

Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities
Congrès des sciences sociales et humaines
1999 Congress - June 2 to 13 / Congrès 1999 - 2 au 13 juin
Université de Sherbrooke & Bishop's University
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE TRADUCTOLOGIE
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSLATION STUDIES

*THE IMPORTANCE OF SUBTITLERS AND TRANSLATORS IN A
MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY (A COMPARISON STUDY OF THE
SITUATION IN AUSTRALIA AND IN PORTUGAL)*

1.A) INTRODUCTION.

Today, Australia has over 162 different ethnic communities and 92 official community languages. Communication through official interpreters and translators is accredited by NAATI, a government-funded body; thus, the cultural identity of each group is preserved. Culturally, the colony started with people coming from England and 26 other countries.ⁱ At the time of white colonisation, there were over 600 Aboriginal dialects, of which only 250 of them survive in some manner. Intertribal marriages were the norm for socio-economic preservation of tribal identity. History has left a gap on the role played by interpreters and natives, vital for the development of the Australian colonies. All we know is that Governor King published cartoon-like messages explaining legal and penal rules and that colonial rule has brought the demise of many a dialect.

It is calculated that only 10% of the aboriginal population speak one of 250 tribal dialects. Of those, 160 are extinct or spoken by a minority of elders. Of the remaining 90, only 20 dialects are spoken daily by young and old alike and transmitted to next generation. Another 70 are almost extinct, and of all surviving dialects, half can count on between 10 and 100 people to articulate them.ⁱⁱ While native languages die, community languages are still growing.

A government report in 1996 states that the Australian linguistic diversity is one of the most remarkable results of its Immigration policy. In 1991, 15% of the population spoke a language other than English. This number has now doubled. Native languages disappear while schools teach LOTE (languages other than English), which became community languages, instead of *Arrernte*, *Warlpiri*, *Wiradjuri*, or other.

Better to be a translator in Australia today than in Japan of yore where one was forced to kneel and become entrepreneur in the black market. Not many chances of any of us being arrested, charged with spying or treason or sent to the pyre like Etienne Dolet, in 1546. Yet, even with FITⁱⁱⁱ creation in 1953, and

the Nairobi Recommendation of 1976, translators were murdered because of Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses".

Many translators still see the profession as passive and non-creative, but academia has started to pay less attention to fluency than to factors such as creative realism. Australia has led the world developing a genuine national linguistic policy with six national reports between 1978 and 1992. In 1995, royalties started being paid to authors of translations used in libraries, similar legislation was passed in Portugal only in mid 1998.

English has, in my lifetime, replaced French to become the universal *Lingua franca*, yet continues to be notoriously rich and diverse, as Sir Winston Churchill pointed out: "*English and (North) Americans are the same people divided by a common language*". "*English has displaced many native languages*", as pointed out in David Crystal's Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language "*being a threat to British languages such as: Cumbric, Cornish, Norn and Manx (of Isle of Man), but is becoming more and more replaced by its north American variety*".

When a language starts growing, it creates communication barriers, nominally having more speakers but fewer people able to inter-communicate. Take for instance, classical works of clear and pure language, such as the **King James Bible** (1611), works of **Shakespeare** (1590-1612), or the Portuguese **Camoens**: more words mean more confusion, less clarity. The **Bible** had approximately 8,000 words, **Shakespeare's**, or **Camoens'** vocabulary 30,000; **Johnson's** 1755 Dictionary had 40,000. Today's family sized **Oxford** Dictionary has 100,000 and the bigger Oxford tops 500,000. Due to the specificity of information technologies, specialists today can only communicate with their counterparts, leaving most people out in the cold. This has become our major hurdle as translators, when converting into languages with a lesser degree of specialisation the detailed description from the language of origin.

When one reads in English, Portuguese or any other language, original works of **Dostoyevsky**, of recent Portuguese Nobel Prize **Saramago**, of Colombian Gabriel **García Márquez**, or the Egyptian **Naguib Mahfouz** (less than half his works are translated into English and only four into Portuguese), one has to ponder the relevance of our expert colleagues *tradutores*, capable of meandering into the relevant minutiae of Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic to give us their equivalent in shades of English, Portuguese or other language.

Recently, an updated computer translating aid was able to render the colloquial "*out of sight, out of mind*" in its Russian equivalent as "*blind idiot*". 'The Boston Globe' reported, in 1998, sales of a '*hair remover*' in Russia being promoted as '*hair tonic*' to the despair of all new bald people.

In every four or five words of Hindi, one is English. Of 600 hundred words added to Portuguese in Brazil, October 1998, most already had an equivalent without the need to anglicise. On the other hand, Australian policy has been to simplify daily English into very Plain English.

