

AUSIT in touch

Quarterly Newsletter of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators Inc
Volume 18, number 1 — Summer 2010



**New AUSIT media
2010 PD calendars
National Biennial Conference**



Member organisation
Federation Internationale
des Traducteurs
International Federation of
Translators

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Front cover photos: Main picture — The Qld Branch chat breakfast at Era Cafe in Brisbane involved much discussion and exchanging of ideas. Inset — The crowd at the 2008 AUSIT National Biennial Conference. See below and page 5 for details of this year's Conference.

From the editor

The deadline for the autumn issue is **10 May 2010**. Thanks to all contributors and the NC. Please send any letters, articles or images for forthcoming editions to:

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This newsletter is printed by Bounty Print and distributed by Mailing Matters.

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Important dates in local and international T&I

10-11 July 2010

NZSTI Conference

Christchurch, NZ

Queries: +64-3-332-7951

email ptuffley@xtra.co.nz.

26-30 July 2010

Critical Link 6

Aston University, Birmingham, UK

30 September 2010

International Translators Day

November 2010

AUSIT National Annual General Meeting

5-6 November 2010

'Synergise' AUSIT Biennial Conference

Registrations open January 2010

30 July 2011

Next FIT Statutory Congress

San Francisco, USA



- Stimulate the mind
- Enjoy the profession
- Interact with like-minded people
- Discover your colleagues
- Solve common problems
- Learn and teach
- Have fun along the way!

AUSIT Australian Institute
of Interpreters &
Translators Inc

Synergise!
2010 Biennial National Conference
Fremantle, Western Australia
5-6 November

For registration and further information www.ausitconference.org or call 0430 650 494

From the helm



President Sam Berner on the changes, challenges and choices facing AUSIT

Success is relative, and can be measured in various ways. At the risk of sounding smug, I would like to say that the National Council meeting we held in Brisbane on 6 February was a success.

There was a buzz in the atmosphere I have recently come to associate with AUSIT. For me it started about five years ago in Brisbane, when I discovered how much good stuff could be done with a group of people who shared one's vision and aspirations. The sensation was mine, but there were various other buzzes around me, and what happened was a bit of a short circuit, a few sparks, some electromagnetic charge, then the buzzing linked together to form the team which, with various additions, has been making waves in Qld ever since.

Then came the buzz in Victoria, with two successful biennial conferences and the inaugural awards night. The feeling never stays in one place, so the ferment flew to NSW, where the awards became national, and where Critical Link was an international event to remember. Qld absorbed the energy again and gave AUSIT the 2008 Brisbane Conference, while in Victoria the NC put the final touches to giving AUSIT the professional administration it badly needed. Infections spread — South Australia picked up the buzz for their inaugural D-Day Expo and the Industry Awards, and while they were at it, we saw probably the best marketing exercise yet by AUSIT: WA's invitation to the Perth 2010 Biennial National Conference. Meanwhile, a new AUSIT website is on its way (see page 6 of this issue for the new look) — one of many vibrant projects the current NC has inherited from its predecessor. Many states are busy preparing their Professional Development calendars (see pages 11-13 for details), in the Northern Territory there is talk of possibly hosting the next awards ceremony, while Tasmania will have its first ever Orientation Day in April. All hands on board!

This was also the atmosphere at the NC meeting. Our National Treasurer Diana

Rodriguez-Losada set the tone by arriving in her AUSIT t-shirt and baseball cap, sleeves rolled up. All ten attending members came to Brisbane full of ideas, with a resolve to move things forward, and full of news from their states. We could have held a two-day meeting, but instead opted for a single day — maybe to force ourselves to make decisions on the spot. It was so busy that people munched their sandwiches and tea while discussing the issues at hand, unwilling to break the spell of this atmosphere. The report from National Secretary Ilke Bruekner-Klein (see page 4) tells what was discussed and decided at that meeting.

As much as we enjoy working together, and whatever the amount of passion we put into what we do, we are not there yet. We are continually faced with changes and challenges, both at the personal level as practitioners, and at the industry level.

The global recession has not hit us badly, but we are seeing industry trends showing private businesses lowering their expenditure on translation by cutting corners — the issue of quality versus price has never been sharper. Outsourcing to overseas colleagues is also rampant, which mostly affects those among us whose competition charges less yet delivers excellent quality, simply because they have lower living costs. 'Crowdsourcing' will probably end up undermining our earnings faster than any achievements in the field of computer translation, though the latter is cropping up more and more on corporate and news websites. The trend to use translators as editors of machine-produced text is worrisome, as is the increasing use of Google translator for free as part of CAT tools in exchange for dumping our translation memories into their black hole, thus improving their machine translation capabilities out of our copyrighted material. AUSIT should aim to raise member awareness about these issues, and be prepared for the possibility of a very different market emerging in probably less than a decade. We cannot afford to be reactive.

On the other hand, there has been almost no improvement in the lot of interpreters working for government and community organisations in Australia and overseas. On the contrary, as funds become tighter, many overseas institutions are opting for phone translating, with practitioners working in little cubicles similar to call centres. This may be environmentally friendly (less driving), but is definitely not better paid. It will be interesting to see if something similar happens in Australia, and how feasible continuing to work under such conditions will be. Unless these interpreters are able to bargain for themselves as a group, I cannot see any changes to their income and rights. Most of them are not members of any professional association, are unaware of what these rights are, and are unsupported and often untrained.

The T&I Competencies Project, which we refused to endorse in November because of inherent technical problems with the material, is back on the discussion table. As this newsletter goes to print, I will be flying back and forth between Canberra and Brisbane attending the new working group as the only representative of the industry. These are sensitive times: if we get the competencies wrong, we will be stuck with nationally endorsed training which does not provide practitioners with what they need. If we don't get any competencies, we will be stuck with no training for entrants, bar the few preparatory courses NAATI provides to those who plan to sit the accreditation exam. There is a strong push to have some sort of competencies package endorsed even if it is poorly done. AUSIT has the responsibility to ensure this does not happen.

Defining a successful organisation is a risk in an environment where communication between the membership and the Council is rare. NC cannot achieve success for AUSIT as a whole unless it hears from the members. I encourage you again and again to voice any feedback you may have, be it by email to admin@ausit.org, or by attending events organised by your local branches and speaking to your delegate. Council members want to hear you, see you involved, interested and buzzing. This is your organisation and the onus is on us all to make it into what we want it to be.

We can opt to be successful. AUSIT can be small and insignificant in the decision-making process, or we can take our fate into our own hands. The choice is ours. We can waste energy fighting the bogeymen on their own grounds, or build our own fortifications to ensure none get through. We have a choice.

I am sure we will chose wisely.

National Council up and running



National Secretary Ilke Brueckner-Klein reports on the busy first meeting of the new NC held in Brisbane in February

Dear Colleagues,

For the first time since the National AGM in Adelaide on 9 November 2009, your elected National Council got together for a meeting to discuss several items. The NC is communicating extensively online on a daily basis, and meets once or twice a year for a full day to discuss current matters in detail and to shape the future of our professional organisation. NC consists of President Sam Berner, Immediate Past President Sarina Phan, Vice-President Tea Dietterich, National Treasurer Diana Rodriguez-Losada, National Secretary Ilke Brueckner-Klein and Branch Delegates Tarja Karjalainen (ACT), Yveline Piller (NSW), Claudia Ait-Touati (SA/NT), Rona Zhang (Qld), and Andre Bevez (Vic/Tas). Patricia Will (WA) was unable to attend.

Our meeting started at 8.30 on a hot and steamy Saturday morning at the University of Queensland in St. Lucia, Brisbane, and by 5.30 pm our brains and stomachs were drained. Needless to say, a subsequent meal and further discussions at a local Nepalese Restaurant took care of that.

What were we up to in these eight hours? The agenda was quite extensive.

Firstly, the individual branch representatives presented their branch reports. Since only three months had passed since the NAGM, during which most of Australia is busy with work, family commitments and holidays, not all branches had a great deal of activity to report. Yet during that period a lot of energy was spent behind the scenes planning for the year ahead: budgets were drawn up, PD calendars were prepared and at least one meeting was held by each branch committee.

