

AUSIT

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INTOUCH

MAGAZINE OF THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Special feature:

Literary translation, part two

Reflections on translating poetry, and on the theory versus the practice ... plus more prizes, and one recipient's story

< pages 4–11

Trans-editing

An overview of the discipline and a call for formal training

< pages 18–19

A dual perspective approach

Exploring how cultural bridging can be reconciled with ethical obligations

< pages 14–16

Using translation technologies to our advantage

Translators are encouraged to keep their technological enemy close

< pages 20–21

PLUS MORE ...

... including a past president's debut novel reviewed, and reflections on being translated



< In Touch

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay respect to them and their cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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A letter from the editor

I'm glad to report that our callout for books and other published work by AUSIT members to review—and also for reviewers—has borne fruit. In this issue one past president reviews another's inaugural, partly autobiographical novel (page 17). While Moreno Giovannoni's *The Fireflies of Autumn* is receiving a great deal of media interest nationwide, Annamaria Arnall's reflections come from the perspective of a T&I colleague and friend. More reviews are in the pipeline; and we'd also like to invite T/Is to review—and/or muse upon—translated books, plays or other works ... from the very particular perspective of people who know the work in question intimately in both languages.

Do freelancers have a silly season?

Working from home on Melbourne Cup Day, I was reminded that freelancers don't often get a chance to take part in office-based celebrations (or aren't obliged to, some might say!). What (if anything) did the freelance T/Is amongst you do to mark the International Day of Sign Languages (23 September) and International Translation Day (30 September: the feast of St Jerome)? If you have any ideas on how to

engage with such events as a freelancer, or did so this year, we'd love to hear from you. And if you're looking to get together with colleagues this festive season, check your AUSIT e-flashes for end-of-year social events near you, or reach out to your local committee.

Thank you proofers!

Thank you to the group of members who volunteer to proof the articles published in *In Touch*. It's amazing what can evade both the authors' and the editor's eyes. You do a great job on every issue, keep it up!

Contributions welcome

If you have an idea but don't think your writing skills are up to it, help is at hand: the editor and Editorial Committee are happy to review submissions and suggest how they can be polished. Each submission accepted is professionally edited in consultation with the contributor. To contribute: check out our Submission Guidelines (under 'Contribute', see URL, left); email any questions to the editor or a committee member (see left); check the submission deadline (above left); and ... go for it!



by Tania Pineda-Stuart and Awesomesatyr, 2018



Member organisation Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs International Federation of Translators

AUSIT FOCUS ON AUSTRALIA'S
NEW AND EMERGING
LANGUAGES

Contents

PAGE

SPECIAL FEATURE—LITERARY TRANSLATION PART TWO

AUSIT member Dylan J Hartmann runner-up in inaugural BKKLIT Translation Prize	4
BKKLIT prizewinner Dylan J Hartmann interviewed by Sam Berner	5–6
2018 AALITRA Translation Prize by Elaine Lewis	7
Translating Poetry: Beethoven in Denver by Harry Aveling	8–9
Who has the final word? Literary theory, translation theory and translation practice by Melissa McMahon	10–11
On being translated by Raewyn Connell	12–13
The dual perspective: reconciling ethical obligations with clients' misperceptions by Dave Deck	14–16
Moreno's Fireflies (book review) by Annamaria Arnall	17
Have you heard of trans-editing? by May Hu	18–19
The increasingly technological world and its implications for the T&I profession by Xiaoxing (Amy) Wang	20–21
Member profiles: Anna (Mickey) Biezen—Peter Zauner	22

News in brief

A review of T&I-related items spotted in the mainstream media since the last issue of *In Touch* was published (excepting articles that are behind paywalls):

2 Aug: The Bible 'comes home' to Gunbalanya

A remote community in West Arnhem Land celebrates the long-awaited launch of a Bible in the local Indigenous language, Kunwinjku. *Eternity News*

3 Aug: My adventures with Moliere

Translator Justin Fleming reflects on the challenges of translating *Tartuffe*, by celebrated French playwright Molière. *The Sydney Morning Herald: What's On*

26 Aug: Fans Translated The Wakandan Text On Black Panther's Suit ...

Using the Wakanda Text Translator available online, a fan of the American superhero film *Black Panther* has discovered that text written in the invented 'Wakandan' language on the torso of the main character, T'Challa, includes 'I love you Mom'. *gizmodo.com.au*

29 Aug: The Koran verse splitting imams on domestic violence

Islamic religious leaders disagree over a controversial verse in the Koran which, some say, gives husbands the right to physically discipline their wives if they 'fear disloyalty and ill-conduct'. *ABC News*

10 Sep: Research highlights needs of new and emerging communities

New research shows that 'ageing migrants from new and emerging communities, such as those from Sudan and Myanmar' need, among other things, earlier access to interpreter services to facilitate interaction with the wider community. *Australian Ageing Agenda*

27 Sep: Aboriginal defendants are pleading guilty due to language and cultural barriers, legal officials warn

Representatives of the Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Interpreting WA and Legal Aid describe a widespread lack of

understanding of the criminal justice system among Aboriginal defendants, raising concerns that scared and confused defendants may plead guilty unnecessarily. *ABC News*

15 Oct: 'Kia ora, Death': Vending machine slogan gets lost in translation

The slogan 'Kia ora, mate'—spotted on a vending machine in Auckland Airport by a te reo (Māori language) speaker—was presumably intended to extend the traditional greeting to visitors. Unfortunately, in te reo 'mate' means 'death' ... so the slogan reads as 'Greetings, Death!' *SBS/NITV*



image courtesy of Gareth Seymour (@waikatoreo)

16 Oct: How *Assassin's Creed* triggered a world-first Egyptian hieroglyphics decoder

The designers of a hieroglyph-based roleplay video game series and Egyptology researchers at Macquarie University pool their resources to bring hieroglyph translation into the 20th century by developing a dedicated machine learning tool. *The Lighthouse (Macquarie University)*

19 Oct: Language barrier delays Perth Zoo stolen tortoise case

The trial of a man accused of stealing two rare tortoises from Perth Zoo initially goes ahead despite the lack of a Vietnamese English court interpreter, with the defendant's lawyer interpreting. *The West Australian*

25 Oct: Assange hearing halted for lack of 'Australian'-fluent translator

With the WikiLeaks founder unable to understand his translator in his lawsuit against Ecuador's Foreign Affairs Ministry, the judge requests a replacement who is fluent in 'Australian'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*

AUSIT member Dylan J Hartmann runner-up in inaugural BKKLIT Translation Prize

Launched this June, *The Bangkok Literary Review (BKKLIT)* is the world's first journal of contemporary Thai literature in translation and art.

Promising to create a 'literary community to help Thai writers and translators bridge the gap between Thailand and the international literary world', *BKKLIT* has inaugurated an annual prize for the translation of contemporary Thai literature into English (another first of its kind). Open to emerging translators, the prize has two categories: short story (up to 4,000 words) and poetry (up to 50 lines), with first, second and third prizes awarded in each.

AUSIT member Dylan J Hartmann was awarded second prize in the fiction category this inaugural year for his translation of 'The Man With His Back to the Tsunami', by highly regarded Thai author Jirapat Angsumali. The judges praised Dylan's work in the following terms:

Jirapat's short story presents grief as a kind of paralysis, and Dylan Hartmann's translation has conveyed this convincingly. Dylan is in full control of tone, making sure that the authorial voice of Jirapat's original is maintained. We were

impressed with how polished the translation was for a translator who hasn't translated much in the way of literature until now.

Dylan is an Australian NAATI-certified Thai>English translator whose trajectory in life to date has been determined largely by his family's move to Chiang Mai when he was a teenager. He now lives in Brisbane and is a member of AUSIT's QLD Branch Committee. A recent interview with Dylan by Sam Berner, chair of the committee, follows this report.

The BKKLIT Translation Prize is sponsored by Assajan, a 'collective of artists and cultural innovators' who aim to 'open up opportunities for the creative industries in Thailand'. Assajan has worked on projects with Sydney Opera House, Facebook and Google, among others.

The other winners of the inaugural prize were Wichayapat Piromsan (fiction) and Noh Anothai (poetry).

More details about both journal and competition: bkklit.com/bkklit-translation-prize-2018/



THE
BANGKOK
LITERARY
REVIEW

BKKLIT
กรุงเทพมหานคร

masthead courtesy of BKKLIT

BKKLIT prizewinner Dylan J Hartmann interviewed

Dylan Hartmann, a member of AUSIT QLD's Branch Committee, was awarded second prize in the inaugural BKKLIT Translation Prize (fiction category)—see page 4. When Branch Committee Chair **Sam Berner** told *In Touch*, we asked her to gather a few background details for a short report. Sam soon realised that Dylan's trajectory from Aussie schoolboy to prizewinning translator was far too interesting to squeeze into a few lines; the result was the following interview.

Sam: So, Thai-to-English translators aren't common in Queensland ... how did you start?

Dylan: Like many other professional translators, I never really planned on becoming one. I just fell into the job after years of studying Thai language and culture. Nevertheless, I'm very grateful that it's worked out so well!

As a teenager my parents dragged me off kicking and screaming to live in Thailand.

