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TRANSLATION:
A SPECIALIZATION, A PROFESSION

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When I was invited to deliver this opening speech, Mr. Henry Awaiss, whom I wish to thank for this honor, asked me to address the theme of this colloquium "Translation: Training, Specializations, Professions". I accepted his gracious invitation without hesitating, for, in my mind, there can be no doubt that the translator is a professional. My task would not have been quite so easy had Mr. Awaiss asked me to define other more complex notions such as "signifiance", the "poetics of translation" or "fidelity". I will therefore attempt, in the short time I have here, to dispel some of the fallacies and diehard preconceptions going around out there about translators and I will strive to demonstrate that translation, when practiced by *qualified specialists in the field of inter-linguistic communication* and not by amateurs, is a profession in and of itself. I will base my argument on the following four topics:

1. the *nature of the tasks* assigned to translators;
2. the *sui generis training* required by this field;
3. the *distinction* between didactic and professional translation; and
4. the *professional recognition* afforded to translators in certain countries.

Robert Le Bidois wrote: "Of all the liberal professions, it is perhaps that of the translator that enjoys–if we can use the word–the very least credit" (in Delisle and Lafond 2003). Despite the fact that it has been practiced for millennia, translation as a trade or profession is largely misunderstood, mostly because it has evolved through time. The old ways have not disappeared, however, and this adds to the confusion. We think we know

what a translator is. The truth is that we have only a vague and incomplete notion. The worst informed still confuse translators (who trade in *written* communication) with interpreters (who trade in *oral* communication). Others think that being bilingual is enough to claim the title of professional translator. How many bilinguals and self-proclaimed "translators" out there believe that translation is only about languages and that a couple of good dictionaries suffice to produce a translation of professional quality? *Most people believe that if you are bilingual you can translate. That's about as true as saying that if you have two hands you are automatically a concert pianist* (Anonymous). Just as knowledge of a mother tongue does not alone make a writer, knowledge of a foreign tongue does not automatically ensure competency as a *professional* translator. The linguist Michael A. K. Halliday wrote some forty years ago: "*[…] translation has to be learnt by [the ambilingual[1]] as a distinct operation; it does not follow automatically from the possession of two sets of native language habits. […] Even those who approach or attain true ambilingualism are still usually unable to translate without instruction*" (Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens 1965: 78). Finally, we often hear that a translator should show insatiable curiosity, scientific rigor, intellectual integrity and resourcefulness. This is true, but not only of translators. The same is expected of other professionals. It is not by listing these types of qualities that we are going to prove that translators are professionals. Let us take a closer look at where things stand by examining first of all the nature of the tasks assigned to translators.

[1] An "ambilingual" is what interpreter and professor (ESIT, Paris) Christopher Thiéry called "a true bilingual" (Thiéry 1976), meaning "a speaker [who] has complete mastery of two languages and makes use of both in all uses to which he puts either" (Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens 1965: 78).

1. The Nature of the Translator's Tasks

As Daniel Gouadec pointed out in a recent work, *Profession: traducteur* (2002), the profile of the professional translator has changed greatly in the last twenty years. This evolution–we might even call it a mutation–began occurring in the wake of the personal computer, translation and office tools[2] software, digitized reference materials and the accelerated communication made possible by the Internet and e-mail. The democratization of these tools and these new modes of communication have meant radical changes in the way translators work and have modified as well the expectations of those who hire them. Knowing that the translator is equipped to do more than transpose a text from one language into another, clients soon began assigning them new tasks.

Nowadays, a translator defines himself according to his specialization (or specializations), the languages he masters, the direction in which he translates and his professional status (salaried or independent) equally. The map of the profession displays a great diversity of functions, many of which did not exist a mere twenty years ago. And most of these tasks could constitute professions in and of themselves. The professional translator is now a jack-of-all-trades. Or, rather, a *jill*-of-all-trades, for the overwhelming majority of translators are women, although more and more men are entering the profession (Gouadec 2002: 26-27).

