessed immediately, and can be pinpointed by date and time references. In the event that real-time is needed, it can be done from anywhere, thanks to modern technology. Economics are an important factor, and Mr Raison feels that court reporters should be concerned about how they can relieve court budgets, and how to give greater value at lower cost.

Mr Raison agrees with the traditional stenographers on several other points. The legal system deserves trained, certified personnel. Machines in themselves are not the solution: smart human beings with brains behind those machines are necessary to ensure an excellent final product. Stenographers use audio back-ups as well, and the stenotype machine, with a good digital record, is a fine backroom transcription technology. When voice-to-print technology is refined, it can work perfectly in conjunction with digital reporting technology as well.

Mr Raison refers to a survey conducted among court reporting professionals, court administrators and other court officials. The purpose of the interviews was to assess what current challenges exist in providing court reporting services, to determine some of the reasons why current delivery models are being used, and to learn what the interviewees believe the upcoming decade holds for court reporting services.

First, Mr Raison points out the commonalities and differences between jurisdictions, and distinguishes different business models for court reporters. For instance, in some jurisdictions court reporters are hired by a judge, whereas other jurisdictions provide court reporting services collectively through court administration. Jurisdictions produce transcripts using either staff or local contractors. Court reporters can be freelancers who work both in private industry and in the courts.

Difficulties with regard to the stenographic model, mentioned by court reporting professionals, include a shortage of certified stenographers, and the steep cost of stenographic services. Court reporting managers face various challenges, which may include an unmanageable volume of transcript orders, lack of control over transcript orders by contractors, limited staff positions, a lack of IT support, and constant technological changes. To get a broad-based cross-reference of opinions, eighteen court administrators were interviewed for the survey. They were asked questions about the court reporting service delivery model, the use of in-house transcribers and/or contract transcribers, and their level of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of the transcription.

It was apparent from speaking to the interviewees that hybrid delivery models of court reporting are currently used in many locations. Those that are currently stenographic only, recognize that the future will include hybrid approaches for a continuation of services. The interviewees also indicated potential changes in the upcoming decade, a broad range from real-time stenography reporting to completely digital court reporting models.

An important conclusion is that two particular skills should be highly valued: language

mastery and up-to-date technical ability. Many jurisdictions look to the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) for certification for stenographers, the National Verbatim Reporters Association (NVRA) for certification for voice writers, and the International Alliance of Professional Reporters and Transcribers (IAPRT) for certification of digital court reporters and transcribers. Mr Raison claims that IAPRT is currently the only organisation offering international training and on line certification. Training materials are on the IAPRT website. IAPRT provides a test for digital court reporters, that it is very difficult to pass.

Another important conclusion is that the court record should be evaluated before finalizing new processes and methods. This presupposes that quality control is in place.

Focus should always be on the intellectual capital behind the record, the court reporters and the technicians, and the need to duplicate that talent within the organization. Mr Raison emphasizes in closing that court reporting services ensure that all litigants are afforded a guarantee of fairness and justice.

# The limits of the applicability of new technologies to parliamentary reporting services: the case of Turkish parliament

*Ayşe Yedekçi (Turkey)*

The second presentation is by **Ms Ayşe Yedekçi**, who is a stenographer at the Department of Minutes Services at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

Ms Yedekçi discusses the working routine of the Department of Minutes Services at the Turkish parliament and the main difficulties that this department has to face in its work. Her aim is to explain why there can be limits to the applicability of new technologies to reporting services, taking the specific situation of the Turkish parliament as a case in point.

First, she briefly describes how the Minutes Services of Turkish parliament work. Reporters of the Minutes Services still use pen shorthand, stenography. They take notes in graphic shorthand during the plenary sitting. Back at their desks, they decipher and transcribe the proceedings that they captured in this way. The Minutes Services work for both the plenary sittings and the committee sittings. In the organization chart there are assistant managers for both the plenary and the committee sittings. In addition to “ordinary” stenographers, the plenary employs expert stenographers and assistant stenographers. The latter do a kind of internship at the Minutes Services. Ms Yedekçi herself is one of the 26 assistant stenographers. There are about ten to fifteen expert stenographers, who fulfil the role of editors. The stenographers attend the plenary sitting. There can be up to four of them present at the same time, together with the assistant manager and an expert stenographer. The stenographers are seated right in the middle, between the rostrum, the chair and the seats of the MPs. This helps them to identify the speakers. Stenographers stay in the plenary for about five or ten minutes, but they swap turns every two and a half minutes. The expert stenographer stays for about half an hour in the plenary and supervises the alternation of stenographers. For regular speeches, in a normal environment without too much argument, it takes about fifteen or twenty minutes to complete the transcript. After that, the expert stenographers edit the report. When it is finished, the report is published, first on the internet and then in the Journal of Records.

Ms Yedekçi then moves on to the core subject of her presentation, the difficulties caused by the working environment and atmosphere in Turkish parliament. In the case of regular, smooth and non-interrupted speeches, the job for the stenographers is relatively easy. Microphones capture the voice, and the stenographers can easily transcribe the audio recording with the help of their shorthand notes. However, difficulties arise when the microphone is closed, but the speaker continues to talk. The stenographers have to keep on writing, since they are expected to reflect these speeches in the minutes as well. They make a small note, stating that the microphone has been closed by the automatic device. Things get even tougher when other MPs start interrupting or talking at the same time. This often happens, and it is part of the working routine of the stenographers. It is a widespread prac-

tice that several MPs interrupt at the same time, and interruptions constitute the main difficulty for stenographers. The plenary hall is big, there are currently 40 party groups in Turkish parliament, and it can be very hard to hear what someone is saying from the seats at the back. Speakers in parliament expect to have an account of what was said very shortly after. Therefore, the stenographers have to start transcribing immediately.

The rules of procedure of Turkish parliament are succinct on the way the minutes should be made: "In the Plenary, the minutes are recorded verbatim or as summary. Verbatim minutes are recorded with the help of the voice recorder by stenographers." For instance, the regulations do not state whether speeches made from the seats without permission should be included. Since it is legally prescribed that the report should be a full report, stenographers are expected to include in it whatever they can.

There can be moments of high tension during the proceedings, with up to ten MPs speaking at the same time, vehemently contesting what the MP on the rostrum or a minister is claiming. The stenographers must try to identify who is speaking and to understand what is being said. They have to reflect in the report everything that is going on, sometimes in a very chaotic atmosphere, with MPs getting out of their seats and crowding in front of the rostrum or the stenographers' table. After delivering his or her speech, when the microphone is already closed, an MP may go on talking while going back to his seat. The stenographers often have to confer among them to establish in the best possible way who said what. The stenographers present have to look in different directions in order to capture what is going on in different parts of the plenary hall.

The report of the proceedings of Turkish parliament is an official legal document, and it can be used as legal evidence in court. As a consequence, the report can be crucial in determining Turkey's agenda. It recently happened that an MP used rude language during a debate, but his words were not on the audio recording. However, the stenographers heard what he said and included the bad words in the report. When this got out, it provoked a huge public reaction, which finally resulted in the MP having to resign as the head of an investigation committee. The incident was talked about in Turkey for more than a week. It shows how critical the work of the reporters can be, and how stressful their working environment is at times.

The record of two and a half minute's regular, uninterrupted speech takes around one and a half typescript page. However, when there is a lot of dialogue, and when the report has to reflect tension during the debate, the report of just half a minute of the proceedings may run to five or six pages, because everything has to be included.