The reports showed there is a downward trend in the number of members in some branches. The NC will put its energy into not only recruiting more members, but also working on membership retention.

The voluntary Professional Development (PD) log-book system was introduced in 2006, and we are going to move gradually to a compulsory self-assessment PD log-book system. The PD committee, chaired by Eva Hussain (Vic/Tas) will provide more detailed information to explain how easy, flexible and even personally rewarding it is to gain the required PD points needed over a three-year period.

Our National Treasurer Diana Rodriguez-Losada has worked closely with the previous National Treasurer Louis Vorstermans to ensure a smooth handover of accounts. Louis' cooperation and assistance is greatly appreciated by the entire NC. Apart from managing and streamlining the accounts, Diana is also busy improving procedures. The plan is to ensure our national treasurer has an ongoing overview of accounts, while the respective branches will continue to be able to draw money to run local activities. This should free up time and resources at the branch level and make it easier for the national treasurer to manage accounts. Yveline Piller accepted the role of back-up signatory to support Diana and act in her absence.

On behalf of the WA Branch Diana also provided an update on 'Synergise', the Biennial National Conference, to be held on 5-6 November in Fremantle. She let us in on some exciting developments. The keynote speaker has been confirmed... and is straight out of Hollywood! Watch this space for more information. The WA Branch will soon upload more details onto the conference website regarding registration, the program and keynote speaker.

Alison Rodriguez (Qld), representing the Qualifications Committee, reported on the review of membership qualifications with the aim of ensuring uniform assessment of

membership applicants. She presented NC with an updated membership application form which will improve the administrative procedure. Furthermore, discussion ensued on how members with several languages will be able to display their languages on the new website once it has been launched. Yveline also presented the Qualifications Committee with work done by the NSW Branch to further facilitate and streamline the application process.

The Marketing Committee's Tea Dietterich spoke about setting guidelines regarding advertisements placed in the *AUSIT - In Touch* newsletter. While in the past the editor was responsible for deciding the placement of ads, from now on the Marketing Committee will be responsible for reviewing advertisements before they are placed in the newsletter.

Claudia Ait-Touati brought up the topic of how to motivate and engage members to actively participate and contribute at the branch level. If you are keen to contribute some of your skills and time to the running of your professional organisation, then please do not hesitate to approach any of your branch committee members or simply let NC know. You can contact us at admin@ausit.org. Each of us started somewhere without necessarily knowing what it was that we might be able to contribute. But by simply coming along to committee meetings and following the e-Bulletin and *AUSIT - In Touch*, you may find there is an area you are interested in.

Andre Bevez, Vic/Tas delegate, has done research on how to apply to the ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) for collective bargaining. While in recent years AUSIT has shifted towards promoting members as business people servicing the private sector, a large percentage of our membership still relies on government and community work. The pay and working conditions of these members need to be safeguarded. Legal advice will be sought on the matter.

Sam Berner, representing the Website Redevelopment Team, presented the design of the new AUSIT website (see next page). An overhaul of the current ten-year-old website has become essential. The new site will be more interactive and provide additional features. The Marketing Team is now working on the website content; some of the old content will be revamped, and new content will have to be written. NC will set up a sub-committee to work on the content as soon as the trial version is online.

NC looks forward to hearing from you. Should you have any questions or suggestions, please write to admin@ausit.org.

For the seventh time since 1999 the most prominent representatives of the translating and interpreting profession and industry come together for a weekend of sharing and learning at the 2010 AUSIT BIENNIAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE in November. This year the venue is the University of Notre Dame in the vibrant port city of Fremantle, Western Australia. Negotiations are progressing well to secure a high-calibre professor of linguistics from the USA as keynote speaker. Stay tuned.

The conference organising committee is requesting papers for 20-to-30 minute presentations, as well as proposals for workshops and panel discussions.

When offering a paper, please consider the conference theme of **synergy**. Your paper should explore, engage with, and illuminate some aspects from the following areas of interest:

- Technological advances in the translating and interpreting field
- Industry engagement with the T&I profession
- Quality assurance procedures
- Cross-cultural communication and training
- Professional ethics in practice
- Occupational health for translators and interpreters
- Provision of T&I services for rare and emerging language communities
- Indigenous language services
- Marketing and business management
- Training and competencies
- Continuing professional development and practitioner credentials
- Mentoring
- Policies and regulatory instruments

Go west!



Annamaria Arnall on behalf of the Biennial Conference Organising Committee

Some issues/questions presenters may want to address:

- Why some aspects of T&I techniques, technologies and theories are worthy of renewed attention;
- What are the most promising features of policy measures for achieving access and equity for linguistically diverse communities;
- How mutual benefit is derived from collaboration with professional T/Is within industry, commerce, state institutions, government administration, arts & science;
- What the best practices are for ensuring the highest quality delivery of language services;
- What resources are available to prevent messages becoming lost in translation;
- What needs in cross-cultural communication and training are still not being met;
- How to resolve ethical dilemmas in everyday practice (e.g. translators dealing with documents of suspicious or questionable origin; interpreters in situations where human rights may be compromised);
- How to deal emotionally with traumatic assignments, caring for your voice, and

positioning the computer and keyboard to keep fit when spending long hours sitting in front of them;

- What the latest challenges are in providing high quality T&I services for rare and emerging language communities;
- What the latest trends are in the provision of indigenous language services;
- How to market yourself as a free-lance translator and/or interpreter;
- The importance of learning to manage your own business;
- Training new practitioners;
- Finding resources for maintaining currency, increasing knowledge, honing skills and gaining CPD points;
- Mentoring as the best example of synergy; and
- Synergy in the field of T&I.

Please send an abstract of approximately 300 words of the proposed presentation together with brief biographical details to 2010AUSITBNC@inet.net.au by 31 May 2010.

Selected presenters will be notified by 30 June and will be asked to confirm their participation by 15 July 2010.

Trados and Macquarie Dictionary winners announced

Still aglow with the energy of the Excellence Awards, we are very pleased to announce that the winner of the SDL Trados studio 2009 licence was Katherine Stuart of Caulfield, Victoria. The valued licence was kindly donated to AUSIT by AETS. Katherine was a first time AUSIT event visitor and thoroughly enjoyed the events. Good onya Katherine! We are looking forward to welcoming you as a member. We would like to thank AETS, SDL/Trados, and particularly Hagen Issell and Linda LaCombe for their generous donations and support of AUSIT.

All attendees at the AUSIT Excellence Awards and/or D-Day will have received an email at the beginning of February notifying them of their six-month online license for the Macquarie Dictionary. You can access your subscription to Multilingual by visiting www.multilingual.com/promo. Enter the promotion code D94AUS in the box.

Claudia Ait-Touati
AUSIT SA/NT Branch Chair and
Principal Delegate

New AUSIT media

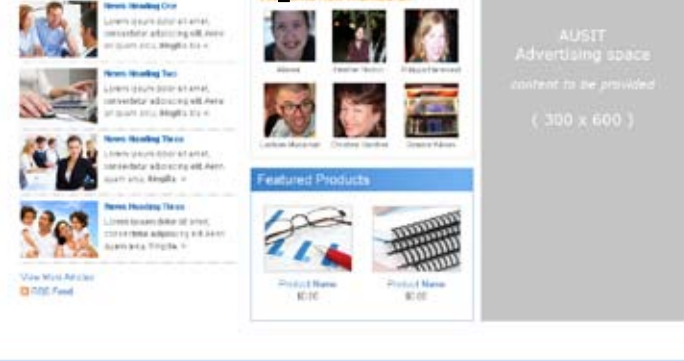
AUSIT QLD e-Newsletter *Talkabout*

In order to keep members better informed and connected, the Qld branch has decided to publish a quarterly e-Newsletter *Talkabout* (Jan-Apr-Jul-Oct). The first issue was released in early January and has received positive feedback from our members. Thanks to editor Alison Rodriguez. The e-Newsletter will not only be sent to our Qld members, but also to all stakeholders in Qld.

