

OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION MONOGRAPH TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER

TRANSLATORS and INTERPRETERS put the meaning and idiom of a text or a speech into the corresponding idiom of another language in such a way that the translated version conveys all the information of the original without distortion and makes the same impact on readers or listeners.

History, importance and scope

Translation has always been essential to communication between peoples. Bilingual glossaries on clay tablets have been found at several archeological sites in the Middle East. Commerce, cultural exchanges, and therefore progress would have been impossible without translators.

In Canada, the British North America Act has provided for the use of both English and French in our federal courts and in the proceedings of the Parliament of Canada and the Québec Legislature. In Parliament, speeches are translated orally at the same time as they are being given, while "Hansard" (the daily report of the debates) is translated overnight for publication the next morning.

The Official Languages Act and other socio-political developments have expanded bilingualism until translation has become essential to the workings of every department of our national life. Until the 1960s the Government of Canada employed at most four hundred translators. Today it employs more than twelve hundred full time, the great majority translating between English and French, but some of them dealing with German, Japanese, Russian, and many other languages. Provincial governments in Québec, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan have their own translation services. CBC translators help bring us the news; those of the National Research Council enable our scientists to keep up to date with research in distant parts of the world. Business and industry also require translators. Some corporations have enough translating to occupy workers full-time. Others call in freelance translators as need arises. Québec's decision to make French its working language has increased the need for translators there.

Last but not least there is literary translation, undertaken either as a labour of love or by contract with a publisher. Until 1970 most translations of Canadian books had been done outside Canada, but special Canada Council grants to publishers are reducing this anomaly. Literary translation requires creative artistry, which virtually makes it a different profession from administrative and commercial translation. There are only a few Canadian literary translators.

At a rough but conservative estimate there are two thousand full-time translators in Canada as well as well a many part-timers.

Nature of the work

Broadly speaking there are two kinds of non-literary translators: those who translate written texts (commonly called translators) and those who translate the spoken word (commonly called interpreters). As the work is quite different, the two will be discussed separately.

Translators: Letters, legal documents, scientific reports, newspaper and magazine articles, educational textbooks, political pamphlets, cooking recipes, technical specifications –all may require translation. In general, freelance translators have to be prepared to tackle a wider variety of texts than their salaried colleagues who deal only with the documents of a particular ministry or corporation. However, some freelancers specialize too. There are medical translators, financial translators, legal translators, and so on.

Whether the original is well or poorly written—and the latter is often the case—the translation should be *well* written. At very least it must be idiomatic and free from any errors in grammar, spelling, or choice of words. At best, it should be impossible to tell that it is a translation and not an original text by a competent author. In the training of translators as much attention is paid to writing style as to the study of languages.

It follows that translators work best into their mother tongue. However, they may sometimes be asked to translate into their second languages. In that case their task will be harder and slower, and their copy, should be checked by a native speaker of the second language.

Translators must understand completely the content of what they are asked to translate. Their basic tools are dictionaries, technical glossaries, encyclopedias, and other reference works; but often the only way to clear up ambiguities is to consult the original author or other experts. Specialist translators have often had training in their field. For example, a medical translator may be a doctor, a legal translator a qualified lawyer. All translators must be well read, and stay abreast of new concepts which may crop up in the texts they work with.

Translators must also keep their readers constantly in mind. They must be aware of changes in everyday language. Television commercials must sound as persuasive in the new language as in the original. Translations of laws must be precise. Translations intended for readers abroad may require the use of different terms and spellings from those used for Canadians.

The first draft of a translation should always be reread, compared with the original and corrected, and the style polished either by the translator or by a colleague.

A translator's work is arduous, but also stimulating. New knowledge, novelties in the language, add interest daily. Each text presents challenges to understanding and expression. There is a skilled craftsman's satisfaction in hammering out a translation which exactly reproduces the original nuances in a natural-sounding style. If it seems "funny French" or "funny English," it is flawed.

