



## FAGOVERSETTELSE: SPRÅKKUNNSKAP UTEN FAGKUNNSKAP?

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The patron saint of translators – Saint Jerome (Eusebias Hieronymus Sophronius) – recommended that "a translator should lead an ascetic life and remain single, the actual job occupying so much of his time and attention that little room is left to establish a family, and the income so low that it would never support one."<sup>5</sup> Even though translators up through the ages have not literally followed his recommendations, they are still practitioners of one of the oldest and perhaps most underrated professions in the world, the oldest attracting far more attention in the media and on the streets than theirs!

As long as man has existed on this planet, the need for people with linguistic abilities has also existed – as communicators and intermediaries. Julius Caesar, for example, needed interpreters and linguistic mediators when he invaded England in 55 B.C, the native population only speaking Celtic. Even though Latin became the official administrative language of the country, it never replaced Celtic as the spoken language of the Britons, and perhaps one reason why it did not survive in spoken form. Celtic, on the other hand, has survived up to this day in Welsh and Gaelic.

The Angles, Saxons and Jutes needed interpreters and translators, likewise the Vikings. These Germanic and Scandinavian tribes settled on the island, intermarried, and their dialects were fused with Celtic into what we today call Old English, the roots of modern English. Old English was also influenced by Latin through the Christianizing of Britian, which resulted in the building of churches, abbeys and monasteries, in which learned men-of-the-cloth lived, prayed and wrote. And it is thanks to ecclesiasts such as the Venerable Bede and his Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, that we have some idea of how the language we know today as English emerged.

During the Middle Ages, English was greatly influenced by French, even though it remained the language of the masses, the language of a socially inferior class, and French the language of the court, administration and the upper classes. So people with linguistic abilities were needed to communicate with the masses. It wasn't until the 14th century that English won its way back into universal use, and by this time, English had adopted and anglicized an unbelievable number of French words – governmental, administrative, ecclesiastical, legal terms, words associated with the army and navy, with fashion, meals, social life, art, learning, medicine, etc. Latin and French were still used in an official capacity in parliament, in the law courts and in public administration, in fact French was the language of lawyers and law courts up to 1362. The Statute of Pleading stated that "...all cases shall be pleaded, shewed, defended, answered, debated, and judged in the English tongue..." in other words, all lawsuits shall hereafter be conducted in English and not in French.<sup>6</sup>

Standardization of the English language and the rapid spread of popular education began around the 1500s, what is called the Modern English Period. And naturally translators were required to

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<sup>5</sup> Qvale, Per (1998): *Fra Hieronymus til hypertekst*

<sup>6</sup> Baugh, Albert C. and Cable, Thomas: *A History of the English Language*

translate all kinds of documents and books and manuscripts into Standard English. The invention of the printing press brought books, which had formerly been the expensive luxury of the few, within the reach of the masses. The products of printing presses were – and still are – able to exert their influence upon language as well as upon thought.

Therefore, the etymology of a language, and not just the rudiments of its grammar, should be common knowledge to all translators, in order to put their profession into perspective. A translator is, after all, expected to provide a product that is not only linguistically correct, but also pragmatically and culturally appropriate. Translating begins and ends with language, both general and specific, and the better a translator commands his or her languages, the lesser chance there will be for misunderstandings and interference.

You could say that Professor Göpferich and I are as different as chalk and cheese – different backgrounds, nationalities, mother tongues, ages and perhaps life experience. Yet we do have one thing in common – our keen interest in translation, even though our points of departure are different.

I am what you could call a generalist cum specialist translator, engaged in the practical aspects of translation rather than the theoretical. I earn my living from practical translation and as those of you in the same position know, deadlines leave little time for theoretical and methodology reflections.

Even though I have a foot in two camps – in the academic world and the business world – I am more interested in the practical side of translation than in translation methodology and theory. After all, it is the quality of the end product – the actual translation – that counts at the end of the day and not which translation method or theory the end product was based on. However, as a part-time lecturer in practical translation at the University of Oslo, I do realize that translation methodology and theory are vital ingredients in any translation studies at university level and I always refer to them in all discussions relating to practical translation.

The following is therefore some of my own reflections about translation in general and about the work I carry out as a staff translator and language consultant in the business world in particular. As English is my mother tongue, I generally follow the golden rule and translate from Norwegian into English, when pushed, from English into Norwegian and from French into English.