These dramatic changes in the language service industry have forced us to redefine the translator. In his daily functions, he puts his knowledge and his talent to work for private businesses, public institutions or publishing houses. To keep pace with the changing

[2] Terms with an asterisk are defined in the Appendix.

demands of the market, today's professional translator[3] must, given the circumstance, be able to accomplish a good many of the following tasks. I've grouped them into two categories: *a*) tasks we might qualify as "traditional", and *b*) tasks involving the use of computers.

a) Traditional tasks:

adaptor (of texts)
bilingual editor
director of projects*
document researcher*
editor (capable of *rewriting*)
ethnologist (the translator is an *inter-cultural mediator*)
job trainer (supervising and directing interns)
linguist (having an extensive knowledge of the language)
linguistic consultant
manager (who needs notions about accounting and marketing)
phraseologist*
proofreader
quality controller*
re-reader
reviser
terminographer
terminologist
translator in the traditional sense

b) Tasks involving computer use :

computer software and materials manager
cybertranslator*
macro-command editor
micro-editor*
model or format designer*
on-line reviser
operator of office tools (ex.: word processing software)
operator of various digitized resources (ex.: translation memories*)
post-editor*
post-translator*
pre-translator*
software adaptor*

[3] This applies above all to translators of pragmatic* texts, the specific category of translators and translations I am addressing here. This may not apply in the same way to the traditional literary translator, but this remains to be seen.

software localizer*
technician (managing software and hardware)
translator of web pages
video technician (if need be)
web designer
website localizer.

This enumeration alone conveys the complexity and the variety of the tasks accomplished by the translator in the computer age. The dosage varies, of course, from one translator to another and depends on many factors, allowing us to second Daniel Gouadec's observation that "translators practice the same profession, but do not get the job done in the same way" (*ibid.* 2002: 3; my translation). And the job no longer privileges the literary scholar or the linguist. It deals with increasingly specialized materials and increasingly technical fields. The computer, we have seen, is ubiquitous. And on this subject, I'll say the following: no translator is obliged to *like* computers, but all have a professional obligation nowadays to *master* the new technology, which is henceforth indispensable for anyone wishing to practice the profession.

The image of the translator sitting alone in his office surrounded by dictionaries and scratching away with a pen or pencil is less and less the reality. For twenty years now, the translator has been "in the game", moving about the playing field of the liberal professions, getting himself, the particularity and originality of his work noticed. He is no longer the invisible translator he once was. He is more and more a part of the communication process. He has become, to quote Daniel Gouadec's formulation, an *engineer in multilingual, multimedia communication* (Gouadec 2002:70), And this new translator, who is still a *specialist in inter-linguistic transfer* (with all that this implies), is becoming more and more a *teletranslator**, i.e. he works from a distance and is no longer necessarily obliged to work on site within the enterprise or organization that employs him.

The translator is therefore a professional in communication, first and foremost because of the specialized nature of his tasks, which require special tools to complete. On the subject of tools, I would add the following point, which I believe to be important: while there is no doubt that digital tools facilitate the translator's work and help increase his productivity and versatility, they are still only *tools, instruments, a means.* A mediocre translator will not become a good one just by entering the digital age. A computer teaches no more to translators about good translating than a pen does to writers about good writing. Like any other liberal profession, translation demands specific training, and the mastery of digital tools, however important, is but one aspect of this training. Erasmus said: " A man is not born, he is made". Which brings me to my second topic: training.

2. A *sui generis* training

The multiplication of forums, institutions and international exchanges, as well as the adoption by many countries of national language policies favoring minorities, have created worldwide a veritable translation industry and have increased the need for translators considerably. The translation industry is part of that vast industry we call the language industry.* Since the Second World War, schools of translation and interpretation have sprung up in most countries. And if these schools were created, it is because translation was judged fit to be taught at university as an autonomous discipline, as autonomous as literary studies, language studies, law or any other. It was acknowledged implicitly that teaching translation was not the same as teaching linguistics, philology, comparative literature or languages. To train professional translators, specialized departments were created within universities, distinct from the others. Personally, I have always found it deplorable that certain translation programs "latch on" to other departments like philology,

linguistics, languages and literatures. Within these two- or three-headed departments, translation is often perceived as the poor relation, that is, when it does not simply serve as a life support system, allowing these departments to attract more students and to avoid disappearing altogether. In this sort of "salvaging operation", we exploit translation rather than serving its cause. What would people think of a law program annexed to a history department? And I'll say nothing of those professors of philology, linguistics, or literature who end up having to recycle themselves as professors of translation. Can one simply fake it? Can one act the part of a translation professor like so many act the part of a translator? But I feel I'm getting a bit confrontational here, and I don't want to be drawn into any arguments. So let's move on.