Good translation cannot be cheap. A clumsy translation can ruin a corporate image or make a laughing stock of a politician. Also, good translation takes time. Some clients who are prepared to pay high prices still expect results too fast for the job to be done conscientiously.

What is the French for "computer software," or the English for "informaticien"? Our languages are in constant and rapid evolution. Even dictionaries cannot keep pace. The latest supplement to Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* lists 6000 English words coined since 1961.

This "vocabulary explosion" has created the job of the *terminologist*. There are about 200 full-time terminologists in Canada, attached either to translation departments or to the Québec French Language Board. Furthermore they have begun to store their work in "terminology data banks," so that translators across the country can have access to it through computer terminals or in the form of printouts.

A much older category within the profession is that of *reviser* or *reviewer*. Revisers are highly experienced translator-editors who correct and polish the work of their less experienced colleagues—or even of their equally experienced colleagues since two heads are always better than one.

Interpreters: For every twenty jobs in translating there is only one opening for interpreters. Perhaps it is better so, because even fewer people have the aptitudes for interpreting than for translation.

By definition, interpreters process the *spoken* word. Beyond that, the major difference from translation arises from the fact that interpreters have to perform their task instantly, on the spot, and often to large audiences. Indeed in the kind of interpreting preferred in Canada, interpreters listen to the speakers through earphones and say their translations into microphones *at the same time*. This called "simultaneous" or "conference interpretation." Imagine doing it live for an audience of hundreds, concentrating, so as not to miss anything the speaker says, with never a pause to look up a dictionary! This is a far cry from work of the patient translator surrounded by reference books in a quiet office. Interpreters, like actors, have to overcome stage fright. No matter how specialized the terminology, how mixed the speakers' accents, how inspiring or how flat, how clear or how rambling the speeches, the interpreter must carry on—and accurately. International misunderstandings have been caused by interpreters' slip. Other kinds of interpreting include "consecutive interpreting," in which the interpreter makes notes of what is being said and translates it *after* the speaker has finished, and "escort interpreting," in which the interpreter acts as guide and translator to an individual or small group. Another branch of the profession is "court interpreting," between judges, lawyers, officials, and witnesses at trials. Here again the responsibility, is obviously heavy.

Few translators want to switch to interpreting, and many interpreters dislike translation. Nevertheless some do both.

Working conditions

The typical translator works at a desk in quiet surroundings, with a typewriter or dictating

machine and a telephone by which to consult clients and authors. Dictionaries and other reference materials are close at hand. Large translation organizations have their own libraries and secretarial staff, even their own terminologists.

A salaried translator may be the only translator in the whole organization. In this case, working life can seem little lonely. Usually, though, translators work in teams. Owing to the nature of the work, colleagues are people of good education, from many backgrounds, and with varied intellectual interests. Job security is good. The biggest Canadian employer of salaried translators is the federal government.

Salaried translators usually work normal office hours, with some overtime when there are documents to be handled urgently. Parliamentary translators, and press translators in newspapers and wire services, must work late into the night. Freelances usually work at home. They enjoy more freedom and variety, but must impose their own discipline on themselves.

Work is measured in terms of the number of words translated. Salaried translators are expected to translate average number of words each day. Freelances are paid by the word. The actual number of words a translator can process each day can vary from a few hundred to several thousand, according to the difficulty of the text and to the translator's experience.

Literary translators are all freelances.

Freelances may obtain work and payment directly from clients, or they, may depend on agencies which channel work to them in return for a commission. Good agencies can protect clients by quality control of the translations. A few agencies employ revisers, but for the most part freelances are expected to supply perfect copy.

Simultaneous interpreters are supplied with the best working conditions possible to minimize distraction. They usually work in a soundproof booth listening to the speaker they are interpreting through earphones. They work in teams of two or three so that each one can take a rest after about half an hour's work. Yet the mental strain is great.

Other interpreters work "on their feet" under whatever conditions the working situation brings.

Interpreters must be prepared to travel. For example, the 1976 Olympics brought 90 interpreters together in Montreal, half of them from abroad because Canada could not supply enough in all the languages used. Interpreters' travel expenses are reimbursed in addition to salaries or fees.