As a teenager my parents dragged me off kicking and screaming to live in Thailand. They'd been hired to teach at an American international school in Chiang Mai, and they enrolled me to study there. As a typical Aussie teen from the Northern Rivers of NSW, I found it very difficult to relate to my schoolmates. This drove me to go out and meet locals my own age, to my good fortune! I still have vivid memories of how stupid I felt, unable to communicate. It was as if I'd become a deaf, blonde-haired clown; I was made fun of constantly. I hated this, so I put all my effort into learning the language as quickly as I could. I owe a lot to my Thai teachers and friends.

After school I enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts/Asian Studies program at ANU; but halfway through I returned to Thailand as a homesick TCK (third culture kid), transferring to

Chiang Rai's Mae Fah Luang University (MFU), where I finished my BA in Thai language and culture. In 2011, now working at MFU, I began supplementing my relatively low wages with freelance translating. As there were relatively few Thai translators with acceptable levels of English, my work was appreciated, and it gave me the great experience of working my way up from the very bottom. Thai agencies typically paid around 100 baht (\$4) per page, and although this was dimly low by Australian standards, it helped me double my income. In the meantime I found the language professionals site ProZ.com, and slowly started building relationships with big agencies.

I was happy translating and working at MFU, but I saw there were limitations for my future, and my ability to return to Australia and work here. When our first child was born in late 2011, my number-one priority became looking after my young family. I enrolled in the Master of Studies program back at ANU, majoring in applied anthropology and participatory development—while working full time and still moonlighting as a freelance translator—with a grand goal of working in aid or development. I graduated in mid-2014: probably the worst time to enter the field, with our new government's cuts to foreign aid that year in the billions! So, having freelanced as a translator for four years and built up a range of experience, I took the leap and went full time. Adding my master's degree to my ProZ.com profile—even though it wasn't related to translation—boosted my credibility, and overseas work began pouring in. By this point I would've passed the 'million words translated' milestone, and I found more and more clinical trial work being sent my way.

So, that's how someone with a background in anthropology became a clinical trial translator.

Sam: When you set out, did you intend to translate literature?

Dylan: I would've liked to, but I'd always heard that it's hard ... or impossible? ... to make a living off it. My translation alone was supporting my family, and my livelihood had never felt so secure.

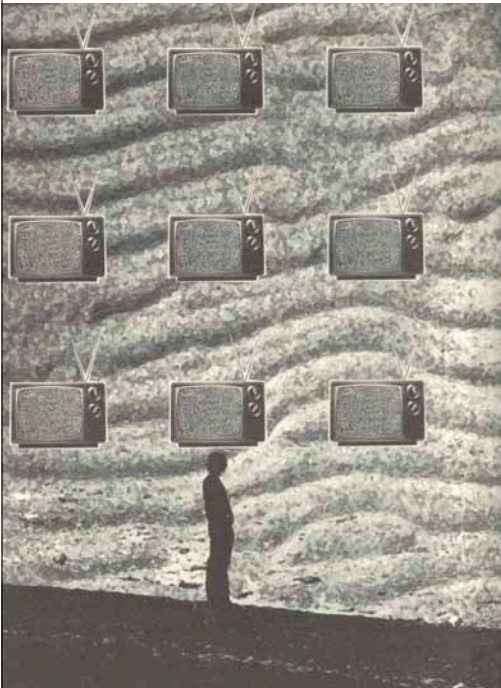
Then in August this year I attended the UQ School of Languages and Cultures Translating and Interpreting Forum, endorsed by AUSIT. One speaker was American Professor Jeffrey Angles, an award-winning Japanese-to-English literary translator, poet and academic.

Listening to him, I felt an existential crisis brewing. 'If all my clinical trial work is

Dylan with the older of his two daughters, Ava Rita



Literary translation feature



the image that accompanied Angsumali's story, by Prapapond Prasertsopa, courtesy of Matichon Book

anonymous,' I thought, 'what's the point? In 20 years, if my daughters look up my name, they'll see nothing but a ProZ.com profile and an entry in NAATT's directory!'

Introducing myself to the Facebook group of the Translators and Interpreters Association of Thailand (TIAT) soon afterwards, I mentioned my hope to one day step into the literary field. The editor of the brand new Bangkok Literary Review saw my post and invited me to enter their short story translation competition ... with its deadline in two weeks. The race was on!

Sam: How did you decide which piece to translate?

Dylan: The story had to be less than 20 years old, and never translated before. Scouring through my library, I found a 2007 collection of short stories, *Shell*, by highly regarded Thai author Jirapat Angsumali. I chose 'The Man With His Back to the Tsunami' from a handful of stories he'd written about the Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004.

When people in Australia hear about a natural disaster or catastrophe overseas, it's presented as an audio-visual 'bite' slotted neatly between the latest local dramas and the weather on our nightly news. The typical 30-second snippet shows the flown-in presenter standing against a horrific background, to heighten the tension. Angsumali's short stories, in contrast, present

personal accounts of the grief suffered by those who lost loved ones and were gravely affected by this immense natural disaster.

Translating this story gave me a chance to act as ambassador for those whose voices are overlooked in the 24-hour news cycle. It began with an image that many will remember seeing replayed over and over again on the news: a solitary man standing on a beach with his back towards the incoming tsunami. He appears calm, showing no fear of his fast-approaching demise. While this clip captivated many of us sitting in the comfort of our homes overseas, thinking 'Why didn't he run?!', it was used by the author to show how grief caused a kind of paralysis in the families of victims. Their losses have been acknowledged, but the pain and heartache that followed can't ever be fully overcome.

*... we mustn't become
complacent in our
comfort zones.*

A year after the tsunami, the mother in Angsumali's story treasures the memories of her lost son and struggles with moving on. Her devastation is shown through the frustration and confusion of her youngest daughter, who insists she get better. The tsunami brought enduring hardship and pain for the families of over 200,000 dead or missing people in Southeast Asia, on a scale the international audience may not have had the chance to appreciate from the 30-second clip.

Sam: From choosing this very first short story you would translate ... to winning a prize for it! How did that feel?

Dylan: By branching out, I've rediscovered passion and challenge in my work; and it feels as if everything is falling into place—as if it was meant to be. The day after I submitted my entry, the editor invited me to join the publication team and translate four more short stories that would be paid in royalties. I worked directly with another award-winning author on these stories; and he, in turn, has now lined me up to translate his upcoming novel.

It shows that we mustn't become complacent in our comfort zones. While I did have *some* experience working with fiction—for fashion

and lifestyle magazines—I'd never dared to venture into the revered sanctity of literary translation!

This *was* the first short story I'd ever translated; but my years of experience in the scientific field—where the focus was on accuracy—did help a lot. I also have to thank my trusty editor, Theresa Somsri, who's been given all credits due and will join me at the prize ceremony.

Sam: You've recently joined the AUSIT QLD Branch Committee. How do you see your membership and participation in AUSIT as useful in your career?

Dylan: I feel that Australia is a very small market for my language pair. It would be the same for many. I can only survive thanks to the multinational agencies and their never-ending supply of work. Joining AUSIT and becoming a committee member made me realise how few members work for clients outside of Australia. Many say this is due to low pay rates, or long payment terms. I'd like to share my experiences and encourage more AUSIT members to work with the big market leaders, to help convince those big agencies that our credential and certification processes are some of the best in the world. If more members reach out and start proving how reliable and accurate our work is compared to the masses of non-certified translators, our organisation will become more widely renowned and more agencies will select AUSIT members to lead their teams. If I can help boost the global name of AUSIT I will, because we're worth it.

2018 AALITRA Translation Prize

The 2018 AALITRA Translation Prize Awards Ceremony was held on Thursday 20 September at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Melbourne. AALITRA committee member **Elaine Lewis** reports on the event.

The focus language for 2018 was Indonesian, and the texts chosen for translation were:

- *Surat* by **Sapardi Djoko Damono** (prose)
- *Barangkali* by **Amir Hamzah** (poem).

The entries were judged by a panel of experts in Indonesian literature and translation: **Dr Harry Aveling** (chair—see his article on translating poetry overleaf), **Lily Yulianti Farid**, **Jennifer Mackenzie** and **Anton Alimin**. The judges said they were looking for ‘creative translations rather than literal texts in English’, and praised the prizewinners for their achievements.

Prizes were presented by Indonesia’s Consul General, **Ms Spica Tutuhaturunewa**.

POETRY

- **First Prize:** **James Scanlan** (NSW)
- **Highly Commended:** **Keith Foulcher** (NSW)

PROSE

- **First Prize:** **Pamela Allen** (TAS)
- **Highly Commended:** **Sophie Revington** (NSW)

In addition to cash prizes provided by AALITRA, each winner received a collection of translated books donated by **Giramondo Publishing**, **Text Publishing**, **The Lifted Brow** and **Brian Nelson** (AALITRA’s past president).

The winning translations were read aloud at the ceremony, and will also be published in *The AALITRA Review*: www.aalitra.org.au

Another past president, **Brigid Maher**, thanked the judges for the huge amount of work involved in choosing the works to be translated, and for the time spent in reading and discussing the translations. Consul General **Ms Spica Tutuhaturunewa** and the Indonesian Consulate were thanked for the use of the **Binhekkka Room** and for their generous hospitality. The convivial atmosphere, combined with the audience’s warm reception of all prizewinners, created a memorable evening.

