

Traditional vs. New Uses for Translation / Interpreting Skills 13th May 2005 Fundação Cupertino de Miranda, Porto,  
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## **AUSTRALIA IS CHANGING ITS LEADERSHIP TACK IN THE TRANSLATION WORLD**

It is certainly a privilege to address such an audience of people professionally skilled at listening and equally expert at appreciating the nuances of language

### **introduction**

Australia's international reputation for innovation and standard-setting started when the Commonwealth Government set up NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) in 1977 to establish and monitor professional standards for translators and Interpreters in Australia, and to support the development of the profession.

The development of translating and interpreting services in Australia is almost entirely due to the governments, which have funded services, training, fostered the skills of bilingual individuals and paid them to apply those skills. NAATI remains a public company dependent on continuing financial subsidy from contributing governments and for more than 20 years has promoted the values of a translating and interpreting profession, mainly by setting standards, testing and registering individuals who could meet those standards or accrediting courses, which produced qualified professionals.

NAATI accreditations since 1977 total 25,037, of which 11,935 have been at the professional level and 13,102 at the sub professional level. Currently there are only 49 accreditations at the senior conference interpreter level and 7 at advanced translator level. AUSIT (The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators Inc.) is the national association of the profession, whose members are practising interpreters, translators, as well as individuals and organizations. Founded in 1987, it is primarily involved in promoting high standards of TI, raising the profile and recognition of translators and interpreters in the community, setting and maintaining high ethical standards, and encouraging continuing professional development. AUSIT has an Australia-wide membership in excess of 750 interpreters and translators. Different levels of membership are on offer to suit translators and interpreters with varying amounts of experience, from newcomers to experienced professionals.

Members are required to abide by the AUSIT Code of Ethics, which is widely accepted as the industry standard, which was adopted in 1995, and launched at the FIT World Congress (the International Federation of Translators) hosted in Melbourne in February 1996. It is also published on AUSIT<sup>i</sup> website. The Code was endorsed by NAATI and Commonwealth Government Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), Attorney General's Department, Refugee Review Tribunal, NSW Law Society, Social Security's Centrelink, NSW Health Care Interpreter Service, Central Health Interpreter Service (CHIS).

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***educating translators in oz***

In Australia, NAATI accreditation is the only accepted official professional qualification for 90 languages and their practising interpreters and translators. Apart sitting for the test, candidates may obtain such accreditation by successfully completing a NAATI approved course, in accordance with its guidelines for content, duration, assessment procedures, staffing and resources.

The University of Western Sydney,<sup>ii</sup> offers postgraduate courses, with only one being NAATI approved at professional level<sup>iii</sup>. All applicants must have an undergraduate degree (from Australia or overseas<sup>iv</sup>) and international students must have a minimum TOEFL<sup>v</sup> score of 580 for their English requirement. In addition, applicants must seat for an entrance test assessing their English and LOTE<sup>vi</sup>, with a minimum pass mark of 60% per language. Entry is subject to quota<sup>vii</sup>. Students must complete eight subjects assessed in different ways, including examinations, essays, research projects, practical exercises, oral presentations, etc., with one subject linked to NAATI accreditation. The final test is the only one that counts for passing the subject and gaining accreditation. Minimum 70% is needed to pass the subject, which follows strict NAATI guidelines, in format and content. Most students pass only one exam, mainly translating into their mother tongue. Examinations are independently marked by two examiners specialised in Linguistics, native speakers of each language, and NAATI-qualified. All tutors are practising interpreters and translators, using up-to-date material, court transcripts, court tapes, real documents, etc...

A degree does not confer automatic knowledge to deliver in this profession, however some degrees (in Portugal, for instance) bear little resemblance with the real world of interpreting and translating. There is a continuing need for maintaining and upgrading skills through short-term courses. In Australia and in Europe, I am often confronted by the lack of awareness at all levels of the community of the role and capabilities of professional TI. We often see it delivered by scores of unqualified, unprofessional, unaccountable practitioners without proper accreditation. All these amateurs should be given a certain deadline to acquire the relevant qualifications/accreditation to work. This state of affairs might be offensive to those who are professional, but cannot be avoided until we have a national and international registration body for professional language delivery. One can only dream of countries setting up a National Committee for Accreditation and Qualification limiting the profession to properly qualified people and stronger legislation for accredited service providers. The recent EU draft #15038 can be the ideal solution after some minor changes.

