

Translating, the art of

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Translation is much more than rendering in the words of one language those of another. Machine translations are still crude, but machines of other kinds can assist a translator's work. In the past three decades translators have become much better organized, and help is available with most of the peripheral aspects of their work. The author prefers indexing his own translations to translating the original indexes. Often the reviewer of a translation seems not to notice that it is one.

Translating is one of several activities that have been described as 'the world's second-oldest profession', perhaps a reasonable claim in view of the recent discovery in Syria of a 3000-word bilingual dictionary on clay tablets dating from about 2500 B.C. Since that time, translators have been continually in action, devoting their minds and their pens (or styli . . . word-processors) to the task of expressing ideas in a different language, whether from the Bible or from a bill of exchange. Until about 1950 they remained so many almost isolated individuals, pursuing their trade with the aid of their knowledge of language, their grammars and dictionaries, and whatever cargo of information and ability they had been able to acquire.

There is still a large measure of ignorance among the general public about what translation involves. Many seem to think that it is not much more than copying, with words being translated one by one into another language. This accounts for the brief success of the ludicrous portable machines known as 'hand-held translators', which purported to be able to translate sentences from one language to another by just such methods. It also helps to explain why translating machines in general are still producing only crude results from unprepared text after a quarter-century of expensive research.

In the recent past there has been important progress in two areas. One is that translators can get access—at a price—to machines that will inform them much more rapidly and completely than conventional reference sources about established equivalent terms, and also to machines (the ineptly named 'word-processors', which are really text-processors) that facilitate the preparation of a fully corrected final text of the translation.

The other development is that translators are now much more organized. In Britain, the Translators' Guild Ltd. (founded 1955) and the Translators Association (founded 1958; part of the Society of Authors) provide

contact between translators, and a common front in dealing with publishers and others whose interests do not always coincide with those of translators. Both are member bodies of the *Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs* (founded 1953), which has similar functions at the international level.

The Translators' Guild, which has about 350 members, is concerned mainly with non-literary translation. Membership is now available only by passing a qualifying examination, but the Guild also admits as affiliates any persons interested in translation as a profession. There is an Index of Members, with addresses and qualifications. The Translators Association, some 200 strong, elects members who have had a translation of a book published. Further information can be had from the respective addresses:

Translators' Guild Ltd., 24A Highbury Grove, London N5 2EA;

Translators Association, 84 Drayton Gardens, London SW10 9SD.

Although indexing is not such an ancient activity as translating, the two have points of similarity, as K. G. B. Bakewell has noted (*The Incorporated Linguist* 20 (2), Spring 1981, 73). We translators are likewise concerned with such problems as bringing about good relationships with publishers and authors, communicating with those who need our services, charging appropriate fees, maintaining quality (although the objective assessment of the quality of a translation is still not at all an agreed process), and recommending standards of presentation (as in British Standard 4755: 1971, *Presentation of translations*).

Translators, as well as indexers, no doubt, have to deal sometimes with writings that contain errors of fact or imperfections of style. The translator dislikes transmitting such defects in the translation, but does not feel inclined to do a job that was the original author's task; however, the translator expects to get the blame for any shortcomings that remain in the translation. The answer depends partly on the purpose and nature of the job—sometimes the original author can be consulted, some translations can perfectly well be accompanied by translator's notes—but there is often no fully satisfactory solution.

Should one translate the index (if there is one), or

index the translation? I am not aware of ever having seen this point discussed. My personal practice (for textbooks of physics and astronomy) is to index my own translation, no doubt inexpertly, from the page proofs, then to check the original index for anything I have missed, although Russian index entries such as (I translate)

Law, Boyle's

—Ohm's

—of thermodynamics, second

do not impel me to follow their example. In any event, I have never received any comment, favourable or not, on

my twenty or so translation-indexes . . .

The Indexer has a regular and admirable section of extracts from reviews in which indexes are mentioned. Perhaps reviewers in general are moderately competent to judge the quality of an index. In a review of a translation, on the contrary, it is rare for the reviewer to understand and have access to the original, fairly rare for him to make any informed comment on the quality of the translation, and common for him to praise the writing as if it were the author's, apparently without noticing that the work is a translation—but perhaps this is the greatest possible tribute to the translator's art!

Government interest in the provision of information

Two reports on the future development of libraries and information services have been published as a single document by the Office of Arts and Libraries.¹ Both reports come from the Library and Information Services Council, which was set up by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 as the Library Advisory Council for England and Wales.

In surveying the existing provision of information to all sections of the community, the Council reports a lack of coordination in policy, in planning and providing services, and in utilizing to mutual advantage funds derived from different sources.

Remedies for this state of affairs are put forward in the second report. It is now essential, the Council says, to consider the development of libraries in the context of information services generally, to promote co-operation, and to make the greatest possible use of the new technology for the capture, processing, and communication of textual information data, particularly by means of electronic publishing.

Giving instances where lack of funding to institutions may be disastrous for services dependent on them, the Council says it is important that the future financing of library and information services should be reviewed more coherently within the framework now emerging for coordinating national policy, and goes on to indicate opportunities for 'pump-priming' with government funds that might be most beneficial.

The implications for manpower and training of the developments foreshadowed in the report are noted, and 'point to the need for a thorough review of current educational provision and future requirements'.

The final section of the report lists specific topics in need of more consideration leading to practical decisions, and sets out the Council's recommendations concerning them.

Indexers, as providers of information—and in the process themselves also needing access to information—

will find their lives affected by the changes here proposed, particularly if their daily work is centred in libraries. Wilfred Saunders, writing about the new LISC, of which he is chairman, stresses the need for 'individuals and organizations who comprise the library and information community to bring forward to the OAL and the council problems and issues which need attention'.²

The UK Government's responsibilities for scientific and technical information services have been set out in an article under that title by John Gray, Special Adviser on Information Services to the Minister for Arts and Libraries.³ The article details the responsibilities, the machinery for handling them, including specific organizations and agencies, and the Government's links with other organizations and activities.

1. The future development of libraries and information services. 1. The organizational and policy framework. 2. Working together within a national framework. London: HMSO, 1982. 47 p. 30 cm. (DES Library and information series no. 12) ISBN 0-11-270542-1. £4.50.
2. *Library Association record* 84 (3) March 1982, 103-104.
3. *Aslib information* 10 (6/7) June/July 1982, 167-70.

M.P.

Public Lending Right

The Public Lending Right Scheme 1982, under which authors are entitled to receive annual payments in respect of loans of their books from public libraries in the United Kingdom, has been brought into force by Statutory Instrument 1982 No. 719: *The Public Lending Right Scheme 1982 (Commencement) Order 1982*. (HMSO, £2. ISBN 0-11-026719-2.) This order implements the Public Lending Right Act 1979.

The timetable for the implementation of the Act requires the collection of records of loans at a number of designated libraries to begin on 14 June 1982; registration by authors of their books eligible under the scheme to begin on 1 September 1982; payment to authors at the rate of 0.5p for each loan to begin 1 July 1983.