



National

Newsletter

THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS INC.

Volume 14, number 1 - February 2006



2005 AUSIT Excellence Awards Evening
Critical Link community interpreting
National Competencies Report

AUSIT names new Fellow

NAATI revalidation





POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMS IN TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING

The Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University in Sydney offers a Postgraduate Diploma in Translation and Interpreting and a Master of Translation and Interpreting in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, French, Spanish, Thai and Auslan interpreting. Both programs are NAATI approved at Translator and Interpreter level and provide professional development and postgraduate qualifications for translators and interpreters.

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www.ling.mq.edu.au/postgraduate/coursework/tip.htm

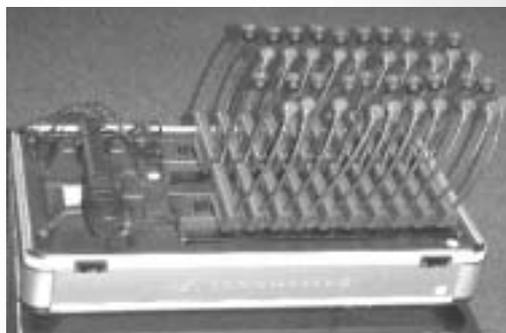
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From the President

Chris Poole on AUSIT and the NAATI revalidation 'proposal'.



We have a basic problem in AUSIT of poor conceptualisation, both lengthways and crossways: we forget the past rather than building

on lessons learnt, and we focus on our own narrow interests rather than embracing the full measure of experience and expertise which the broadest definition of the profession represents. But a lot of our limited energy is currently directed at remedying this. The *Newsletter* and *eBulletin*, the glossary, the Awards, and the Board of Professional Conduct will all expand people's awareness, and reflect energy well-spent.

Our task is hard enough, without also having to spend time sorting out ideas that very well-resourced bodies keep generating from the periphery.

This is true of our involvement in the NAATI revalidation proposal, recently described in a discussion paper and canvassed in a series of forums. On the one hand our response to this idea consumed a considerable amount of our time and energy, and on the other we would have been remiss to ignore it completely. Yet revalidation is not central to the development of the profession.

Without going into the details of the proposal (our response to the discussion paper is available on the website), what has become apparent during these forums is that revalidation is a project which was imposed on NAATI from above; it was written into their constitution as a requirement from the government owners of NAATI so that accreditation be made 'current'. Whilst working directly with NAATI on practical improvements to the existing testing methodology may be of value, it is neither realistic nor fair to expect the Authority to participate in dialogues on broader policy issues which may affect the industry as a whole. A more appropriate step is for AUSIT to communicate with the NAATI Board or government representatives. I am pleased to report that Susan Bures, the Chair of the NAATI Board, gave very encouraging indications that NAATI would like to work with AUSIT on revalidation. AUSIT will prioritise

preparing information to ensure that the NAATI Board understand our current activities and priorities.

Whether or not we can do much for revalidation is interesting. This is called a 'proposal' but the decision seems to have been made, with input being sought at the forums from all the usual suspects¹ only on the details of implementation. This caused some outrage: 'Why weren't we consulted earlier!? We are the peak body!!' In NAATI's defence it is quite natural that they overlook AUSIT. NAATI is a government creation and, put simply, is a device that attempts to give comfort to any bureaucratic purchasing function which must account for the disbursement of large sums of money. Mostly that means government agencies purchasing language services in bulk with taxpayers' money.

As so many of our members regularly point out, awareness of NAATI accreditation amongst the end users of bulk language services (doctors, policemen, judges, etc.) is still quite patchy, and of course penetration into the business domain — perhaps as big as the community domain in dollar terms — is negligible. The government only cares about the community domain and if NAATI isn't enabling accountability then it is perfectly reasonable that the government focuses on trying to fix NAATI. Clearly this excludes, or is only partially applicable to, all those practitioners who work in the business domain. In other words revalidation will not necessarily cover the complete industry that AUSIT represents.

AUSIT believes there are three elements making up a person's fitness to practise as a professional: continuing practice, continuing professional development, and a clean record of ethical conduct. NAATI have produced a proposal which covers only two of these elements, and which will not take effect for another five years. AUSIT, operating with no money and in members' spare time, has already implemented measures for all three elements.

There is a suggestion the viability of each system will rest on 'coverage'. NAATI has accredited 22,000 people
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¹ Sorry, 'stakeholders'.

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Thank you once again to all for the numerous and punctual submissions. I would like to remind members that the deadline for the April issue is 30 March 2006.

Special thanks go out to Chris, Barbara, Annamaria, Silke, Kate and all others who helped. Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome, as are any images.

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The editor reserves the right to edit or not to publish any item submitted for publication. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editor or those of AUSIT and its Executive.

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Front cover photos from the AUSIT Excellence Awards Gala Evening, held 28 November 2005 at the Carlton Crest Hotel in Melbourne. Top: The cream of the T&I industry enjoying the evening. Middle: AUSIT National President Chris Poole (far left) with winners of the 2005 AUSIT Excellence Awards (from left) Vanessa Hearman, Liang Joo Leow, David Holm, and Tony Juhanson, Ros Beaton and Daina Coles (Dept. of Education and Training). Bottom: (Left) The Fred Cheah Band. (Right) Ros Beaton, representing the Dept. of Education and Training, accepts the Award for 'Outstanding Contribution to the T&I Industry, watched by the Hon. John Pandazopoulos, Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs.



Minister announces winners of AUSIT Excellence Awards for 2005

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The Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. John Pandazopoulos, took pleasure in announcing the winners of the three AUSIT Excellence Awards for 2005 during the Presentation Gala Dinner held at the Carlton Crest Hotel on 28 November 2005.

'The Bracks Government is strongly committed to ensuring that all Victorians have fair and equitable access to important basic services,' Mr Pandazopoulos said. 'We recognise the vital role that interpreters and translators play in our diverse society; this is why we have committed over \$2 million to the *Language Services Strategy* to improve the delivery of language services in Victoria.'

'The Bracks Government is also pleased to be key sponsor of the 2005 AUSIT Excellence Awards,' he said.

The AUSIT Excellence Awards have been fully embraced by the T&I industry and its supporters. They enjoy the backing of key sponsor the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA), partner organisations SBS Radio Melbourne and the National Accreditation Authority for Translators

and Interpreters (NAATI) as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Victoria State Office.

EXCELLENCE IN INTERPRETING AWARD

The simultaneous interpreting by Vanessa Hearman, professional Indonesian interpreter and Liang Joo Leow, senior conference interpreter of the Corby verdict won the 2005 'Excellence in Interpreting' award.

The Corby verdict rendered by three judges at Denpasar District Court, Bali, in May 2005, and the interpretation into English via audio and video link were both broadcast live by Channel Seven.

As testament to the quality of the interpretation, the live broadcast won the ratings, while other stations used Seven's broadcast. Broadcast history was made in Australia as this was the first time simultaneous interpreting was performed on a live news feed according to international standards.