Plenary sittings constitute by large the major part of the workload of the reporters, especially in terms of difficulty. The stenographers attend committee sittings as well. The rules of procedure of Turkish parliament say: "If the committee so decides, a full minute is recorded". Usually, the committee decides so. In committees sittings, just one stenographer is present at a time, and he or she writes for about half an hour. The committee debates are generally calmer and easier to transcribe. However, if the atmosphere gets more tense during a committee debate, it can be even harder for the stenographer to transcribe the proceedings, since he or she is alone in the committee room, trying to capture everything that is going on.

Ms Yedekçi draws some conclusions with respect to the applicability of new technologies to the reporting services of Turkish parliament. The difficulties that stenographers have to deal with in relation to the specific setting and working conditions in Turkish parliament, limit the feasibility of introducing new technologies in reporting services, such as instant reporting or digital audio transcription. Ms Yedekçi does not question the importance or effectiveness of new technologies in itself, but she doubts whether pen shorthand can be abandoned under the existing conditions. Parliamentary and cultural traditions and practices, along with the rules of procedure of parliament, are also an important factor that determines whether new technologies can be adopted. For instance, in Turkey MPs or the general public, when reading the report, expect that everything, including interruptions shouted from the seats at the back, is reflected in the report.

After the presentation, **Ms Lida Horlings** asks Ms Yedekçi what the chairman is doing to maintain order in parliament. Ms Yedekçi replies that the chair can admonish the MPs to be calmer, and sometimes suspends the sitting for a short time. Isn't there a factor of subjectivity if reporters can choose to either include or leave out comments that they heard but that are not recorded, Ms Horlings goes on to ask. Ms Yedekçi replies that the stenographers are objective and have taken an oath.



# Rules of reporting: the principles of representing spoken discourse in the Records Office of the Finnish parliament

*Eero Voutilainen (speaker, Finland)*

The third contribution is the presentation by **Mr Eero Voutilainen** of a paper co-authored by three delegates from the Records Office of the Finnish parliament: **Ms Maarit Peltola**, **Mr Teuvo Råty** and **Mr Niklas Varisto**. Mr Voutilainen is a part-time reporter at the Finnish parliament, and a doctoral student at the University of Helsinki, working on a PhD-thesis that deals with parliamentary language and interaction in Finland.

Mr Voutilainen's presentation is based on recent discussions and developments at the Finnish Records Office. The aim of his contribution is to continue the useful discussion on the principles of reporting that took place at the last year's IPRS meeting in Prague. His intention is to discuss from a practical point of view the linguistic decisions that are made in reporting.

The principles of reporting in the Finnish parliament have changed very much in the last few decades. A quotation that dates from the late nineteenth century, shows that the reporter's job in those early days was to "correct a contentually and technically bad speech into exemplary condition regarding both matter and linguistic form", and to "compose confusing statements into such shape that it was easy to get a hold of their content". In practice, this meant quite heavy editing, resulting in a big difference between original speeches and the speeches published in the records. MPs complained at the time that individual speeches, as represented in the report, sounded "like they were given by one man". These quotations well reflect the situation of parliamentary reporting in Finland until the late 1980s.

From that time onward, Finnish parliamentary reporters have paid more attention to the authenticity and individuality of the speeches, as a result of many changes, both inside and outside the parliament. In the 1950s, speeches started to be recorded with audio recorders. This enabled the reporters to pay more attention to linguistic details, and made it easier to determine the faithfulness of the written record. More recently, online video broadcasts have raised the question of how much difference there should be between the video and the written record, since both are now accessible to everyone and easy to compare. The parliamentary speech culture, and language attitudes in general, have changed a lot as well. Modern parliamentary speeches show considerable stylistic variation. Differences from the written standard language are not always seen as simply wrong. On the contrary, they can be important in marking the individual style and the political image of the MP.

Overall, these changes have led to a shift from standardization towards more toleration of naturally occurring linguistic variation. This in turn has led to a need for new reporting

principles and systematic guidelines for reporting. The aim of the Finnish Records Office is to publish an introduction to its principles on its web pages, in order for readers to know exactly what kind of changes are being made in the reporting process.

Mr Voutilainen then proceeds to giving a general overview of the relationships between spoken and written language. Speech and writing are in a sense fundamentally different. Therefore, it is only natural that they do not always follow the same logic or even the same grammar. Plenary sittings in parliament appear to be somewhere between both categories, speech and writing, because the main speeches are generally written beforehand, and only one speaker is allowed to speak at a time.

According to Mr Voutilainen, reporting can never be completely neutral or objective, because converting speech into writing entails many choices. All these choices affect how the MP and his or her speech are viewed by the public. Mr Voutilainen argues that this makes it necessary to consider why and for whom the report is made. The point of view of the Finnish Records Office is that the record is an open source of information, and that the citizens and the media are the key audiences. This choice has important consequences for the principles of reporting. The Finnish Records Office follows a wide definition of grammatical correctness. Even deviations from the written standard language may be important in creating the individual style and image of the MP, which means that reporters should be very careful in their so called corrections. The key goal of the record is to make sure that the reader can understand the proceedings in the same way as the hearer of the proceedings, neither worse nor better.

Reporting demands a never ending balancing between opposed, and sometimes conflicting, phenomena, like speech and writing, authenticity and readability, and written language and linguistic variation, e.g. regional dialect or personal style.

Mr Voutilainen then turns to the more concrete features of the practices of reporting in the Finnish parliament. The first aspect that he is considering, is the grammar of the speeches. Reporters in the Finnish parliament do not treat all the grammatical features in the same way. Mr Voutilainen proposes a division in four categories.

1. Variation in speech sounds is usually standardized for the sake of readability. Exceptions are made only if the non-standard feature has particular rhetorical importance, for example as a dialect marker that ties the speaker to a certain regional or social group.
2. Words are usually left as they are. They usually do not damage readability, but may give important information about for example the regional background and personal style of the speaker.
3. Combinations of words, or phrases, are sometimes altered slightly to help the reader. Some small differences from the standard language would draw more attention in writing than they do in original speech, because even the same feature may be linked to different ideologies, values or attitudes when seen in writing than when heard in speech.
4. At the sentence level, much personal variation is tolerated as regards for example word order, if it does not cause big problems for reading. However, there are many types of asymmetric structures in spoken language that result from the fact that

speech production happens in real time. These types of expressions are often changed into their written language equivalents, if they are not particularly significant rhetorically. For instance, “This is a remarkable thing this government proposal” might be changed, for the sake of readability, into “This government proposal is a remarkable thing”.

Mr Voutilainen goes on to discuss several categories of speech phenomena and the way the Finnish Records Office deals with these phenomena when drawing up the account.

So called false starts and self-corrections and are systematically corrected to match the speaker’s final intention, if it is possible to know that from the speech without any far-fetched interpretation. For instance: “And this is... These things must not be mixed up” is put down in writing as “These things must not be mixed up”. Unfinished structures are avoided if possible. If not, interruptions are marked with three full stops. “Planning expressions”, i.e. expressions that are clearly the result of the fact that spoken language is time-bound, are removed, if this does not change the meaning of the expression.

Blunders and slips of the tongue are always corrected in obvious cases, unless other MPs bring them up afterwards. In that case, it would be very strange to correct them. The main principle is that an expression is considered a blunder if the right way of saying it can be considered common knowledge, either generally or within the parliament. For instance, “Indifference towards the law diminishes unfortunately” can be changed into “Indifference towards the law increases unfortunately”, if it is clear from the context that this is what is meant. Even so, it is sometimes very hard to distinguish so called innocent blunders from ignorance.

Erroneous claims, false citations and inappropriate conduct are not corrected in the record, because this would contradict the principle of open information in parliament. Moreover, the MP is always responsible for his or her speech, not the reporter who is transcribing. According to the rules in Finnish parliament, accusing someone of lying or being a liar is not allowed. However, if an MP says “You are a liar”, this is included in the record. Other types of inappropriate conduct that are not corrected in the record, include indiscrete word choices, swearwords et cetera.