True schools of translation are distinct from language schools, even if we acknowledge that translation programs do indeed strengthen language skills by developing the student's ability to manipulate written language in a diversity of communicative contexts. A school that teaches languages and claims to train translators by adding, for example, a few translation courses in the final year, is a school that misrepresents itself and deceives its students. By the same token, a school where students are taught languages and translation simultaneously is a school that does not understand the prerequisites involved in becoming a translator. These students run the risk of being ill prepared for the professional world. Throughout her entire career, Danica Seleskovich has insisted over and over again that "one cannot teach translation while teaching languages" (Seleskovitch 1983: 103), and she was right to hammer this truth home. Learning a language is like learning to read music, to make sense of a score, while learning to translate a given text, prepared in a specific way, conveying a specific message to a specific reader, is like interpreting a so-

nata before an audience. Both cannot be done simultaneously: reading and understanding always precede performance.

What makes a school of translation, one worthy of the name, distinct?[4] A great school of translation distinguishes itself, among other ways:

(a) in the *pratical* training it provides future translators;

(b) in the very clear *distinction* it maintains between language teaching and translation teaching;

(c) in its definition of the translator as a *language technician* whose task is to reproduce as accurately as possible the articulation of thought within discourse;

(d) in the little room it allows for *linguistic theories* proven by experience to be of little use for the training of translators;

(e) in the creation of *distinct programs* for translators and interpreters;

(f) in the *constitution of its programs*, which include, notably, courses for strengthening language skills (ex.: problems in language from the translator's perspective, differential lexicology, writing, comparative stylistics), courses for general development (ex.: economics, law, geography, history), many different practical courses in translation (ex.: general, specialized, the revision of translated texts), ancillary courses (ex.: documentation, terminology, translation theory, the history of translation) as well as courses designed to instruct future graduates in the manipulation of the computer tools that will be part of their future work appointments ;

(g) in the organization of vocational training or *internships* in the workplace;

[4] I am purposefully leaving aside the important area of research carried out in these schools at the graduate level.

(h) in its ability to adapt to evolving *markets* and to keep up with its changing *needs*;

(i) in its close and sustained relationship with *professional associations* of translators;

(j) in the substantial number of courses taught by *members of the profession* (professional translators, revisers or terminologists), just as a medical school assigns courses to practioners in the field;

(k) in its efforts to help future graduates acquire *professional qualifications* and to facilitate their *integration* into the job market (Dubuc 1987).

To sum up, a good professional school teaches the *profession.* A tautology, perhaps, but one worthy of remembering. In these schools, the skills we wish to impart to students are *language oriented* (the manipulation of written language), *translation oriented* (techniques of inter-linguistic transfer), *methodology oriented* (document and terminological research), and *discipline oriented* (economic, legal, or medical translation for example) and *technically oriented* (the manipulation of translation and office tools software) (Roberts 1984: 172; 1985).

These skills are strikingly similar to those listed by Christiane Nord, who was teaching at the Institute of Translation and Interpretation of the University of Heidelberg when she wrote the following lines: "[…] *the essential competences required of a translator [are] competence of text reception and analysis, research competence, transfer competence, competence of text production, competence of translation quality assessment, and, of course, linguistic and cultural competence both on the source and the target side*" (Nord 1991: 235). It is evident here that the training of professional translators demands

far more than just language training, as important as this is. The enumeration of these skills brings me to my third topic.

3. Didactic *vs.* Professional Translation

Another misconception about the nature of professional translation is that it is fundamentally no different from translation in the academic context. I have demonstrated elsewhere in a comparative chart the difference between translation exercises practiced in a language learning context and the training practiced in a translation school (Delisle and Janhke 1998: 213-218). I don't have time to discuss this demonstration in detail, so I'll refer, if I might, to the work where this study was published, *Enseignement de la traduction et traduction dans l'enseignement,* co-edited with Hannelore Lee-Jahnke (Ottawa, Ottawa University Press, 1998). In my article, I list no less than 26 differences between these two types of translation, which have, in the end, very little in common. In contrast, I found no more than ten similarities. In the following presentation, I'll limit myself to five of the principal differences between didactic and professional translation.