'Calm and professional interpreters; incredibly trying circumstances; stand-out performers on the day; sheer unflappability; superb interpretation' — *Channel Seven*.

EXCELLENCE IN TRANSLATING AWARD

David Holm, professional Chinese to English translator (NAATI accredited), won an 'Excellence in Translating' award for his book *Killing a Buffalo for the Ancestors*, published by Southeast Asia Publications, Northern Illinois University, 2003. The work contains annotated translations and transcriptions of Zhuang ethnic group (southern China and South East Asia) cosmological texts found in a manuscript hidden in a cave and provides a vivid and coherent account of both religious and performance aspects in buffalo sacrifice.

'Magnificent job of making an important cultural artefact accessible', — *Professor of Foreign Languages, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University*.

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE T&I INDUSTRY AWARD

The Department of Education & Training won an 'Outstanding Contribution to the Translating & Interpreting Industry' award for their training package *Talking In Tune — A Guide to Working with Interpreters in Schools*. The 30-minute video, hard copy training guide and comprehensive user notes are being distributed free to all government schools in Victoria and are also available through the Language and Multicultural Education Resource Centre. The guide provides models of situations where interpreters should be used in school-specific contexts.

RUNNER UP

Runner up in the 'Outstanding Contribution to the T&I Industry' category is the Victorian Deaf Society (VicDeaf) with its Auslan (Australian



NAATI CEO Sherrill Bell with winners of the Excellence in Interpreting Award, Vanessa Hearman and Liang Joo Leow.

National Council February 2006

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Since the publication of the last newsletter the following people were admitted to AUSIT as ordinary members:

Noriko Shiba, NSW; Saskia Celine De Vries, Qld; Arudkumar Rajaretnam, SA; Gioconda Schembri, Vic; Vuthy Ear, Vic; Slobodanka Tomic, Vic; Federica Stefani-Comi, Vic; Leviseda Douglas, Vic; Vera Oujaimi, Vic; Adriana Rozada, Vic; Yuki Ghantous, WA.

Associate affiliate subscribers:

Sheng-Lien Wu, NSW; Natalie Payne, NSW; Vonni Chapman, WA.

Student subscribers:

Amy Panetta, SA; Graciela Tabain, Vic

Congratulations and welcome to all new members!

Prizes for newsletter submissions

AUSIT is pleased to offer as prizes for the best (as judged by the editor) submissions to the April issue of the *National Newsletter* one copy of Translation Office 3000 freelance translator (useful for interpreters too) accounting software and three copies of AnyCount word, line and character counting software, both from AIT Software Developers (see advertisement and website on page 15).

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Clockwise from top of previous page — 1. Excellence Awards Co-coordinator Silke Gebauer (far left) with Highly Commended finalists, (from left): Clare Moreton (Dept. of Justice), Emily England (Manager of the 'Four Steps for Life' Program by the Metropolitan Ambulance Services), Maggie Bracher (Corporate Language Communications), Seda Douglas (Khmer), Victoria Jourdan (Spanish), Vera Oujaimi (Arabic), Christoula Nicolaou (Greek) and Charles Qin (Mandarin).

2. Outstanding Contribution to the T&I Industry winner, Dept. of Education and Training, represented by Ros Beaton (left), and runner-up VicDeaf, represented by CEO John Paton (right), together with Hon. John Pandazopoulos, Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs.

3. Winner of the Excellence in Translating award, Professor David Holm, with Barbara Mountjouris, Director of VOMA (Vic. Office of Multicultural Affairs).

Sign Language) Interpreter Professional Development Programme. The largest provider of Auslan interpreters in Victoria introduced its mandatory PD programme for Auslan interpreters registered with VicDeaf Auslan Interpreter Service (VAIS) in 2005. The launch of this professional development programme confirms the pioneering role VicDeaf plays in the T&I industry.

HIGHLY COMMENDED — INTERPRETERS

Charles Qin, senior conference interpreter, Mandarin (NAATI accredited), was recognised for simultaneous interpreting as part of the inaugural visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to Australia in 2003. Christoula Nicolaou, professional Greek interpreter (NAATI accredited) was recognised for her interpreting with the Melbourne Greek Film Festival 2005 while Vera Oujaimi, professional Arabic interpreter (NAATI accredited), won a

'Highly Commended' recognition for a series of interpreting assignments for Victoria Police.

TRANSLATORS

The work of Victoria Jourdan, professional Spanish translator (NAATI accredited), on the translation into Spanish of the 88-page guidebook *Crystal Oracle — Guidance from the Heart of the Earth* was recognised as 'Highly Commended'. Leviseda Bun Douglas, professional Khmer translator (NAATI accredited), received a 'Highly Commended' recognition for her translation into the Khmer language of published information for the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service.

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION

The Department of Justice's Diversity Issues Unit was recognised for its Justice Online Directory for Justice
(continued on page 7)

AUSIT Excellence Awards – What next?

Silke Gebauer on the future of a national Excellence Awards campaign

After the Excellence Awards gala dinner in Melbourne last November, guests went home entertained and perhaps a little better informed about T&I. The winners and short-listed entrants were recognised in front of an audience of their peers, high-level representatives from business and government and users of language services. The sponsors were satisfied with the outcome their investment helped achieve. Considerable media interest (mainly through SBS radio and ethnic print media) was generated and the event managed to just remain in the black (more on that later). AUSIT's key stated objectives and obligations (to both entrants and sponsors!) were met — bingo.

The Awards also produced some less visible, highly worthwhile side-effects. AUSIT established and consolidated relationships with other organisations and reputable individuals (jurors, media representatives, translation reviewers, etc.) from a position of strength, gained new members and established assessment guidelines for the quality of translation and interpretation jobs (refer to <www.ausit.org>). The thousands of emails and brochures sent out to promote the Excellence Awards — including an internal bulletin to 14,000 members of the Victoria Police — went a long way to promoting AUSIT and the profession.

The Awards success has created a problem, albeit a nice one... How can AUSIT do it again? And how do we make the 2006 Awards a national exercise without compromising the local impact achieved by the Vic/Tas campaign? The Excellence Awards, inaugurated in 2004 with one category only ('Contribution to the T&I industry'), then conducted in 2005 with an additional two practitioner categories ('Excellence in Interpreting' and 'Excellence in Translating') are still only open to individuals/organisations residing in Victoria or Tasmania, yet have proven viable. So as to grow in prominence and status, the Awards campaign should continue, but on an annual basis; after all, AUSIT is a national organisation. This would create a massive financial challenge for an organisation trying to provide the level of member services offered by other professional associations yet

asking for a fraction of the membership fees charged elsewhere.

With its Excellence Awards program, AUSIT has joined the ranks of other professional associations — against the odds one could say.

