

The Translator's voice

Presented in Brisbane in July 1994 by **Dr Judy Wakabayashi**,
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I am honoured to be invited by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators to follow in the footsteps of such distinguished previous speakers in presenting the Jill Blewett Memorial Lecture. Unlike our interpreter colleagues, we translators are generally not used to speaking in public. In fact, the only time you usually hear (or 'see') the voice of the translator in public is when an interpreter is speaking on television. Yet both translators and interpreters need to make our voices heard more loudly and more frequently, a topic to which I shall return later.

Only once did I have the pleasure of meeting Jill Blewett, albeit briefly, and that was at a translation studies conference here in Brisbane nine years ago. Yet everything I have heard about Jill indicates that in her dedication to the interpreting and translating (T&I) profession she epitomised the ideals toward which many of us are striving. I once read an article called "The Catechism of a Professional", which listed one of the attributes of a professional as contributing to the profession so that others might stand on his or her shoulders and reach "higher and farther". This implies an ever-rising standard of quality, and Jill Blewett's strong shoulders have indeed helped others to take the interpreting and translating profession in Australia to higher levels.

AUSIT too is playing a significant role in that (again quoting from the "Catechism") "many small people speak with one large voice", defending the interests of its nearly 1,000 members. Indeed, professional solidarity (respecting and supporting fellow professionals) is one of the eight principles laid down in AUSIT's revised Code of Ethics. Although still a young and relatively small organisation, AUSIT has grown in strength so that it is now recognised as the national advocate representing the interests of T&I

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Since then she has taught Japanese-English translation and translation theory in the Master of Arts in Japanese Interpreting and Translating program at the University of Queensland, and in 1993 was awarded a Ph.D. for her research on Japanese-English translation. In 1996 she was a visiting research fellow at Leiden University in The Netherlands, researching the history of Dutch-Japanese translation in Edo Japan. She has published a number of articles on translation, and continues to research various aspects of translation history, theory and pedagogy.

Dr Wakabayashi is involved in several professional organisations for translators (including AUSIT) and continues to translate books and other documents on a professional basis. In August 2002 she took up the post of associate professor of Japanese translation at Kent State University in Ohio.

practitioners in Australia. It can be rightly proud of its achievements and its efforts to improve the standing and public profile of members of our profession. AUSIT's publications, liaison and consultant work and successes in the area of industrial relations all make concrete contributions to the welfare of its members. Yet much remains to be done, and to the extent that resources permit I would urge AUSIT to take on an even greater and more provocative role on behalf of its members in such areas as providing information and advice to members and the public, promoting training, research, professional standards, improved working conditions and recognition of the profession. Moreover, AUSIT's voice is still not reaching many T&I practitioners, particularly those who are in most need of

professional support and development because they are not yet accredited, so perhaps AUSIT's most important constituency actually lies not in its members but in its potential members.

This year has already witnessed some key developments for the evolution of the T&I profession in Australia. Without doubt the highlight of the year has been the highly successful 14th World Congress of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) in Melbourne in February, the first time this major gathering of T&I professionals and academics has taken place in the southern hemisphere. Individual practitioners in Australia might perhaps question the relevance of FIT to their everyday work, but attending the conference would have soon dispelled any such doubts or scepticism. The presentations revealed a common core of concerns relevant to translators around the world, and the conference was also an excellent opportunity to broaden our horizons and gain an understanding of some areas of T&I that perhaps we do not come into contact with in the course of our daily work but from which we can learn valuable lessons. As the conference organiser, AUSIT can only benefit from the resulting strengthened ties with its overseas counterparts and from its enhanced international profile.

The contents of the two books launched during the conference were indicative of significant areas in T&I. One reflected the emerging interest in the history of translation and the importance of placing our work in its historical and cultural context. The other was a handbook for liaison interpreting, a field of particular importance in the Australian context and one in which our expertise has won worldwide recognition.