AALITRA is a national organisation that promotes interest in all aspects of literary translation. It sponsors public lectures and events on the topic, and partners with university bodies to hold conferences on both the theory and the practice. It also distributes news of events, conferences and other initiatives relevant to translators, and publishes an online journal: The AALITRA Review, which carries peer-reviewed articles and translations. If you have an interest in literary translation, and especially world literature in translation, it’s definitely worth considering joining AALITRA: www.aalitra.org.au

The biennial AALITRA Translation Prize is open to all Australian residents. The focus language and texts for 2020 will be announced later this year or early next. (Since the prize’s inauguration in 2014, the focus languages have been Spanish, Chinese and Indonesian.)

James Scanlan (winner, poetry) receives his award from the Indonesian Consul General **Ms Spica Tutuhaturunewa**
photograph courtesy of **Diana Cousens**



Translating poetry: Beethoven in Denver

According to editor, translator and academic **Harry Aveling**, ‘translation of poetry is a difficult and contentious field ... poetry itself is believed to be difficult’, exhibiting ‘a special relationship between content and form that is impossible to move from one language to another ... Poetry is “what is lost in the translation” (to misquote Robert Frost).’ American translator and poet **Burton Raffel** identified four distinct audiences for translated poetry; and Harry dedicates his summary of these audiences—and the various ways in which poetry is translated for them—to the memory of Raffel, who died three years ago.

There is no single satisfactory way to translate poetry. Besides the fact that it is often considered difficult to understand, perhaps because it is written with an emphasis on subjective emotion, poetry is uniquely shaped by the distinctive rhythms, rhymes and metres of the source language.

There is another problem as well: the various audiences for poetry in translation have conflicting expectations. In his book *The Art of Translating Poetry* (1998)¹, Burton Raffel identifies four very different audiences.

The first are scholars and their students, who require a literal or ‘formal’ translation that will take them back to the original poem—or as close to it as possible. These formal translations—concerned with ‘fidelity’ and ‘exactness’—struggle to show the social, philosophical and historical dimensions of the original work. They are sometimes wooden because of their concern with capturing the content of the original, but this is not always felt to matter.

The following is an extract from a translation of a poem by the Indian poet Swami Haridas, praising the love of Krishna (also called Bihari and Hari) for Radha:



Her breasts are jugs, her youth is blossom, the spring is kept hidden behind her bodice and garment.

A palace of qualities, she is sitting in a garden of beauty, her face shining.

Bihari has the loveliness of myriads of cupids, by seeing him all suffering is destroyed.

Such a connoisseur is Hari, her sovereign; she came to embrace him and they unite, smiling.²

Philologically it is no doubt accurate: as poetry; however, it leaves much to be desired.

Raffel finds such translations difficult, but ultimately justifiable. As he argues elsewhere with reference to his own translation of *Beowulf*:

Old English scholars don’t need a translation of *Beowulf*... not for themselves ... They prefer the original and I say more power to them ... When scholars employ a translation it is for other people, non Old English readers. Why? To teach them about oral-formulaic verse? I think not. The idea is to expose them to a meaningful dose of beauty as the Old English mind conceived and expressed it, to show them in concrete style what the Old English poet could and did do.³

The second audience consists of a general set of readers who are interested in literature for its own sake and require an ‘interpretive translation’. In this situation the translator, although not always in full control of the original, knows enough about poetry to recognise the literary qualities of the text and render them in the best English possible. This is the translation of poetry into poetry, for people who have neither access to the original nor any need to attain it.

Here is a simple Malay *pantun*, translated by the colonial scholar Sir Richard Winstedt:

Malacca fort it cannot fall

My love, she cannot lie.

As dies the basil on yonder tray,

In her arms I will die.⁴

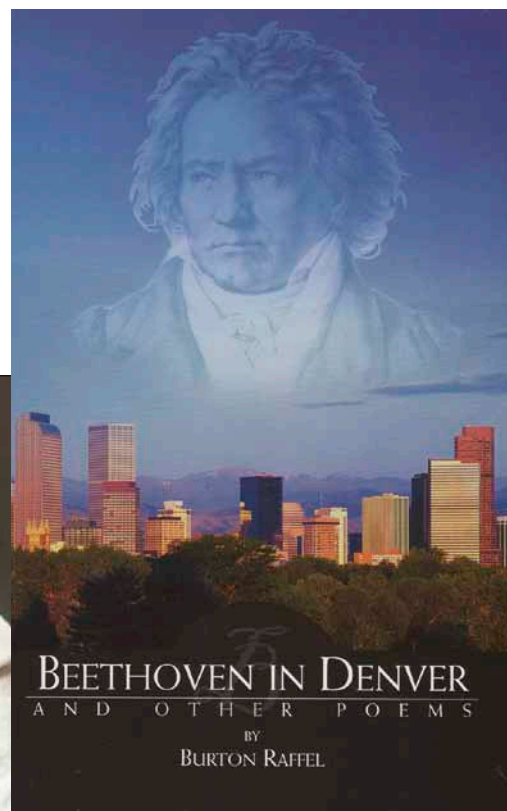
Winstedt follows the original form almost exactly: four lines made up of two rhyming couplets, the first of which establishes an image from nature which finds its fulfilment in the second. Readers who are interested in Malay literature, and those curious about the origins of the French *pantoum*, will find this translation not only aesthetic but useful.

Poetry is ‘what is lost in the translation’ (to misquote Robert Frost).

Harry Aveling (opposite page) at the
AALITRA Awards Ceremony (see p. 7)
photograph courtesy of Diana Cousens

cover image courtesy of
Conundrum Press, Denver, USA
Burton Raffel, 1928–2015

*formal translations—
concerned with ‘fidelity’
and ‘exactness’ ... are
sometimes wooden ...*



Then there are those who seek a ‘free’ or ‘expansive’ translation. The material ‘takes on its own distinct poetic shape as the translation develops’, allowing its audience to read ‘something, anything, new rather than something old’.⁵ That ‘something’ is bound by the conventions of the receiving culture. We can compare Herbert Giles’ Victorian translation from the Chinese:

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver’s loom,
Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow—
See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
Round as the round moon shines in heaven above,
At home, abroad, a close companion thou,
Stirring at every move the grateful gale.
And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills
Cooling the dying summer’s torrid rage,
Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,
All thoughts of bygone days, like them bygone.⁶

with Ezra Pound’s haiku-like version:

O fan of white silk,
Clear as the frost on the grass-blade,
You also are laid aside.⁷

As Pound asserted, the translator should focus on ‘things’, use no word that ‘does not contribute to the presentation’, and use a rhythm that is ‘musical’ not that of the metronome. ‘Make it new’, Pound said, and he did.

Finally, there are those readers who want to see the translator’s own poetry as shaped by foreign texts. Robert Lowell argues in the preface to his 1962 book *Imitations*:

This book is separate from its sources, and should be read as a sequence, one voice running through many personalities, contrasts and repetitions ... I have been reckless with literal meaning and labored hard to get the tone ... I have dropped lines, moved lines, moved stanzas, changed images and altered metre and intent.⁸

Another critic, James Holmes, describes this as a ‘devious’ or ‘extraneous’ translation, ‘where the form adopted is in no way implicit in either the form or the content of the original’.⁹

Here is part of Lowell’s re-creation of François Villon’s ‘Le Lais XXXIX, 1–8’:

I am thirty this year,
near Christmas, the dead season,
when wolves live off the wind,
and the poor peasants fear
the icy firmament.
Sound in body and mind,
I write my Testament,
but the ink has frozen.¹⁰

The translation combines material from three different passages (including the opening stanzas of ‘Le Lais’ and ‘Le grand testament’). As Gargaillo argues, the following are all qualities of Lowell’s work rather than Villon’s: the music of the lines, the detachment of the speaker, the suggestive pause at the end of the sentence, and the general tone of understatement.¹¹

Raffel’s major book of poetry is called *Beethoven in Denver*. The irony of this odd combination will not be lost on literary translators.

Harry Aveling, *PhD (NUS), DCA (UTS)* is an adjunct professor in translation studies at Monash University. He has translated extensively from Indonesian, Malay and francophone Vietnamese literatures. He is editor and translator, with Burton Raffel, of Indonesian poet WS Rendra’s *Ballads and Blues: Poems translated from Indonesian (1974) and Testimony: A Life in Poetry (2015)*.

¹ B Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (University Park and London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 110–128.

² LL Rosenstein, *The Devotional Poetry of Svami Haridas* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), p. 300.

³ B Raffel, *The Forked Tongue: A Study of the Translation Process* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 31.

⁴ RO Winstedt, ‘A History of Classical Malay Literature: Monographs on Malay Subjects, No. 5’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 31, #3, 1958, p. 164.

⁵ Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry*, p. 110.

⁶ H Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature* (Rutland: Charles Tuttle, 1973), p. 101.

⁷ R Sieburth (ed.), *Ezra Pound: Poetry and Translations* (New York: The Library of America, 2002), p. 280.

⁸ R Lowell, *Imitations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. xi–xiii.

⁹ J Holmes, *Translated!: Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 25.

¹⁰ F Villon ‘The Great Testament’, trans. Lowell, *Imitations*, p. 8.