Many members of our profession appear not to recognise the numerous benefits winning an award — or merely being mentioned in the Excellence Awards context — can have for their professional image. This will change over time as the Awards become bigger. Not only will future organisers need to promote externally to the world at large, but they will also need to target potential applicants with their promotions. One member quite rightly said: 'AUSIT has always had great performers', but until those high-flyers feel an AUSIT Award is worth their time and money and participate in these contests, we may not be showcasing the very best T/Is. This comment is not intended in any way to take the shine away from the worthy winners to date who recognised an opportunity and become pioneers by participating, it is merely an observation made by the organisers. Numerous nominees — some of whom undoubtedly belong at the top of the profession — declined to prepare a submission; 'lack of time' was the most frequently stated reason.

The other hurdle AUSIT has to overcome is the reluctance of its members to pay — even at cost-price — for services offered. Admittedly, Victorian members have been dragged from a casual Christmas party at a university canteen to an official affair held in the ballroom of a four-star hotel with a minister and heaps of media in attendance, all within the space of a few years. However, if we are to shake the cottage industry feel and look (with its resultant lack of recognition and remuneration), we need to start behaving differently. Fortunately AUSIT had sponsors willing to invest thousands of dollars into this fledgling program. The sponsorship allowed us to pay for some essential services (such as processing the nominations and submission reference checking, translation reviews and design services). A huge part of the monies collected also went towards subsidising the member ticket prices and VIPs.

Countless pro bono work hours were provided for project management,

financial control and bookkeeping, copywriting, media liaison and event organising. No viable business model would rely solely on volunteer work for key services required within certain deadlines; nor should AUSIT, if it wants to continue with an Awards program at the standard that has been set. Until now the Excellence Awards program has been powered by enthusiasm and the challenge — scarce resources (and in some cases also not renewable). If the estimated 1,000 unpaid volunteer hours dedicated to the 2005 Awards campaign had been charged at \$55 an hour (double that figure for most accountants, PR consultants and other professionals), AUSIT would have had to find an additional \$55,000. Our 'profit' would have instead ended up a huge loss. Finding funds is the key; the rest is relatively easy.

Based on experience so far, running the Awards as a national campaign is feasible. Given AUSIT's current centres of activity, one scenario would be to conduct the campaign from a Vic/Tas base, applying the model and processes established by the Vic/Tas committee over the previous two years. One jury (possibly with some additions to keep it balanced) would do the judging and the Awards presentation dinner would be held in Melbourne. Using the example of a sporting competition where the host nation gets to enter all the disciplines, the host state would have the honour of having its applicants eligible for a regional award which would ensure continued local participation and interest. This regional award category would be identical to what has been awarded so far: a contest of Vic/Tas based applicants based in the existing categories. There would also be the added level of a national award for all applicants to enter. We would end up with the same three award categories but there would be two lots of winners for each category — one regional, one national. Same jury, same process, but more trophies to present. Some allowance would have to be made to ensure that short-listed entrants from other states attended the Awards presentation in Melbourne, but these are mere technicalities. Ideally, AUSIT would be so well staffed and funded that each branch could conduct its own regional award, with the top entrants

going on to a national award. That may take AUSIT some years to achieve but is worth working towards.

As an outgoing Awards committee member I can say that it was hugely satisfying — exhilarating even — to prove to ourselves this project could be done. I feel highly rewarded by the level of commitment and support the Awards generated. A particularly enjoyable aspect for me was the great solidarity and compatibility of the team. Imagine the heights AUSIT could scale with the right quantities of all the vital ingredients (one being paid staff). This is all a matter of time. The precedent has been set with other AUSIT services: administration, *Yellow Pages* advertising and the publication of this newsletter.

The future looks bright.

(from page 3)

President's report

and in Australia currently 4,000² people are accredited practitioners. AUSIT has only 750 members. 'Cover' is an imprecise verb in this context. NAATI doesn't represent anyone. They simply charged them to sit a test once. Whilst AUSIT doesn't necessarily agree with practitioners' reasons, we know many people are unhappy with their purchase. Many have found that this test was not a prerequisite to a career, and the rationale put forward by NAATI for revalidation is itself a stinging reminder that perhaps not all of those 4,000 are fit to represent a profession. By contrast, every single one of our members cares enough about advancing the profession to pay each year for the privilege, even if it is only to disagree with me.

We are already doing an impressive job. Imagine how much better it would be if we each had a clear picture of the road we've travelled and the way ahead? If we each grasped the full dimensions of the industry? And if others could leave us alone to get on with it!

If you know a practitioner who isn't a member, get them to join! If you're not on the eBulletin, get on it, and if you only lurk, start speaking up! And if you're reading this, start writing something for the next issue. This is not 'someone else's problem'.

² This figure seems derived from TIS and Centrelink mailing lists. The 2001 Census showed 3045 people self-identifying as T/Is.

Mastering the eBulletin

Lately there seem to have been many member queries regarding use of the eBulletin. Here are a few tips. To join the eBulletin, send a blank message to the following address: <AUSIT-eBulletin-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>.

You will receive a message with more information and details of participation (e.g. your subscription, logging in, etc.). To send a message to the group, send an email to the name of the group using the address above, but first remove the second hyphen and the word 'subscribe' preceding the @. For example, the address to send messages to the eBulletin is: <AUSIT-eBulletin@yahoogroups.com>. To send a message to a Yahoo group that you already subscribe to, just do the same: remove the second hyphen and the word 'subscribe'. To unsubscribe, replace 'subscribe' with 'unsubscribe', as in <AUSIT-French-eForum-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com>.

Whenever a group member posts a message, you receive this as an email in your letterbox. You can also opt for a summary or 'daily digest' of emails by sending a message as described above (once you've subscribed), replacing the word 'subscribe' with 'digest', or you can log on to the yahoo groups website <http://groups.yahoo.com/> and from the 'My Groups' page, click 'Edit My Groups', then alter your setting from 'individual emails' to 'daily digest'.

If you want to stop your messages coming when you go away, send a message as above, but put in the word 'nomail'; e.g. <AUSIT-eBulletin-nomail@yahoogroups.com>. When you come back and wish to rejoin, send this message: <AUSIT-eBulletin-normal@yahoogroups.com>.

If you want to change the email address that you use to subscribe to any of AUSIT's Yahoo groups, you can do it yourself through the <Yahoogroups.com> website as long as you have your own Yahoo profile. Alternatively, you can simply resubscribe from your new address using the general subscribing instructions. If you are no longer able to unsubscribe from your old address because it has been disconnected, you can ask your friendly administrator to take care of this.

(from page 5)

Minister announces winners

Information (<www.justice.vic.gov.au/translations>). The Metropolitan Ambulance Service received a 'Highly Commended' recognition for their *4 Steps for Life* CPR Programme which was produced by language services provider Corporate Language Communications initially in four languages other than English.

AWARD CRITERIA

The key selection criteria for the initiatives recognised by AUSIT through these awards include innovation, role model value, benefits delivered to users and/or practitioners, and the level of impact on the industry as a whole. Additional criteria for the interpreter and translator categories include linguistic and interpreting skills, professionalism and ethical conduct, evidence of research and use of available resources, accurate reproduction of all information, and

faithful reproduction of the style, register and other pragmatic features of the original in the translation.