What do we mean by "mother tongue"? It can be defined as the native language of a person, which normally means the language learned by that person during childhood. It is therefore possible for someone to have more than one mother tongue e.g. when a child spends the first years of his or her life in an environment in which two or more languages are spoken concurrently to more or less the same extent.

Is it possible, then, to translate specialized texts into another language if you only master a language that is used for general purposes and have no expert knowledge of the specialized subject in question?

The following example is a caption from a brochure presenting a small industrial town on the west coast of Norway, produced for the general public, not for experts!

### Elektrolysen

Prebakeomnane i A-hallen er mellom dei mest moderne som finst i aluminiumindustrien. Dei 80-cellene vart starta opp i 1981, og med en strømsstyrke på 222 kA produserer kvar av dei fire gonger så mykje primæraluminium som ein Søderbergomn i den eldre C-hallen, som var bygd i 1959 og vidare utbygd i 1965.

The obvious problem in this example are the nouns elektrolysen, prebakeomnane, A-hallen, cellene, strømsstyrke, kA, primæraluminium, Søderbergomn, C-hallen – nine words that can be categorized as language for specific purposes (LSP), and the rest as language for general purposes (LGP). Change the nouns or the verbs and you change the meaning. The LGP words glue everything together to give the sentences meaning. But there are also other problems, but not quite as obvious, unless you have the technical know-how to recognize them. For example, two terms have been used for the same piece of equipment – omn and celle – and some "false friends" are lurking in the background – elektrolysen, hall. What information is contained in the terms prebakeomnane and Søderbergomn? To explain all this in detail would take too much time, so I present the actual translation instead.

### Potrooms

The 80 prebake cells in potroom A are some of the most up-to-date in the aluminium industry. These cells came on stream in 1981, and with an amperage of 222 kA, produce four times as much aluminium as one Søderberg cell in the oldest potroom C, which was built in 1959 and expanded in 1965.

I think we can all agree that our task as translators is to communicate the message in the text we are translating to our readers, and to be able to do this, we must understand the rudiments of both the source language and the target language in order to be able to translate it with absolute accuracy. We must also be able to recognize words and their characteristics as lexical units and we must be able to select the appropriate ones in the the target language (TL). We must be aware of words that more or less correspond in the source language (SL) and TL but are not exact equivalents – elektrolysen, hall. We must be familiar with life in the SL and TL countries to be able to grasp allusions in texts that are not fully explained because they are familiar to the SL reader, be able to express and understand references to things existing in one country, but not in another. How do you translate the following examples into the TL English?

rakefisk	smalehovud	farikål
mølboland	Løvebakken i Tigerstaden	
bikkja i bakken	julebord	
buljongpar	Bislettbrøl fra Store Stå	
Baller av stål – eller har Braathen frynsete nerver?		

The two sentences we looked at initially were taken from a brochure intended for the general public, in other words, a brochure that anyone who thinks he or she masters the English language should be able to translate. However, this is not the case. To be able to translate the two sentences correctly, you need to have some specialist knowledge of the subject area. You don't have to be an expert, just a specialist! Which means as a translator, you have to be both a generalist and a

specialist rolled into one, which in turn means that you have to master both language for general purposes (språkkunnskap) AND language for specific purposes (fagkunnskap).

A translator must also be able to combine his or her linguistic skills with encyclopedic knowledge, be able to comprehend both language and facts. You can only translate well what you know well, be it general and/or specific knowledge, and extra linguistic knowledge is essential for understanding and reexpressing the message in the text, i.e. you require not only language proficiency and linguistic knowledge, but also all the essential extra-linguistic knowledge and life experience, both general and specific, which is so vital to a translator. It is this extra-linguistic knowledge – our cultural, historical, geographical, political, social, musical, mathematical, scientific, technical everyday knowledge – we draw on when we translate. Unfortunately, such extra-linguistic knowledge is not something that can be acquired over night, but is amassed throughout a lifetime, both consciously and unconsciously.

Is it possible then, as the title of this seminar suggests, to translate documents, etc. for specific purposes if you only master language for general purposes and your knowledge of language for specific purposes is limited, or are the two inseparable?

Language for general purposes is generally defined as the language relating to everyday life, the language we find in newspapers, brochures, general correspondence, ads, instruction handbooks, documents, reports, general texts on consumer affairs, politics, drugs, leisure, economics, sports, cooking, fitness, health, travel, etc. – in other words everyday texts that are intended to convey and communicate information and instructions, as apposed to literary texts, to the general public. And it is this general type of text the majority of translators are asked to translate, so they should be able to get by with just language for general purposes, yet we know that this is not the case.