¹¹ F Gargaillo, ‘What Tone Allows: Robert Lowell on François Villon’, *Literary Imagination*, Vol 6, #2, 2014, pp. 191–209.

Who has the final word? Literary theory, translation theory and translation practice

The translator could be described as a servant of two masters: the author and the reader. But is an author even the master of the meaning of their own words? And does the authority of the author depend on whether they have a ‘name’? French>English translator **Melissa McMahon** considers her current commercial translation practice in light of the literary theory she was taught at university.



It's fifty years since the publication in French of Roland Barthes' influential essay 'The Death of the Author', which challenged the idea that the author is the point of origin and final authority on the meaning of a text. According to Barthes, the myth of the Author—with a capital 'a'—is that the text expresses a set of ideas, feelings and visions that were originally formed in the mind of the author (the author as point of origin), and that deciphering a text means correctly reattaching the words to whatever the author had in mind (the author as final authority).

Against this, Barthes argues that the moment the author puts pen to paper, they enter into a network of meaning they do not own and cannot control—the writing itself is in charge. Writers themselves talk about this phenomenon: words 'get away from them', characters 'develop minds of their own'. For Barthes, this is not just

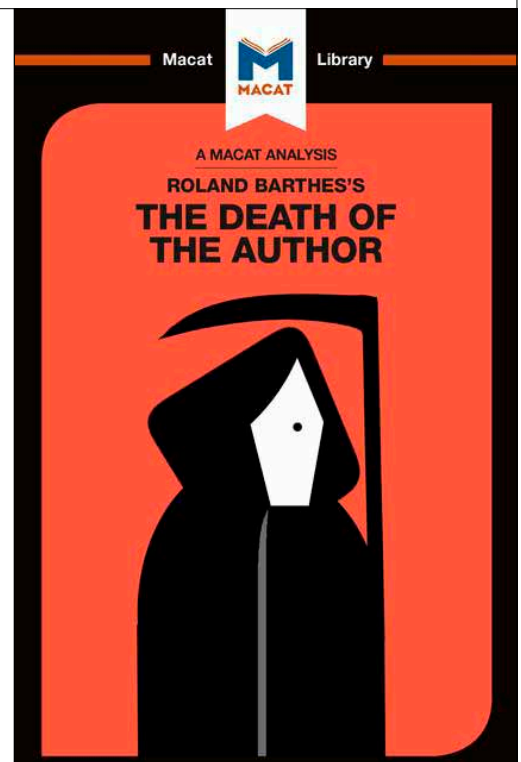
an anecdote about the experience of writing, but the essence of writing itself:

... writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.

I always think of this essay when I see references to Friedrich Schleiermacher's oft-cited theory of translation, the famous opposition between translations that 'bring the reader toward the author' and those that bring 'the author toward the reader'. For Barthes, unlike Schleiermacher, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination', which is to say with the reader. It should be noted, though, that for Barthes the reader—like the author—is as much a 'place' assigned by the text as a real person.

... writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.

Barthes' position is not just based on the idea that language trumps the language-user when it comes to meaning, but that the material reality of language is inseparable from any abstract idea it is supposed to convey. Language for Barthes, following Saussure, is a set of signs, each made up of a 'signifier'—the material element of language, spoken or written—and a 'signified'—the meaning we attach to the



sounds and letters. Just as the text is not simply a vessel for the intentions of the author, the signifier is not just a vessel for an intended concept: meaning itself is guided by the signifiers available to us; and what is the 'signified' itself, but another kind of signifier? Is there actually such a thing as a 'meaning' we can identify as separate from the word that means it?

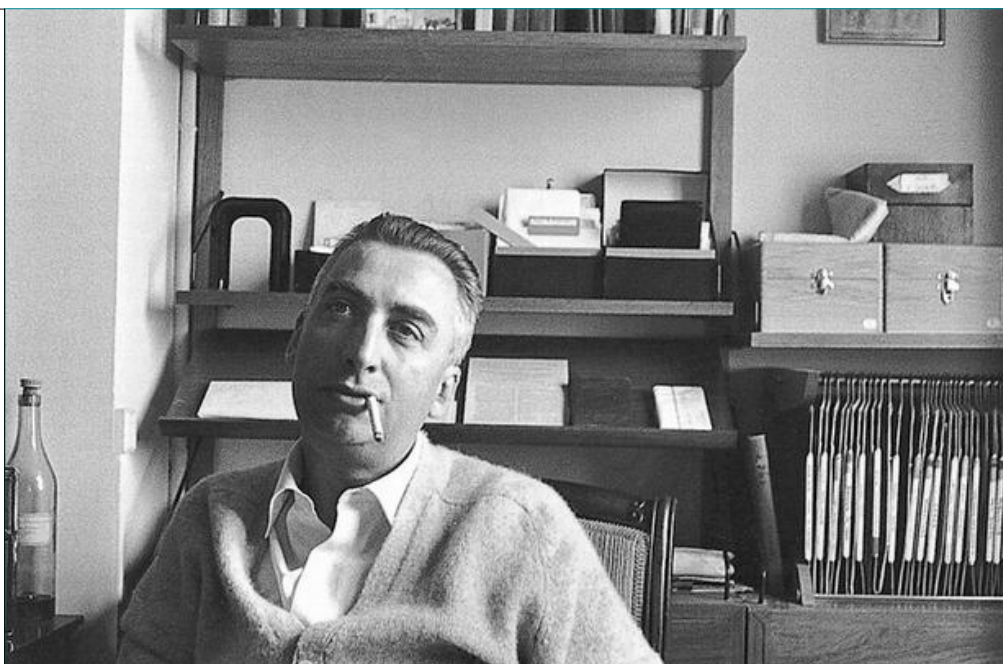
Here we arrive back at translation again; this time, however, we're looking not at different philosophies or approaches to translation, but at the possibility of translation itself. The signifier—the letter on the page, the sounds that come out of a mouth—is exactly what is destroyed in the act of translating. What

makes a specific language a specific language, if not a certain shape and arrangement of words and sounds? The translator erases and replaces these with another shape and arrangement of words and sounds; and what is this process guided by, if not something like a 'signified' that we separate from the first and attach to the second? Sometimes, when engaged in translating work—spending whole days wiping out signifiers and gazing at signifieds in my mind's eye—I think about how I'm betraying my university lessons on the primacy of the signifier and the myth of the signified.

That's not to say that Barthes and his school are wrong. The whole difficulty of translation has to do with the problem they point out: how much meaning is bound to the particular weight and shape of a language, which draws in not just the formal properties of the word, but also the broader culture within which it's embedded. This problem is relative of course: the more a text deals with standardised concepts and objective processes, the more it looks towards a signified that can be isolated from the specific language that expresses it. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the literary text (and above all poetry), for which the whole aim is to upset standard ways of thinking and to strike intimate chords, exploiting the formal potential of the signifier.

We don't need to be translators of poetry, though, to have this experience of grappling with a signifier that has no obvious partner on the other side of the language divide. What does that experience consist in? Speaking for myself, there is a something—a shape or shadow, a movement, an aura ... a ghost?—that the source term 'gives off', and which I try to hold onto after whisking the term away. The 'mind's eye' is supposed to be a metaphor for a purely intelligible process, just as we talk about having a good 'nose' for meaning; but when the sensory metaphors pile up—when we talk about the 'feel', 'flavour', 'colour' or 'shade' of a term—should we start thinking of it as a kind of synaesthesia rather than conceptual association?

There would still be a kind of signifier, some sort of sensible shape and arrangement rather than a pure abstraction, just not (yet) a linguistic one. As it moves closer to a target term, the ghostly presence becomes like the blur of a thousand words running past like shapes in a slot machine, stopping and starting until 'the penny drops'.



Barthes argues that the moment the author puts pen to paper, they enter into a network of meaning they do not own and cannot control—the writing itself is in charge.

In what sense are these experiences like the 'ideas, feelings and visions' the original author of the text might have had, and are we attempting to recreate them, consciously or unconsciously, when searching for a term? Barthes replaces the idea of an Author who precedes the text with the idea of a 'scriptor' who 'is born simultaneously with the text'. He replaces the idea that the text records a pre-existing meaning with the idea that the text performs a meaning in the here and now. There is still an author, but one whose identity is more put together by the text than vice versa.

One of the main differences, it seems to me, between literary translation and the kind of work that the commercial translator engages in lies in the presence or absence of this Author-with-a-capital-'a' hovering over the text, whether dead or alive. It is a truism that every text is written by somebody who could technically be referred to as its author, but are the nameless clerks who draft or redraft

a contract 'authors'? Are the nameless copywriters who produce the blurb for a medical brochure 'authors'? Not in Barthes' sense or indeed in Schleiermacher's, I think. You could say that in commercial translation, the figure that really hovers over the translator is not the Author, but the Client.

Melissa McMabon is a Sydney-based full-time French>English translator and Chair of the Editorial Committee of In Touch. She studied French, linguistics and philosophy at university and went on to obtain her PhD in philosophy. She still does scholarly translations—and has even had a go at poetry—but is happy to specialise in the worldly field of cookbooks.

above: Roland Barthes (1915–80) in his study, by Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1963

opposite page: cover image courtesy of Routledge (Taylor and Francis Group)

On being translated

Poet, academic and unionist **Raewyn Connell's** work has been translated into nineteen languages. She reflects here on the experience of being translated.



