

## LANGUAGE MATTERS



# Living on adrenalin



**T**ranslation and Interpreting are just two of the many newer academic disciplines beginning to gain recognition as subjects worthy of study in themselves.

Fifty years ago they were more or less unheard of; 20 years ago they were known, but little understood. Today, they denote two very different professions which our increasingly complex planet can ill-afford to do without.

However, the training which goes into producing modern-day professionals is something which is only just starting to be understood: the first *Language International Conference* on the theme of 'Teaching Translation and Interpreting' was held as recently as 1991.

Translation, so widely used in language teaching, is a subject hardly anybody seems to know how to teach. In the sixth form I received the only piece of advice that any of my teachers ever gave me: "Take your time over a translation; you don't need to write down anything until you've thought about it". Good advice which I occasionally echo to my students today.

But, sadly, nobody ever taught me anything more about translation than that. At university, I wrote a trans-

*lation a week for three years, but techniques required, guidelines to be followed, even basics like how to get the best out of dictionaries - these were never mentioned. Translation was literal, and it served to indicate which of us had spent time living in Spain, and which had not. We worked on a variety of texts, chosen ac-*

*Translation, along with grammar, for many years formed the basis of any foreign language course. And anyone who could competently translate might well be called upon to interpret. But neither translation nor interpreting was seen as a subject worthy of study in its own right. Today, attitudes are changing, says BRYAN ROBINSON.*

aminations offered by the Institute of Translation and Interpreting. All of these give this relatively modern profession a level of respectability it lacked before. But many still, perhaps, err on the side of attaining academic respectability through establishing high standards, without really teaching anyone how to

achieve these. After all, when it comes down to it, what makes a good translator or interpreter? How much of it is training? Innate talent? Experience? Undoubtedly there are skills which can be taught: mother tongue reading skills - seldom studied in schools now; and advanced second language writing skills. Information technology is also a vital part of a translator's work - would that I'd been able to use a word-processor when I was at university! And a database! A knowledge of basic librarianship and documentation studies is also needed as a translator must

be a hybrid, semi-specialist, finding out what he or she can from available resources.

And the extent to which the translator or interpreter needs to be a hybrid goes further than that. Economics, law, medicine, and any number of subjects are taken by translation students on an equal footing with would-be economists, lawyers, and doctors. All this is in addition to courses giving a basic grounding in Applied Linguistics and, of course, their two, or more, foreign languages.

However, isn't there also a part of the translator or interpreter which is "talent"? Or, perhaps more accurately, aptitude? Or just simply personality? There are charac-

teristics of inquisitiveness, of perseverance, of an obsessive need to hunt down every last clue, which are not found in every budding translator attending courses. The Sherlock Holmeses amongst us are few: patient, painstaking detective work is far from fashionable; and if the image of the interpreter is of someone working at break-neck mental speed, enclosed in a booth, living on adrenalin; then that of the translator must be the old-fashioned detective, magnifying glass in hand, looking under every stone for clues as to shades of meaning; but also working against the clock in a commercial environment where nobody ever gives you enough time to write a per-

fect translation. Somewhere there must be a place for training people in these skills, too. There is a need for greater transparency in terms of the criteria required of students of translation or interpreting, and for greater clarity on the part of translators and interpreters as to which skills they themselves use. No amount of teaching can substitute for talent; but everyone will benefit from knowing where the target has been placed. *Bryan Robinson teaches at the School of Translators and Interpreters, University of Granada, Spain.*

**"The image of ... the translator must be the old-fashioned detective, magnifying glass in hand."**

According to who-knows-what criteria; and always we were wondering why one particular translation had to have more red ink spread across it than any other!

Nowadays there are universities like Heriot-Watt, Bradford, Bath, Salford, and others, which run first degree courses in Translation Studies. There is the Institute of Linguists' post-graduate Diploma in Translation, and the highly specialised ex-

**Just how easy is translating? Look at this. On the left, extracts from the original; on the right, possible translations (with endnotes explaining the translation challenges encountered, and how they were solved.) The text is from Paper 1 of the Institute of Linguists' Diploma in Translation examination in November 1992.**

#### LA MALA PRESA

... en cuya página contigua aparece un ... "escándalo" de sexo, sudor y duros.  
... por ahí fuera, ...  
... líder político opina en la 23 y joven hermosa da lecciones prácticas de anatomía en la doble a color de las 24 y 25. Esta contigüidad o mexcolanza entre contenidos erótico-amarillos y contenidos "serios" es la gran novedad de la "prensa mala" española, que tanto irrita por aquí y ahora al personal.

#### A bad press!

... on the very next page you have a steamy sex'n'bribes scandal!  
... in the big world out there!  
Leading politician's views - page 23.  
Topless Beauty gives practical anatomy classes. Full colour double spread - pages 24 and 25. This juxtaposition, or jumble of porno-sensation and "serious" content is an original creation of the "bad" Spanish press which, right here and now, is getting up so many people's noses!

1. "the" or "a"? Using "a" gives the title a second meaning which is totally in keeping with the content of the source text (ST), and with its "Keith Waterhouse" style.
2. Unusually for Spanish journalism the ST uses alliteration.
3. This is what suits the target text (TT) style.
4. Is this expression offensive? It is certainly far stronger than the original. However, some popular Spanish journalists would use it if it existed in Spanish precisely because of this. Spanish written and spoken journalism, as the article itself says, permits much more than its British counterparts. This is a good opportunity in the text to convey the flavour of the writer's message.