Qualifications necessary for Entry and success

Translators must enjoy normal good health in order to provide reliable service—and this in spite of leading an entirely sedentary working life. They often have to meet unreasonably close deadlines set by people who do not understand how much care their work needs. They must therefore be able to work under pressure.

Because they are often called upon to translate texts in subject areas with which

they are unfamiliar, translators must possess the initiative and know-how to locate background information. One psychological test has suggested that translators' interests are close to those of research workers. They should be willing to share their knowledge and experience with colleagues—and be prepared to ask colleagues for help in solving the problems that arise in their own texts.

Translators must know at least two languages fluently. But above all, they must have all the resources of their own language at their fingertips. Here we must emphasize the art of writing: many people can speak a language fluently without having learned to write it well.

Interpreters naturally do not need the polished writing style of the translator. But they must be at least as aware of the world about them. They must be able to think clearly and quickly "on the spot"—and have nerves of steel.

Preparation needed

Until recently, most translators received no professional training. Many came from related fields such as journalism or language teaching. However, as elsewhere, the tendency is toward a more formal and exacting professionalism. Although it is still not essential, many employers now ask for a university degree.

Several Canadian universities offer full-time bachelors' programs in translation: Moncton, Quebec at Three Rivers, Laval, Concordia, Montreal, Ottawa, Queen's, Laurentian, and British Columbia. Laval, Montreal, and Ottawa also offer masters' programs. The main languages in all these programs are French and English, with German in addition at British Columbia. Laval, McGill, Montreal, Quebec at Hull, and Toronto (Woodsworth College) also offer part-time studies leading to a diploma.

Programs, including some in literary translation, are available in several universities in the United States. There also some famous schools in Europe.

The professional associations have also started to play part in training, by arranging evening and weekend courses and workshops for their members who want to keep up to date or specialize.

But courses are not enough without practical experience. Translators really need to do an "internship" like doctors and lawyers, but under present circumstances it may be hard for a beginner to find that first job. Several of university programs include on-the-job training periods. The Government of Canada offers scholarships to encourage Canadian university students to join its Translation Bureau, where they are given further training. There is a competition each December for these scholarships. For further details, write to: Training Division, Translation Bureau, Secretary of State Department, Ottawa K1A 0M5. A few other large translation services take on beginners occasionally and place them under experienced revisers for a time. Helpful revisers can contribute much both in knowledge and in enthusiasm, and can show how to profit from criticism instead of being discouraged by it.

Foreign-language training: Students who wish to become translators in languages other

than English and French face a particular problems, since no Canadian university offers a full professional program in any foreign language. Majoring in a given language does *not* by itself prepare one to become a translator.

Most university studies in Canada are structured along disciplinary lines, that is, a language student will take courses only within the language department. However, the working translator has to cope with problems which are interdisciplinary. A young translator between English or French and a foreign language wishing to find employment in Canada must have specialized knowledge in at least one of the following subjects: economics, finance, law, geology, medicine and biochemistry, zoology and botany, physics, agronomy.

Foreign-language students wishing to become translators are urged to seek further information from either the Vice-President (Foreign Languages) of the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario, or the Multilingual Services Division, Secretary of State Department, Ottawa.

Interpreters have trouble getting appropriate training in Canada. The Secretary of State Department Translation Bureau trains a few of its own translators as interpreters for Parliament, where there are about 50 interpreters working in the House of Commons, the Senate and the various committees. The universities include some interpretation courses in their programs, but not enough. There are, however, a number of specialized schools in the United States, in Europe, and in Japan. So Canadian students often go abroad for this training.

Employment, advancement, outlook

Until university courses were set up, Canadian translation needs could only be fully satisfied with the help of immigrants. There are still good openings in Canada and abroad for *competent* translators, but employers and clients are becoming more selective. Opportunities are particular good for translators who are also specialists in technical fields such as agriculture, medicine, or law.