Another important development in 1996 has been AUSIT's launching of The Australian Translation Journal. This provides an ideal venue for sharing views on wider, non-language-specific issues, and I strongly encourage practitioners to make their voice heard through this outlet. The inaugural issue represents an excellent cross-section of some of the practical and theoretical issues facing interpreters and translators in Australia today.

The past year has also seen some outstanding achievements by individuals in our profession. To mention a few of particular note, after having so ably organised the FIT Congress, Adolfo Gentile was elected as a FIT Vice-President, Terry Chesher has been appointed chair of the FIT committee on community-based interpreting (and translating); Mary Gurgone has been appointed to the FIT Ethics Committee and Barbara McGilvray to the Literary Translation Committee, while Anthony Pym is an important figure contributing to the academic world of translation theory in Europe. Australians are making an impact at the international level in the field of T&I, and we can be proud of our growing achievements in this arena.

Recently I have been doing some research on the history of translation and interpreting in Japan, and this has brought home to me the difficulties and low status of our predecessors. Gone now are the days when interpreters (in Japan at least) used to interpret on their knees and doubled as black marketeers, customs officials and doctors, and when the only way to join the profession was by membership in a family of hereditary translators/interpreters or by buying shares into the professional guild. Yet despite all this, interpreters and translators played a pivotal role in shaping the language, literature and ideas of Japan, as they have in every language community, and they were a vital link in Japan's relations with other nations, and even back in the 17th century there was a rudimentary system of training and testing.

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Today, at least in Australia, there is little likelihood of our work causing us to be imprisoned or charged as a spy or even burnt at the stake, as was Etienne Dolet in 1546, along with his translations.

Elsewhere, however, the situation is sometimes grim, despite the foundation of FIT in 1953 and the Nairobi Recommendation of 1976 on the legal protection of translators and translations and the practical means to improve the status of translators. The Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was murdered, presumably because he dared to translate this controversial work, and the Italian and Turkish translators also came under physical attack. And it is still sometimes a matter of metaphorically shooting the messenger, as when diplomatic incidents are blamed on mistranslation. *The Translator's Diary*, a new publication that appeared this year, contains interesting anecdotes and quotes related to the T&I profession, some of which depict humorously, but only too depressingly, the still-prevailing attitudes towards interpreters and translators. For instance one entry describes how a speaker at an international meeting turned to the shadow interpreter and took up the argument with her. When she correctly reminded him that she was only there to interpret, he asked her for advice on sightseeing. The incident reflects both how interpreters are sometimes held responsible for the actual contents of the remarks and a view of the interpreter's work as ranking with that of a tour guide. Another anecdote in *The Translator's Diary* describes how, during a break in a conference, a participant was amazed to learn that interpreters were working at the conference, saying, "... why bother? We've all got headsets that do the interpreting!" As all these illustrate, undoubtedly there is still a great need to change public perception of T&I professionals, their role and their status.

The Inaudible Voice

I am currently translating a book on Biblical ethics, which brought to mind the questions raised in I Corinthians 12:30 ("do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?") No, indeed, not all "speak with tongues", and not all who do speak

with tongues are capable of interpreting or translating. We should value our skills and refuse to act as a ghostly presence, instead expecting and demanding to be treated as expert communication brokers. Any change in the public perception of T&I professionals must be preceded by a change in our own attitudes. It is well and truly time for us to rise from our knees and assert our professional identity. Although our job is to give voice to the words of others, too long have our own voices been faint.

The professions of interpreting and translating are still generally regarded, even by practitioners, as constituting passive, non-creative work of a second-order status. We ourselves often contribute to our shadowy existence, and our lack of status and tendency to be marginalised are due at least in part to our self-effacement. We need to abandon our often still defensive stance and speak up for ourselves. In the past decade changing perceptions of the translator's role have led to increasing advocacy amongst some theorists for translators to become more visible, assertive and even openly interventionist in their practice, by which I am referring particularly to recent trends in the field of literary translation, where the tide seems to be turning away from emphasising fluency in the translation work towards a deliberate foreignising,

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though there is by no means universal acceptance of this approach. But regardless of whether or not we adopt such a stance in our actual work, when talking about our work it is important to be more assertive and vocal. I encourage translators and interpreters to devote more time to reflecting on what they do and to share these thoughts by contributing articles to professional newsletters and journals, speaking at professional gatherings and in public and participating in electronic networking with colleagues.