Where then do we use language for specific purposes or should I say terminology for specific purposes? Because isn't that what it really is – terminology that is specific for certain disciplines, such as science and technology, economics, finance, commerce, etc., wrapped up in, enclosed in language for general purposes.

The following extract from a technical document contains lots of language for general purposes, as well as language or terminology for specific purposes. And the danger here is that if the kitty is getting low, a translator might agree to translate a document that covers areas he or she simply knows far too little about, may even assume that his or her knowledge of language alone will see him or her through. It is a fact of human nature that we can all make mistakes from time to time – and I am no exception. Nobody is perfect and the occasional mistake testifies that a translator is both mortal and fallible, even though it may cost him or her dearly.

#### Anodeskift

Det ble utarbeidet et nytt settemønster, med 2 enkeltskift i syklusen. Dette ble tilpasset driften slik at enkeltskiftene ble tatt sammen med ovnene i neste kullskifteseksjon. Dermed ble det ikke behov for å skifte fra åk til enkeltgriper på krana. Settemønsteret er vist i vedlegg 1.

Anodeskiftet ble utført etter en modifisert SP. Det er normalt tre personer involvert i denne operasjonen; (1) Operatør "mellom ovnene", (2) Kranfører og (3) Truckfører. Under forsøket var det i tillegg en fjerde operatør som betjente anodeklemmene, (4) Operatør "Klemmeløfter". Punktvis foregikk anodeskift etter denne lista:

1. Tre deksel blir løftet av.
2. På vanlige posisjoner blir det meislet i sidekanal og mot nabo butts. Det blir ikke meislet mot nabo nysatte kull. I hjørne- posisjoner blir det meislet på begge langsidene. Det blir meislet ett hull midt mellom anodene som skal skiftes.
3. Kranfører fører anodegriperene i posisjon og tar tak i anodestavene. Systemet blir satt i spenn slik at anodene ikke skal sige ned når klemmene blir løsnet.
4. Dekslene legges på plass, operatør "klemmeløfter" går opp på dekslene og løsner klemmene og henger dem i opp i stativ for dette.

Such a text cannot be successfully translated by someone who has no specialist knowledge of the subject, one of the reasons being that you have to understand more or less how the operation is carried out, how the equipment works, so that no misunderstandings arise. In other words, you have to have some technical know-how. I had difficulty myself with the text, because in some places, it wasn't clear what the authors were referring to or meant.

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What for example did they mean by "på vanlige posisjoner blir det meislet i sidekanal og mot nabo butts, etc." I knew where, but not exactly why, or which equipment was to be used. After discussions with the authors and other experts, it was decided that the English text should be more explicit and precise than the Norwegian text to prevent any form of misinterpretation, as the translated document was to be used by engineers who do not have English as their mother tongue.

In ordinary positions, a crust breaker was used to make holes in the crust in the side channel and against the neighbouring anode. No hole was made next to a newly set anode. Holes were made along both long sides of the anode at the corner positions. A hole was also made in the crust in the centre, between the anodes to be changed.

Let's look at some texts that are related to everyday life. How much extra linguistic knowledge do you need to have to translate this into Norwegian?

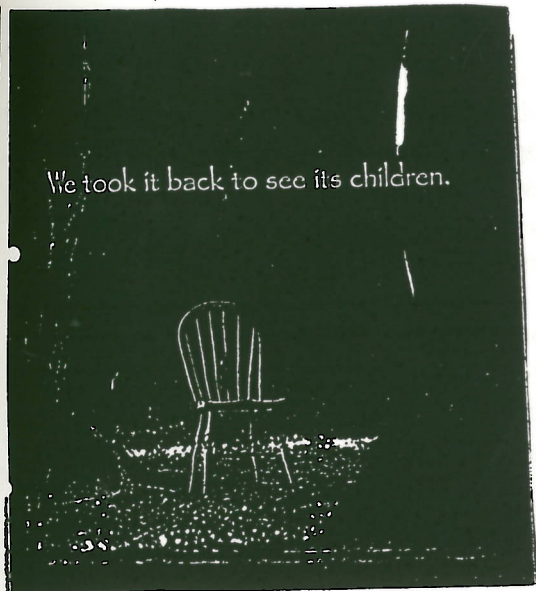
"Mr Piper, the English are paragons of cleanliness. It is a well-known fact that they use more soap per capita than anyone else in Europe."