Languages have to go back to basics and be taught as such at school, in order to promote social equality. In Australia, those who use *LOTE (languages other than English)* at home have lower employment rates, and this is mainly due to their lack of English skills.

B) EQUITY, ACCESS, DISCRIMINATION

The (Australian) anti-discrimination Law of 1977, states that is illegal:

- *To discriminate because of race (including nationality, country of origin or descent),*
- *To prohibit anyone from using his/her language at work or school, and*
- *To demand total fluency of English without an accent unless that is inherent part of the work duties.*

Another vital area of I/T is Health, where life and death has sometimes to be decided instantly, and especially in psychiatry when relatives serve as interpreters only to discover sensible and confidential information that should be kept from them. Australia facilitates interpreters and translators for most situations and most languages, having dedicated multilingual officers even in minority languages such as Khmer (Cambodia), Laotian, Farsi (Iranian) and Tagalog (Filipino).

AUSIT's policy (Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators) in its 1992 manifesto, "Invisible Interpreters and Transparent Translators" clearly states that: "***The lack of knowledge of non-Australian cultures is behind most racist attitudes in Australia.***" The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Report on Racial Violence stated that there were enough anti-discrimination State and Federal laws but the results have not changed.

C) TRANSLATION MODELS

Those who normally write about Translation, base it on a model where the translation process is a transference or conversion of meaning. "*Translation is basically a change of **form**...transferring the **meaning** from the language of origin to the destination language. This is done through a movement from the **form** in the first language to the **form** on the second language, through semantic structures. It is the **meaning** which is transferred and should be kept constant.*^{iv}"

From this arises the question of splitting **form**...and **meaning**. A long tradition coming from Aristotle splits them, in the conception of a linguistic signal having a meaning. This tradition refers to contents of a word or text, treating language's **form** as clothing for ideas, assuming that what was said in a

language is translatable and expressible in another. Such universally accepted traditionally has never been irrefutably proven.

Saussure's^v analogy "*Language is like a sheet of paper: thought on one side, expression on the reverse*" provides an alternative. Here, one cannot isolate one from the other.

"Translators know they are crossing the bridge to the other side, they do not know what bridge they are using. Sometimes, they return via another bridge and start anew to check everything again. Every now and then, they fell off the parapet and stay in limbo. There is much smuggling and surreptitious evasion, apart from wilful discarding of unwanted uniforms or embarrassing difficulties."^{vi} Here is a curious metaphor of getting across from a language or culture to another, instead of the more traditional conversion or transfer model. The same can be seen in Haas^{vii}: *The translator does not transfer wine from a bottle to another. Language is not a receptacle and there is nothing to transfer..."*

Let us not be carried away by formal models and picturesque metaphors. In Australia, as in other parts of the world there is ample debate on the role of interpreters and translators. On courts of law, interpreters are warned against acting as defence lawyers of an accused or witness, to interpret what is said without leading their clients in an answer, which has to be spontaneous. These are legitimate worries but one has to question the legal ruling of '*must interpret or translate no more, no less than what is said*'. Languages differ between them, some rich, florid, and complex where there are no formal alternative expressions for standardised universal meanings.

Some theoreticians promote translation models where **meaning** can be extracted from a text and reinterpreted into another. They may as well consider a translator as a mere driver of messages, from one language to another, from a formal linguistic expression to another. Finally, they may conclude that to be a translator, one does not need to have special skills and expertise. Apart from being inexact, this is highly dangerous.

Language in itself is a tool for political purposes, yet Australia has only one official language and none of the problems of countries (e.g. Belgium, Spain, and Canada) where linguistics and politics are often mingled. Policies that encourage community languages help their preservation and are a source of enrichment of the community as a whole.

Many times, what is in question is the acuity of translators and their skills to interpret in a true psychological, historical, emotional, and cultural sense. Australian professionals are both analysts and creative interventionists, and they must have a gamut of *general knowledge* well above average, coupled with specific knowledge in a variety of disciplines.

Contrary to the rest of the world, I/T in Australia started with volunteers after the War and today, the right of an interpreter is legislated for most stances of life. The first case dates back to 1885 when the Supreme Court of Queensland dismissed a homicide case against four aborigines because there were no interpreters. Most recently, courts have ruled (1983, 1987, and 1991) "*natural justice can only be served by the availability of interpreters*".