JURY

The six jury members appointed by AUSIT are highly qualified and respected individuals representing different sectors of the T&I industry, with Dr Rita Wilson acting as jury spokesperson. Dr Wilson coordinates the Postgraduate Translation Programme at the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University, and has authored several publications on translation and research in fields such as literary translation, intercultural studies, narrative and new media.

Details on the nomination process and submission criteria for the 2006 Awards will be publicised in early 2006. For further details please go to Excellence Awards at <www.ausit.org>.



Glamour and Excellence in Interpreting and Translating

Louis Vorstermans was glad he dusted off his dinner suit and attended the successful Awards evening

There are some among our colleagues, albeit but a few, who do not think of interpreting and translating as a glamorous profession. Strange though this may seem, they persist in telling any fool who listens that we are underpaid, undervalued and under-appreciated. Well, if these colleagues attended the Excellence Awards evening in Melbourne last month, they are sure to have changed their tune, although they are usually the types who do attend such events because they think it is a waste of time and effort (if you know what I mean).

I went, and what I saw at one of the premier venues of Melbourne, was a 200-strong gathering of intelligent, cultured, multilingual, articulate and very good-looking people, dressed to the nines and clearly determined to have a great time — yeah!

To see Kate Ritchie and Silke Gebauer on stage conducting the awards ceremony in their striking, floor-length gowns made the Oscars look downright amateurish and tawdry. What a performance! The band played music even I recognised, the food was excellent and our president, an MC *par excellence*, conducted proceedings with his usual confident flamboyance. What more can I say, except that those who could have attended and didn't need to have a good look at themselves.

Seeing Laurie in his dinner suit almost made me decide to buy a new

one myself; the waist band in the old one has shrunk somewhat, no doubt due to insufficient use of either the suit or the body that used to fit inside it. My wife, who can be very unkind at times, argues that it's the latter, but since there is still freedom of thought in Australia (at least for the moment), I have decided to believe the former.

So, was the evening a success?

From an entertainment point of view, the answer is clearly a resounding 'yes' with a drum roll. Let's not forget however, that this was an AUSIT function with a clear strategic objective, namely that of raising the qualitative profile of our profession and its practitioners by focusing both our own and our clients' minds on one of our aspirations; that is to deliver the best that our profession has to offer.

Was this objective achieved?

It is fair to say that the nature of the objective makes it difficult to judge both whether it was achieved, and to what extent. At this early stage, we can only make a subjective assessment of circumstantial evidence, but we do need to ask ourselves whether the effort of the usual dedicated bunch of volunteers and the resources contributed by sponsors were a worthwhile investment. Sorry folks, we are a professional institute not a farnarkling club, so pay attention!

Let's have a look at the outcomes.

1. The conception, organisation,

funding and management of the event demonstrated a mature and high-level of professional and managerial skills among the active membership of AUSIT's Victorian Branch. It also showed an increasing level of confidence and a desire to showcase the often hidden skills, expertise and professionalism that exist within the profession in Australia.

2. The number and quality of nominations for the Awards are testimony to the high level of quality practitioners in our midst and to their desire for recognition by their peers. Listening to the judges on the night, we were made aware of the difficulty in choosing between so many outstanding candidates, despite a strict set of guidelines.
3. The generous sponsorship and attendance of a great number of prestigious government, semi-government and private agencies with an interest in our profession underscored their keen interest and support for the strategies and initiatives AUSIT is taking.
4. Lastly, a senior minister representing the Victorian Government agreed to open the event. Trust me, government ministers are not known for wanting to be closely associated with mediocre or unsuccessful events.

(continued overleaf)

Report on the meeting held to reconstitute ALiTrA

The Australian Association for Literary Translation is pleased to announce its reconstitution as AALiTrA.

Following previous notification of members of ALiTrA*, a meeting to discuss reconstitution was held on Saturday 11th November, during the 'Translation and/as Culture' Conference, sponsored by the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University (10-11 November 2005). The slight change in name of the Association reflects the discussions which took place.

After opening remarks by former president Simon Patton and the retiring president Judith Rodriguez, the meeting (which was deemed to be the AGM of the Association) unanimously approved the reconstitution of the Association.

Those present then nominated a Steering Committee to oversee reconstitution of the Association. That Committee consists of Harry Aveling, Judith Rodriguez, Brian Nelson and Rita Wilson, with additional members to represent various Australian states and other relevant areas: Vrasidas Karalis (NSW), Anne Ryden (WA), and Deborah Walker (New Zealand). Other members may be co-opted as appropriate.

Formal elections for a new committee in the terms stated in the Constitution of AALiTrA will be held at a later date, as announced by the Steering Committee.

A high priority for the Steering

Committee is to increase membership of the Association throughout Australia and New Zealand. (The desire expressed at the meeting to include members from NZ may lead to a change in the name of the Association.)

There was unanimous support for the immediate aims of AALiTrA:

- The production of an electronic newsletter, to be distributed to members twice a year;
- The planning of half-day workshops throughout Australia;
- Re-activation of the Leros Press, including the publication of a series of volumes on aspects of translation and translation studies, as well as new translation volumes. Formal MOU arrangements already exist between Leros Press and Monash University. This move was supported by Philip Grundy, who withdrew from the management of the press;
- Such other activities as the Steering Committee and membership of the Association shall decide.

There was also support for the longer-term aim of founding an Australian Centre for Literary Translation, for which sponsorship funding will be sought. This Centre will host visiting translators, foster exchanges, assist the work of translators by providing practical support, encourage research projects, and enhance the work of local translators by forming links with similar centres around the world.

AALiTrA intends to develop links with

AUSIT, the Victorian Writers Centre, the Asia Pacific Writers Network (which is currently considering the establishment of an Asian-Pacific Translation Centre), FIT, and other relevant bodies.

According to figures provided by the retiring Treasurer Chris Watson, the association holds;

- (1) A business cheque account, of \$672.95 as of 30 Sept. 2005 (from which the bank deducts a fee of \$6.50 per month), and
- (2) A fixed term deposit, due to mature on 2nd January 2006, of \$5733.34.

Chris does not intend to continue his own association with AALiTrA, but is prepared to assist in the financial hand-over. He understands that access to the fixed-term deposit depends on having a signature from the secretary (who we have thus far been unable to contact).

It was agreed that the immediate activities of the Association and its Steering Committee would be coordinated from the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University.

Harry Aveling
haveling@hotmail.com

*Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Chiaki Ajioka, Robert Aperdale, Judy Bartosy, Cacio Chow, Madeleine Cincotta, Quinto De Vitis, Robyn Ianssen, Aiying Ma, Marian Maddern, Richard Reisner and Chris Watson.

(from previous page)

In my view (and I was not involved in organising the Awards evening) the event was also a resounding success from a strategic point of view. If there is anything less than positive to be said about the event, it is that the volunteers who worked so hard to make it happen were once again the usual people. Coincidentally, these are not people who say that our profession lacks glamour or that we are unappreciated;

quite to the contrary, they tend to be very successful in their professional lives as well.