DIDACTIC TRANSLATION	PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION
Pedagogical objective: acquisition of *language knowledge* (mastery of a second language)	Pedagogical objective: acquisition of *professional qualifications* (the competency of a specialist in inter-linguistic and intercultural transfer).
No demands regarding a particular *profession*.	The importance of preparing for *integration* into the translating profession.
Selection of various texts, most often *literary texts,* for the purpose of demonstrating a range of difficulties in translating (grammatical, lexical, relating to text genre, etc.)	Selection of various texts, most often *pragmatic texts,* for the purpose of demonstrating a range of difficulties in translating the type of text addressed in a *real work situation*.
Didactic translation is essentially a *means*	Professional translation is an *end in itself.*

to learn a language, to test comprehension.	It is a communicative act requiring at times the modification of the source text to meet demands other than the linguistic.
It is possible to translate without understanding everything, since the goal of the exercise *is to improve comprehension.*	One does not translate to understand, but rather *to help others understand*. *The most complete understanding possible of the source text* is therefore essential.

Translation is very much a specialization warranting specialized training in specialized schools. Translating is a demanding job with its own principles, rules, methods, meta-language, history and tools. Thirty years of teaching translation and reflecting on its pedagogy have convinced me. From the cognitive point of view, translation requires a *savoir-faire* (in interpreting and re-expressing the meaning of a text) based on a "savoir" or knowledge that is equal parts linguistic and encyclopedic. It is therefore neither a science nor completely an art, but a technique which, like any technique, can be learnt. The great schools understand this.

4. Professional recognition

My fourth and final topic, which will help me defend the professional status of the translator and his work, is the *professional recognition* translators have won in a few, yet still, unfortunately, all too few, countries. Canada is one of them. The law officially acknowledges the titles of "certified translator", "certified terminologist", and "certified interpreter" for the members of the professional associations of Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.[5] These titles are "reserved" for official members of these associations. In Quebec, for example, this victory was won in 1992 after thirty years of negotiations with government authorities (Delisle 1990). By certified members, we mean "professionals

[5] The administration of professions is under provincial jurisdiction in Canada.

who have either university training or many years of experience as translators, terminologists or interpreters. They are granted the title of certified members once they have passed an examination sanctioned by OTTIAQ[6]" (*Répertoire 2003-2004*) or have their application with supporting evidence accepted (apprenticeship program). Of course, anyone believing himself capable can translate. The law does not restrict the activity to recognized professionals, as is the case in medicine or law. However, those who do business with uncertified translators are taking a risk and may be unpleasantly surprised. Some believe they are being economical by hiring unqualified translators who work cheaply, only to discover in the end that this desire to save has cost them dearly. But this is another subject altogether: the education of the client.

As a member of a profession, the certified translator is held to a code of ethics detailing his obligations and responsibilities to the public, his client and his profession. The mission of the Order is to ensure and promote the competency and professionalism of its members and to protect the public. The OTTIAQ accomplishes this mission by placing a premium on competency, ethics, professional responsibility, transparency, cooperation, open-mindedness and innovation.

Conclusion

To conclude, we might recall that as early as 1976, UNESCO, in its Nairobi declaration, invited us to recognize "the principle, according to which translation is an autonomous discipline whose teaching should be distinct from language teaching and which requires specialized training" (UNESCO 1976). Translation is a profession in and of itself, and informed employers are demanding more and more that the translators they hire be certi-

[6] L'Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec.

fied members of a professional group or association, just as one would expect an accountant to be certified or an engineer to belong to an engineers association. Long considered a necessary evil, the translator is now consolidating his status as an indispensable agent of communication between different language collectives.