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One point often neglected in courses is how to address issues of postmodernist, postcolonial, feminist lexicology and politically correct terminology. Currently, clients demand more and more from translators, namely proficiency in all sorts of programs and TM (translation memories). Our budgets have to be stretched continually to update our fast decaying operating systems, hardware and software. In our pursuit of new clients, we are asked to perform as typesetters, artists, illustrators, terminology managers, walking encyclopaedia of bits, bytes, and all sorts of things.

### **historical background**

Contrary to the rest of the world, TI in Australia started with volunteers after the War and today the right to an interpreter is legislated for many stances of life. The first case dates back to 1885 when the Supreme Court of Queensland dismissed a homicide case against four aborigines because there were no interpreters. Most recently<sup>viii</sup>, courts have ruled, “*natural justice can only be served by the availability of interpreters.*”

In Australia, the need for official interpreting came with the flow of displaced persons from wartime Europe. Initially and for many years, the task of interpreting was assigned by default to NESB<sup>ix</sup> people. From 1950 onwards<sup>x</sup> when the police arrested a “wog” - as they called all non-Anglo-Celts in those days -, it had to rely on a friendly “wog” who just lived across the road, selling fruit. The more “wogs” that were arrested, the less time the fruit seller had to work, so the police decided to pay him a small fee for his “*translating*” services. Eventually this Sicilian *Luigi* discovered that there was more money to be made in interpreting than selling fruit. Soon he was joined by *Nick* the Greek, *Abdul* the Lebanese, *José* the Spanish, *Milan* the Yugoslav and many more. They were always accompanying police officers becoming important figures, socially relevant in their neighbourhoods.

Soon, the Australian-born children of non-English speakers found themselves in the objectionable position of communicating on behalf of their relatives. In the late 1960s, at least two deaths in childbirth were attributed to the unavailability of interpreters – leading to the establishment in 1973 of the Emergency Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS). It was a dangerous situation, especially when it was life threatening, and occurred every time an untrained person, with some knowledge of both English and LOTE, was used as an interpreter<sup>xi</sup>.

During the 70’s many important changes took place with the creation of TIS, the Anti-

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Discrimination Board, EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity), EAC (Ethnic Affairs Commissions), etc.... These pioneers were experienced practitioners but not professional. Bilingual officers recruited in the early 80's to serve as interpreters/translators, had to pass a test, show their involvement with their communities and a sympathetic attitude toward ethnic minorities. Complaints abounded and there was an urgent need to both set standards and provide professional training. For much of its existence, NAATI has had to struggle against this legacy of pre-existing practice. Hence, its attempts to lift professional standards have been constrained by the interests of long-standing practitioners who could only be accommodated as para-professionals.

The 1996 House of Representatives Report on Access and Equity recommended the employment of bilingual/bicultural staff across departments and agencies<sup>xii</sup>. However, in the health and legal areas, the report noted, only accredited NAATI interpreters and translators should be used<sup>xiii</sup>. The 1978 Galbally Report expressed preference for bilingual services<sup>xiv</sup>. According to Galbally, it took twice as long to use an interpreter as to provide service directly in the language of the client. Bilingual staff was more effective, and reduced distortion. The current Multicultural Agenda regards translating and interpreting as essential to service a multicultural society.

### **current situation**

What is the current state of the art? The present situation derives more from government decisions and its current political interests than from the supply and demand. Mostly, the pervasive effect of the application of the user pays principle to services once promoted as "free," meaning "*at no cost to the end users*". These services once were totally concentrated on the hands of the Commonwealth and subsidized by public funds. Through the 70s and 80s, TIS used to provide the so-called "free" services, receiving funds from the Federal budget. The persistent losses led to changes in funding and the dismantling of some services. Then State and Territory governments agreed to pay interpreting costs for people seeking to access their services.

By 2001, on-site interpreting represented 40 % of all fee-free services but 66 % of the cost. Telephone interpreting accounted for 50 % of total fee free services but only 19 % of the cost. The figures for translations were 10 and 15 % respectively. The bulk of fee-free interpreting on site was for medical practitioners in private practice. During 2000-01, doctors used 36 % of fee-free services but 43 % of the budget<sup>xv</sup>. As much as a service to NESB speakers, TIS now sees itself as a service enabling other service providers to meet their

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obligations to the linguistically and culturally diverse population of Australia.