Is there a lesson in this? Yes — if you want to be successful, you have to aspire to be the best in whatever you do. You have to study hard to reach to peak of your profession, you have to work hard to gain experience and give your customers more than they can reasonably expect, and you

have to invest in your profession at large, by making a contribution to its professional institute, AUSIT. I know success is mostly a matter of dumb luck, but the harder you work, the luckier you get.

National Competencies Report

‘Where is AUSIT going? We have no vision!’ Well-worn is this dramatic pronouncement; some have even laid it at my feet. In my less patient moments I’m inclined to simply decipher this as the bleating of someone who has either not been paying attention, or who would like AUSIT to go somewhere else, with a vision that differs from the one we have now. Which is...?

— The development of a robust public construction of our occupation, which will then serve as the basis on which each of us can achieve improvement in the rewards gained by us as individuals, and recognition of us collectively as a modern profession.

This vision consists of many elements:

- equipping each member with the tools to do the job, through professional development, the eBulletin, and networking;
- increasing our profile — the AUSIT website, eBulletin, publications;
- defining the good — the Excellence Awards;
- defining the bad — the Board of Professional Conduct (BoPC);
- and lastly, developing a library of terms and concepts that defines the

very basics of who we are and what we do — the Glossary, Excellence Awards, BoPC and the National Competencies Project.

As reported previously, this last project is being undertaken by the Service Industries Skills Council to develop a set of Competency Standards (such as already exist for most other occupations in Australia) which will dictate the form and content of all VET (Vocational Education and Training) sector training for T&I in Australia.

Many members of AUSIT have actively contributed to this project, which amounts to a definition of T&I, and has been written *by practitioners themselves*.

The revolutionary aspect of this last statement must not be overlooked. For years we have fallen through the cracks, been overlooked, and been the last people consulted (when we have been consulted at all!) about matters which have a direct bearing on the development of OUR profession! For example, in December last year it came to light¹ that ANZSCO were updating their definitions of occupations and had not even thought to consult with us regarding their proposed definitions of translator and interpreter!

The Competencies Project represents a major step in our history: the opportunity to influence directly the design and implementation of all T&I training and education in TAFEs and other VET sector Registered Training Organisations Australia wide (including courses approved by NAATI). This is a power we have rarely before enjoyed.

But are we enjoying it? Are we really taking advantage of the opportunity? Have YOU read the latest report? It is reprinted on the AUSIT website. If there is anything in the report you disagree with, it’s not too late. If you want a strong vision, fully supported and promoted by a profession of committed practitioners, then *you* have to do the work. There are 150 pages. Start reading, thinking and commenting.

Chris Poole
AUSIT Representative on the National Competencies Project Steering Committee

¹ As with the Competencies Project, we are indebted to Heather Glass, President of WAITI for bringing this to our attention; she further led in the preparation at very short notice of a submission on behalf of AUSIT, WAITI, ASLIA, NZSTI and SLIANZ.

(from the back page)

Is English the world’s oyster?

native speakers who themselves learnt from non-native speakers, is another common cause of local variation. Thus English hybrids arise.

Behind such transformations of English is the need for people to cement their local identity in a local language. The Indian version, dubbed *English*, is so popular that advertisers find it more resonant than standard English or Hindi. With the nation’s population rivalling China’s, English could become another major language for the world. As mutually unintelligible linguistic hybrids develop in the world, any potential for English to be a global *lingua franca* could be undermined.

Everything else aside, however, if we are to have a world language is English the best choice? Its phonographic irregularity is often an immediate objection as far as reading

and writing are concerned. (Half a million English words are not spelt the way they sound.) Some aspects of the grammar, such as tense and number are more complicated than in certain other languages.

On the other hand English has a comparatively huge and ever-growing vocabulary which enables the user to be more precise and concise. It may take twice as many words to communicate something in a non-English language. Then again, the size of this lexicon presents a greater difficulty for the learner.

The question arises: which version of English should have currency? North American spelling prevails in China, British spelling in India. I found great variation in pronunciation within China, ranging from decidedly American to distinct Oxford and some like neither.

In fact, it is a contentious point whether there should be a standard English at all.

The issue of English as the world language is a huge sack wriggling with questions. However, at the very least we should be very sceptical about the anglophonic triumphalism of mass media and many public figures. Despite the global reach of English at present, it is unlikely to become humanity’s *lingua franca*. And we may well ask whether we really need a global language anyway — but that’s a topic for another day.

Stephen Crabbe

This article was originally published on 13 January 2006 by *Online Opinion*:
<<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=4048>>

Professions Australia meeting

I attended this meeting on behalf of AUSIT on 7 November 2005 in Canberra. There was a fairly good turnout, with about 30 representatives being present. Formal minutes will be available in due course but the following were the main points of interest:

- Professions Australia (PA) now consists of 26 member organisations;
- PA has budgeted for, and is on track for, a small deficit (approximately \$8700) this calendar year, which the meeting considered acceptable given the organisation's considerable cash reserves held in term deposit and cash management accounts. The same is likely to apply in 2006;
- Two minor constitutional revisions were adopted:
 - One, making clear that when the representative of an organisation is elected to PA's Council, the organisation in question may appoint a replacement representative;
 - A second, removing the provision for the chairperson of a PA general meeting to have a second (or casting) vote in the event of tied voting. (Apparently casting votes are no longer considered good practice.);
- The meeting discussed skills shortages in Australian professions, especially the criteria used by DIMIA in selecting which professions are currently understaffed and are thus to be included on the Skilled Occupations List. It appears that newspaper advertisements form the main basis for the current list. As a result, PA intends to write a paper seeking a more sophisticated set of criteria. Since professional groups with memberships below 5000 apparently cannot put submissions to DIMIA on this issue, it may not be very relevant to AUSIT;
- The meeting also discussed guidelines for the teaching of ethics in undergraduate courses. Deakin University is to do some more work on this under contract from PA, including perhaps a survey

- of PA members to gather data for describing and analysing the nature and types of ethical issues perceived and experienced as important by member associations and their members. It was noted that a set of principles for establishing a code of ethics is available on the PA web site;
- The current draft of PA's *Blueprint for National Registration of the Professions* was discussed briefly. The *Blueprint* has been developed to facilitate the implementation of national registration arrangements for those professions subject to regulation by state and territory governments by seeking to articulate the principles which might guide the development of such arrangements. Clearly there remains a way to go before PA can seriously engage federal or state governments in this process;
- The meeting discussed the most recent PA workshop on accreditation, which was apparently very successful. PA thought it would be able to run about two workshops every 12 months and sought ideas for the next one, to take place probably in the first half of 2006. Many members, including AUSIT, showed interest in a workshop on continuing professional development (CPD), including the possible creation of links between CPD and membership criteria. Such a workshop seems likely to go ahead and AUSIT will be invited to attend. Other possible workshop topics included disciplinary processes and corporate governance for non-profit organisations;
- A suggestion was made that all members forward an outline of their own CPD programmes to PA, which could then place them on its website for all to access. Amongst other things, this could perhaps assist in attracting — where necessary or desirable — larger audiences to individual events. Participants considered it reasonable that organisations charge other PA members reduced (members') rates for attendance at

such workshops. PA will mull this suggestion over and may approach member organisations in due course;

- There was some discussion about the inclusion of a 'Young Professionals' category in PA organisations' membership categories. Most members appeared to already have a young member of the profession on their boards, and apparently this was considered to be good practice. Members were asked to survey their young professionals so as to determine what they may want, particularly from PA;
- The next meeting of PA will be the Annual General Meeting, to be held on Monday 29 May 2006.