Being translated is flattering. Somebody has thought well enough of my text to put time and effort into sharing it with a new audience. I feel warmed, even when the result is a mystery.

The Japanese edition of my book *Gender and Power* (1987), for example, is a beautiful piece of book-making, but I can only guess what it's like as a text. And I can hardly imagine what it would be like to read *Gender and Power* in Japan, with its own gender order and debates about gender questions.

With a translation in Roman script that I can follow sentence by sentence, usually recognising at least some key words and phrases, the feeling is different. I have an immediate connection with this text, although it's still not the text I sweated to produce. It's like being grandmother rather than mother, perhaps, while my relationship to the Japanese text (to stretch the simile) is more like that of aunt.

When a translator approaches me with queries—something I encourage strongly—I learn unexpected things about my own writing. I once imagined my prose style to be plain, clear English, a blend of George Orwell and Jane Austen with a touch of Dashiell Hammett. I discover it is actually laced with allusions, figures of speech and assumptions of prior knowledge—like the previous sentence.

For instance, one translator was stumped when I wrote 'letting things slide'. I hardly thought of that as a metaphor—but it is. 'Jobs for the boys' was another puzzle—think of the literal meaning. Worse: I'm from a generation that was brought up on Shakespeare, the Bible, and the Prayer Book, and I sometimes quote from the seventeenth century without realising it.

Nouns in apposition; academic terminology, such as 'embodiment'; and slang, such as 'sexpot': these are traps too.

Allusions and jokes may go dead flat—and not only in translation. The final passage of *Gender and Power* is entitled 'Concluding Notes on the World to which a Social Theory of Gender Might Lead'. This is a joking allusion to the conclusion of John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory*. Nobody seems to have noticed.

When a translator approaches me with queries—something I encourage strongly—I learn unexpected things about my own writing.

I have come to realise how much I rely on the rhythm of English to scaffold an argument, connect pieces of evidence, or convey nuances. When I am writing, I speak the sentences in my head, and constantly correct for sound. Since punctuation is the main tool for conveying rhythm in written English, I get very touchy about punctuation. I once had a terrible argument, lasting half the night, with an editor who had deleted all my semicolons.

How does a translator convey the rhythm, in a language with a different sound-pattern? I simply don't know; I'm not fluent enough in any other language to tell.

Some translators have worked very hard on the text, discussing many of the difficulties with me, rather than rushing into print. The German translation of my book *Masculinities* (1995), for instance, is the product of beautiful scholarship and teamwork, and I know it has a strong reputation in Germany. It feels good to be associated with such a text, though it was other people who did much of the work!

There is always a feeling of displacement. A translation appears later than the original, sometimes many years later. I don't know in advance which pieces will get picked up. Less of my work has been translated into French than into German, Spanish, or Swedish; none into Arabic; and some of my best writing hasn't been translated at all ... yet.

I still feel there is something miraculous about my words going out into the world in new forms. Every translation means an unexpected audience, a chance for new connection and exchange of ideas. This is culturally and politically important—particularly given the xenophobia being whipped up in our country, and around the world, today.

But reaching out *as a writer* creates a dilemma. To write the best work I can—the most worth translating—is to write English at full stretch, using the marvellous resources of the language. But using all those resources makes the product more difficult to translate. When I give a lecture to an audience whose first language is not English, I try for clarity above all. I used to think that was the priority in writing, too. Now I'm not so sure.

photo of Raewyn taken by Peter Hall
cover images:

Gender and Power courtesy of Polity Books, UK
Masculinities courtesy of Allen & Unwin, Australia



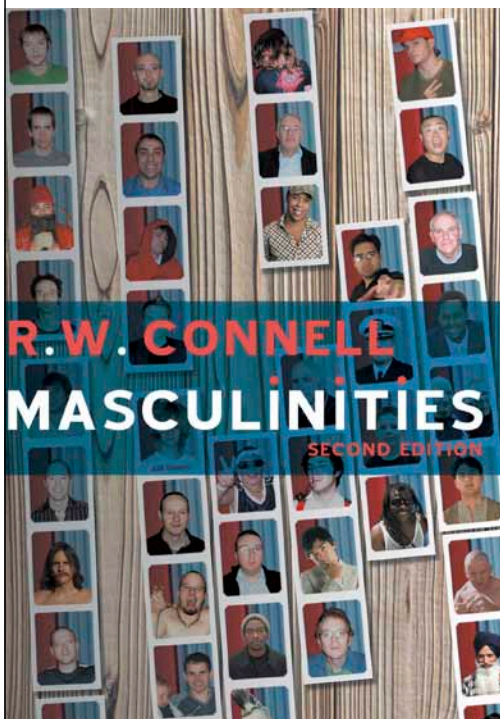
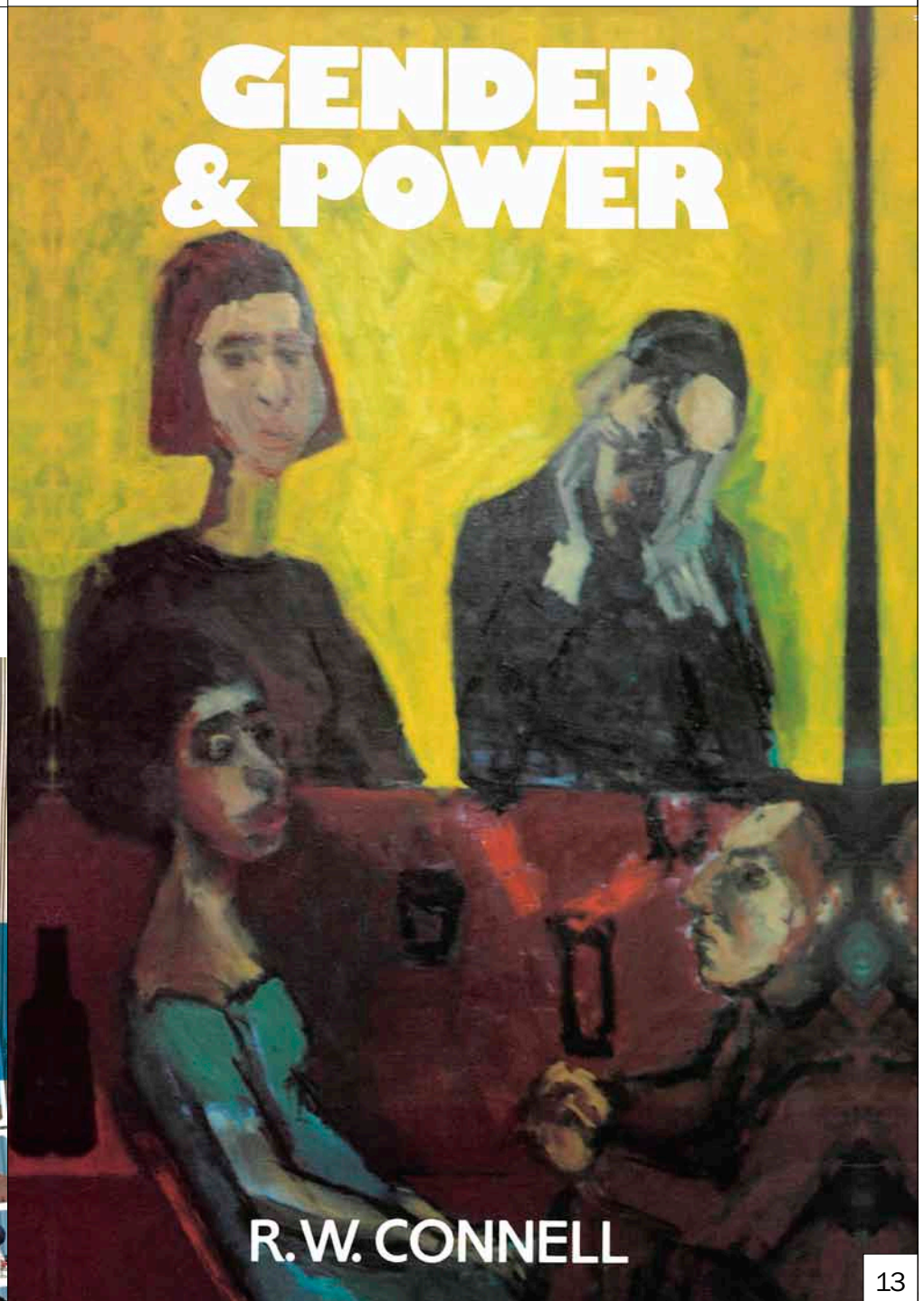
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Raewyn Connell became Professor of Sociology at Macquarie University in 1976, launching a new department that tried to embody academic democracy as well as new agendas for sociology. In the early 1990s she moved to the University of California at Santa Cruz, then returned to a Chair at the University of Sydney. She is now Professor Emerita at the University of Sydney, and a life member of the National Tertiary Education Union. Raewyn is also author/co-author of twenty-five books, including *The Good University*, to be published in early 2019.