From the point of view of individual practitioners, this diversification of service provision probably increased opportunities for higher remuneration. The present figure indicates 1915 active professionals of whom 1,090 are registered for interpreting work, 667 for translating and 100 for both. Commercially speaking TI can become a huge industry niche in the promotion of trade or selling the Australian version of English-As-A-Second Language to students throughout the Asian-Pacific region.

There is no data available to know exactly how many people derive their full income from the profession, those who moonlight and those who need another job just to pursue their translating and interpreting labour of love. There is no reason why Australian innovation and standard-settings in the 70's and 80's cannot give way to a new approach to the profession for this 21<sup>st</sup> century. There must be vision, a bold, risky and innovative approach to this new era of user-pays to get the most out of it.

There must be an *interface*, between training and professional work. We also need more research on aspects currently not included in theoretical teaching and in practical techniques.

AUSIT has encouraged for quite some time the mentorship system. A professional translator or agency employs a recent graduate for a certain period. While there is a salary and other social benefits, the mentor is the only responsible for any translations, which are supervised and edited. At the end of the day, or week, the mentor sits down with the trainee and explains all the changes made to the translations. This system can be adapted here to accept students who can learn and train at the same time provided there are some protocols between the teaching institution and translators and agencies, with provision for independent supervision.

Here in Europe people are starting to think about these and other problems. They were forced upon them by this new trend, which threatens to change countries traditionally associated with emigration into immigrant countries. Translators and interpreters leaving institutions such as ISAI may realise there is a huge new market and new languages to break into it but remember it might not be the bonanza people may expect. It all depends on you. We are creators too and explorers of worlds, words, cultures and languages. Remember, that the Australia Council now recognises translators as creative artists on par with writers for purposes of Literature Fund translation grants.

I will end paraphrasing Umberto Eco<sup>xvi</sup> "*Sense for sense and not word for word, negotiation is the*

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*key to a good translation,” or as Ann-Marie MacDonald of the Banff Int’l Literary Translation Centre said, “Translation, like writing, is both art and craft, with a touch of alchemy. When translator and author actually get to meet, the result can be inspired. Nuance is what translates language into art.”*

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i The Institute offers a vast number of services to members and non-members:

- 1) a referral service
- 2) information on training
- 3) continuing professional development
- 4) a voice in the world for translators and interpreters
- 5) professional status to members
- 6) networking opportunities
- 7) a quarterly newsletter
- 8) professional indemnity insurance at group (reduced) rates for members
- 9) Yellow Pages entry under the AUSIT banner for members
- 10) E-mail network for instant and ongoing exchange of information and ideas.

ii [ex-Macarthur] Western Sydney University: TI Information Manual. [Bachelor of Arts \(Interpreting and Translation\)](#) (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish & Vietnamese) [Graduate Certificate \(Interpreting & Translation\)](#) This course can be taken by bilinguals in any language combination and it can be done on campus or via distance mode. [Graduate Diploma \(Interpreting and Translation\)](#) (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish & Vietnamese) Masters Courses (not leading to accreditation by the national accreditation authority for translators and interpreters) [Master of Arts \(Interpreting and Translation\)](#) (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish & Vietnamese, [Master of Arts \(Translation and Linguistics\)](#) - [Master of Arts \(Translation and Linguistics\)](#) – by Distance (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Indonesian, Japanese, Spanish & Vietnamese)

iii Old level three.

iv Deemed to be equivalent by NOOSR [National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition]

v TOEFL [Teaching of English as a Foreign Language] or IELTS of 6 (six)

vi LOTE [Languages other than English] as coined in 1991 by Michael Clyne. Clyne, M. G. 81991) *Community Languages: The Australian Experience*, Cambridge University Press, London, UK

vii On average 150 applicants for 20 fulltime places.

viii 1983, 1987, and 1991.

ix people of non-English speaking background

x Nasir, Mike, *The future of the interpreting and translation professions*, Sydney Language Centre, Jan. 2001.

xi *The Language Barrier, a Report to the Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications by its Working Party on Interpreting August 1974*. AGPS, CANBERRA 1977

xii House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *A Fair Go For All*, Report on Migrant Access and Equity, AGPS Canberra, January 1996

xiii ditto, January 1996.

xiv *The Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services to Migrants*, AGPS Canberra 1978, better known as the *Galbally Report*

xv Review of the Commonwealth Translating and Interpreting Service, May 1997

xvi *The Guardian*, Nov. 1, 2003 *Translation as negotiation* by Umberto Eco, Weidenfield and Nicolson.