Malcolm Leader
ACT Chair and Principal Delegate

(from page 15)

provision, technology and the professionalisation of the field. The publication of selected papers from each conference has given more prominence to community interpreting within the broader fields of interpreting studies and applied linguistics, but academic sophistication is only one aspect of this — most presentations and papers deal with recognisable nitty-gritty issues of practice and professionalism.

A feature of Critical Link conferences has been their inclusiveness — indigenous languages, sign languages and immigrant spoken languages have all been covered, and often, despite different linguistic modes, a commonality of themes and issues has become apparent while still noting clearly distinctive features.

Critical Link is the major international forum for community interpreting; contributions and networking will continue to expand at Critical Link 5. For a full history and documentation of the Critical Link movement, visit <www.criticallink.org>.

Terry Chesher

For he's a jolly good one

Past AUSIT President **Moreno Giovannoni** receives the Institute's highest honour in recognition of his wonderful contributions to AUSIT and the T&I profession

Moreno Giovannoni, our National President from 2002 to 2004, has been made a Fellow of AUSIT. For those members who don't know what being a Fellow means, it is the highest honour AUSIT members can bestow on one of their peers, recognising dedication and hard work for the benefit of AUSIT and the profession over a number of years.

Moreno joins the following Fellows of the Institute:

David Connor (Vic), Mary Gurgone (WA), Barbara McGilvray (NSW), all appointed 1995; Terry Chesher (NSW), Bob Filipovich (Vic), Harry Blackmore (WA), appointed 1996; Klaus Hermes (Vic), appointed 1997; Armand von Stein (Qld), Lia Jaric (NSW), appointed 1998; and Marta Barany (NSW), appointed 2001.

In 2005 the VicTas branch committee voted unanimously to appoint Moreno a Fellow after David Connor gathered the necessary letters of support from members around Australia and presented the proposal to the committee. National Council then ratified the decision.

Many of the support letters referred to Moreno's infectious enthusiasm and determination to make AUSIT more relevant and important as the national professional association, with greater benefits for members all over Australia. He did this at considerable personal and professional cost (but was never heard to complain), and he certainly deserves our appreciation and recognition. Moreno inspired by example: he has always been generous with his time, promoting T&I as a business and educating the public about the role of translators and interpreters. His legendary networking ability and emphasis on AUSIT as a national association stimulated some members who had dropped out or lost enthusiasm to return to active involvement in the association.

Thanks to Moreno's initiative the AUSIT website was completely overhauled in 2002, providing the

membership and the wider public with a useful and practical information tool. He supported David Connor's idea of fostering and facilitating communication among members by introducing the eBulletin, which has since grown to become a major benefit of AUSIT membership: an ever-increasing number of members use it to share experiences, ask their peers for assistance, promote professional development and exchange information and views about language and all matters related to T&I. Moreno also helped with the redesign of the *National Newsletter* to make it more attractive and informative, and his work with the Pay and Conditions committee and the review of membership categories further contributed to strengthening the Institute and making it more relevant and useful-

A few quotes from the letters supporting his nomination give an idea of how much Moreno's colleagues appreciate his contribution and his dedication.

'...during [his] term as President of AUSIT, the organisation gained extra strength and grew both in membership and in prestige. Moreno's devotion to his duties as a volunteer office bearer surpassed expectations; he faced all challenges with great energy and elasticity, was generous with his time and exemplary as a charismatic leader. He has instigated several changes and inspired his successors in the office.'

'Moreno burst out of the comfort zone of his successful business as a freelance translator to lead AUSIT at a time when it was more or less coasting along after years of static or falling membership and few new services or activities for members. He set up a small group — a sort of "Kitchen Cabinet" — with which he was comfortable and proceeded to work energetically towards the vision he had of what the professional association could

and should be.

One of the reasons for his decision to become active in AUSIT was the eBulletin, at the time newly set up by David Connor. Moreno used this to transmit his ideas and his optimism to the membership, and to encourage others to work for positive change in the Institute and an improved profile for the profession as a whole.

He inspired by example, and was always generous with his time despite having to keep earning enough money to maintain himself and his family. Membership numbers rose under his leadership, and a number of the positive changes and improvements he instituted have been continued since, with obvious benefits for members.'

'... he inspires T/I professionals to come out of their shells and to promote themselves as professional business people.'

'With his wit and personality he has been able to bring people together. I believe his appointment as a Fellow acknowledges his work and standing in AUSIT and in the profession in general.'

'Moreno is a man of action. This is exemplified by the speed with which he harnessed the necessary support and technical capacity to bring the website into the phase of vigorous growth and community acceptance that is now its hallmark. He is prepared to work hard himself, but, perhaps more importantly, he has the charm and persuasiveness needed to enthuse others and get things moving.'

He was also praised for his 'forthright approach to issues and willingness to stimulate debate' and 'his willingness to provide leadership and set directions for AUSIT.'

Congratulations Moreno!

Barbara McGilvray

Literary translators finding voice

Sarah Wall interviews literary translators and AUSIT members Barbara McGilvray and Kevin Windle on gaining recognition in the English-speaking publishing world

Several AUSIT members are accomplished literary translators, including Barbara McGilvray, who has translated from Italian and French some 25 books and film scripts, ranging from fiction and biography to books on cooking and art, and Kevin Windle, who has translated and published plays, poetry, novels and academic works from nine languages, including Russian, Polish and other Slavonic tongues. Below are excerpts from interviews with them conducted by Sarah Walls.

How did you first get involved in literary translation? Was it difficult to break into the field?

BMcG: In 1970 I responded to a newspaper advertisement by a Sydney publisher who wanted someone to translate children's stories from Italian and French, and I was lucky enough to get the job. In retrospect it seems quite extraordinary that a publisher would be advertising for translators, but this was well before the globalisation that came with the Internet. Now this is a very difficult field to break into.

KW: As a postgraduate student in Canada in the 1970s, I translated some short stories by the Polish writer Andrzej Brycht, mainly for my own amusement. A literary magazine took an interest in them, so I needed to get the author's permission to publish. I then learned that Brycht had recently arrived in Canada and was delighted to find a translator for his work. I went on to translate and publish a short novel of his.

What is the main attraction of literary translation for you?

BMcG: The chance to make the work of a writer I've enjoyed reading and who I think has something interesting to say accessible to a broad English-language readership, and the challenge of finding the right voice in transferring the writing from one culture to another.