The Literary Voice

In Australia we tend to focus discussions of translation on pragmatic translation, but let us not forget the important (though usually less lucrative) area of literary translation, in which there is growing interest of late. The Australian Literary Translators Association (ALiTrA) has its own newsletter, has published an informative pamphlet on translation and copyright, and has lobbied successfully for financial assistance for the publication of literary translations. English is notorious as a language into which few

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translations of foreign literary works are made; rather, it is a language that is translated *from*. Hence we are impoverished, despite the linguistic and cultural pluralism present elsewhere within our community. ‘Productive diversity’ seems to be the buzzword today, and translators can play a key role in enriching our literary canon by introducing translations of foreign works. Important too is the outward translation of Australian literary works. Both translators and publishers act as gatekeepers and gate-pushers (to borrow the terminology of a speaker at the FIT Conference) who determine which foreign writers and foreign works are presented to Australian audiences and which Australian works are introduced abroad.

Also of importance is an appropriate critical infrastructure in which the fact of translation is explicitly discussed in critical reviews.

One small but encouraging development is that translators of translated books in Australian public libraries are now eligible to receive royalties under the Public Library Lending scheme implemented in 1995. Other positive developments for literary translators include Literature Fund translation grants, the Dinny O’Hearn SBS Prize for literary translation, and ALiTrA’s Sponsor-Publish Program under which translations produced by members and accepted for publication by an

Australian literary magazine or journal are eligible for financial support. Improved conditions for translations in regard to copyright and book translation contracts are also something for which we need to lobby. Publishers are still sometimes reluctant to indicate that certain works are translations, preferring instead to have the author gloss over the work of the translator in the preface with an expression of gratitude rather than clearly indicating the translator’s name on the cover and title page.

The Educator’s Voice

The importance of proper T&I training has long been stressed, but I would like to elaborate further on this, because it is where Jill Blewett made her greatest contribution to the profession and because it is where my own interests and experience lie. Training not only raises quality standards but is also an efficient use of resources in that it shortens the learning process. Again, we need to stand on our predecessors’ shoulders, instead of climbing from the ground upwards with each new generation of T&I practitioners. We are still having to combat the idea that interpreting and translating are not discrete skills which need to be acquired over and above language skills – witness the remarks on Internet mailing lists for translators by many practitioners who remain sceptical of translation courses. Yet their own comments and discussions of translation often betray that many are still reinventing the wheel, worrying over the same old issues that have long been of concern to translators, but which are addressed directly in training courses. No doubt the same goes for interpreters. Training is one way of avoiding this repetitiveness and waste of effort, as well as of ensuring higher standards of quality.

One issue that Adolfo Gentile’s inaugural memorial lecture mentioned in connection with Jill Blewett was her concern for verisimilitude in the classroom. This can take a variety of forms, such as specifying the hypothetical target audience, working to deadlines, producing visually

polished output, and interpreting in front of live audiences. The impact of technology on our work today makes it even more essential for students to become familiar with the practical aspects of the profession, such as word processing, modems and how to use the Internet to find information quickly and effectively. Ethics is also a vital component of any T&I training course, and in this connection it is pleasing to see that AUSIT is to establish a Board of Professional Conduct.

Problems facing T&I training institutions include the difficulty of selecting appropriate candidates, and more research is needed to identify the aptitudes specific to T&I, as distinct from language skills. Another problem is how to impart the necessary subject matter knowledge most efficiently (for example, an understanding of legal and health matters) and cooperation with other university departments and with outside organisations is one means of achieving this. Staffing is another perennial problem. During talks with convenors of two soon-to-be established T&I courses in Europe recently I was horrified to be told in response to my query as to who would be teaching the translation stream of the courses that, “Oh, we have several native speakers on staff”. No mention of the need for T&I educators to be more than just a native speaker. No mention of the need for professional T&I experience, teaching skills or a broad understanding of the theoretical issues involved. And this from T&I educators!