Note: this article is an edited version of a blog post on Raewyn's website.

www.raewynconnell.net

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The dual perspective: reconciling ethical obligations with clients' misperceptions

As all AUSIT members are aware, they are required to adhere to the organisation's own Code of Ethics. In a paper he gave at the AUSIT National Conference 2017, National Secretary **Dave Deck** explained how a social work model based on a 'dual perspective' can help T/Is to bridge the gap between their culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients and Australian bureaucracy, and examined how T/Is can reconcile this role of cultural bridge with their ethical obligations. Dave summarises his paper here.

The 'Impartiality' principle requires T/Is to refrain from giving advice or making comments. However, the contexts in which assignments occur are rarely clear-cut, and practitioners often need to reconcile their ethical obligations with CALD clients' misperceptions about interactions with 'officialdom'.

A recent arrival's view of such interactions may differ significantly from that of someone who has grown up here; and these differing perceptions might create tension with the requirement for impartiality.

The Dual Perspective Model

A useful starting point is the 'dual perspective' approach proposed by Norton et al. in 1978: a 'conscious and systematic process of perceiving, understanding, and comparing simultaneously the values, attitudes, and behaviour of the larger societal system with those of the client's immediate family and community system'.¹

Used to analyse how individuals, when part of a minority, can develop that sense of their place in their physical and social environment that is important for maintaining psychological and emotional health, the 'dual perspective' can help T/Is to analyse the reactions of CALD clients vis-à-vis their own role.

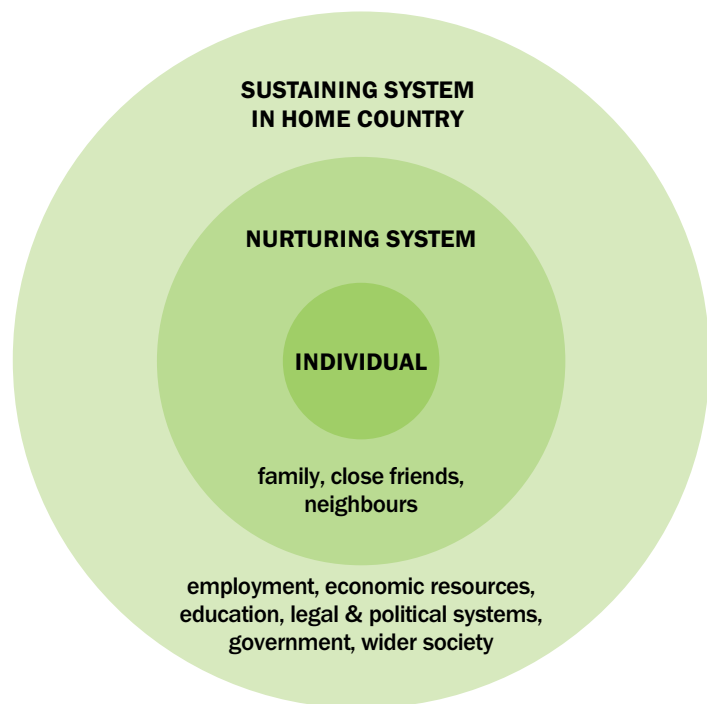
An individual within any culture develops this sense of 'place'—a set of (largely unquestioned) assumptions about the world and how to interact with it—over time, through: explicit teaching; community sanctions for unacceptable conduct; and subconscious absorption from life experiences. If these assumptions are shared by the majority, there is minimal disjunction; however, when an individual is 'transplanted' into another society with different majority assumptions, the potential for disjunction increases. Moreover, because assumptions are often held subconsciously they are difficult to unlearn, and the transplanted individual may continue to see the world through the 'lens' of their original cultural assumptions.

Greatly important to every individual is their 'nurturing' system: the network of family, close friends and neighbours which provides the supportive environment necessary to maintain psychological and emotional wellbeing. When

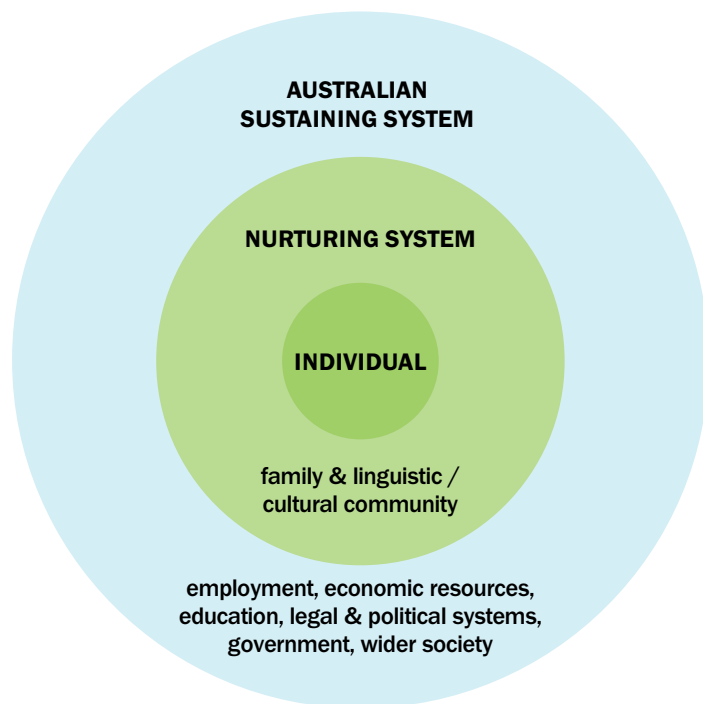
... when an individual is 'transplanted' into another society with different majority assumptions, the potential for disjunction increases ...

the cultural values of that immediate community align with those of society as a whole, the nurturing system blends into wider society. However, for the transplanted individual, this nurturing system shifts: family and close friends become more relied on, while 'neighbours' are often replaced by those sharing a language, cultural values and assumptions, and/or religious beliefs.

Also of great importance to every individual, however, is the 'sustaining' system that provides physical wellbeing: employment (in turn providing income and housing);



before transplantation



after transplantation

education; legal and political systems; and government services. No one can avoid interacting with the wider sustaining system; and the transplanted individual, seeing this system through their different cultural 'lens', may not understand it. This disjunction between nurturing and sustaining systems can have various practical consequences.

Analysis of some differences

One powerful influence on a CALD client's expectations is previous experiences, particularly in their country of origin; these may include:

- widespread inefficiency or corruption among officials: they may make decisions based on personal whims, or demand bribes. In such situations applicants may seek the support of influential community figures, or try to arouse officials' sympathy
- highly rule-bound officials who reject applications for trivial reasons
- security officials known to routinely employ violence and/or coercion
- doctor-patient relationships in which the doctor has unquestionable authority.

The common factor here is an unequal power relationship.

Individuals brought up in Australia, however, are likely to have developed different

assumptions and expectations, having experienced:

- officials required to make decisions according to stated policies: applications that comply with published guidelines are generally approved without argument, and arbitrary decisions can be challenged
- an increasing emphasis—including within government agencies—on 'customer rights', and allowing applicants to put their case
- policing systems that are subject to public scrutiny
- a general 'empowerment' of the customer/consumer which extend to fields such as health: doctors lay out the options and patients have their say.

The power relationships here are significantly more balanced.

Expectations about appropriate behaviour towards officials also differ:

- In some cultures, a dramatic reaction to an adverse decision—such as expression of real or feigned anger, and/or swearing—may be regarded as normal.
- In other cultures harmony is highly valued, and appealing a decision may require subtlety in communication.
- There may be taboos in matters such as eye

contact, or how bad news should be communicated, or sensitive issues discussed. Unfortunately, many Australian officials are both monolingual and monocultural, viewing interactions through the 'lens' of the country's predominantly Anglo-Celtic post-colonial culture.

Some practical consequences

Some practical consequences observed over a number of years of translating and interpreting include:

- clients demanding full translations (and sometimes even accusing translators of unethical conduct), despite the fact that authorities accept translations of personal documents in 'extract' form—most likely because the clients fear capricious officials will reject 'incomplete' translations
- applicants to the Refugee Review Tribunal, when invited to raise any further matters, simply stating 'I hope the tribunal will approve my application'—suggesting they are trying to elicit the tribunal's sympathy
- similarly, applicants giving seemingly irrelevant answers—they may be trying to guess the most 'pleasing' answers, again suggesting they are seeking to elicit sympathy
- CALD suspects in police interviews often not understanding (or struggling to comprehend) when cautioned that they are not obliged to

... [and] because assumptions are often held subconsciously they are difficult to unlearn, and the transplanted individual may continue to see the world through the 'lens' of their original cultural assumptions.

answer questions—perhaps reflecting different suspects' rights in their countries of origin

- CALD patients, when presented with several options, asking the doctor to decide, or asking the interpreter for advice—the former is consistent with a cultural belief in the doctor's authority.

The interface with ethics

T/Is are not only linguistic bridges but also cultural bridges, often able to identify where culturally-bound assumptions will lead to misperceptions and confusion. But how to square this with the impartiality principle? Clause 4.4 stipulates that T/Is mustn't 'voice or write an opinion, solicited or unsolicited, on any matter or person during an assignment.' This is generally interpreted as precluding T/Is from acting as cultural bridges, even when one or other party specifically requests advice on a cultural issue. This principle has a sound basis:

to prevent the practitioner from influencing an interaction, especially during an interpreting assignment.