Non-verbal actions and events are marked in the record when the reporter feels that it is necessary. As regards prosody, emphasis or tone of voice, it is sometimes necessary to change the word order in Finnish, in order to express the intended meaning. For instance, “There has been only conversation in that regard”, can better be represented in writing by “There has been conversation only in that regard”, because otherwise the word “only” seems to refer to the wrong element. Gestures, movements and events are marked between square brackets if that is necessary in order to fully understand the speech. For instance: “Here it is. [MP waved the budget proposal in his hand.]”

A final category that Mr Voutilainen discusses, is that of so called “unnecessary” words. Planning expressions, e.g. words such as “like”, “kind of” et cetera, are an example. Another group consists of sentence-initial particles like “and”, “but”, “well”, “so”, which are very common in spoken language. If none of these particles were erased from the record, this would be confusing, because clauses in spoken language are very often connected to each other by these particles. Thirdly, mannerisms or expressions that the MPs overproduce

when planning the speech in real time, are removed from the report as well. However, it is important to always ask what makes us think that something in the speech is unnecessary. Different people find different things unnecessary. Are parliamentary reporters willing to make that choice for the potential readers?

Mr Voutilainen concludes by considering some possible directions for further development in the reporting principles. The first could be to bring the written record even closer to the video recording in order to move it further towards authenticity, and to erase any so called unflattering differences between the video and the written record. The opposite option would be to consciously move away from the original recording by standardizing the language of the written record. This would favour readability and, possibly, some aesthetic norms at the expense of authenticity. There would always be the video recording available to those who want to know how things were specifically said. Even more radical would be the choice to move towards written summaries of the discussion, approved by the MPs. This would emphasize content over form and make the report shorter. However, this would give considerable power and responsibility to the reporters. One remaining option would be to abandon written reports altogether and replace them with video links to the records. This option has actually been suggested once in the Finnish parliament, because it would bring considerable savings. However, it would also reduce the accessibility of the plenary sitting, by making it harder to do automatic searches and statistics, quick browsing, and so on.

After the presentation, questions are asked on the topic of blunders. Reporters of the Finnish Records Office may choose to correct a blunder, unless another MP is commenting on it. In the latter case, they don't make any changes. If there are no comments, and if the speaker says it right a first or a third time, reporters may decide case by case what to do. **Mr Herbert Houdijk** asks about the situation when a blunder is not commented on during the debate and has been corrected in the report, but is heavily discussed in the media afterwards. Mr Voutilainen admits that it would be embarrassing if that were to happen, but to his knowledge something like that has never happened in Finland.

# Reporting in the Polish Sejm

*Monika Rydel (Poland)*

Ms Schwarz-van Poppel gives the floor to **Ms Monika Rydel** for a reaction on the Finnish contribution. Ms Rydel, who is an editor at the Polish Senate, tells about the situation in the Polish Sejm and the way the report is produced there, focusing on the differences with the Finnish system, and taking into account the exchange of ideas on this topic between the Polish and Finnish reporting services that took place before the start of the conference.

To begin with, Ms Rydel underlines that in Polish parliament there is only one version of the report. The report that is produced and published online after every sitting is the final product. The department that is responsible for the report, does not revise the report once the sitting is over. Editors do not listen to the audio file again either. This has to do with the fact that the department has also other duties to perform between sittings. For instance, employees of the department also have to draft legal acts and proofread interpellations submitted by the MPs.

Secondly, Ms Rydel discusses the difficulties that the department encounters during the reporting process. The main problem is connected with the role of stenographers in the Polish Sejm. In the Polish parliament, there is a division of roles between freelance stenographers on the one hand and editors on the other hand. The editors do not work in the plenary hall. It is the freelance stenographers who are responsible for writing down what is going on during the debate and noting all the additional actions, such as interruptions shouted by the MPs, any unusual behaviour, et cetera. However, a single stenographer sitting in the plenary hall, using pen shorthand, is not always able to register everything that is going on at the same time during the debate, especially if the debate is heated. This sometimes causes gaps in the report, which are difficult to fill in for the editors. When the speaker refers to an interruption that has not been included in the report, the speaker's response becomes incomprehensible for the reader.

Another problem has to do with comments that are put in the wrong place by the stenographer. The editor usually tries to correct that afterwards. However, this often requires contacting the stenographer concerned, which takes time and is sometimes not even feasible, especially in the late hours. For these reasons, the reports department is now considering a new solution for the work of stenographers.

Finally, Ms Rydel points to the fact that a video record of the proceedings is available on the Sejm's official website. As a consequence, everyone can compare the report with the recording and notice any difference. In the standing orders of the Sejm, it is indicated that the report is a stylistically edited document. Unfortunately, citizens and even the media are not aware of that rule. Thus, they do not understand that discrepancies between the written account and the recorded form are inevitable, and they sometimes seem to be surprised or even indignant at that. In addition, there are no rules or regulations indicating what exactly can be altered on the MPs' request. Every authorization poses a dilemma. The MPs are entitled to ask for changes, but the reports department must be careful in comply-

ing with their requests, in order not to be accused of manipulation. Every case has to be considered separately, and the final decision is always taken by the head of the department.

# Workshops

## Introduction

After Ms Rydel's presentation, **Ms Schwarz-van Poppel** proceeds to the following item on the agenda, the workshops. She invites everyone to discuss the questions raised in the contributions by Mr Voutilainen and Ms Rydel during the workshops. **Ms Patti Calabro**, member of the IPRS Steering Committee, announces the four workshops that were selected on the basis of the number of enrolments: 1. Editing the transcription of spoken word. Because this topic is very popular, there are two separate groups discussing it; 2. Working conditions; 3. Quality; 4. Training.

## 12.30 p.m. Presentation of the results of the workshops

After a break and after the workshops, the plenary meeting continues. A representative on behalf of each group summarizes the ideas discussed during the workshop.

### **Group 1 (Finland, Netherlands, Poland): Editing the transcription of spoken word. Presenter: Mr Wouter Zwijnenburg, Netherlands**

All participants agreed that there should be official guidelines for editing, specifying which types of changes in the report are acceptable. Even then it remains important to always think about why we edit, because there are sometimes discussions about our work. Another topic that was discussed, is subtitling. In the Netherlands, subtitling the video broadcast or streams of parliamentary proceedings is mandatory. Can the written report be used as a means to subtitle the on-demand video archive? The group's feeling is that the written report is very different from subtitling. For instance, in the written report words or sentences are sometimes moved to a different place. Subtitling cannot be a substitute for the written report either. Therefore, the group's positive conclusion is that our reports will be needed for many years to come.

### **Group 2 (Finland, Japan, Netherlands, United Kingdom): Editing the transcription of spoken word. Presenter: Mr Dick Boersema, Netherlands**

The group discussed some of the changes that affect the reporting profession. For instance, people nowadays speak differently than in the past. They speak more like in a stream of consciousness, and this requires more editing. Another change however is that proceedings are more and more available on video, which in turn lays emphasis on the authenticity of the transcript. The participants agreed that there has been an evolution in the way of making the report. There used to be a tendency among reporters to think that they knew better. That "cowboy style" of reporting from the past is no longer current. Why should we, as reporters, decide what an MP has said? Our primary goal is to follow what the speakers

say, and to be as accurate and grammatically correct as possible in transcribing it. This group also believes that the skills required to do this, will be needed for a long time yet. Not all countries represented in this group deal with wrong quotations in the same way. In the UK, as opposed to the other countries, wrong quotations are corrected in the report.