Although this attitude can also be found in Australia, it is reassuring to see signs of next-generation interest in pursuing T&I studies at the doctoral level, which might have a trickle-down effect in leading to improved training standards in the future. It is important for present-day educators to commit their knowledge to paper for the sake of their successors. With a new generation of educators coming through, we need to learn how to train the trainer and pass on our skills. It is difficult to find experienced professionals who also have teaching and academic skills and an interest in passing on their knowledge in a structured,

formalised way, hence such teacher training is vital, as our profession in Australia does not yet have sufficient numbers of qualified T&I educators that we can easily fill in the gaps caused by the departure of members of our team.

I would also strongly encourage increased interaction, cooperation and staff exchanges amongst training centres in Australia, as well as with our counterparts overseas and full-time practitioners. I would hope that our community of

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interests would outweigh any sense of rivalry amongst different institutions.

Professional development (another of the eight principles in AUSIT’s Code of Ethics) is not limited to training at educational institutions. It can take the form of on-the-job upgrading of skills, professional workshops, or even self-study. Regardless of the format, what is important is to strive constantly to build on our language skills, transfer skills, presentation skills and specialised background knowledge, and towards this end we must be prepared to invest time, effort and money. We must continually extend ourselves through new T&I experiences and through listening to colleagues’ experiences. It is easy to become complacent in a small pond of familiar work, but a gradual and ongoing extension of one’s skills and knowledge pushes back our boundaries and takes us to new levels of professional expertise.

Relations between educators and the profession are also of vital importance, and both groups can only benefit from closer ties. It is easy for T&I educators and researchers to become isolated from the real world of professional work, unless they themselves remain professionally active, but the advent of Internet mailing lists such as LANTRA, Honyaku and Jachitra allows educators to hear the voices of professionals on a daily basis in a way that was not possible in the past, and provides a valuable reality check.

One area in which clear ties between educators and practitioners could be beneficial is that of internships or mentoring. The difficulties facing new graduates of T&I courses (the lack of job opportunities where they can work solely on T&I, the lack of feedback on their work, poor pay, the large initial outlay for dictionaries and equipment) may be alleviated in part by internships or practicums, as well as by a mentor system where newcomers to the profession are matched with more experienced practitioners who assist them in overcoming some of the common hurdles faced by beginners, no matter how well trained. Mentoring has the potential to offer a powerful collaborative learning experience as the mentor helps the mentee negotiate through new professional challenges. The mentor's role is to offer advice, introduce alternatives, challenge, motivate, and encourage initiative, tasks for which the mentor requires adequate conceptual and empirical preparation, or the mentor-mentee relationship might produce marginal or even negative results.

Another aspect of education is the education of those outside our profession about the nature of our work. This is one area in which AUSIT can make and is making a contribution, by disseminating information on what is involved in T&I work and dispelling the persistent misconceptions surrounding our work, such as the confusion between translating and interpreting and the belief that language ability equates with an ability to translate and/or interpret. Of particular importance is the need to educate clients as to the nature of our work, the necessity of providing adequate background information and documentation, and the importance of using accredited practitioners.

Testing and accreditation lie at the interface of training and professional work. Australia is at the forefront in the field of T&I accreditation, and there is growing recognition of the importance of

using accredited interpreters and translators, but in certain quarters (not least amongst some practitioners themselves) there remain questions as to the need for accreditation and the ability of accreditation tests to determine accurately a candidate's ability to work at a professional standard of quality outside the examination room. For the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to be perceived as a credible testing authority, there is a need for rigorous selection of examiners, workshops for examiners, and an ongoing review of standards, marking guidelines and individual panels. I am pleased to see that NAATI is working on all of these areas, and it deserves commendation for its work in what is often a difficult climate.