NSW Branch website

View photos of past activities and details of future events on the new NSW website <http://sites.google.com/site/ausitnsw>.

New AUSIT website — a sneak preview



The 'Home' and 'About Us' pages from the revamped design for the AUSIT website, unveiled recently by the Website Redevelopment Team.

E-Bulletin discussion

From AUSIT Admin To David Connor
1 February 2010

David,
Yoko is currently going through the membership application process ... Are you able to help by, say, posting this sort of question to the mailing list?

Phil Gerner

-----Original Message-----
Sent: 1 February 2010

I spoke to one of you earlier about an ethics dilemma I faced today and was told to send this email to you...

The dilemmas:

1. My client, a translation agency, asked me to sign translation certificates for each of the multiple documents I translated. The certificate was a separate document from the source or target document of the translation work, and it identified the source document very loosely, for example: Type of document: Ad. Version number: 1 The file name of the document was 'advertisement.doc', and the revision number in the "properties" of the file was revision number 3. It could have been revision number 3 by MS Word, but version number 1 for my client. As such, I could not establish that my client and I were referring to the same source document, and I felt queasy about signing a certificate stating that I translated the document correctly.
2. Also, I learned there actually were about seven almost identical documents, except

for the dates that appeared in them. What the client did was as follows: He sent me only one source document and a list of dates to translate. Then he put together 7 translated documents himself, and asked me to sign seven different translation certificates for 7 source documents... For dilemma 1, I changed the source file identification to my satisfaction; i.e. Type of document: advertisement, file name: advertisement.doc, authored by XXX, emailed on 29/01/2010, revision number: 3. And I signed the certificates. For dilemma 2, I signed only one translation certificate for the source document that the client actually sent me, and refused to sign the other translation certificates for six other source documents that the client said were identical except for the dates, but I did not personally see. ...I could perfectly understand what the client was trying to do: just save some translation expenses when the documents are almost identical, and still get translator's certifications for the translations. Could or should I have done anything differently? Warm regards, Yoko Onuki

1 February 2010

For (1), electronic copy: I would put the certification, translation and source in one document, and keep a copy.
For (1), hardcopy: attach translation and source document to the certification and

make a single document out of it. I don't think a loose piece of paper / file stating that a file with a certain filename has been translated holds much clout. For (2): correct, never ever certify something you haven't seen... Daniel Muller

1 February 2010

As far as I can tell, Yoko has done the right thing. The agency would have had to seek cooperation with the translator in doing what they attempted to achieve by railroading her. They were wrong in trying to slap it on her like that without giving her the opportunity to verify what she was signing for. It's unacceptable in my book. I insist on writing my own certifications and include the source document in what I certify. Lawyers, tax agents and business advisors do not object to that in my experience. (FWIW)

Kind regards,
Uli Priester

2 February 2010

Dear David,
Thank you very much for including me in this discussion before my membership has been approved. ... I appreciate your support.

Warm regards,
Yoko

The Kaleidoscope of practice: A snapshot of the translating and interpreting profession in Australia



Helen Slatyer AUSIT NSW
Branch Chair & **Jemina Napier**
(Macquarie University)

In 2007 AUSIT conducted a survey of the translating and interpreting profession in collaboration with ASLIA (Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association) and the AFDS (Australian Federation of Deaf Societies)¹. The following is a very short extract of the 155-page report on the study 'The Kaleidoscope of practice. A national survey of translators and interpreters'.

Some of you will remember completing the survey online through Survey Monkey in 2007 (though disappointingly only 89 of the 798 respondents were AUSIT members). The

survey is the most comprehensive of its kind, with a large number of responses (861 of which 798 were valid) and with 102 different items in the questionnaire designed to collect information on the linguistic and demographic profile, qualifications, income and nature of work of translators and interpreters, and their perceptions about a professional translating and interpreting career path, professional development and professional association membership.

Our aim in undertaking this research was to produce a snapshot of the profession

in Australia that was research based. Not surprisingly, many of the results confirm what we already know anecdotally about translators and interpreters such as the large proportion of female community interpreters in the profession and that by and large we are poorly remunerated for a profession we are passionate about.

Of the 798 respondents, 44% were interpreters, 34% were both interpreters and translators and 22% were translators, 59.9% were female and 28.7% were male².

We start young and keep going well past retirement age: the youngest respondent was 20 and the oldest 83 years of age. The largest number of practitioners falls into the 40-49 year age bracket. Translators and interpreters in Australia who responded to the survey come from 64 different countries, with the largest group (still only 7.3%) born in Australia. The second largest group came from China (2%), and the third largest from Lebanon (1.3% or 11 respondents). The largest working languages represented in

Translators, Interpreters & Both

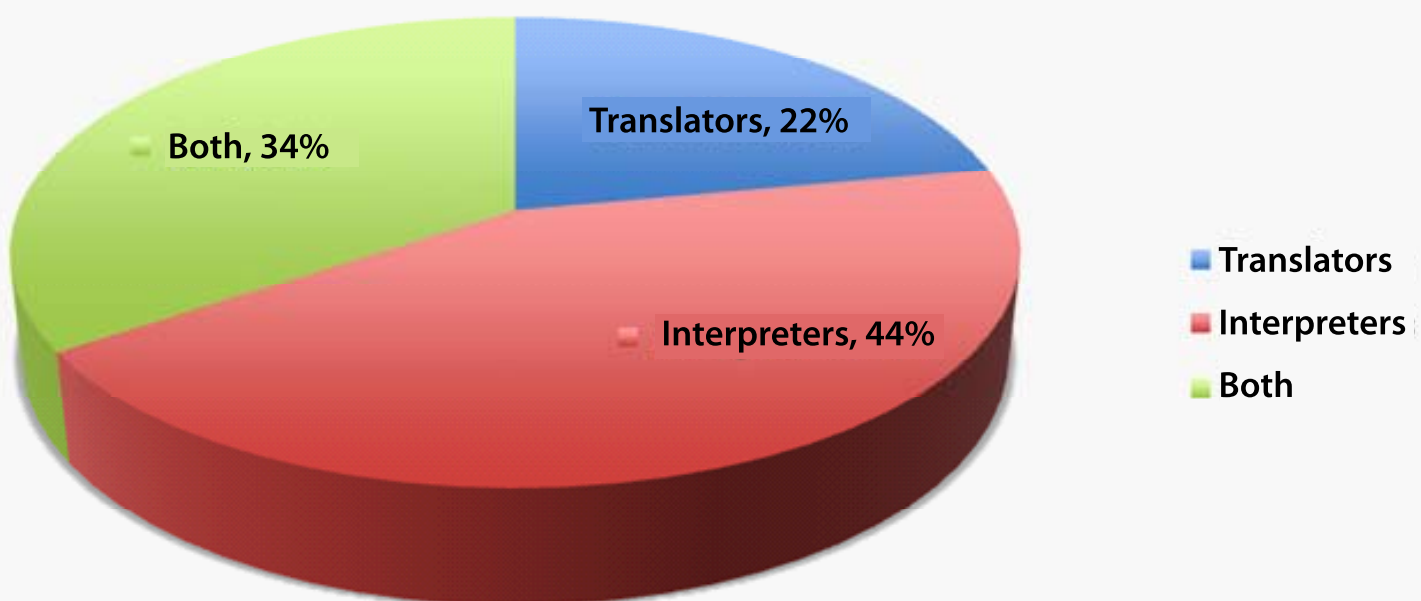


Figure 1 — Overall numbers of translators and interpreters

the data are listed in Table 1 below. A large number of languages were represented by 1-3% of the responses (such as Russian, Arabic, Japanese, Polish, Vietnamese, Serbian, etc), while 20% of the responses fell into the 'Other' group with only one or two people representing those languages. These included Scandinavian languages, the Baltic languages, Pacific Islander and some African languages.