**Group 3 (Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Turkey): Working conditions. Presenter: Laura van der Zande, Netherlands**

The working hours in the parliaments of the countries that are represented in this group differ, yet the work pressure is high in every parliament. Reporters always have to work until the end of the sitting. All participants agree that these conditions affect their work. One solution may be the hiring of freelancers. This is done in the Dutch parliament, but the delegates from Turkey claim that it is not feasible in their parliament, because the conditions are such that the work of parliamentary stenographers cannot be done without proper training. Another solution, working in shifts, as the Dutch parliamentary reporters do, is not possible for the Czechs, because they lack the capacity.

**Group 4 (Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, United Kingdom): Quality. Presenter: Mr Jonathan Hoare, United Kingdom**

What is quality in reporting? The group agreed that it has various components, such as the readability, fluency and consistency of the report, and its accuracy and faithfulness to the speech. How can quality be assured? A first important aspect is recruiting the right people for the job. The situation in Austria differs from that in the other countries in that it is difficult there to get enough applicants. Secondly, training these people in a professional way is fundamental. All participants acknowledged that technology has an increasing influence on their work as parliamentary reporters. The report is edited to some extent in all the parliaments that were represented in the group. The most literal, verbatim approach appears to be the one in the Belgian parliament, and the most edited approach the one in the Austrian parliament. To assure the consistency aspect of quality, the Dutch make use of an editor who reads all the text produced during a plenary sitting. That would probably not be feasible in the UK.

**Group 5 (Argentina, Cameroon, Italy, Netherlands, United States): Training. Presenter: Mr Herbert Houdijk, Netherlands**

This group was composed of reporters using very different methods and technologies. There were voice writers and captioners from the United States, shorthand writers from Argentina and Italy, and shorthand and machine writers from Cameroon. Obviously, training for those different methods is also very diverse. Training for respeaking in the United States has evolved from informal, “kitchen table” training into more formal and professional training at schools. Respeaking demands specific skills, and voice writers are more and more developing standards for their profession. Cameroon has two languages, French and English, and both use different technology. For French, reporters use machines, for English they use pen shorthand. The staff is trained at university level. A serious problem is that it is hard to get the funds that are needed for training. In Italy, shorthand training



was abandoned as a consequence of the introduction of automatic speech recognition. Training now focuses on the skills that are needed for editing the texts produced by speech recognition. Shorthand is no longer used in Dutch parliament either. Applicants for a job as a reporter who have passed the entrance test, are enrolled in an in-house trainees program.

**Ms Schwarz van Poppel** thanks **Ms Kimberly Turnage** and **Mr Daniël Tuijnman** for the CART-services that they provided during the meeting.

**1 p.m. Closing**

# Report of the 2013 IPRS meeting in Ghent, Monday, 15th July (day two)

Venue: Artevelde University College, campus Kantienberg, L.01, Aula 4

Chair: **Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel**

## Agenda

1. **Opening**
2. Lorraine Sutherland (UK): **From black art to black gown – a postgraduate diploma in parliamentary reporting**
3. Dominick M. Tursi (USA): **History of shorthand, Evolution of a timeless profession**
4. Herbert Houdijk and Matthijs Bakker (the Netherlands): **VLOS vs. 2.0, the next level in reporting**

### 4 p.m. Opening

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel**, coordinator for IPRS on the Intersteno Board, opens the session and welcomes all delegates.

# From black art to black gown – a postgraduate diploma in parliamentary reporting

*Lorraine Sutherland, with Jonathan Hoare (UK)*

Ms Schwarz-van Poppel gives the floor to **Ms Lorraine Sutherland**, head of the parliamentary reporting office of the House of Commons.

Ms Lorraine Sutherland started some thirty years ago as a parliamentary reporter. The method of training in those days was simple: two weeks to learn the trade and the rules from an experienced reporter. This was called “Sitting with Nellie” and was in fact a form of black art in that nothing was written down. There were no written rules, only word of mouth. An editor simply had to feel if something was wrong. Some of those unwritten rules were very strange. Some subeditors for instance never allowed use of the word “particular” or “particularly” and preferred “especially” instead. Also a sentence could not start with the word “this”.

At the time, Peter Walker, the deputy editor, was very keen on shorthand. But finding qualified shorthand writers who could write fast enough proved to be difficult. So the reporting office started its own stenography school and used a stenography teacher. Walker also believed that Computer Aided Transcription could halve the number of necessary stenographers. That didn't turn out as expected, as not all of the trained stenographers were good CAT-reporters. In 1997, therefore the decision was made to drop shorthand and to concentrate the training of recruits not on capturing the words but on English language skills. This meant training in audio only reporting.

The current postgraduate diploma in parliamentary reporting is validated by an external learning organization. But why seek validation of an already very good and well established training program? About seven years ago, the administration in the House of Commons underwent a big restructuring exercise. One of the results was that the Hansard department merged into a bigger department including the Clerks and security. This urged the Hansard to ensure retaining their unique identity and the quality of their product. One of the subeditors came up with the idea of externally validating the reporter training course. This scheme was already very successful with an intake of seven people every eighteen months, and the quality of the reporters was really good. The aim of validating was to codify the course and put it to potential further use, for example short tailored courses for the public, codifying the editorial training, and language skills training for colleagues from other departments.

The subeditor who came up with the idea was asked to look for the best possible fit in terms of a partner. He visited various universities around London and came up with City University in 2008. This university was not chosen because it has a good school of journalism. The official report is definitely not a newspaper report. City University also has a really good focus on business and professions. In the end, Hansard became affiliated with the law school of City University.

Getting the validation right meant a lot of preparatory work. It was necessary to produce an over twenty pages long submission document that had to be revised many times in conjunction with City University. Also academic assessment methods had to be devised. This meant revising the assessment methods already in use. The descriptors of grades that were to be attributed to people's marks had to be described. Also the various levels of attainment had to be distinguished. It took some eighteen months to agree on the course content, which was ready in April 2010.

The hope was that the new validated training program could be applied to the May 2010 training group. Unfortunately however, the Dean of Validation at City fell ill. It also proved to be a mistake to let all the weight rest on the shoulders of only one subeditor. Therefore a committee was formed, which meant rewriting the submission document once again. Sometimes the committee was surprised by the university, for example in asking formal terms of reference or asking for external examiners. So it had to jump through different hoops before getting permission and getting to the eureka moment.

Things fell into place on 27th April 2012 in a meeting with the validation committee of City University at the House of Commons. During this meeting former students of the class of 2010 spoke about their learning experiences. Their testimony convinced the committee that Hansard was serious, knew what it was doing and would be a good partner. After some more discussion about the assessment criteria they agreed, after which the course started with the class of 2012.

Ms Lorraine Sutherland then introduces sub-editor **Mr Jonathan Hoare**, who elaborates on the content of the newly devised course. He sees three main aspects of the process of finding new Hansard reporters. The recruitment consists of 1. a detailed person specification for advertisement in newspapers and a written test for candidates, 2. a transcription test in Parliament, and 3. a formal interview. What is the person specification? Hansard needs people with a wide general knowledge and the ability to understand complex argument and to report it clearly and grammatically. Their intellectual capital must consist of language skills, and knowledge of current affairs, national and international politics, in order to interpret what they are transcribing. Hansard also requires of candidates the ability to edit their reports in Parliament. Another aspect of the specification is the ability to check references, skills in general research, quotation and other details. These need to be absolute accurate in the official reports. Another important aspect is that candidates have team working skills. Hansard is in need of team players because work is being done in a deadline driven environment. Candidates also must have good keyboard skills and familiarity with Windows-based software.