KW: Taking part in the creative process, becoming a kind of co-author. This is an attraction if you feel sympathetic towards the original work; less so if you don't, of course. The fact that a perfect version is usually unattainable (especially in poetry) itself

also constitutes one of the attractions.

Do you think there is sufficient awareness amongst Australian publishers, writers and readers of the value of literary translation?

BMcG: Far from it, but it's not just an Australian problem. Writers I think are generally aware of the value of translation, but readers don't always know when the book they're reading is a translation (especially if it reads as if it were originally written in the target language). In the past this detail often hasn't been mentioned anywhere in the printed publication, with the translator's name rarely appearing under the author's. I belong to literary translators' internet groups centred in Italy and the UK and the story is the same. British publishers in general are notorious for their neglect of literature in other languages and their lack of interest in publishing translations. Less than 3 per cent of books published in the UK are translations.

In Australia, literary translators by and large are not joiners or networkers, so raising their profile is difficult. In the 1990s we had ALITRA, the Australian Literary Translators Association [see page 9 of this issue — ed.], and five years ago Sydney PEN persuaded the NSW Government to fund a biennial prize for literary translation; the third Premier's Literary Translation Award and PEN Medallion were presented at the literary awards dinner in May last year. The first winner was Mabel Lee, for a body of work including her translation of *Soul Mountain*, while at around the same time the author received the Nobel Prize for Literature. That produced a flurry of positive press all over the world, because Mabel's translation was the only English version of the novel. You'd have to hope that happy event made more publishers and readers in Australia aware of the value of literary translation.

KW: The number of translated books published in Australia is tiny, so, on one level, the question hardly applies, but there are certainly readers who do value it and appreciate what it entails. One might think, though, that in a multicultural society publishers could do more to encourage the cultural interaction translation promotes.

One area where a stunning lack of awareness has manifested itself in the past is in newspaper book reviews. Reviewers of translated books are apt to ignore the fact of translation and not mention the translator at all. Most literary translators can quote reviews of 'their' authors in which the reader is inadvertently led to believe that the author wrote in English. But I think these days reviewers are less blind to translation than they used to be.

How do you think the situation of literary translators in Australia compares with that in Europe or North America?

BMcG: It varies a lot. In Norway for example good translators can earn a more than comfortable living translating literature from English. They are very organised, and so much money is earned from royalties that the translators' association funds scholarships and trips for members to present at conferences and so on. In other countries (and certainly in Australia) it's quite rare for a translator to be able to negotiate royalties. That's something literary translators' associations in Europe are pushing for. The UK Translators' Association, in cooperation with the Society of Authors (the kind of collaboration we should investigate in Australia) produced a model publishing contract more than two decades ago, building on the UNESCO Nairobi Agreement of 1976 which recognised translators as having equal status with authors. Australian translators should be using a similar contract to protect their copyright.

KW: My impression is that the real dividing line is between the situation of literary translators in English-speaking countries and elsewhere in the world. It is a well-known statistical fact that much more translation is practised from English than into it. Lawrence Venuti has spoken of our anglophonic cultural imperialism: the view that we English-speakers can manage quite nicely without translating very much at all and don't need to import from other cultures. It follows from this that translators will enjoy less status and respect than they do in cultures which are more conscious of the need for them.

A wordsmith in Spain

Member **Jacqueline Buswell** follows scholars of language, religion and philosophy during a linguistic journey through the Iberian Peninsula

Late last year I visited the Iberian Peninsula for the first time to practise my Spanish and explore Spanish culture and history — and in the process I enjoyed language-learner experiences with Catalan, French, Euskara, Galician and Portuguese as well.

In Andalusia, everyone spoke to me in Spanish, and I came face to face with Spain's Arabic and Hebrew legacies. Three religions — the Moors, the Jews and the Christians — share a long history in southern Spain, both through old wars and a long time spent living together. Spanish has some 4,000 words of Arabic origin, according to the writer Juan Goytisolo.

In Cordoba I had my photo taken with Maimonides, who stands in dark stone near a synagogue. A Jewish philosopher and physician born in that town in 1135, Maimonides wrote major works of philosophy and religious law before his death in Egypt in 1204. He was one of many people of Spanish/Jewish or Spanish/Arabic origin forced to leave Spain during the 12th to 15th centuries. Other scholars included Averroes, an Arab philosopher and medico born in Cordoba who died in Marrakech, and Ibn al-Arabi, a Sufi mystic, who was born in Murcia and died in Damascus.

Part of a line of wordsmiths and philosophers from Aristotle to St Thomas Aquinas, these men studied, translated and interpreted Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and Latin philosophical, medical and legal texts, while the Sufi claims to have received his knowledge through visions. They are considered key links in the transmission of knowledge across different cultures and languages even though they suffered migration and exile due to the military upheavals of their day.

This 'golden age' of intellectual collaboration across religious lines came to an end even before the Catholic monarchs expelled Moors and Jews from Spain in 1492, after which mosques and synagogues were often

converted to churches. In Cordoba, the Catholics built a cathedral inside the great mosque. Muslims have only recently won the right to pray there again amidst the magnificent arches of a building now known simultaneously as both cathedral and mosque.

Alfonso X was a 13th century Christian king, poet and musician who founded schools of translation and music in Toledo and Salamanca, respectively. Toledo still has a translation school, the Escuela de Traductores de Toledo, part of the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha. According to Director Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, while the school is primarily a research centre, its priority is the translation of Arabic and Hebrew texts into other languages, with a special interest in Morocco. Since 1999 the School has been running a Masters course in Arabic-Spanish translation. From 1996-2000 the school and the University of Malaga participated with the European Cultural Foundation in a project to translate Arabic literature into seven European languages. The translations were enriched by meetings to discuss the work in progress between the authors and translators.

The Toledo Translation School Library contains many dictionaries and reference books, a set of ancient Hebrew texts from a personal collection (beautiful, bound books kept behind glass), and texts on Arabic literature and history, linguistics, migration, demography and more.

In Salamanca's School of Documentation and Translation, I saw a film, *L'Auberge espagnole*, about the adventures of a young man who goes to study Spanish in Barcelona. As the film was shown in French with French subtitles, with some parts in Spanish and bits in English, I found it entertaining and a good resource for language students. In the library I read that translators and interpreters should see their roles as bricklayers of a new Tower of Babel. I also consulted books on ethics and grammar. What is a 'faithful translation'? According to

my notes, it might mean 'being true to hidden meanings, allusions, that are often essential to the text', whereas loss of content, style or tone is 'falsification'.

In the old part of Salamanca University I sat in the room where Friar Luis de León talked to students who listened while sitting on wooden benches which are still there today. During the Inquisition this theologian and poet was accused of translating the *Song of Songs* into the Spanish language and imprisoned for five years.

I was in Salamanca when a new dictionary on Spanish usage around the globe, the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*, was published by the Real Academia Española and 22 other Academies of the Spanish language. The work discusses and recognises different vocabulary and usage in the various Spanish-speaking parts of the world. The daily *El País* and other media agreed to follow the norms defined by the Dictionary — a *norm* being 'accepted current use', not an imposed law. The Academies consider that different linguistic options are valid in different countries and in different registers.