This availability of I/T services creates more social equality not only for basic needs as health and welfare, but legal ones as well. It all started in the 70's when mechanisms were introduced for the accreditation of professional interpreters and translators. Of 161 community languages, 92 have accredited professionals. In recent years, successive governments have introduced user-pays concepts, reducing free services to a minimum. The national Telephone Interpreter Service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, there is a national multilingual network of radio and TV and a national accreditation authority (NAATI) to test prospective candidates. The market is saturated for major languages and lagging for minority languages, including aboriginal dialects.

NAATI tests at international level, demand a very high level of proficiency in written English although sometimes minority languages have not enough qualified people to test the prospective professionals. Of over a thousand professional translators in Australia, only a handful that I know survives on that. Many professionals have contractual links with government agencies but cannot survive on that alone. Even the professional body AUSIT (Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators) has long abandoned its policy of suggested rates. Not even the government agencies accepted them, and many of us had to revert to other more lucrative occupations. Freelancers end up accepting every job, never completing specialisation in any given fields, but the few who have specialisation in the technical fields where demand is high enjoy booming revenues. Academics or authors, instead of translators, do literary translation in Australia and budget trimming in the past decade has left many professionals in limbo. New openings derive from changes in the influx of immigrants. The next Olympics in 2000 will provide a bonus for many professionals, although thousands of volunteers and people without formal qualifications will represent the bulk of workers.

D) SUBTITLING

Subtitling is the written translation of a linguistic message from a source to a destination, free from body and facial language, it is also an exercise in listening, interpreting, translating and reproducing exactly everything in a concise, brief and significant way subjected to time and space limitations. When subtitling, one doesn't have enough time to tell everything he/she heard, having the superhuman mission of translating specific images and cultural context, with skills that include literary analysis, script writing, empathy and awareness of cultures, languages and sensitivity for cultural issues in a multilingual and multicultural Australia.

SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) TV was created in 1980 and provides programming in almost every community language in Australia using subtitling instead of dubbing. Its biggest difficulty was to adapt rigid guidelines: each subtitling line has 26 characters (including spaces) and has to last for a minimum of three seconds. Not everyone in the various languages speak the same way (some shorter, some longer, some faster, some other slower). The most difficult task is the lack of equivalence of certain cultural images:

2. A) LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER

In the beginning of the 90's, three alleged Nazi collaborators from Ukraine were presented to criminal court in South Australia under the jurisdiction of Commonwealth Law for War Crimes 1945, amended in 1988. One case was dismissed, the other did not reach court proceedings, and a third was exonerated on medical grounds.

The prosecution based its case on evidence presented by thirty (30) Ukrainian witnesses brought to Australia. Many were aged, fragile health, low educational standards and from rural background. They had never left their rural surroundings; their villages and their lives were centred on fields, gardens, and animals. They were flown to Australia with the expectation that they could narrate what happened in their areas of residence forty years before.

Although they were willing to co-operate and provided important forensic evidence during investigation, they faced disaster when confronted with the Anglo-Saxon juridical and criminal system. They became frustrated, frightened, and unable to comprehend the court decision or, how this was reached. It was like putting them on a mass production line, entering, and leaving not knowing what they went through.

Since this group was large, it was a good representative of problems with interpreters and interpretation, namely the lack of response of the judiciary system to appreciate the close relationship between cultural origins and a court deposition. It was clearly demonstrated in this case that the role of a court interpreter could not be to reproduce literally, and faithfully a mirror image of what was said. In the above case, this provoked a communication breakdown between the parties. A considerable number of cultural and linguistic differences became visible because of this trial and do not confine themselves to Russian and Ukrainian.

In 1992, the Supreme Court finally recognised the fundamental right to a just trial with full access to translators, in recognition of the multicultural characteristics of the Australian society. In 1991 ('Adamopoulos versus Olympic Airways') the courts have ruled:

" The mere fact that a person speaks English fluently enough to perform his/her duties, serial work or run a business does not automatically imply

that he/she is at ease with responsibilities and obligations imposed by being a witness on a Court Case."

This was later confirmed with new State laws in New South Wales in 1995, and in other States. Before these laws, there were many examples of injustice due to the absence of interpreters.

2.B) AUSTRALIAN PROSECUTION OF WAR CRIMES. EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES

English is based upon sentence structure, whereas Russian is based upon ideas and concepts. For instance, there is no Russian equivalent to "**privacy**" and "**identity**", since those concepts did not exist in Russian. Each language has its own system; just imagine that in Russia, the supreme criminal authority is the prosecutor and not the judge. When a prosecutor takes a case to court, in Russia, the accused can consider him/herself automatically guilty. In the Australian War Crimes Case, the witnesses never thought of being counter interrogated and stopped being co-operative.