Language	% of responses
1. Auslan	12%
2. French	11%
3. Chinese, Spanish	9%
4. German	7%
5. Italian	5%

Table 1 — Working languages

Translators and interpreters are generally well educated, with 54.8% having a university degree (not necessarily in translating and interpreting), although there is also a fairly large number who didn't complete high school (26.4%). Amongst the respondents with translating and interpreting qualifications, TAFE level qualifications are popular amongst interpreters, but university level qualifications (BA, MA and PhD) outnumber TAFE (52% compared to 48% of those with a T & I qualification). Ninety-two percent of respondents have some form of NAATI Accreditation or Recognition and 89.1% gave the reasons for obtaining NAATI Accreditation as 'Entry to the profession' or 'Recognition of professional status'. For the translators, 49 respondents had Advanced Translator or Advanced Translator (Senior) accreditation, and 318 had Professional Translator accreditation. For interpreters, 10 people had Conference Interpreter (Senior), 2 Conference Interpreter, 239 Professional Interpreter and 225 Paraprofessional Interpreter accreditation.

The employment picture is far from rosy, with only 11% of the 292 translators, and 9% of the 255 interpreters who answered this question having full-time work. Incomes reflect the part-time and casual nature of our employment, with the largest numbers of translators and interpreters reporting an annual income of less than \$15,000. The majority report that they don't have enough work to sustain full-time activity in either translating or interpreting. Despite this, 67.9% of translators and 68.8% of interpreters are either 'Very satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with their work. Translators are more likely to believe that they are adequately remunerated for their work than interpreters (18.4% of

translators responded they don't believe so compared to 10.9% who believe they are, and 19.6% of interpreters who don't believe so compared to 8.4% who believe they are). A small number of practitioners (both translators and interpreters) earn over \$50,000 a year from this activity. Many translators who commented that they believe they are adequately remunerated indicated that it was because they negotiated their fees directly with their clients and were able to obtain a good rate, rather than when they obtained work through an agency. For those interpreters who believe they are not adequately remunerated, this was not only because there wasn't enough work, but also because the hourly rates were too low. In addition to low rates of pay, many commented on the lack of recognition reflected by the poor working conditions. '[I want] to be treated with respect and paid adequately by my employer', 'Work is rewarding and stimulating but remuneration and conditions are insulting'.

A love of languages, linguistics and literature were the main attractions for entering the profession. Many also cited the attraction of earning additional income (to their principal occupation). Other reasons are the independence and flexibility of the work and the desire to help people understand each other.

These are some of the findings of the survey, there are many more that probe different aspects of the profession and what translators and interpreters believe about their work. The survey enables us to have a solid understanding of the parameters of the profession providing a platform from which to address the inadequacies of the current conditions in which many of us work. We can also learn from those who are entirely satisfied with their professional activity and have made a success of their professional activity.

'The employment picture is far from rosy, with only 11% of the 292 translators, and 9% of the 255 interpreters who answered this question having full-time work. Incomes reflect the part-time and casual nature of our employment, with the largest numbers of translators and interpreters reporting an annual income of less than \$15,000.'

1. The project was jointly funded by the partners with Macquarie University matching the total funding of the partners through a Macquarie University Collaborative Research Grant.
2. In this question 11.4% of the responses were invalid. Other questions were not compulsory, therefore the total number of responses or percentage of responses do not necessarily add up to 100%

<h2>Are you LinkedIn?</h2>		<p>Sometimes it's a small world, and that's what LinkedIn is about</p>
<p>The AUSIT group on LinkedIn is the perfect starting point for online networking. It also enables you to make contact with individuals outside AUSIT who are connected to your fellow AUSIT members. Joining the AUSIT group on LinkedIn is a fast track to building your e-network. Take advantage of your AUSIT membership. Joining LinkedIn gives you an instant community to grow your network quickly. Why wait? Get your online networking underway. To join just visit:</p> <p>http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=1933378</p>		

NSW Branch report



Yveline Piller
AUSIT NSW Principal Delegate

Over the last few months the NSW Branch Committee has been very active, starting on 27 September with our International Translation Day Picnic in Sydney, which was well attended despite the strong winds on Observatory Hill.

On 31 October Maurice Thibaux led a hands-on Wordfast workshop in the computer lab at Macquarie University. According to feedback from the 20 participants, the workshop was a great success.

In December about 40 members and partners met at a Greek restaurant in the

CBD, networking in a convivial atmosphere over a festive dinner.

At the National Council meeting held in Brisbane I had the pleasure of tabling 'The Kaleidoscope of Practice. A National Survey of Translators and Interpreters', a 187-page research report recently completed by NSW Branch Chair Helen Slatyer with Dr Jemina Napier, and co-funded by AUSIT and others (see page 7). Based on a survey of some 800 T & I practitioners, this work gives AUSIT's NC a clearer picture of the profession and its challenges.

Following groundwork done by the Qualifications Committee, NSW has also devised and proposed practical and simplified standards to help all branches approve new members more quickly and give more weight to qualifications other than NAATI accreditation.

As the national website is being redesigned, the President and NC were presented with a 12-page specification document outlining the back-end functions and improvements to all our administrative processes, from new applications, through to membership renewals, suspensions, electronic fora and other key functions.

From February NSW members can expect a smorgasbord of activities this year: the PD committee has compiled a program of monthly events, from academic presentations to workshops on practical topics for T/Is, all offering great opportunities to network, improve practice and accumulate PD points.

View them all on the new NSW website: <http://sites.google.com/site/ausitnsw>.

Join us at the next event!

Chat Breakfast — 23 Jan 2010

This was the first event I organised for AUSIT Qld in my new role as PD Coordinator so I wasn't really sure of what to expect. Initially there were problems booking the venue as our usual location was overrun by a cruise ship that day and many other cafés in the area either don't accept weekend bookings or groups of over 10. It turned out there were quite a few more than 10 of us, with 32 taking part in the end, making this the best attended AUSIT Qld Chat Breakfast ever.

The new location, Era Café, turned out to be wonderful, with good food and coffee and a lovely al fresco setting. We may end up moving our tri-monthly chat breakfasts here permanently!

I thought it fantastic to meet all who came along: the old and new faces, friends and colleagues, and of course the other dedicated members of our Qld Branch Committee Sam, Rona, Ita and Véronique.

The breakfast involved much discussion and exchanging of ideas, many questions were asked and answered, and I dare say a lot of good networking went on. Events like this remind me I am part of a vibrant, thriving, interesting and passionate profession, and all my wonderful colleagues only help renew my enthusiasm for it.

I have put together a jam-packed PD program for everyone this year and all events will be announced via e-Bulletin.

QLD's Chat Breakfast and Trados workshop



Alanna Wilson-Duff
AUSIT Qld PD Coordinator

There's really something in there for everyone, so get on board and sign up. I very much look forward to seeing you all at another AUSIT event soon.

Trados Workshop — 28 Jan 2010

AUSIT Qld's first workshop for this year went very well indeed: an excellent attendance of 20+ people listened as presenter Danièle Heinen provided us with three full hours of very informative insights into the workings of CAT tools, the CAT tool industry and Trados in particular.

The challenge for Daniele was the range of experience levels in the room — many of us had never seen or used the program before, whilst others were quite familiar with the software but wanted to refresh their knowledge and improve their Trados

skills. Despite this, I dare say everybody got something out of it and was able to ask the questions that had been keeping them up at night.

I myself have been using Trados for many years, but seeing as I only ever use it for a particular type of translation and for particular clients, I often go for long periods without opening the program. Consequently I have always stuck to the basic functions and never really delved into the more advanced operations the software can perform. I can definitely say I learned a thing or two and spent the following day putting them all into practice to keep them fresh in my mind.

I'm looking forward to our upcoming Wordfast workshop so I can compare.

Qld Branch report



Rona Zhang
AUSIT Qld Branch Chair & Principal Delegate

This report highlights what the Qld branch has been doing over the three months (Nov 2009 to Feb 2010) since the NAGM in Adelaide. It also lists what the branch has lined up for the rest of 2010, and details our work behind the scenes.

OVERVIEW OF BRANCH ACTIVITIES

AUSIT Excellence Awards — 6 Nov 2009

AUSIT Qld supported this important event, with a flock of AUSIT Qld members attending the Gala Night in November last year. The Organising Committee of the AUSIT Biennial National Conference 2008 was thrilled to win the 'Paul Sinclair Outstanding Contribution to AUSIT' Award for successfully hosting the event. The current committee is determined to continue the good work and team spirit which has become the benchmark of AUSIT events in Queensland.