Once candidates have applied and put their CV in, their knowledge of current affairs and their language skills are tested in a written test that they send in with their application. For example, candidates have to spot the mistakes and errors in a sentence like: "I understand that they are due to meet President Joseph Zuma, the South American leader, later this week." (I understand that they are due to meet President Jacob Zuma, the South African leader, later this week.) After weeding the people out who don't have the required basic skills, the ones left over are invited into Parliament for a transcription test. From the 800 applicants for four jobs, 60 remained after the written test. These candidates were required to transcribe a five-minute speech in 75 minutes. The test, the second main aspect,

was marked by several sub-editors. On the basis of this test, the decision was made who was invited for a formal interview, the third main aspect. Twelve candidates each got a 30-minute interview with a panel consisting of the Hansard training manager, one of the course trainers and a representative of human resources in Parliament. As a result, four candidates were appointed.

In the past, the training course lasted three months, after which the trainees started on the job. The new, validated course consists of two modules. Module 1 consists of a three month training course in a classroom. In module 2 the trainees are embedded in the teams, working live under close supervision of trainers and line managers. Module 1 means working full-time over a period of twelve weeks, testing transcription skills under time limits, including frequent visits to live events in the House of Commons Chamber or Committees. Not just listening to recordings of old debates of Parliament on data tapes but experiencing what it would be like to do the job for real. Methods used in module 1 are group instruction using recordings of debates; practice in transcribing; one-to-one coaching; shadowing, i.e. shadowing reporters who are actually reporting for real, and observing live proceedings; independent study, as required by City University; knowledge reviews; copy analysis, i.e. analysing within the group the issues of editing a particular text; Hansard expert presentations; learning logs; formal one-to-one meetings monthly.

What is Hansard looking for as the key learning outcomes in module 1? The trainees should be able to follow complex arguments on specific debates in which technical language is used. They need to be able to understand parliamentary processes, i.e. the procedure of the House of Commons and its Committees. They must appreciate how developments in contemporary politics inform reporting choices. Making choices of editing verbatim reports means understanding politics and the implications of editing choices. They need to know the process through which a bill went in the House of Commons and the House of Lords before becoming law. They need insight into contemporary politics and current affairs and how these influence and are influenced by official reporting processes. They also must understand the need for accuracy and impartiality in different parliamentary contexts. The recruited people will become committee reporters and will work on different types of committees, legislative or select committees. In the latter committees, the style of reporting is much more verbatim. They therefore must recognize and critically apply different reporting styles in different contexts. They need team working skills, advanced written and oral communication skills and IT skills. They need to be adept at using the Hansard Reporting System, a package of software.

The assessment of module 1 consists of two main parts. The four written exercises are mainly transcription tests. The marks received on those make 2/3rds of their mark at the end of module 1. There is also a two-part multiple choice test on parliamentary procedure, 1/6th in weighting, and a presentation based on individual research on a relevant topic, also 1/6th in weighting. The assessment criteria for the transcription are as follows. Trainees get seven minutes to produce a five-minute transcription. The content has to be accurate, full and reflecting character and flavor of the speech. The content has to be grammatically correct and in accordance with the house style. The member information has to be correct. Also the copy needs to be fluent, with repetition and redundancy omitted where appropriate. The copy needs appropriate use of grammar, house style and punctua-

tion. Hansard uses an extensive style guide. The last criterion is the intelligent use of relevant documents.

After three months in class, the trainees move into module 2 and into teams. They work alongside the permanent staff. All their work is live, edited for real and published as part of the official report. This is closely monitored and evaluated by the trainers, who will become their line managers once they work on the job. The trainees fly solo but get regular feedback on their work so they can see what areas need improvement. At the end of module 2, the course tutors and the director assess the progress of trainees, and work towards giving a final diploma award.

The assessment of module 2 consists of three parts. Trainees maintain a portfolio of their work, their reporting for real, and commentaries on the issues considered in the course of doing their work. This gives them the ability to demonstrate the issues they have considered and the knowledge they have used in order to produce their work. This interesting process allows them to explain why they make certain choices in producing transcriptions. These portfolio commentaries are assessed by the tutors as part of the line management process. This gives them 50% of the marks that they are awarded. The other 50% comes from the four written exercises, as in module 1.

The final result is that all four trainees of the class of 2012 have graduated. One of the students got a distinction and the other three got merits, which means they are all very good students.

Ms Lorraine Sutherland concludes the presentation with the announcement that the following course starts in January 2014. Hopes are that this time it will be possible to work in conjunction with colleagues from the House of Lords. Also the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association might come up with a scholarship so that a trainee from an overseas parliament can do the indepth training of module 1.

**A member of the audience** asks how many trainers are working with the trainees. Ms Lorraine Sutherland answers that the training is done by two main trainers, supplemented by subeditors to a total of twelve. In module 2 trainees are closely supervised in the teams in which they are embedded.

**Mr Herbert Houdijk** explains that the Dutch parliamentary reporting office is used to training trainees itself without rules for the trainers. Are there any rules set for trainers in the parliamentary reporting office in the UK? Are they validated to be a trainer? Ms Lorraine Sutherland answers that all trainers followed a three day “train the trainer” course. During the collaboration with City University, Hansard has learned a lot about teaching courses.

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel** thanks Ms Lorraine Sutherland and Mr Jonathan Hoare for their presentation. She congratulates them on this new and interesting development in recruiting. Being a head of a parliamentary reporting office herself, Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel will surely consider introducing something similar in the Netherlands.

# History of shorthand, Evolution of a timeless profession

*Dominick M. Tursi (USA)*

The second presentation is by **Mr Dominick M. Tursi**, official court reporter and founder of The Gallery of Shorthand in the Alfonse M. D'Amato Federal Courthouse on Long Island, New York City, in the USA.

Mr Dominick M. Tursi has worked in the state court system and currently works, among other things, in the United States federal court system.

In his opinion the preservation of thought began some 5000 years ago. Epoch I begins with the earliest form of written expression in what is now called Iraq in 3500 BC. The Sumerians came to realize that any important thought should be preserved. They therefore created a systematic way of writing and reading called "cuneiform". In some 400 years they compiled a 2000 word and pictograph system of writing. About the same time, 3200 BC, the Egyptians came to a similar realization and decided that the existing hieroglyphics were far too complex. They devised the hieratic and demotic scripts as means to preserve important thought.

Before continuing with this story, Mr Dominick Tursi explains how he came to found The Gallery of Shorthand. Someone from the department that runs the Federal Court building asked him to display his collection of steno machines. He immediately accepted and began to think about telling the story of shorthand and making people in this profession proud. The result of the hard work that followed is the The Gallery of Shorthand, prominently located at the entrance of the Federal Courthouse. It catches every visitor's sight, court reporters, lawyers, witnesses, students, good guys and bad guys, especially as it is the only red space in an entirely white building. The intention is that the gallery has something for everyone. On hearing of his visit to Belgium, the Chief Judge of the Federal Court asked to share these words with the audience: "We are so pleased to host The Gallery of Shorthand in the Eastern District Central Islip Courthouse. The Gallery pays tribute to the important work of shorthand reporters without whom the judicial system could not function. Members of the judiciary, litigants, the press and the public all depend upon court reporters for a record of court proceedings. Access to an accurate and complete record is crucial for attorneys in preparing arguments for appeal and for their clients whose rights may be at stake. We are enormously grateful to our court reporters for assuring the accuracy of the proceedings."

Mr Dominick Tursi's enthusiasm for showing the story of shorthand made a museum designer work on the design for free. Doing things for free is quite a feat in the USA. The Gallery finally opened in September 2010. What is the concept, the mission, the philosophy of the Gallery? Thomas Jefferson stated that if governmental deliberation is to be remembered, revived or acted upon, it first must be recorded. This means that discussions must be memorialized in impartial and accurate writing. This timeless truth led to the creation

of written language in 3500 BC. It compelled Julius Caesar in 95 BC to order that deliberations of the Roman Senate be written. In 1873, reversing the prior practice of secretive deliberations, the United States Senate hired official reporters to transcribe their debate. The Congressional Record in the USA was started by a court reporter, Thomas Lloyd, who wrote tachygraphy shorthand.