Mr Piper would snort derisively at this. "That doesn't mean diddly-squat, boy just because they're cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and Eyeties. My God, a dog's cleaner than a bunch of Krauts and Eyeties. And I'll tell ...."

from "The Lost Continent" by Bill Bryson

What does diddly-squat mean and what/who are Krauts and Eyeties? To which period in history do these words belong? What does it tell us about the speaker? His age? His attitudes? What's his nationality? If this had been written by a Brit, he would have written Jerries and wops instead of Krauts and Eyeties.

And the following advertisement?



The main message in this ad is very simple and should be easy to translate, but we must keep in mind the target group. People who live in deserts with no trees, for example, might have difficulties understanding the message. National psychology and attitudes can cause ads to misfire when transferred from one country or continent to another.

Many years ago, before cultural awareness was considered important, an American company, I believe it was, decided to market one of its pharmaceutical products in the Middle East. They decided to use illustrations instead of words to get their message across. It took some time before they realized why this great product of theirs was no success in those countries. I don't have the actual ad, but I think the following illustrates the point.



What they forgot was that ads are read from right to left in Arabic countries, not from left to right as in the Western world. The marketing department had just not done its homework, nor the advertising agency that produced it.

What then are we looking for then when we place an ad in a paper or journal for a new staff translator? Most companies nowadays seem to be looking for people with a degree in translation, as well as a degree in the target language(s). The successful candidate should also have a perfect command of his/her mother tongue and be familiar with economic, financial, technical, legal and monetary issues. These are also some of the prerequisites Hydro looks for.

Where then can candidates acquire a degree in translation in Norway? Translatology or Translation Studies is now a subject in its own right at the University of Oslo, organized by the Institute of Applied Linguistics. Students can sign up for just a semester unit, or take it as a foundation, intermediate or main subject. Practical translation is naturally an inherent and essential part in all the courses, and certain criteria have to be met throughout the semester. Students who are not up to par are informed about this and then monitored throughout the semester. Translations are graded throughout the semester to give the students some idea of where they stand, if they are on form or under par.

Translation workshops are arranged every other week throughout the semester, Norwegian-English one week, English-Norwegian the next. The students are given a deadline for mailing or faxing their translations to us, and no handwritten translations are accepted. The students have PCs at their disposal and are taught the rudiments of word processing. We try to run a tight ship, to train them for the real world, because our experiences are that many of the students who sign up for these translation courses, particularly the semester unit, think they are going to have a cushy semester, with plenty of time to do other things, take a part-time job or even sign up for other courses. They soon find out that the work load is much heavier than they have otherwise been used to as students, what with linguistics, theory, methodology, Norwegian language classes and lots of practical translation from Norwegian into English and English into Norwegian.

One of the reasons we set deadlines is that the content of the translation workshops is based on the translations the students themselves hand in, on their written comments about any problems they encountered underway and how they solved them, and the finding of a parallel text. The students themselves must therefore do the hard work and we get the pleasure of correcting their translations and noting down all the errors – grammatical and cultural, misinterpretations, false friends, textual problems, etc. – to form the basis for our workshop sessions. What we are trying to do is to open their eyes to the intricacies and finer points encountered in the actual act of translating, to tackle cultural differences, improve their knowledge of the target language, in general prepare them for a profession as a translator, even though we know that academic translation is quite different to professional translation.

In my daily work as a staff translator, I don't have the time to sit and think through how I solved a particular problem, and then note it down. Solving translation problems is just another part of my everyday work, as natural as breathing. The difference between those of us who physically make our living from translation and those who study, teach translation is that freelance/staff translators don't have the time to ponder over which translation method or theory would be the best to use in the pending translation.

Over time, my clients have learnt that translation takes time, depending on the content of the document, etc., that translation is something that should be included in the initial project work

and budget, and that sufficient time should be allocated for the actual process of translating. But as we all know, in the business world "time is money", so deadlines are getting shorter and the work load heavier now that we are all on-line and available 24 hours a day. But however short the deadlines are, translators should never let them affect the quality of their work, because when all is said and done, it's the quality of the end product, the actual translation itself, that counts at the end of the day.

## **REFERENCES**

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Baugh, Albert and Cable, Thomas: *A History of the English Language*