ECCQ AGM — 16 November 2009

As a member of the Ethnic Communities Council of Qld (ECCQ), we were invited to their 2009 AGM. Previously we participated in the Council's working group to lobby the Qld government to fund interpreting services for a range of non-government organisations. After a year's hard work, the effort has been successful. We will continue to work closely with ECCQ and its member

organisations in 2010 to promote AUSIT.

Annual Branch Dinner — 26 November 2009

Committee members of the Qld branch got together at the local Polish Club before the big Christmas Holiday. This was an informal gathering and a great opportunity for the team to catch up with the latest news, celebrate our achievements, and reflect on the events of the past year. We also discussed plans for 2010, while some great ideas came to light over the dinner table.

Chat Breakfast — 23 Jan 2010 and Trados Workshop — 28 Jan 2010

See reports by Alanna Wilson-Duff, page 9.

Qld Branch Committee meeting — 29 Jan 2010

The first Qld Branch meeting for 2010 was held to brainstorm our PD and event plan for 2010, review the success of the ITAMEL project, check our finances, and work out budgeting. We also discussed the pros and cons of closing the Qld Branch bank accounts. This was a very productive meeting; most of the discussions are reflected in this report.

ITAMEL Project — 2 Sept 2009 to 24 Feb 2010

ITAMEL stands for 'Interpreter Training and Mentoring for Emerging Languages'. This interpreter training project was funded by

the Brisbane City Council and managed by AUSIT Qld. The training was designed for candidates from over 20 emerging languages (including Dinka, Nuer, Swahili, Hirundi, PNG Pidgin, Kriol, Wik Mungkan, TSI Creole, Hmong, Fijian Pidgin, Amharic, Karen, Tigrinya, Bislama, Cook Island Maori). After two rounds of interviews, 24 students were successfully enrolled. The weekly two-hour workshops covered a variety of subjects over 24 weeks. We are very grateful to the School of Languages & Comparative Cultural Studies of UQ for kindly providing the training venue for us. We are now planning a graduation ceremony with encouragement of graduates students to sit a NAATI accreditation or recognition test. The Qld Branch has decided to run the training and mentoring project again in the near future.



Qld PD and event calendar 2010

Our PD Coordinator Alanna Wilson-Duff, with assistance from other members, has put together a jam-packed PD and event program this year (see opposite).

Membership

Over the last three months, Qld has welcomed three new AUSIT members: Angel Bogicevic, Lian Hua Ng and Melinda Hollingsworth, while we have also approved one Senior Practitioner. This year we are hoping to recruit a large number of new members through the AUSIT Orientation Day to be held at the University of Queensland on 27 March.

Enhancing industry links

We have successfully established and will continue to enhance links with the University of Queensland, Qld Health, Austrade, Brisbane International Business Women's Group, Brisbane City Council and ECCQ.

Finally, as Chair and Principal Delegate of the Qld Committee, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the entire Qld team for their great work and support. I really enjoy being part of this energetic, dedicated and supportive team. A big thank-you to all Qld AUSITeers for your continued support and active participation. We look forward to seeing you at our next event.



Chat Breakfast at Era Cafe

AUSIT Qld PD & event calendar 2010

Month	Date	PD Event & Provider	Location
Jan	Sat 23th	10am-12pm — Chat Breakfast (completed)	Era Cafe, South Brisbane
	Thurs 28th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop: Trados with Danièle Heinen (completed)	Room 211, Building 32, UQ St Lucia
	Fri 29th	4:30pm — AUSIT Qld Committee meeting (completed)	2/34 Plunkett St, Paddington
Feb	Sat 6th	AUSIT National Council Meeting (completed)	Room 211, Building 32, UQ St Lucia
	Thurs 25th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop: Terminology management and glossary building with Paul Frosdick (completed)	Brisbane Square Library
	Sat 27th	4:30-8:45pm (inc. ½hr break) — Workshop: Business skills for freelance translators with Sam Berner (completed)	Brisbane Square Library
Mar	Fri 19th & Sat 20th	9am-4pm (inc. 1hr lunch break) — Workshop: Court interpreting with Sarina Phan & Laurie Robson (confirmed, times and dates may change)	(TBC)
	Thurs 25th	5:30-8:30pm Workshop: Finance with Tammy Harriott, Westpac (confirmed)	Brisbane Square Library
	Sat 27th	10am-4pm — AUSIT Orientation Day with Rona Zhang	(TBC)
	17th to 31st	French Film Festival	Palace Centro & Palace Barracks
Apr	Thurs 8th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop: Documentation and information research with Maura Wilson (confirmed)	(TBC)
	Sat 24th	10am-12pm — Chat Breakfast, informal	Chez Laila, South Bank
	28th Apr to 2nd May	German Film Festival	Palace Centro
May	Fri 21st	NAATI Awareness Day	Melbourne
	Thurs 27th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop: Wordfast with Maurice Thibault (confirmed, date may change)	Brisbane Square Library
	21st to 31st	Spanish Film Festival	Palace Centro
June	Sun 20th	1-4pm — Mid-year family picnic	Roma St Parklands
	Thurs 24th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop: On-line presence with Sarah Dillon (confirmed, date may change)	(TBC)
July	Sat 24th	10am-12pm — Chat Breakfast, informal	Chez Laila, South Bank
	Thurs 29th	5:30-8:30pm Workshop: Subtitling & Transcription – Roberto Stevanoni (confirmed, date may change)	Brisbane Square Library
	30th July to 9th Aug	Brisbane International Film Festival	The Regent & GoMA
Aug	Sat 21st	10am-2:30pm (inc. ½hr break) — Workshop: Medical Interpreting, <i>intermediate</i> with Ita Szymanska (confirmed, time may change)	(TBC)
	Thurs 26th	Time TBC — Workshop: Alejandra Hayes on her thesis (confirmed, date may change)	(TBC)
	Sat 28th	10am-2:30pm (inc. ½hr break) — Workshop: Medical Interpreting, <i>advanced</i> with Ita Szymanska (confirmed, time may change)	(TBC)
Sept	25th to 27th	Greek Film Festival	Palace Centro
	Thurs 30th	6-8pm — AUSIT Qld AGM	Brisbane Square Library
Oct	30th Sept to 18th Oct	Italian Film Festival	Palace Centro & Palace Barracks
	Sat. 2nd	St. Jerome's Day Dinner & Dance	(TBC)
	TBC	Queensland Multicultural Festival	Roma St Parklands
	Sat 23rd	10am-12pm — Chat Breakfast, informal	Chez Laila, South Bank
Nov	5th to 6th	Biennial National Conference	Fremantle, WA
	Thurs 18th	5:30-8:30pm — Workshop (TBC)	Brisbane Square Library
	Fri 26th	6pm — End-of-year committee dinner	(TBC)
Dec	1st to 6th	Hola Mexico Film Festival	Dendy, Portside
	Sun 5th	1-4pm — End-of-year picnic	Roma Street Parklands

Some important notes:

- 1) TBC stands for 'To be confirmed'.
- 2) Events will be announced around one month prior via e-Flash.
- 3) To register for any PD events, please contact Qld PD Coordinator Alanna Wilson-Duff at alanna@wordsmithtranslation.com.au.

A few words from the centre



Maya Cifali
Interpreter trainer & AUSIT SA/NT member

I wish to remind colleagues in the various states and territories that Alice Springs, in the centre of this vast continent, is a thriving multilingual township of some 26,000 people, where a variety of languages (European, African, Asian or Aboriginal) are in daily use and interpreters are in high demand, especially at the Court House, Hospital Emergency Department and the Mental Health Unit.

Besides health and law, which remain the major areas where two-way understanding is the basis for positive outcomes, many other community needs are also covered by interpreters. The mining industry employs

interpreters for their negotiations with Aboriginal traditional owners; the tourist industry requires interpreters for tourists from France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Japan to name a few; primary and secondary schools rely on interpreters to discuss with migrant parents the difficulties their children are facing in their efforts to integrate into the Australian mainstream; and Centrelink, the Immigration Department and their agencies have to appoint sensitive interpreters/liaison officers to communicate with newcomers and facilitate their access to entitlements.