The history of shorthand as told in the Gallery is told in ten epochs, i.e. important pivotal segments of time. The Gallery shows many artefacts, steno machines and books. The oldest book on shorthand in the Gallery dates from around 1600. Mr Dominick M. Tursi explains that all artefacts were paid out of his own pocket.

Returning to the history of shorthand, Mr Dominick M. Tursi stresses the importance of knowledge to make a good record. Most people outside the reporting profession think reporters just hear and write. The Sumerians already knew in 3500 BC that there is more to it. It took twelve years to train their official scribes, who later on rose to high positions in society. The scribes of Egypt developed, as stipulated earlier, quicker forms of writing than hieroglyphs. One of these scribes became the overseer of all royal scribes and physicians and dentists. Amenhotep, son of Hapu, was one of the most important scribes who endured several reigns. He was overseer of all projects of the Pharaoh and the construction of the temples at Luxor.

Epoch II starts in 206 BC in China. The Chinese had a different reason for inventing faster and faster ways of writing. They wanted to capture confessions after arrests as quickly as possible and needed fast ways of writing down what the accused was saying and sign it off. In 2007 Dominick M. Tursi with some of his colleagues visited Beijing to meet their counterparts and write about the Yawei Stenotype. After he had a go at the machine, the first thing the Chinese reporter did was sign off on the transcript. A clear throwback to the reason for the original invention of fast writing in China.

The third epoch in the Gallery is Roman shorthand. This epoch starts in 63 BC, when Cicero invented the first system of short writing as used by his slave Tiro, who essentially is Cicero's reporter. Tiro wrote on wax tablets and read his shorthand in Latin to the transcribing scribes or transcribers who wrote the original speech on parchment. There are no remains of Tiro's shorthand, which was improved and expanded over the course of many centuries. Why? They melted the wax after use and re-used it! A book on display in the Gallery, one of only four in the world, contains later iterations of Tironian shorthand. When Tiro started using shorthand to capture Cicero's words in Senate, other senators became jealous. Responding to their need, Cicero and Tiro trained the slaves of these senators. So the first corps of court reporters was born.

Epoch IV starts in 500 AD with the abolition of shorthand, as during the Middle Ages it was considered cryptography, diabolical, black magic and witchcraft. Emperor Justinian forbade its use in 534 AD, although shorthand skills of monks were both permitted and encouraged. Interest renewed around 1180 AD when Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, encouraged research into Tironian shorthand.

Epoch V starts in 1588, and is known as "The vital 250 years". Timothy Bright invented the first pivotal system, which became the most extensively used for the ensuing 60 years. It was motivated by the need to record sermons and parliamentary debates. One of the early



masters of shorthand was Samuel Taylor. He and others invented systems called “polygraphy”, “swift writing” and The writing schoolmaster.

The revolutionary systems of shorthand, based on phonetics, came up in Epoch VI. In 1837, a 24 year old English teacher by the name of Isaac Pitman, who studied and used the system of Samuel Taylor, publishes Stenographic Sound-Hand. This system, later renamed to Phonography, Writing by Sound or simply Pitman Shorthand, is the most revolutionary in the history of shorthand. Being an excellent businessman, Pitman sold inexpensive weekly and monthly magazines that enabled people who could not afford school to start learning shorthand. In 1888, John Robert Gregg launches his system as Light-Line Phonography. Because of the stranglehold of Pitman on the English market he decided to come to New York. As it turned out, Ben Pitman, Isaacs younger brother, had been there first with Pitman Shorthand. Ultimately John Gregg went to the Midwest. Eventually his system became the most used system throughout the United States, because it was easier to write.

Epoch VII is about the proliferation of shorthand in Europe. England, Germany, Italy and France were predominant in developing shorthand systems.

Epoch VIII looks at the proliferation of shorthand in America. In those days, around 1900 or so, in the USA shorthand development stopped, thus no new systems emerged other than the well-intended but subpar system by John Radcliff in 1650. All other systems used were adaptations of Pitman’s system. In the opinion of John Gregg, who brought his system to America in 1893, Gregg Shorthand wasn’t meant for the verbatim high speed writer but for the lower speed stenographic writers in business’s and offices. Only when a speed writer named Frederick Gurtler reached 260-280 words per minute, Gregg was convinced of his own system. In the 1910s, speed writers using Pitman or Gregg won speed contests with 280 words per minute and 99% accuracy. What this learns, is that it isn’t the system but the person who is the most important.

Epoch IX is the epoch of mechanized shorthand. There is very little known about the men who made the early attempts to invent shorthand machines and keyboards. In France Gonod attempted in 1827 to develop mechanized shorthand. In Germany Baron Karl de Drais de Sauerbrun (1829) and in Italy Celestino Galli (1830) also constructed prototypes. Interestingly, already in 1884 a man called Birolin claims to be able to improve the Bartholomew Stenograph by attaching a transmitter to it, “in the electrical combination therewith of a typograph or a typewriter at any convenient distance therefrom which when acting as a receiver will serve to convert the conventional signs into the ordinary letters of the language”. Does this mean real-time transcription in 1884?

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel** invites the audience to a short break, including coffee and something to eat.

Mr Dominick Tursi resumes his presentation to expand on the evolution of shorthand machines in Epoch IX. The Ireland Stenotype from 1911 forever defined the mainstream keyboard and remains the English-language industry standard. It used a two-row, tripartite key arrangement of initial consonants, final consonants and middle vowels to create the greatest output with the fewest strokes. Its inventor, Ward Stone Ireland, was a genius but borrowed a lot of technique from the Bartholomew Stenograph (1879) and the Anderson Shorthand Typewriter (1886). He was sued by Anderson, who won the lawsuit. By the

time he could collect, Ireland was out of business anyway. Ireland came back in 1917 with the National Shorthand Machine. It uses a different arrangement of consonants and added subordinate keys. Also in 1917, The Stenotype Company improved Ireland's mechanism and called it Master Model Three, followed in 1927 by Master Model Four. This is a pivotal model, used in the world-famous Hauptmann/Lindbergh trial in the thirties. It catapulted machine shorthand into mainstream reporting. In 1930 the Smith Stenotype came in use, designed by Howard B. Smith and Walter Heironimus. In 1939 the Palantype was developed, patented by an English woman called Fairbanks, based on the design of the French Grandjean (1908). Also in 1939, The Reporter came along, invented by a lawyer, Mr Thomas Bilyeu, with three rows of consonants and five vowel keys. His motto was: put more keys on and people learn faster! Another development in 1939 is the Stenograph. Milton H. Wright and his son Robert, working for The Stenotype Company, started Stenographic Machines and improved upon the Master models with a light-weight magnesium shell and a dependable clutch mechanism, plus silent operation and an endless-loop self-inking ribbon. The Stenotype Company responded by hiring a French designer to produce a textolite model. Problem was that the plastic casing cracked as a result of rapid temperature changes. In 1940, the problem was solved with a metal housing.

In 1943, Wendell V. Kirkpatrick invented the Brevitype, a very small, light-weight and attractive machine, made to print standard English letters. In the forties, Russia developed something called the CTM-machine. In 1957 the Düsseldorf parliamentary reporter Heinrich Hermann Bruckschen invented the Simla, which used a tripartite keyboard. This was followed in 1963 by the Princess-Steno. In 1963, the Stenograph Square Design came along. In the time of the Cold War, Russian communications were being intercepted by the USA with the help of IBM. The need became apparent to accurately log these data. In reaction to a request made by the CIA, Robert Wright of Stenographic Machines placed organ-type switches in a steno machine to sense key strokes, and used a cable to transmit them to a tape recorder. Thus the first computerized machine was invented, the so-called DataWriter. In 1971, Stenographic Machines brought the Curved Design on the market.