Below are some useful websites I came across:

In Barcelona, the Mediterranean Editors and Translators held their 2005 Meeting in early November. See <www.metmeetings.org/>.

A translation journal published in Madrid since 1993, *Vasos Comunicantes*, Asociación Colegial de Escritores (ACE), is accessible at: <www.acett.org>.

Toledo Translators' School: <www.uclm.es/escueladetraductores>.

Salamanca University Translation School: <<http://exlibris.usal.es/>>.

Critical Link and community interpreting

The idea to form Critical Link originated in the early 1990s when a group of Canadian interpreters and interpreter educators perceived an unmet need to bring together interpreters in the community sector who had not had regular international conferences or meetings, and who in many cases did not even have regular contact with other community interpreters in their own countries. Unlike the field of conference interpreting, community interpreting enjoyed little research, had patchy training provisions and distinct variations in ethos and comprehension of the interpreting role.

At that time community interpreting was well established in only a few countries, yet changing migration patterns and forced movements of peoples around the world meant that soon many more countries would have to face the increasing need for language services. Sign

language interpreting and interpreting in indigenous languages were also developing fields, albeit growing unevenly. It was time to think of international contacts and to begin learning from each other's experience.

The first Critical Link conference in Geneva Park, Ontario in 1995 drew delegates from over 20 countries; its centrepiece was a stirring debate on the role of community interpreters, with articulate and sharp divisions between those favouring a role of strict language transfer and those supporting an activist and advocacy role to overcome the racism, prejudice and underservicing which beset clients not proficient in the dominant language. A similar level of debate took place over the concept of 'community interpreting' itself. Papers at this first conference tended to set the scene, describing the state of community interpreting and training, certification, provision and policy issues in each country. Canada,

the United States, Australia and Sweden were the most active participants in discussions and papers.

The next three conferences — Vancouver 1998, Montreal 2001 and Stockholm 2004 — each brought growth and development in two directions:

- Increased attendance from many countries which had recently discovered community interpreting and were keen to share their experiences. Virtually every western European country was represented at the next conferences, as the salience of language issues grew in this region. They were also joined by countries from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe.
- Growing sophistication in presentations — evidence of the growth in the quality of research, management, testing, service

(continued on page 11)



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Is English the world's oyster?

Media in anglophonic countries echo frequently with triumphant reports that English has become the world's *lingua franca*. The belief has apparently become the norm in the wider community. But how true is it in fact? Authoritative researcher David Graddol has produced statistical evidence that, while the number of people who grew up speaking English in 1950 was 9 per cent of the world's population, the projection is 5 per cent or less by 2050. According to these figures, there will be 1,384 million native speakers of Chinese, 556 million of Hindi and Urdu, 508 million of English, 486 million of Spanish and 482 million of Arabic.

There can be problems in the research methods used to ascertain the extent of English-speaking ability. For example, terms like native-speaker, foreign-speaker, bilingual — even English itself — have been defined in conflicting ways. Some researchers accept a person's self-assessment of English competency, but others have discovered that self-assessment tends to inflate considerably the level of proficiency (Barbara Walraff, "What Global Language?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 2000). It does seem, however, that English is finding global acceptance in the general area of science. (David Graddol, "The Future of Language", *Science*, 27/2/04.)

Languages tend to ride on the back of national power around the world — Latin under the *Pax Romana*, French and Spanish during the era of European expansion. Following the British colonial period, English has been swept along by the US as the prevailing world power. This too will pass. Already a number of languages are challenging English on the Internet. And if regionalisation of trade and security wins the day against globalisation, languages of influential nations such as China are likely to loom far larger.

Having lived and taught English in China for a while I can agree that there is great enthusiasm for learning the language. Many Chinese believe that it is already the global language and therefore essential for worldly success. In streets and markets strangers would often call out in English — either to sell me something or to trigger a practice conversation — assuming that anyone with fair skin and fair hair would talk

English, whatever their national origin.

The language is already a core component of the primary school curriculum and proficiency is a prerequisite for tertiary entrance. For the fast-growing middle class, education expenses for their child are the most important item in the family budget. There is a huge demand from such parents for kindergartens with English programs and for out-of-school special tuition.

What about the quality of the English education? My tertiary Chinese students had been learning it from high school onwards and most could handle reading and writing very well indeed. Listening comprehension tended to be more of a problem and speech even more so — a common observation by foreign teachers in China. There are, though, many outstanding speakers of English among the students and graduates, as exemplified by the contestants in the national English-Speaking Awards broadcast annually by CCCTV.

Formal surveys of proficiency rank China fourth in all of Asia, and significantly higher than Japan or South Korea. At tertiary level at least, sophistication of the English education process is progressing at speed. Web-based learning involves three million students across 1,000 universities and colleges and is spreading, with determined moves to refine the methodology. Continuous research also aims to improve the learning of young children.

But some factors could gradually lead to a revision of the priority given to English in China. Despite the government's thrust, many vocal citizens do not see the language as a vocational tool. Foreign trade companies use English-speaking proficiency tests to select recruits, while dissenters say that contact between foreigners and most employees will be minimal and inconsequential. Workers in most other fields will not need English at all, they say, and the standard set by universities is appropriate only for the elite band headed for overseas study.

I listened to Huang You Yi, vice-president of the Chinese Translators Association, stress that the greatest need was not for more English-speaking, but for more Spanish-proficient Chinese, due to the rapidly

expanding trade ties with South America. For the same reason, he added, Arabic language skill would soon become equally important. The national television organisation CCTV has recently complemented its established English-speaking channel with a new one operating in French and Spanish. In 2004 German joined English, Japanese and Korean as a specialisation at the huge college where I taught. French, in particular, is likely to gain a strong following since France and China have just shared a Year of Cultural Friendship and signed an extensive economic and trade agreement.

The Chinese Government aims to have 125 million school-students speaking English by the opening of the Beijing 2008 Olympics. The effect of this push on China's national language is another bone of contention in the country. Secondary school teachers complain that they often cannot understand the essays they are marking because the students' knowledge of basic Mandarin is inadequate. Many students, they say, insert terms plucked from the Internet which make no sense in the Mandarin context.

Chinese children have many different mother tongues but *pu tong hua* (Mandarin), originating from the Beijing region, is purportedly the national tongue. Some researchers claim that Mandarin is the most effective medium for education in China but is starved of resources in favour of English. (*South China Morning Post*, 19/3/05.) One source claims that only 45 per cent of the total population is fluent in Mandarin.

Chinese, both rulers and ruled, are quite nationalistic, and if resentment like this becomes strong enough they may well put the brakes on English-learning. Similar viewpoints tend to arise in other countries where English makes inroads.

Conversely, English itself tends to change radically in countries where it is widely adopted. Nigeria and India, where the language has been used for a long time, are publishing their own dictionaries and text books to deal with this reality. English has absorbed many native words and phrases. Syntax and pronunciation also tend to become unique in such situations. Poor teaching, especially by non-

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