For any interpreter, multiculturalism (which

I would like to see renamed *intercultural relations*), the principles of access and equity, and even the lyrics of our national anthem, are not meaningless words, but actually direct our lives toward achieving better understanding of each other, therefore helping reduce discrimination or racism in whatever form they may take.

With this in mind (and added to a mood of recruitment) the Darwin-based Interpreting and Translating Service of Northern Territory (ITSNT) has asked two of us in Alice Springs to develop some PD sessions addressed to the profession and its clients. On this occasion the NT Government is footing the bill. So no fees or charge to participants!

It is always difficult for Alice Springs-based T/l's to feel part of the larger T&I family and participate in PD workshops, events or conferences, as these are often held in distant major urban centres.

As a member of the SA/NT Branch of AUSIT, I am happy to present to our colleagues in other states a table of our PD sessions to June 2010. Should any of you be inclined to join us for a Centralian PD trip-cum-holiday, please let me know. This is in anticipation of the 2011 AUSIT NAGM, PD workshops and Excellence Awards I hope AUSIT SA/NT will jointly host in Alice Springs after this year's Biennial Conference in Fremantle.

AT THE INITIATIVE OF ITSNT

Invitation to Interpreters and Translators of the Alice Springs Region
CARMEL BATSON (AUSLAN) and MAYA CIFALI will present
A SERIES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS
addressed to PRACTISING and POTENTIAL T/l's and their CLIENTS

PLEASE JOIN US for the following monthly workshops

WHERE NOONIE'S ROOM AT THE DIPLOMAT'S HOTEL
Behind the swimming pool — entrance from Hartley Street
WHEN Last Friday of each month, from 5.30pm to 7.30pm

26 Feb 2010	INTRODUCTION Approach to interpreting — Public speaking confidence (prior preparation > peak performance). Text analysis (key words, articulation). Approach to translation — Cultural interface in written texts.
26 Mar 2010	Role shifting — Conflicts of personality while interpreting. Acting, non-gender specific issues. Ethics. When and how to use an interpreter (for clients).
30 Apr 2010	Note taking — Horizontal and vertical, articulations, numbers, pictures. Expanding memory (audio-visual games).
28 May 2010	Contextual studies — Location skills, glossary categories. Eg. health, law, education, tourism, others?
25 June 2010	Behaviour management — For yourself and others. The people factor.

Expressions of interest: Ring Carmel on 08 8953 8880 or Maya on 08 8952 8229.

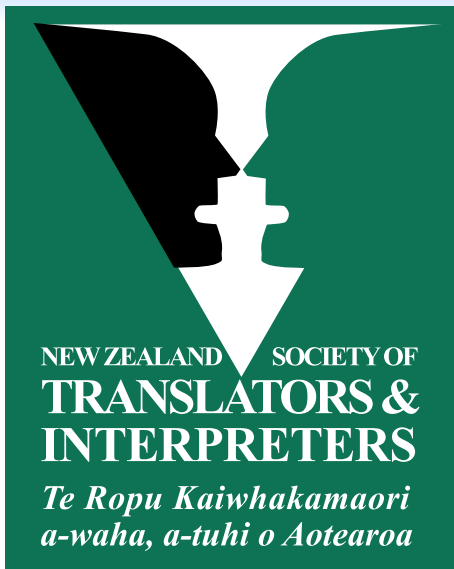
AUSIT Vic/Tas PD & event calendar 2010

Date	Presenter	Topic/Description	Length/PD Points
13 March	Brad Paez	Balancing personal and professional ethics Going beyond typical business ethics, this workshop focuses not only on developing an understanding of the AUSIT Code of Ethics, but also on transferring those ethical principles into practice and your own personal beliefs. Have you ever wondered if you have crossed the line in your role as an T/I? Or do you prefer to play it safe?	3hrs 20 points
April	Marc Orlando	Note-taking skills for interpreters This series of workshops aims to provide interpreters working in the community domain with the note-taking skills for long and challenging jobs such as interpreting for witnesses in court, formal speeches and complex corporate meetings etc. It will also inspire those who wish to master their consecutive interpreting skills and further their careers as interpreters.	3 x 3hrs — session 1 30 points
April	Cornelia Elbrecht	Coping with stress and trauma The impact of an interpreting assignment can be stressful and exhausting. It is important that interpreters recognise the signs and look after themselves after experiencing stress from their assignment. This workshop aims to provide interpreters with some strategies to cope and discuss what type of jobs can be stressful.	3hrs 10 points
	Marc Orlando	Note-taking skills for interpreters	3 x 3hrs — session 2
May/June	Marc Orlando	Note-taking skills for interpreters	3 x 3hrs — session 3
	Eva Hussain, Sarina Phan & Sompit Watkins	Translators essentials Are you starting out as a translator? Are you overwhelmed by all the software and hardware available in the market? Do you know what equipment to buy to set yourself up as a translator? Do you know how to set yourself up as a small business operator? Do you want to hear from those who have successfully set up their own translation businesses? Sarina Phan, former President of AUSIT, Eva Hussain, former Vice-President and Sompit Watkins, Vice-Chair of AUSIT Vic/Tas Branch, all run their own translation and interpreting businesses. They will share with you some answers and tips on how to get started as a translator. This is a workshop for new translators. CAT Tools — Trados/WordFast. A demo workshop These three experience translators will jointly present a demo on Trados and Wordfast, the two main CAT tools, their pros and cons and some of the technical challenges in using them and how to overcome these. This practical workshop will provide translators with a quick overview of CAT tools and what the benefits are in having them as business tools.	5hrs 20 points
August	Sarina Phan & law enforcement representative	Working with law enforcement agencies This workshops aims to provide new interpreters with general information about the criminal justice system in Australia and the knowledge and skills required to work effectively with law enforcement agencies. It will be delivered in two parts, providing interpreters with valuable information, practical interpreting exercises and opportunities to discuss legal and technical terminology.	2 x 4hrs 40 points
September	TBA	AGM and networking The Vic/Tas Branch AGM is held every year in spring. A social and networking event will be held prior to our AGM so members can come and meet the upcoming chairperson and committee members.	10 points
October	Multiple speakers	AUSIT Orientation Day - Melbourne	Half day 10 points
5-6 November	Multiple speakers	2010 AUSIT Biennial National Conference — SYNERGISE, Fremantle WA	1-2 days 40 points
December		End-of-year party	10 points