The phrase 'during an assignment' may offer a partial solution: we can infer that 'voicing an opinion' (read: discussing cultural issues) *before* or *after* an assignment may be acceptable. Another part of the solution might lie in consistent application of subsection 7.4 of the Code of Ethics, which deals with briefings.

Conclusion

There are several points of tension between T/Is acting as 'cultural bridges' and the ethical requirement of impartiality, i.e. not voicing opinions or giving advice. This article—while not seeking to give any definitive answers—has suggested some possible approaches, in the hope of generating further discussion within the profession.

Dave Deck has practised as a translator and interpreter in Indonesian and Malay for about 25 years. He chairs NAATI's Indonesian/Malay—as well as English—examining panels, and from 1998 to 2014 ran NAATI workshops for both translating and interpreting candidates. Formerly an Air Force educator, Dave returned to the Defence Force School of Languages to teach Indonesian, then became their Assessments Officer before retiring from Defence in 2009. From 2006 to 2014 he taught T&I theory and Indonesian T&I at RMIT. In 2014, after retiring from regular teaching, Dave joined the Vic/Tas Branch Committee and accepted the position of branch delegate, as well as chairing the committee from 2015 to 2017. Dave has applied the experience gained at NAATI and RMIT to teaching short PD courses, and since November 2016 has been AUSIT's national secretary.

¹ Dolores Norton et al., *The Dual Perspective: Inclusion of Ethnic Minority Content in the Social Work Curriculum* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1978).



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Moreno's Fireflies (book review)

by Annamaria Arnall

'... if you were born there it is inside you somewhere' writes **Moreno Giovannoni** towards the end of his debut novel *The Fireflies of Autumn*. The work is a collection of robust and emotional, true yet tall-tale-like stories that relate to the Tuscan village San Ginese, the enchanted birthplace of the author.



Saturday Age, and were included in *The Best Australian Essays* in 2014 and 2017; and in 2016 he was the inaugural winner of the Deborah Cass Prize for Writing, which led to the publication of *The Fireflies of Autumn* by Black Inc. in July this year.

The book is a collection of tales, enveloped in a magical, surreal veil of language that *In Touch's* readers might particularly appreciate: tales first, we're told, recounted in Italian by a narrator character called Ugo, then translated into English by another character called Translator. In effect, you could say that Moreno remained grounded in his original metier even when writing fiction ... or, I should say, auto-fiction, as he himself belongs to the personae dramatis.

The individual tales build a novel around a stock of central characters: they progress over time, and actions fall into a steady arch as the stories come together to become the history of a family, of a village community, of their day-to-day life in peace and war.

The topic of migration is central to the novel. People leave San Ginese for America or Australia ... only to return ... and, in some cases, to leave again. The individual tales, however, have their own topics rippling away to cover this centre with colourful layers and reduce the glare that a sharp focus could inflict on it; and thanks to a masterful economy in the writing, the stories tell us about a great many things at once. For example, another writer would use maybe ten times as many words as Moreno does here to describe pedagogy and intergenerational relationships:

While little Bucchia pleaded with him, using the formal form of address with parents, which was common then, 'Non me lo rompete! Non me lo

rompete!' Paolino chopped the cart up with an axe. No one would have believed him capable of doing something like that.

I particularly admire the way Moreno weaves Italian into English. These Tuscan words are to the writing what spices are to a dish: essential to its character. Meanwhile, the reader may learn some etymology:

The men sat and played *briscola* and *sopa*, slapping cards down on the table defiantly with exclamations of jubilant victory: 'Toh!'

Well, you all know how many years ago the young men of Villora stole the *barrocci* (the carts, from the Latin *birotium*, meaning two-wheeled) which were kept in the stables, and hid them. The first time they did this, it took everybody by surprise and no-one knew what was happening.

Since the release of *The Fireflies* ... , Moreno has become highly visible again: giving interviews, presenting author's talks, appearing at meetings with readers. If he turns up at a library or bookshop near you, grab the chance to have him sign your copy!

The Fireflies of Autumn (Black Inc., 2018) is available from the publisher and other sites online as well as in bookshops. It has been widely reviewed, including in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian Book Review*, *Books+Publishing*, *The Monthly* and *The Saturday Paper*. In October Moreno discussed *San Ginese*, his family, and the book with Sarah Kanowski on Radio National: Conversations.

Many AUSIT members would know Moreno personally or from various items of industry news. His highly visible involvement in the T&I profession goes back several decades: Moreno was the charismatic national president of AUSIT in 2002, the year I joined our association, and we've seen him active within Professionals Australia's TIA group in recent years.

Few colleagues would know, however, that Moreno has another identity besides that of a freelance translator and interpreter of the Italian language: he's also a writer. His pieces have appeared in *Island*, *Southerly* and *The*

cover image (above) courtesy of Black Inc. Annamaria (left) with Moreno (on screen) and his novel

Have you heard of ‘trans-editing’?

Although trans-editing techniques are widely used by international and ethnic media in Australia—including the BBC World Service, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, ABC Radio Australia and SBS Radio (who broadcast in 67 languages other than English)—the term ‘trans-editing’ is not widely known. Obviously, it means translation and editing working together—but why, and how? SBS Radio’s former head of Mandarin, **May Hu, OAM**, tells us what she does on a daily basis; examines in more depth what trans-editing is; and considers how quality in this field could be improved in Australia.



Since I joined SBS Radio in 1992, trans-editing has been my daily job.

The process involves, for me:

1. collecting relevant news articles from *SBS Radio News*
2. compiling and editing the content
3. translating this into a short article in Chinese.

Here’s an example from August this year: during the Federal Government’s ‘leadership spill’ I gathered three news articles which took different angles on what was happening; compiled the information contained in them; then edited, translated and rewrote the material into one short article in Chinese before reading it on air. The final news article needed to be accurate, balanced and objective.

At an AUSIT National Conference many years ago I met John Crone, then the organisation’s general treasurer. In conversation I discovered that John worked in trans-editing too, for ABC Radio Australia as director of their North Asia section. He pointed out that although we talk about all sorts of translations, the term trans-editing is rarely used, and I added that there are no courses or PD sessions that focus on this

discipline. We agreed that it would be great if we had trans-editing courses in universities, and AUSIT PD sessions on the topic. I would have liked to co-write this article with John, but sadly he passed away last April.

Danish academic Karen Stetting coined the term ‘transediting’ (now usually hyphenated) in the 1980s, to cope with—as she put it—‘the grey area between editing and translating’.¹ With globalisation and the growth of the information highway in the twenty-first century, the demand for trans-editing of news is increasing in Australia and globally.

Danish academic Karen Stetting coined the term ‘transediting’ in the 1980s to cope with ‘the grey area between editing and translating’.

Unfortunately, incompetent trans-editing frequently results in mistranslations which distort headlines and produce misleading (or ‘fake’) news. The issue is that, in addition to the linguistic and cultural knowledge involved in translating, trans-editing involves skills more traditionally associated with journalism: namely a sense of the accuracy, balance and objectivity referred to above.

For example, this August many Chinese media sources, including the powerful WeChat, reported: ‘澳洲宣布战胜癌症’ (‘Australian scientists have succeeded in defeating cancer’). As consumers in both Australia and China rushed to get hold of the new wonder-drug, scientists from WEHI in Melbourne came out and said that this was ‘fake news’: the original story from SBS and Fairfax reported that they had discovered a new type of anti-cancer drug without the harmful side-effects of conventional cancer treatments.

So, how can we ensure quality in trans-editing? I believe that the answer lies in education. My own skills were greatly enhanced by taking the multicultural journalism course run by Wollongong University for SBS Radio producers in the 1990s. Ideally, news trans-editors should have qualifications in both journalism

and translation; or at least have NAATI accreditation in translation, or have studied trans-editing as part of a journalism course.

I would suggest that universities that have T&I programs—such as RMIT, UQ and UNSW—introduce courses on the subject. My AUSIT colleague Leong Ko—a senior lecturer teaching translation of news at UQ—agrees that his students would benefit from also studying news trans-editing, as this would be more practical in the real world, where their skills could be adopted by the media industry straight away.

I would also like to see AUSIT, and other culture-specific T&I bodies such as CITAA (the Chinese Interpreters & Translators Association of Australia), running PD sessions on trans-editing for practitioners working in the field of media.

I hope John Crone's dream comes true one day. We can change the world for the better if we work together.

May Hu, OAM was born in Shanghai and migrated to Australia in 1988. She holds multiple qualifications in T&I, journalism and media studies. May joined SBS Radio in 1992, was a senior producer and head of the Mandarin section there until her semi-retirement in 2013, and is now a casual producer. May is also a prominent MC and event host in the Australian Chinese community. She received an Australian National OPSO Media Award (2002) and a Victorian Multicultural Commission Award for Excellency in Multicultural Affairs in Media and Arts (2006), and was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List last year.

¹ K Stetting, *Proceedings from the fourth Nordic Conference for English Studies* (1989), accessed online.

May at work in the late 1990s (above), and with veteran SBS news anchor Lee Lin Chin



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The increasingly technological world and its implications for the T&I profession

Following our recent feature on machine translation, practitioner Amy Wang reflects on the differences between machine and human translation, and explores how practitioners like herself can best adapt to—and even benefit from—the inevitable technologisation of the T&I industry.