Research on interpreting and translating is another important area. Research provides the opportunity to reflect on practice, and it also leads practice. Some of the main trends and influences in recent translation studies include postmodernist, post-colonialist and feminist approaches to translation, terminology and lexicology, the problems of translating minority languages, computer-aided translation, corpus-based translation studies, translation pedagogy, translation history, and translating for the screen and advertising, and in future years this research can be expected to have an impact on the practice of translation. In the newly evolving and exciting area of interpreting research, there is a welcome freshness to the empirical approaches being adopted, and research on the interpreting of signed languages is also gaining prominence. Important areas requiring further research are the cognitive processes involved in interpreting and translating, and identification of the skills necessary on addition to language skills. It is also instructive, I believe, to examine the alternative experience of interpreting and translation offered by non-Indo-European languages, in view of the fact that research has so far been largely slanted towards Indo-European

languages used in relatively homogenous cultural settings. The recent appearance of studies of translation theory in the Arab world and India, for example, is an encouraging sign of greater diversity within the field. In some universities in Europe translation studies has been accorded its own department or even faculty, and I look forward to T&I research and training gaining greater prominence within Australian academic institutions. Yet outside of academia we can be proud of being amongst the world leaders in areas such as telephone interpreting, accreditation, subtitling and liaison interpreting.

The Professional's Voice

We must not forget that as well as being a vital service, interpreting and translating are also a means of earning a living. We have a product to sell, a quality product one hopes, and we should be able to expect adequate remuneration for our services. Yet economic exploitation of translators and interpreters (for example, long working hours without extra compensation, no paid sick leave or annual leave for freelancers, no professional insurance) remains common. Poor conditions in turn raise quality issues. For instance, there is a fair chance that the provision of community T&I services might be privatised at some time in the near future, and if qualified T&I professionals are unwilling to work at the lower rates suggested the work will be performed by unqualified people. We need an improved infrastructure for T&I activities in Australia, and we also need to acquire more savvy in such areas as marketing our skills and managing ourselves as businesses.

Another matter for concern is that of health issues related to the physiological stresses involved in our work, such as eye strain, back pain, lack of exercise, and RSI in translators and sign-language interpreters.

Voices from Abroad

While living in the Netherlands recently I was working at Leiden University, one of the oldest universities in Europe. In 1575 Prince William of Orange rewarded the heroic endurance of Leiden's population during the Eighty Years War with Spain by giving the town a choice between tax exemption and being granted a university. The people chose learning over a lighter tax burden, and the university flourished, becoming one of the most famous academic institutions in 17th-century Europe, and today it is still the leading university in the Netherlands. I hesitate to think what Australians might do in the current climate if offered such a choice. Recent funding cuts for education and for language teaching in particular and the proposed abandoning of LOTE teaching in primary schools in Queensland make me wonder whether we are as farsighted as were the people of Leiden over four hundred years ago. Government policies have an enormous impact on our profession. Official indifference towards T&I activities or a lack of understanding towards LOTE teaching, one of the sources from which future interpreters and translators are drawn, can

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have a very adverse effect on our work, just as patronage of translations by the government and private organisations can play a vitally positive role.

One thing that struck me in my recent travels was the resurgence of linguistic autonomy. For instance, use of the Irish language has revived to the extent that it is now possible in Dublin to study computer technology or engineering wholly in Irish. The Friesian language in northern Holland and Catalan in the Barcelona region are other examples that come to mind. This gave me pause to reflect on the linguistic diversity of Australia and to mourn the

dying out of so many of our indigenous languages. I was also struck by a sense of loss at the growing sameness of different cultures. Never were we far from a hamburger restaurant or a cinema showing Hollywood movies. Although there is increased intellectual acceptance of foreign cultures and diversity and a move away from Western-centred values, in material terms the trend is toward increasing homogeneity of material culture. Perhaps the resurgence in linguistic autonomy is a reaction to reduced cultural diversity, an attempt to retain some sense of identity.