In 1977, BaronData Systems introduced the StenoConverter, their first try at computer transcription. In 1982 the XScribe Corporation followed with the StenoRam, with a built-in modem to transmit data to a computer. In 1987 the SmartWriter came along, the first machine to capture notes on a floppy disk. In 1988 Jerry Lefler introduced the Digitext-ST, the first realtime writer. Because it used a restricted system with little room for flexibility, it never took off in a major way. It was followed by AccuWriter (1989), Impact Writer (1994) and Foni'ks Writer (1998).

In 1991, a new type of machine was introduced: keyboard input machines. These are paperless, don't use an on-board display screen and thus rely on an external computer for readback. Stenograph introduced the first of these in 1991 and called it the ProModel, followed by Gemini (Infinity) in 1994 and the Tréal. These were followed by the Stenture in 1992. China produced its first shorthand machine in 1994, the Yawei. During his 2007 visit to Beijing, Mr Dominick Tursi brought one of his Yawei machines as a present to the inventor himself, Mr Tang Yawei. He was rewarded by Mr Tang Yawei with one of the latest models of the Yawei Stenotype.

Last but not least, in 2003, Stenograph came along with the Mira, a brilliant machine using

digitouch, as invented by Johnny Jackson. The now common iPad functions are based upon his patented invention.

Mr Dominick Tursi concludes his presentation with some exciting news. In the upcoming NCRA Convention in Nashville an attempt will be made by six writers to write 400 words per minute during one minute. This requires enormous finger speeds and concentration.

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel** thanks Mr Dominick M. Tursi for the liveliest presentation in IPRS history.

## VLOS vs. 2.0, the next level in reporting

*Herbert Houdijk and Matthijs Bakker (the Netherlands)*

The third contribution is the presentation by **Mr Herbert Houdijk** and **Mr Matthijs Bakker**, aided by **Mr Arash Ahmadi**.

Mr Herbert Houdijk introduces “something completely different” as the subject of this presentation: VLOS, which stands for, in Dutch/Flemish, VerslagLegging Ondersteunend Systeem or, in English, Reporting Support System. He is a staff member with the Dutch Parliamentary Reporting Office and as such responsible for the VLOS system. Co-presenter is Mr Matthijs Bakker, who presented the first version of VLOS at the Paris conference in 2011. He is a senior reporter with the Reporting Office and a member of the project team which was closely involved in the development of this new version of the VLOS system. Last but not least, Mr Arash Ahmadi, who is the lead architect of the development team and responsible for the technical development of the system, contributes to the presentation.

Mr Herbert Houdijk considers the 2.0 version of VLOS, the next level in reporting. On his first working day in Parliament, on the 1st of November 1971, Mr Herbert Houdijk entered the ranks of the Stenographers’ Office as a trainee stenographer/reporter. What he saw, were: notes made by using shorthand, reports written by using typewriters, uncorrected reports published the next day, and an overall workflow oriented to paper. A jump into the 21st century shows a different picture: hand typewriters have been replaced with computers, and an application called StenoService has been introduced, which works with templates within Word documents. On this basis, the Dutch Parliamentary Reporting Office started the development of the first version of VLOS (1.3), still based on the idea of using templates and working within MS Word document structures.

Nowadays the picture is even different in a world that is changing faster and faster. What do we see in parliament nowadays? Members and MPs using tablets and smartphones. Ongoing debate on social networks like Twitter and Facebook. There is a need for information that is immediately accessible and open to the public. There is a need for an immediately accessible digital report. For environmental reasons, people use and want less paper.

To meet the needs of the fast developing world of information the Dutch Parliamentary Reporting Office decided to build a completely new version of the VLOS system, called 2.0. The four major elements are structure, logging, editing and revision.

1. The first step was to take a close look at the structure of a plenary meeting of parliament (i.e. agenda, terms, speakers, motions, interruptions et cetera) and of the way reports of these meetings are made. On this basis, the structure of a database was designed.
2. Using VLOS 1.3 learned that the logging screen wasn’t intuitive enough. While logging, the reporter was already thinking in terms of editing the report. This slowed down the logging and made it more complex than necessary. This meant introducing a more intuitive and faster logging screen.

3. The new way of working also came with a new editing module, partially relying on MS Word.
4. A completely new element is the introduction of a revision website. Under VLOS 1.3 the whole revision process was oriented towards paper, sent in and out by mail. Paper is no longer needed when using this website. In this way VLOS 2.0 introduces the possibility of a completely paperless process.

But what happens to the report as a result of all this? Referring to the scene in the motion picture *The Matrix* (1999), Mr Herbert Houdijk states “There is no spoon”. This doesn’t mean that the IPRS meeting can be stopped because the Dutch have solved the problem! It simply means that there is a report but not in the way the term “report” was used before, i.e. a paper version of the report document. The change that is required is a change from thinking in terms of paper to thinking in terms of data and databases. So, what is a report? It simply is a view on a database, filled with time loggings, metadata and content, all embedded in XML computer code. By using this code, a report is transformed from a “flat” paper document to a report with many layers in it, which each have their own place and meaning. As a result of this, the report is now free of form. A Word-document, a PDF-document, a HTML-file? It’s all possible. Of course it is still possible to print a version of a report. Also immediate publications are possible on pc, laptop, iPad or smartphone. This means immediate access to reports from every location. The database can also be used to make video streams accessible. The metadata can be used by search machines on the video. The report can even be used to generate subtitles in videos.

Apart from the in-house possibilities, a lot of different parties are very interested in receiving the coded report. The Dutch Parliament wants to present open data to the public. This reuse or third-party use can for instance mean: graphic summaries of debates in word clouds, RSS-feeds, extensive research on debates and collaboration in parliaments. Also figures can be presented to the public in more interesting ways.

So what is the update on VLOS-developments? VLOS 2.0 was launched in the plenary meetings of the Dutch House of Representatives on the 25th of June. A lot of work has been done in building modules to use VLOS for committee meetings. By the end of 2013, the modules for using VLOS in the plenary meetings of the Senate should be ready. Somewhere in 2014, VLOS 2.0 will be used in every meeting of both House and Senate.

Mr Matthijs Bakker continues the presentation with a live demonstration of the VLOS 2.0 application and puts the spotlight on Mr Arash Ahmadi as the system developer and one of the main geniuses behind VLOS.

VLOS is a network application. It is currently only operational for the plenary of the Dutch House of Representatives. But, as said, VLOS is expected to be rolled out for both standing committee meetings and the Senate later in 2013. After choosing “plenary”, VLOS produces the homepage on which a meeting workspace can be chosen, dedicated to a single sitting of parliament. VLOS automatically creates these workspaces as soon as the information about a sitting becomes available in the parliamentary information system that is updated by the Secretariat of the House of Representatives. A meeting workspace can be selected by date or by number of the sitting. After choosing a date, VLOS produces another homepage, this time for the site of a plenary sitting. The agenda items with information on the

subjects of debate are automatically imported from the parliamentary information system. On the left hand side, this screen displays options that depend on the role of the user in the workflow and on the user's permissions. For instance, items can be added to the agenda. The texts of agenda items can be completed and alterations can be made. The data entered in the database are then merged with the template that VLOS uses to create a ready-made text fragment in the final report.