Workshops in Tasmania

10-April Launceston 11 th April Hobart	Andre Bevez Sompit Watkins & Alice Jaworski	AUSIT Orientation Day — Tasmania AUSIT Vic/Tas cordially invites all translators and interpreters to come to this special AUSIT Orientation Day. The speakers at this event will be Vic/Tas office bearers and Tasmanian representative Alice Jaworski. The event is designed to facilitate an environment for practitioners to network, and share acquired knowledge from peers on how to become a better and more successful T/I. The main theme will be professional development and future PD in Tasmania.	4hrs 20 points
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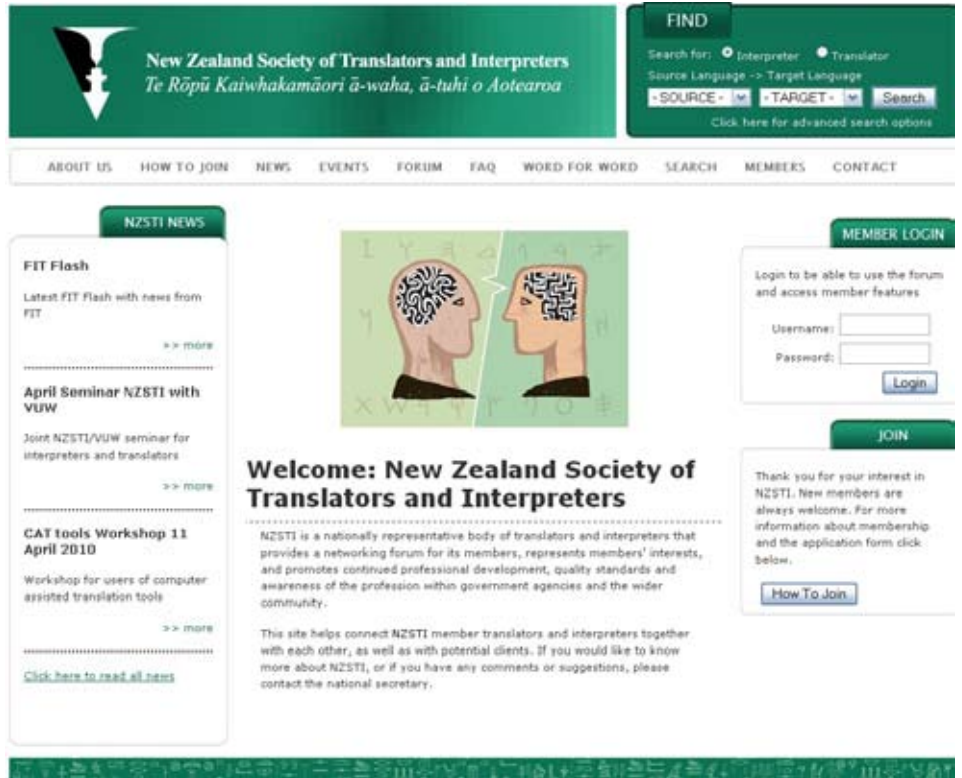
Please note: topics and presenters are subject to change. Please direct any questions regarding any of the PD events listed to Sarina Phan at sarinaphan@yahoo.com.au or ring 0403 080 888.



New NZSTI website



Patrick Geddes
Editor of *Word for Word*, NZSTI's journal



NZSTI has recently released its new website at www.nzsti.org.

The 'look' of the website incorporates NZSTI's colours of green, white and black and has a clean, updated appearance. The site contains new features such as an improved members' section, a members' forum — open to contribution from the whole membership — an expanded 'News' section, and an improved search functionality for members of the public seeking a translator or interpreter.

The upgrading of the website was a very involved process for NZSTI Secretary Diane Walton and administrator Wendy Dawson, who frequently had to coax and cajole the contracted web developer into completing the work by his own self-prescribed deadlines. This developer frequently did not deliver on time so Diane and Wendy often had to 'step in'. It is probably solely due to Diane and Wendy's tenacity that the work was completed at all. We are very grateful to them and, despite a number of hiccups, we are very happy with the result.

CALL FOR PAPERS — NZSTI Conference 10-11 July 2010, Christchurch

A major topic in recent years has been the progress of globalisation and the resulting challenges and opportunities for the translating and interpreting professions. The global economic crisis has given a sharp additional twist to this topic, making clients increasingly conscious of their bottom lines; translators and interpreters are confronted with the challenge of how to survive, let alone prosper, when current or potential clients are also struggling for survival. When added to advances in machine translation, this makes the market for T&I services a much more competitive place.

The effect of increased competition, especially when third-world colleagues are able to offer their services more cheaply, puts into sharper focus what have been perennial professional issues. It challenges practitioners to review how they market

their services and how they operate, addressing such issues as: how to more effectively promote the proposition that quality is worth paying for; how to live up to that proposition by working cost-effectively so as to give value for money without compromising quality of service; and how to reconcile the sharpening of competition in the global marketplace with the collegial principle of professional solidarity. These are questions with implications in terms of professional ethics, performance standards, development and training, and business practices.

Adding a domestic dimension to this picture is the important role of translation and interpreting for the social and economic wellbeing of New Zealand as a multicultural nation vitally dependent on world trade.

The Conference is intended to provide a forum for the exploration of these and related issues. Proposals are now invited for presentations, either in the form of papers or workshops, to help to achieve this purpose.

Papers should normally comprise a 20-

minute presentation, followed by 10 minutes' question time. Workshops should normally comprise a 50-minute presentation which introduces a practical activity for a small- to medium-sized group, or which facilitates focussed discussion of a topic. However, alternative formats for both papers and workshops will be considered if the proposed topic, objectives and treatment are deemed likely to be of sufficient interest and value.

Interested speakers are invited to send an abstract (approximately 300 words) of their proposed presentation, together with some biographical details, to the Organising Committee at info@nzsti.org (putting CONFERENCE PROPOSAL in the subject line) by Monday 15 March 2010. Selected presenters will be notified by 8 April 2010 and will be asked to confirm their participation by 30 April 2010.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss your requirements with someone, please contact Peter Tuffley on +64-3-332-7951, email ptuffley@xtra.co.nz.

Further details, including registration for attendees, will be available in due course.

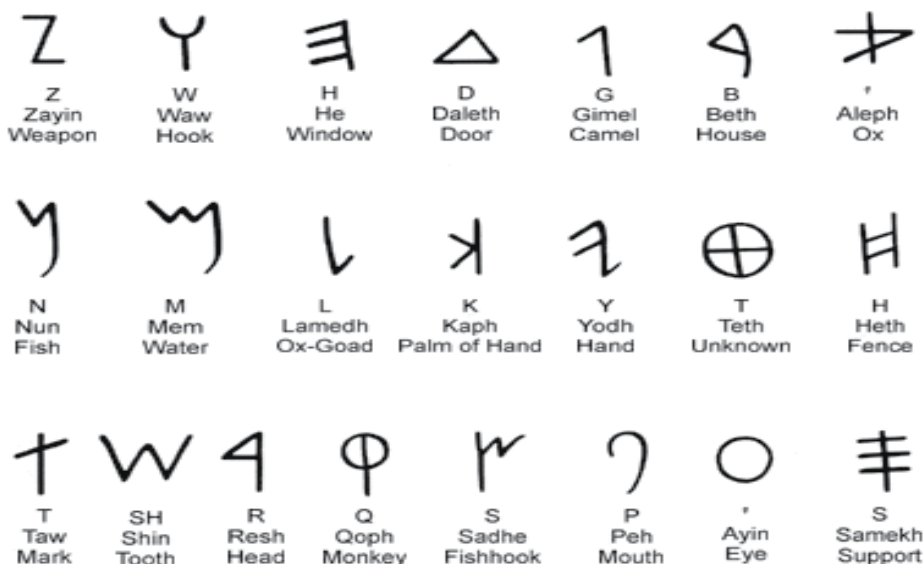
The first alphabet



Mona Jabbour
AUSIT Vic/Tas

The most important invention attributed to the Phoenicians is the alphabet considered the predecessor of all those used today.

Consisting of 22 letters, with no vowels, and written from right to left, it was created around the middle of the 2nd Millennium BC. Each letter resembled an object the name of which began with that letter. Later, the scribes introduced cuneiform writing which was faster and more practical. As inscriptions in stone and on monuments are easier to conserve



there are more of them than writings on papyrus and parchment. There were bilingual texts in which it was possible to compare the Phoenician mainly with Greek, but the great number of names, — generally translated not transliterated — complicated identification of the letters. It is certain, however, the Phoenician alphabet

spread throughout the Middle East mainly in inscriptions and travelled as far as India. With the Phoenician merchants it moved along the Mediterranean coasts and was adopted and adapted to the needs of the Greeks and Etruscans who probably transmitted it to the Romans. The world received the gift of writing.

Translating the untranslatable

Hey, all you translators out there — ever notice that the people writing about translation are mostly people who have never translated a word in their lives?

I can't figure it out. A dance critic may never have danced Giselle, but s/he knows something about the art and practice of dance. Translation theorists don't seem to have ever tried rendering a text into another language. In fact, they might tell you — in the words of one memorable theorist — 'the text doesn't exist at all.' Try telling that to your client.

Translation theory gets positively screwy on the subject of 'translatable' and 'untranslatable' words. Since there are no exact equivalencies between languages, nothing is really translatable. And since it's all relative anyway, nothing is really untranslatable. Oh, right. Tell that to a translator who has just spent the afternoon on one word that defies translation.