The Voice of the Future

Having digressed somewhat, let me close with a few comments on what lies ahead for the T&I profession. Looking back at the inaugural memorial lecture I can see that many of the issues raised then are still issues today, hence their repetition here, which might give them the appearance of platitudes but which in no way diminishes the need for these issues to be stressed repeatedly. Yet one clear difference that has emerged in the last five or so years is the impact of technology on our work. At both the organisational and individual levels we must start our strategic planning now for the emerging needs for our services in line with the opportunities and challenges presented by advances in information and communication technology. Submitting translations by modem and floppy disk is now becoming the norm, and complex formatting and desk-top publishing represent an increased challenge for translators, whose clients expectations towards the final format and the speed of delivery are rising as technology changes. It is clear that we need to harness technology to our needs. Translators in particular cannot afford to be Luddites, and a typewriter with a correction key is no longer the height of technology nor sufficient to the task at hand. We must be prepared to invest considerable sums of money in the tools of our craft, such as computers, fax machines,

modems, terminology management systems, reference works and dictionaries (nowadays often available in electronic form, which greatly facilitates the search process). Technology is even affecting how we charge for our work, with counting by bytes now being common in some countries. Technological changes also offer new work opportunities. Software localisation is a booming area of translation, and the translation of World Wide Web pages is also a new growth area. Not only translators' associations and T&I training institutions but also individual translators nowadays often have their own home pages in the Internet, which represents an excellent advertising opportunity, and the Internet is also invaluable as a research tool and source of information. Other areas of translation which will see increased growth include voice-overs and cartoons, all relatively new genres which present fresh challenges for the translator.

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Technological innovations also mean that national boundaries are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Technological developments have made offshore translating a reality, and in some cases time differences can work to our benefit, although the downside is that clients might now decide to shop elsewhere for cheaper rates overseas. Even within Australia there is no longer a vital need for translators to be physically located near their clients. The isolation that was previously a concomitant feature of the translator's work is being overcome through electronic networking.

The ease of communications today means that in language-specific matters help is just as likely to come from a colleague in Scotland or Brazil as it is from a locally-based colleague. Electronic networking enables speedy exchanges of often highly specialised knowledge in the spirit of a gift economy. This comprises a

valuable resource for translators (often their only contact with colleagues). I look forward to the development of more language pair-specific forums in addition to more general forums such as TRANSLAT, and Usenet newsgroups such as sci.lang.translation. Interpreters seem to be lagging in this respect, although information technology also has implications for their work, with the advent of video conferences and computers in the booth. I look forward to the day when there will be greater formal networking amongst interpreters, as the benefits of such interaction are enormous.

Machine translation is already a reality in some narrowly defined areas of work in certain languages, and pre- and post-editing courses are beginning to appear in translation schools' curricula. Because of the poor quality of most machine translation, a more realistic trend nowadays is towards machine-assisted human translation, but machine translation should be viewed in a positive light as freeing human translators from hack work so that they can apply their skills where human intelligence, intuition and creativity are most needed.

Looking ahead, we must start now to prepare for the challenge posed by the Sydney Olympics, with the concomitant need for large-scale language services, including interpreting and translating. We need to ensure that the experience of the Atlanta Olympics, where reportedly only volunteer T&Is were being used (one wonders whether there are quality control procedures in place), is not repeated here in Sydney in the year 2000.

Finally, let me apologise for perhaps not paying due attention to the multifaceted concerns of community translators and of interpreters (for instance, the problems inherent in media, court, liaison and conference interpreting), areas of work with which I am less familiar. The emphases in this lecture are a reflection of my own sphere of

experience, not of the relative importance of these different areas of our profession. In closing, I would like to think that one day soon this memorial lecture will be presented not by a T&I educator like myself or by an eminent person from outside the profession, but by a full-time professional interpreter or translator, someone who has given thought to his or her work and who is willing and capable of sharing these reflections with colleagues. Then, and only then, will we truly hear the translator's voice.

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