In the Australian War Crimes Cases (1992-1995), it was *discovered* that many words had no translation into Russian or Ukrainian. The same happens when translating legalese into Portuguese: *solicitor, barrister, witness box, QCs (Queen's Counsel), Advocate, Barrister, Attorney, Notary, affidavit, bail, Bill, Act, Statute, Law or Code*, whose meaning implies a full explanation of the legal and judicial Westminster-based system in Australia. This can become a trap for any interpreter/translator, and the mere option between two words can jettison listeners into a wrong direction.

Anglo Saxon culture tries to separate rational from emotional and if a witness becomes emotional that is considered negative. In Russian culture that shows how genuine and spontaneous the witness is. A controlled witness would be non-genuine and negative. Witnesses were questioned in a distorted way. The Anglo-Saxon emphasis is on precision: year, month, colour, time, day, distance, etc. Russian culture is not so precise and is more worried with aspects of memory. Witnesses used their own system to answer, but this was taken as being imprecise. On the question "*what month?*" the witness replied according to his/her own reality (agriculture or religion) "*the week after Easter*", or "*when the apples were ready to be harvested* or, "*when it was lunchtime, meaning sun height*".

This was the same evidence they would have provided forty years ago, but now it was being treated sceptically due to its lack of precision. Most perturbing was the formal way of inquiring "*I put to you...may I suggest*", sentences were clearly not understood, "*can you tell me?*" eliciting "*Yes, I can*". Both in Russian and in some aboriginal languages there is tacit agreement "*If you want me to say X, OK, then I say X*"

For instance, in Russian culture (and Aboriginal, among others) visual contact (eyes in the eyes) constitutes a challenge, whereas for Anglo Saxons lack of visual contact means a negative attitude from the witness (lie, evasion, etc.)

Questions should have been short, specific, concise, and not based upon a monolingual culture.

There are strong indications that numerous people ARE behind bars because they did not impress on the jurors, or because they had to rely on interpreters. On the other hand, interpreters are under crossfire from lawyers and judges to translate literally all that is being said, what becomes evidently unjust.

3. HOW THE MEDIA SEE US. SOLUTIONS TO SOME OF OUR PROBLEMS

Media in Australia has an above average appreciation of the profession, because in the past thirty years government policies created an awareness of cultural identities, anti-discrimination and ethnic identity. Quite often, professionals are called in to help edit or translate in magazines, radio, and TV. Curiously, mainstream print media journalists tend to call us '*ethnics*'. They either do not have an ethnic background, or do not know where they came from or where they are going. Pity them, poor fellas: they must be ET's from outer worlds just been transplanted into our ethnic world.

In Portugal, professional translators began becoming recognised especially since people discovered that for Saramago to receive the Nobel Prize people actually had to translate his works. Occasionally, you see a translator mentioned on some literary pages. In the past four years since I settled in Portugal, many people showed surprised at how one could earn a living doing translations. They do not envisage anyone but a secretary doing translations.

The disregard we suffer in many areas is exclusively attributed to us. We tend to be non-affiliated with major associations. We work mostly in isolation, retired from the public view. When a few of us helped found AUSIT, a little more than a decade ago, we had to suffer from government and public alike, since no need for such an association of professionals was perceived. In Australia, we tend to be self-regulatory and in the past couple of years organised many international fora, including FIT's 14th World Congress in 1997, our Code of Ethics has been revised and is very comprehensive now, we have a permanent member on the board of FIT and we have won some major concessions from government in a time of curtailed free services.

Our access policies have granted us good media coverage in Australia. In Portugal, unless you are well known in a specific field and then if you also do translations the subject might be aired: not because you are a translator, but just how come that you also do translations? My advice would be for people to associate and congregate in national and international organizations and associations so that, as a professional class we might be counted in and heard. Until then, you only need translators when you move into a country where your B languages are of no use.

Every country needs a language policy, but how many actually have one? That has been our first national demand. A market plan established for the

appropriate accreditation of I/T professionals (the Australian model can be quite useful) would allow us to concentrate on the availability of qualified professionals. A strategic planning encompassing national education, training, and career path, has to include provision for the profession. NLLIA (National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia) has developed national strategies that might be useful for countries where the profession is less developed. Bear in mind that at some time, in the past we were also mere beginners and amateurs.

Quality is as important as availability. NAATI and AUSIT in Australia have created standards and recommended professional guidelines. This is only the beginning for a full registered board of interpreters and translators as it happens in some sectors of Australia and in some other countries. The Sydney Olympics in 2000 will improve our public stand in Australia, only if government, private agencies, and companies recognise the importance of our cultural and linguistic role in a global market.