But there is still a long way to go, no matter where we are in the world, before the translating profession receives the recognition it deserves. Yves Gambier invites translators to strive for this recognition and for the visibility they still lack by integrating themselves into the processes of communication. I quote: "the image of the invisible translator, man of the pen, is being replaced with that of a translator, man of dialogue, who wins his presence by having his particular tasks and responsibilities acknowledged […]" (Gambier 2003: 16). The translator should spare no effort in maneuvering, as I mentioned earlier, within the professional playing field of communications. Moreover, this is another important aspect of the professional association's mandate.

I hope I've been able to convinced you that the translator is indeed a specialist in inter-linguistic communication. We must grant him this recognition and dispel the worn out, disparaging clichés that label him a *traditore* and help the misinformed tarnish his image. To sum up, I'll say that the translator is well and truly a professional because he accomplishes specialized tasks, because his training requires university study, because translation as a profession has nothing to do with translation as an academic exercise, and finally, because certain countries have already acknowledged the profession officially. Let's hope that some day all translators everywhere will win this acknowledgement. They deserve it. I thank you for your attention.

[Translated by Ryan Fraser, Ph.D. student, School of Translation and Interpretation, University of Ottawa. November 2003]

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Appendix

DEFINITIONS

Note: All definitions are conceived and formulated from the perspective of the translator and his work.

client
Person ordering a translation. The actual physical or moral person assigning a work to a translator or to a translation office.

cyber translator
Translator responsible for the live translation of transitory internet materials : electronic messages, mailing list contents, sections of on-line forms and even web site contents. (Gouadec 2002: 56)

digital graphic designer
Person who produces images using a computer (Termium Plus).

director of projects
Person responsible for defining, planning, piloting, monitoring and controlling the execution of a translation project (cf. Gouadec 2002: 419) .

document researcher
Person responsible for collecting information indispensable for the comprehension and the re-expression of a document to be translated.

language industry
Industry addressing all aspects of text information processing, be it written or spoken, including translation (terminology, interpretation, localization, translation tools), language courses, voice processing systems and the management of information (indexing and automated analyses, document extraction, answering questions, etc.). It includes as well the delivery of messages, aids for the handicapped, etc.

linguistic engineering
Techniques and procedures for the automatic processing of natural languages (Gouadec 2002: 422).

localizer
Language specialist (translator) responsible for adapting a product to a particular linguistic and cultural environment for the purpose of meeting a need and a market (Termium Plus).

micro-editor
Person responsible for manipulating, on a microcomputer, all digital tools and services used for publication. (Gouadec 2002: 425)

model/format designer
Person specialized in the presentation of the various elements of a printed document or a visual support (Gouadec 2002: 425).

office tools
Digital tools such as word processing software, with its spelling and grammar checks, word counts, etc.

phraseologist
Person responsible for documenting and processing the stereotypical expressions of a particular field, of a specific language material or sub-language (Gouadec 2002: 426).

post-editor
Language professional responsible for revising and editing machine translations.

post-translator
Person intervening after the translation and responsible for any further editing required on the translated material before its publication (re-reading or revision, formatting, digitizing, etc.) (Gouadec 2002: 426).

pragmatic text
Any text that is of generally immediate, short-term use, which imparts some information of a general nature or specific to a domain, and for which aesthetics play a very secondary role. (Delisle 2003: 62)

pre-translator
Person responsible for accomplishing all necessary operations prior to the transfer (analysis, documentation, terminology, etc.) (Gouadec 2002: 426)

quality controller
Person responsible for confirming that a product meets certain criteria for quality.

software adaptor
Person responsible for modifying the characteristics of software programs for the purpose of adapting them to new users, different from the initial users, with or without the modification or addition of functionalities (cf. Gouadec 2002: 417).

tele-translator
Translator practicing his profession at a distance (Gouadec 2002: 429).

terminographer

Person responsible for the inventory, collection, treatment, organization, creation, management and dissemination of terminology Gouadec 2002: 429).

translation memory

Data bank used in computer-assisted translation, including equivalence tables associating source language text segments with their target language equivalents. Serves as a support in translating repetitive language elements (phrases and phrase segments) and corrects and revises translated texts (*Grand dictionnaire terminologique,* Office de la langue française du Québec).

translation tools

Computer tool helping accomplish a translation related task. Software for computer assisted translation, bi-texts, concordances and translation memories are all translation tools (Delisle, Lee-Jahnke and Cormier 1999: 10).