Mr Matthijs Bakker sheds some light on the role of the reporter in working with VLOS. The duty of a reporter is first of all to log the proceedings in the plenary hall. There is no need to make a shorthand transcript. Reporters rely on a digital audio recording but they still have to make notes. That is where VLOS comes in. The program runs on a small computer in the plenary hall. The data entered is synchronized via the network with a database on the VLOS server.

On the logging screen displayed on the computer in the plenary hall, the reporter can log keynotes about speakers and floor actions by clicking pictures and icons. The reporter can enter text as well by keyboarding. Together these digital notes stored in a database via the network constitute a framework for the segment of the proceedings that the reporter must transcribe. The e-logging screen shows the same list of agenda items as edited before.

The first agenda item, the opening, can be selected with a mouse click. Next, the chair is selected by clicking the picture of the chairing MP. VLOS creates an entry in the list of keynotes that can be seen in the right hand column on the logging screen. The next thing to do for the reporter is to identify himself by selecting name and picture in a dropdown menu. This tells the system to assign to this person the job of transcribing the part of the proceedings that corresponds to his or her five-minute turn in the plenary hall. Then the chair opens the first debate. The reporter clicks the agenda item, and as soon as an MP is given the floor, this keynote is logged by clicking the picture of this MP in the box of pictures on the logging screen.

VLOS distinguishes between speeches and interruptions. When an MP is called to deliver his or her speech on the platform, the "speech" icon in the ribbon on top of the logging screen is clicked. Every following MP that the reporter clicks, is filed in the list of keynotes as making an interruption. When a new MP gets the floor, the reporter clicks the "speech" icon again. As the Dutch House of Representatives consists of 150 MPs, it can be something of a challenge to find the right name quickly enough in the box with pictures. To make things easier, a selection can be made beforehand. The reporter usually knows which MPs will participate in a debate. The picture of these MPs can be moved to the upper box on the screen by drag and drop. This drastically reduces the numbers of options. When it is time for a minister to answer, the reporter clicks his or her picture in the box of members of government and presses the "speech" icon. Other keynotes that reporters can log during their five-minute turn include different types of floor actions: tabling a motion, non-verbal utterances such as applauding, or the repeal of an amendment.

The logging screen includes a stopwatch and a bar filling with green. This bar turns red after five minutes, signalling that it's time for reporters to switch turns. The following reporter simply presses the button named "turn" in the ribbon. The previous five-minute sequence of keynotes is now available to the reporter as a framework in which to transcribe

the audio. The reporter who has taken over, can type the first words of his turn in the editing box on the e-logging screen. This makes it easier to find the beginning of a turn when starting transcribing.

If the next agenda item is a vote, VLOS opens a screen which enables the reporter to capture the voting procedure. This is one of the more spectacular new features in VLOS 2.0. The first item put to the vote can be a motion. After clicking the item, VLOS shows an overview of the logos of the different political groups in parliament. The chair rapidly states which parties are in favor. The reporter clicks the corresponding logos. VLOS then calculates the results of the votes so that it is immediately clear if a motion is adopted or rejected.

After his turn in the plenary hall the reporter returns to his desk and opens the VLOS screen to click the link to his part of the report. VLOS then opens a page that contains all the keynotes that a reporter has logged during a five-minute session. This is the framework of a report to be. It is basically a collection of small VLOS-forms that need to be filled in. These serve as an interface for writing structured data into the database. The transcription job of a reporter in VLOS consists of two separate stages, i.e. ensuring that keynotes and metadata such as timestamps, names of speakers and procedural elements are correct, and subsequently transcribing the audio. On the left of the screen a column shows the hierarchy of logged keynotes. This tree allows the reporter to further edit the metadata, for instance by including an inadvertently missed speaker or procedural element.

The second stage, that of editing, finds place on an editing screen which uses the Office 2010 version of Word as a database editor. This document contains the information about the procedural elements, metadata that cannot be changed in Word. Word is only used to type the text of speeches and interruptions in line with the audio. If for instance the reporter did all the work properly during a turn with votes, the document generated by VLOS doesn't need any further editing. When the reporter is done, he saves the Word file. After closing the editing screen and the forms page, VLOS shows the page with the turn documents. The reporter can then indicate that he has finished his part of the report and submit it to the editors by clicking the button named "finish". This part now becomes available to the first editor, who checks spelling, typos and other errors. When the text editor has finished proofreading, he submits the part of the report with a mouse click to the following editor, who is specialized in the procedural part of the report. He checks if all the formal statements are correct. As soon as this has been verified, he clicks the "finished" button.

This part of the report is now ready for publication. The editor can generate the report to be published, after which publishing is just a matter of clicking a button. The provisional version of the report is sent to the website of the House of Representatives via the network and is immediately available to the public. In VLOS the document is available in various formats. It can be opened as a Word-file. Also a preview of the HTML-publication on the web is available.

**Ms Marianne van Gool** wonders what will happen if the system goes down. Is there any way of working outside VLOS?

Mr Herbert Houdijk answers that technique can be vulnerable. If the systems fails, the re-

porters switch to another, slightly outdated system. However, the reports have to be reproduced in VLOS 2.0 to be able to publish it.

**Paul Hadlow** wants to know how much time is involved with this kind of development.

Mr Herbert Houdijk answers that the Dutch Parliament started an e-program in 2004. It was about that time that the first thoughts on VLOS appeared. It took a lot of conceptual work before an operational VLOS version, VLOS 1.3., was introduced in September 2011. In June 2013, VLOS 2.0 went live. More techniques will be made available. Speech recognition amongst others is knocking at the door.

**A member of the audience** wants to know more about the correction website.

Mr Herbert Houdijk explains that the MPs who spoke in a debate get a link for their use only by email. Opening this link gives them access to their speeches and interruptions, with some context, on the correction website. The link is valid for 24 hours and gives the MPs the possibility to propose corrections in their words. Suggested corrections are highlighted in the text. After 24 hours the website closes, after which the Dutch Parliamentary Reporting Office decides whether these correction proposals are agreed upon.

**Mr Arjan van Hessen** asks if there is the option of audio-visual feedback in the correction website.

Mr Herbert Houdijk thinks that this suggestion will attract too much focus on the differences between the audiotape or videotape and the written report. This feeling may however change in the future.

**Mr Jacek Gilarski** asks if video on demand on the basis of the metadata is an option. Can the text of a report also be linked with video?

Mr Herbert Houdijk assures that it is possible. There is already a website by the Dutch Parliament called DebatGemist (MissedDebate). The public has access to videos of all plenary sessions. VLOS data is used for the search machine on this website. VLOS can also be used as a metadata system for archiving videos. It is ready for the future! Linking the text to video has already been successfully tried by Mr Arjan van Hessen.

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel** adds that it has only been done as an experiment. It is not a service open to the public yet.

**Ms Lida Hordijk** asks how the reports are archived.

Mr Herbert Houdijk explains that the Dutch Parliamentary Reporting Office is not responsible for the archives. However, there is a program under way on using digital archives.

**Ms Lida Hordijk** wants to know if this means no more contributions to the classic Handelingenkamer (Reports Library) in the buildings of Dutch Parliament.

Mr Herbert Houdijk explains that the Handelingenkamer only has some historic meaning left.

**Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel** thanks Mr Herbert Houdijk, Mr Matthijs Bakker and Mr Arash Ahmadi for their presentation. She also wants a round of applause for **Ms Kimberly Turnage** and **Mr Daniël Tuijnman** for voluntarily subtitling on site.



# Closing

*Ms Rian Schwarz-van Poppel*

The two IPRS sessions surely have been a success. The next IPRS meeting will be held in the autumn of 2014. The location is still not clear. Keep in contact on the IPRS website and Facebook!

**6.30 p.m. Closing**