'Hi, I'm calling to book a women's haircut for a client.' In May 2018, Google wowed the world with two short demonstrations showcasing the jaw-dropping ability of its recently launched AI Assistant. In both examples, Google Assistant made an appointment for its human 'client', managing natural flows of conversation with a deceptively human-like speech style. You might be thinking 'This actually sounds creepy, but what has it to do with interpreters or translators?'

Well, let's cast our minds back a decade to 2008, a year after Google Translate was launched. Many of us still remember that, in those days, computer-generated (or machine) translation (CGT/MT) was synonymous with 'lousy translation'. But technology and artificial intelligence (AI) have evolved so rapidly that, in merely 10 years, AI has not only caught up with human intelligence, but shows signs of exceeding it. Today, if you type a URL into Google Translate, it will convert the whole website into your target language within—literally—seconds; and even for a master of languages, the accuracy and fluency of the target text is distressingly good. If you install the Google Translate app on your smartphone, it can actually interpret basic verbal conversations between dozens of languages without delay.



Amy with her 'CAT' tool, Master Meow

A more concerning fact is that such developments are also observed in arguably more challenging T&I fields. In April 2018, Chinese-based company Tencent attempted to replace conference interpreters with AI-powered engines at China's Boao Forum for Asia. Unfortunately (or rather, fortunately for us practitioners), these machines failed to deliver acceptable interpretations, and human interpreters had to be engaged urgently in order to enable meaningful communication at the forum. However, this incident hints at a future in which even highly skilled conference interpreters might be driven out of the market by machines.

So, does this mean today's interpreters and translators (T/Is) will all eventually lose our jobs? Will T&I become a profession only found in history books? And more importantly, what can we do to keep ourselves competitive in this highly technological world?

Some would say, if we look back on the last couple of centuries, it is obvious that with the invention of the steam engine, the human race was dragged into a new era in which the utilisation of machines has been increasingly dominant: laundry and dishes are no longer washed by diligent maids; complicated calculations no longer require mathematical geniuses; and in some cases, highly complicated machines which no longer need skilled operators (such as driverless trains) are already a reality. It seems we humans are deprived of an increasing variety of jobs and opportunities by new machines, and there is nothing we can do to keep ourselves employed.

Others argue that certain machines have replaced humans on specific tasks, but that this has also created huge potential. Perhaps most obviously, while machines are busy washing dirty dishes and laundry, women have been freed from house duties to receive higher education, contribute to public opinion, manage companies, and even lead countries. While computers are busy calculating numbers, talented minds have mastered different types of code, giving commands to those machines, and ultimately creating billions of dollars. And while machines are busy monitoring

themselves, millions of workers have mastered the skills of building machines and equipping them with higher intelligence, so that the machines can better assist humans. In fact, the fate of humans in the highly technological world does not seem so gloomy after all.

Well, if we view the reality of machine-generated T&I from a more positive perspective, our future seems less frightening. But of course, it would be extremely naïve and dangerous to turn a blind eye to the threats brought by MT and simply assume that T&I practitioners will be automatically promoted to more glorified positions without having to work for it. In fact, we cannot effectively address the employment crisis posed by increasing mechanisation without embracing the challenges with open minds, identifying the right path with decisive eyes, and grasping the opportunities through working hard. So, the real question for T/Is is how to digest the reality, navigate effectively, and become fully prepared for the challenges and opportunities brought by our AI counterparts. Here are a few thoughts:

1. Know our enemy

Let's assume MT is indeed our enemy, what should we do then? I would say learn everything about this 'enemy'; for how are we going to persuade our clients that human translation is superior if we are ignorant of what MT can do? How are we going to outperform MT in any bid if we're unaware of its advantages and drawbacks? How are we going

to survive as T/Is if we are unable to use MT to our own advantage? Having insufficient knowledge of our enemy will surely hinder any chance we might have of 'defeating' it.

2. Evaluate the situation

What do we want to achieve in the long run? Driving MT out of the market altogether would be an extremely unrealistic goal. If we examine carefully what has been driving our clients towards MT, we find two main factors: cost and efficiency; and who can provide any service cheaper and faster than a computer?

So, it's only realistic to acknowledge that part of the language service market is destined to be 'lost' to machines. At the same time, however, we must secure the rest of the market. How? By identifying our unique strengths and fully exploring our potential.

3. Know our strengths

What *are* our strengths? No doubt computers work best at matching existing data, but when it comes to creativity, we humans can still be confident that no other creature has ever performed better. We are able to process complicated language features creatively; to reformulate a whole message coherently instead of translating sentence by sentence; to recreate a target text creatively to reflect the implied meanings behind words; and most importantly, to make conscious translation choices based on comprehensive evaluation of the text and its function. All these factors will help us to remain competitive in this highly technological world.

... if we view the reality of machine-generated T&I from a more positive perspective, our future seems less frightening.

4. Identify the right direction

If we try to understand MT from a different perspective, it becomes obvious that it's an application of technology designed to boost human productivity. Therefore, if we're capable of utilising MT as our ancestors did hand tools, we will be able to deliver the target text more efficiently. Time and energy spared through machine-assisted translation can be put towards learning new skills and gaining knowledge, as well as producing target texts with greater creativity, effectively adding value to our service. This will ultimately ensure that human practitioners remain competitive in the T&I sector. After all, if there were only one aspect of human nature we can be certain of, it would be our constant pursuit of the new. So, new trends, technologies, books and ideas are guaranteed to catch people's eyes around the globe. When a whole new idea emerges and an artistic recreation into another language is required, no one will be more suited to the task than a highly skilled and creative human T&I practitioner.



Xiaoxing (Amy) Wang is a practising interpreter (English<->Mandarin) and translator (English>Chinese) with seven years' experience, and a member of In Touch's Editorial Committee. She holds a Master of Interpreting and Translation degree from Western Sydney University, and was recommended for the NAATI Conference Interpreter (English to Mandarin) credential upon completing two conference interpreting courses at UNSW. Amy is an active AUSIT member: she served as chair of the NSW Branch Committee from 2014 to 2017, and has recently been appointed national vice president, responsible for communications and public relations.

Member profiles

Q&A

Q1
How did you come to be a translator and/or interpreter?

Q2
Tell us about a project you have worked on that was especially interesting or challenging (within the bounds of confidentiality of course).



ANNA (MICKEY) BIEZEN

Anna (Mickey) Biezen has been a member of AUSIT since around 2003. She's a translator, Dutch↔English, and is based on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Mickey began translating part time in early 2003, and has been full time since March 2005, working in the areas of health care and immigration as well as subtitling.

[Editor's note: for all of you who are dying to know ... it's a lemur!]



PETER ZAUNER

Peter Zauner has been a member of AUSIT since 2009. He's a part-time translator, English↔German, and is based in Sydney.

Peter has been translating engineering and technical documents since 2009.

A1
I studied modern languages at high school in Belgium, and spent a year in the US as an exchange student. On leaving school I worked for various international companies and often translated unofficially at work, so I figured I might as well make it official. I became accredited and began translating on the side, but enjoyed it so much I ended up becoming a fulltime freelance translator.

A2
Subtitling is my favourite area of work. It can be challenging—especially if you have to shorten what's being said to fit it onto the screen, or when it involves wordplay—but it's always interesting and fun. I hadn't been translating for long when I worked on a gameshow in which competitors solved riddles (including fake village names) to find items. For example: *'De koffer staat op een blauwere plek, waarop maandelijks betaling de maag schuurt'* ('The suitcase is on a bluer site, where monthly payment scours the stomach'). 'Bluer site' implies a lake, so that was easy. The village was *Loon op Zand*. Monthly payment (wage) in Dutch is 'loon', and 'de maag schuurt' refers to a Dutch proverb 'zand schuurt de maag' ('sand cleans the stomach'). This means 'eating a little sand won't hurt you', i.e. 'don't be so dramatic' ... but not in English. I needed a clue that related to *zand* (sand) ... scratchy paper! 'The suitcase is on a bluer site, where monthly payment is on scratchy paper'.

A1
I'm originally from Austria, and came to Australia in my thirties. I did my engineering studies partly in German (in Vienna) and partly in English (here in Australia); then settled in Australia and took on a day job as an engineer in the water industry. I soon saw that—as in almost every sphere of life—communication is the key to success in the workplace. However, engineers are not all good communicators. Translating engineering and technical texts, I get a real buzz out of combining these elements: engineering, my two languages, and the building of bridges across cultural and linguistic barriers.

A2
For the last five years I've had a regular client, a small translation agency in my native Austria specialising in engineering translations. These include engineering manuals, technical specifications, service reports and, at times, documents used in operator training. I'm in email contact with my project manager several times a week. We've always maintained a very friendly and jovial tone, and sometimes chat about our personal lives. Two years ago, on holiday in Austria, I visited the office and met the owner and all project managers in person. This was an important step in deepening the professional and personal relationship I have with this agency, and our collaboration continues to be one of mutual respect and consideration. My customer allows me to overrun deadlines at times; and I'm prepared to prioritise their jobs, and to work late if one is particularly urgent.