Take, for example, the lovely word *откос*. If you are buying new windows for your Russian apartment, you will be offered the service of *отделка откосов* — finishing work on the something-or-others. You flip open your dictionary and find that *откос* is a slope, which doesn't fit the context. Then you open specialised dictionaries and find *sconcheon*, *jamb*, and *reveal*. Then you open your English architectural

dictionaries and read definitions like 'the outer side of a window frame.' Then you smoke three cigarettes trying to envision the outer side of a window frame. By now you have figured out that in deep-set Russian windows, *откос* is the inner wall stretching vertically from the sill to the top of the window enclosure and horizontally from the window to the room wall. You have also realised that the windows in your American home don't have any *откос* because the walls are a measly three inches thick and the windows are set flush into them. In desperation, you start calling English-speaking friends who might know something about architecture. By this time the sun has set, you're not taking calls from your client, and it's time for another cigarette run (and since it's after 5PM, make that a cigarette and booze run). Finally, you decide that whatever an English-speaking architect would call *откос*, a non-specialist would call it the 'inner wall of a recessed window.' You hate it, but you have just calculated that, due to one word, you are now earning 14 cents an hour for this translation. You type it in, attach the translation to an email, and hit 'send.' And then you curse translation theorists down to the twelfth generation.

On the other hand, there are a few purportedly 'untranslatable' Russian words that don't seem terribly problematic. Russian has two neat little words that mean

'someone of the same age': *ровесник* and *сверстник*. The former means someone born in the same year; in common usage, the latter can mean someone of approximately the same age and/or social set. The English word for this — *coeval* — isn't used much, but otherwise it's not hard to translate. *Он — мой ровесник.* (He and I are the same age.) *Сверстникам поэта не нравились его стихи.* (The poet's contemporaries did not like his verse.) Another good word for this is 'peer,' which, among other meanings, is someone of the same age or social group. This close translation equivalency often works from English to Russian, too. If you have teenagers, you'll be concerned about *влияние сверстников* (peer pressure). Since they never listen to their parents, to protect them from bad peer pressure, you consider enrolling them in a program where *сверстники обучают сверстников* (literally 'peers teach peers') — a slightly complex way of describing peer counseling.

And then you fantasise about making one of those theorists translate your window company text.

Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter.

This article originally appeared in The Moscow Times on 29 January 2009 and is reprinted here with kind permission of the author.

When up means down



In Someone Else's Shoes

by Joseph Assaf

Publisher: Jascom

International Pty Ltd,

Leichardt, Australia, 2007

Article compiled by Mona Jabbour

Joseph Assaf, an Australian citizen who migrated from Lebanon, and once described as 'the guru of multicultural marketing' describes in the second chapter (edited below) of his book, In Someone Else's Shoes, how he began learning English.

'When a brain can think, but lips cannot speak, one feels inadequate. Communicating seems a simple affair, if one can only find the right word in the right language.

My Arabic was excellent, my French was superb, but my English was non-existent. One can laugh now, in hindsight, at the confusion that every migrant must endure when ploughing through the inexplicable maze, which is the English language. One of the few words that I knew was "up". This word took on special significance when I embarked on my first train trip to the central business district.

The day after I arrived, I stood in a queue waiting to purchase a rail ticket. I was listening carefully to what people were saying. I frequently heard the word "city" and, because of my knowledge of French, I knew what that word meant. When it was my turn to purchase a ticket, the word came out reasonably well. Then the ticket-seller asked (what I later presumed was), "Return or one way?" Because of my silence, or maybe it was my blank expression, the ticket-seller made an executive decision and issued me with a return ticket, perhaps thinking to spare me the agony of being stranded in the big smoke.

Having thought I had gotten through the hardest part of the process, I soon realised that I did not know where to wait for the train. I looked around, trying to work out where to go and where to stand. What does one do after being given a ticket? I had not been on a train before, so you can imagine my confusion when I saw people dashing in every direction. This was my first experience in a big city.

Men hate to ask for directions at the best of times, but when you can't even do it in the right language, it's a double burden. Standing at the top of the stairs and wondering which platform I should go to, I spied a mother who was holding the hand of her child. She too, asked for a ticket to the city. She was not aware of my presence. I knew I could not let her out

of my sight. I watched the frantic woman dragging her child along and I decided that it would be a good idea to follow her. She seemed like she knew where she was going, so I adopted her from a distance, and unbeknownst to her, became even more dependent on her than her own child. She didn't realise that she had two kids in tow — one on a longer, invisible leash, thinking: "Don't lose her, whatever you do!"

Her maternal presence dragged me along and I felt comforted to have someone take the lead, but I quickly began to doubt my decision when I heard her say to her daughter, "Hurry up", while at the same time, she went down the stairs. I could not understand why we were going down. Hadn't she said "up"? I had no choice. I put my trust in her and followed, all the while carrying a new burden of confusion. How could "up" mean "down"?

That was my first bewildering experience of catching a train. She sat. Her child sat. I sat. And the train set off.

Before long, I was pleased to secure a job in a factory. I worked in a tannery in Adelaide.

After a while, I managed to get a different job bagging potatoes. The work was hard, but all the time I was picking up the language. Finally, I was able to speak enough to secure a much more salubrious job as a bus conductor!

When I returned to Sydney to pursue my studies, I was again lucky. I managed to get another factory job. This time, I was making television tubes. I was given the task of spraying the inside of the glass with a silvery lacquer. It was repetitious, manual labour. We wore thick gloves but no goggles or breathing gear, which pleased me, because it meant we could talk.

The factories provided me with much more than a living. They gave me my first multicultural experience in Australia. I was fascinated by the extent of the cultural diversity.

Given that I could speak only a little English and none of the other languages that surrounded me, I was unable to work out who came from where. It all just sounded foreign to me. Still, in this unlikely place, while spraying the insides of TV tubes, I expanded my vocabulary, one word at a time. On occasion, I exchanged confectionery for words, particularly with one co-worker — a big, pleasant Scottish bloke whose command of the English language was most useful to my education, even if his accent was a bit confusing. I would purchase bags of candy or even a packet of cigarettes merely to exchange one lolly or a "smoke" for one new word. He was otherwise not so easy to approach.

It was a genuine cultural exchange I suppose, the Lebanese tradition of barter — lollies for language, confectionery for conversation.

There were still so many English words that I could not understand. Eventually, I started to make a regular habit of purchasing the daily newspaper, remembering my primary school teacher in Lebanon who encouraged us to read Arabic and French newspapers at a young age. He used to say, "Even if you do not understand it, you must buy the paper each day. By making that investment out of your pocket-money, you will be more inclined to read, and begin a life-long interest in reading. And the more you read, the better chance you will have for grasping the language."

After two years of deciphering newspapers and swapping candy or cigarettes for words as I went about my manual work, I had learned enough English and saved enough money to study full-time at Sydney University where I completed a Bachelor of Arts.

At university I again experienced the wonders of cultural diversity. Although there were many overseas students, I was probably the only non English-speaking, nonskilled resident migrant student. I was studying full-time, and even though my boss at the factory structured my work around my studies, giving me night-work and more shifts in the holidays and so on, my first year was still tough. Nonetheless, I was touched by his generosity. It made it possible for me to meet the cost of my studies.

My second year at university was much easier because I had won a Commonwealth Scholarship that provided a living allowance, enabling me to leave my factory job. This gave me the chance to enjoy my university life.

I had been in Australia for four years, and was only one year away from completing my degree. Even back then, I had begun to see the potential of Australia's cultural diversity. While many people counted only iron ore and wool among the country's natural resources, my eyes were opened to its untapped linguistic resources. Imagine what it would cost and how long it would take, for a country to teach its citizens so many languages. These resources are very real for Australia and they can translate into significant political, social, and economic competitive advantage.

To me, Australia was the "World Bank of Languages". It was, and is, a microcosm of the best that the world has to offer. It is like a mirror that has the ability to reflect all the vivid colours of the globe. So, I established the Ethnic Business Awards in 1988 and I've been a member of the National Multicultural Advisory Council, the Australia Foundation for Culture and the Humanities, and the Council for Australian-Arab Relations.'