The Translation Bureau of the Secretary of State Department is by far the biggest single employer of translators, handling some 75 different languages in-house and through freelance. Entry is by competition.

Other job opportunities in both the public and private sectors are frequently advertised in the careers sections of leading newspapers, especially in Montreal and Toronto. Canada Manpower centres too receive some requests. Knowledgeable employers often send job announcements to the professional translators' associations for circulation to members—one of the benefits of belonging to an association.

Freelance agencies are listed in the Yellow Pages under "Translators & Interpreters." They usually set their own tests. Direct entry into the freelance market can sometimes be obtained by showing prospective clients samples of one's work.

Conference interpreters work in teams. Therefore, freelance interpreters are coordinated by team leaders. Clients seeking freelance interpreters do so through a team leader or through an agency. A contract is signed for each meeting.

Many translators and interpreters, including some Canadians, work for international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (Montreal), the United Nations (New York and Geneva), NATO and the European Economic Community (Brussels). However, most international organizations differ from Canadian ones by requiring that their translators know at least *three* languages. They hold their own recruitment competitions.

Remuneration

In 1979 Canadian translators command starting salaries of around \$12 000, which may rise with experience to over \$25 000. Freelances ask 6 to 15 cents a word, depending on the languages and on the degree of difficulty of the text. Salaries and freelance rates in a few European countries are as high, but in most other parts of the world—including the United States—they are lower, often much lower.

The employer supplies the salaried translator's office and equipment dictionaries, dictating machine, secretarial services, etc. Freelances have to supply their own.

It is not surprising that interpreters are well paid. Like translators, they may be salaried or freelance. Salaries in 1979 start at about \$16 000 a year in Canada, while freelance conference interpreters charge \$230 a day. These fees may seem heavy, but it is even more dangerous to engage unqualified interpreters than it is to dally with amateur translators, because in interpreting, there is no chance of revision.

Professional associations

There are three provincial associations of translators in Canada, the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), the Society of Quebec Translators (STO) and the Corporation of Translators and Interpreters of New Brunswick (CTINB). They co-operate nationally through the Council of Translators and Interpreters of Canada (CTIC). Literary translators have their own national association, the Canadian Society of Literary Translators. Each association publishes a directory of members.

The associations have done much to raise the standards and the status of translators in Canada. Membership conditions vary from one association to another, but all three provincial associations hold an annual examination under the auspices of the CTIC for the diploma of Certified Translator. There are also student memberships for beginners. More and more employers—other than the Government of Canada, which holds its own entrance competitions—are specifying membership of a professional body.

The Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario also holds accreditation examinations for interpreters. But since much of their work is international, many interpreters belong to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), which is headquartered in Paris.

At the international level, the national associations affiliated to the International Federation of Translators (FIT), which co-operated with UNESCO in drawing up the Nairobi Recommendation, a sort of world charter of translators' rights. The fit sponsors

the magazine *Babel*, and organizes a world congress of translators every four years – in 1976 it was held in Montreal.

It is in every translator's interest to join a professional association and help uphold its standards. There are short-term benefits in the form of contacts with colleagues and potential clients or employers. There are also long-term benefits that arise from belonging to a profession that has a recognized status.

For further information

On the profession in general:

Translating. I. A. Finlay. London: Teach Yourself Boook, 1971.

On technical translation:

Scientific and Technical Translation. I. Pinchuk. London: Deutsch, 1977.

On literary translation:

The Art of Translation. T. H. Savory. Paperback edn. London: Cape, 1969.

On interpreting:

The Interpreter's Handbook. How to become a conference interpreter. J. Herbert. Geneva: Librairie Georg, 1968.

On the differences between English and French as seen from the translator's viewpoint:

Deux langues, six idiomes. I. de Buisseret. Ottawa: Carleton-Green, 1975. (Obtainable from the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario.)

This G.C. Occupational Information Monograph in the present revised edition was prepared by the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario. Edited by C. L. Bedal. First published in 1973. Revised and republished in 1979 by the Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, 1000 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4W 2K8, and © by The Governing Council of the University of Toronto.