Appropriate training has to bear in mind the real world where we live: impossible deadlines, less than perfect conference settings and equipment, high production rates at extremely high standards, various and sometimes conflicting destination markets, interpreting in front of a cast of a thousand hostile eyes without recourse to background material, and ethical constraints.

Knowledge of modern technologies from PC's to modems, Internet, translating programmes for more repetitive and low-key tasks (avoid repeating AltaVista's disaster trying to translate Kenneth Starr's report). Computer-aided translation, translation pedagogy, history of translation, subtitling and publicity translation are grey areas not included in most current courses, yet they are essential for people like us to survive in the current globalisation arena.

Our clients are beginning to demand ICQ instead of zipped e-mail, our budgets have to be stretched continually to update our fast decaying operating systems, hardware, and software). We became typesetters, artists and illustrators, terminology managers, walking encyclopaedia of bits, bytes, ROM, RAM, Eudora's, Pegasus, Netscape's, and Explorers. Yes, we are creators too and explorers of worlds, words, cultures and languages.

Being a native speaker might help but is not necessarily a perquisite to be a good professional or an efficient teacher. Previous experiences sometimes mean much less than what it sounds. If you are only an academic, you can hardly compete with someone active in the marketplace. Most people still have erroneous conceptions about us, and the mere linguistic knowledge is not always synonymous with a competent ability to interpret or translate. I might be fluent in some languages but would not even dare try to translate a brief sentence.

There must be an *interface*, between training and professional work. We also need more research on aspects currently not included in theoretical teaching

and in practical techniques. Postmodernist, postcolonial, feminist lexicology and politically correct terminology are also to be addressed.

In Europe^{viii}, many languages are going through revivalism from Ireland's Gaelic, to Friesian, Gallician, Catalan, and Basque. In October 1998, Portugal accepted a second official language, the *Mirandês*, spoken in Miranda do Douro. In Australia, many dialects have been reborn in the past decade. In East Timor, the colonial language of Portugal became a language of resistance against the oppression of the new colonial rulers, Indonesia. Indo European languages have been prevalent so far, but let us not forget that within a couple of decades; Asian languages will become spoken by a majority of people.

One last bit of good news: if you think of moving to Portugal remember that a literary translator earns between \$2 and 14 US dollars a page, but in Australia you may get at least ten times more...

Author's Motto: Quality translation and interpreting are worth their weight in gold^{ix}

i Greece, Italy, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Austria, Canada, Gibraltar, Holland, Hungary, India, Madagascar, Mauritius, Poland, Russia, Sweden, USA; West Indies, Cape of Good Hope, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Persia, Portugal and Latvia. According to the records of the First Fleet who disembarked on January 26, 1788.

ii In Aboriginal Australian Encyclopaedia

iii FIT International Federation of Translators, Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs.

iv Larson, M. L. "Meaning based translation: a guide to cross language equivalence", University Press of America, Lanham 1984

v De Saussure, F. "Cours de Linguistique Générale" Editions Payot, Paris 1972, p. 157.

Recently, within this line of thought, Halliday's new concept of meaning and lexicon-grammar rejects the notion that language is a system of forms with linked meanings arguing that lexicon-grammar embodies semantics.

Another theoretical point is the representation of meanings, irrespective of language of origin or destination. Even if one can extricate or de-link meanings from the original text how does one represent it? If meanings can be extracted from the form of a language and re-expressed in the form of another language, this represents a third form of expression or representation, irrespective of origin or destination. For limited purposes, logical and mathematical representation can provide such metalanguage, yet no one has developed a comprehensive, intensive and satisfactory system, capable of representing the extralinguistic meaning. Representation of knowledge is a serious problem in artificial intelligence and NLP (Natural Language processing). A final problem arises because all these theories being expressed and written in a natural language like English. "Translation within a language is not different from translation between two languages."^v Other translation models do not need to extricate meaning from form text to represent it independently, understanding it as a creative process or a cross-cultural event.

vi Palmer, F. R. ed. 'Selected Papers of J. R. Firth' 1952-1959, Longman, London, 1968 p.197

vii Haas, W. "The theory of translation" Philosophy 37, 1962, p.228

viii William of Orange, in 1575 rewarded Leiden inhabitants with the choice between fiscal exemption and a University for their effort in the 80-Year War with Spain. Leiden is today one of the oldest universities. How many of our contemporaries would today opt for a University?

ix Bibliography:

Journal: Antipodean (1997/98), The Australian Translation Journal, Australia

Journal: The Bennelong (1993-1998), Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators