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THE FINAL ISSUE

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‘Goodbyes’ call for reflections on past and present relationships and – in the case of ‘Language International - fond memories.

The beginning

In the life of ‘Language International’, I have merely been one of the helpers, the contributors to the journal. When the invitation to be a co-editor landed on my desk, I was – believe it or not – engrossed in some time-consuming project. Other papers were piled on it. The invitation eventually surfaced again – now much too late for me to decline the honourable offer. So I decided to stay on for a couple of years and then absent myself decently.

The first issue, brought out by Geoffrey Kingscott in close cooperation with Bertie Kaal, changed my attitude completely.

Meandering across the globe, I recognised early on in my career that many language professionals did have a serious problem with their lack of status and prestige. They felt they were considered word machines, mere ancillary servants of the great and mighty, and a necessary evil which delayed important work. This was most obvious when I was at the (now) European Union institutions as an outside, university consultant, and I met old school-friends and other professional language workers who – justifiably - felt that they were not respected for their efforts. But it was actually a ubiquitous attitude to language work.

‘Language International’ clearly offered the possibility of ensuring that the status of translators was improved in the eyes of the world. It offered a forum for language workers. They could use it for addressing common issues, exchanging updated information, passing on news. Furthermore, it had a format which signalled professionalism to outsiders. The journal was thus not only a pleasant surprise but a real delight: This was an undertaking to which I would gladly contribute. Ever since then, I have contributed to ‘Language International’.

The professionals

Whenever I have been and contacted language professionals to make interviews or asked about local translation affairs, doors have been opened, hospitality shown and information proffered. I have had such meetings in places as disparate as a car with a smashed rear window to an office with a magnificent view of central Manhattan. I have been welcomed in Russian, Slovene, Uzbek and Chinese associations, in a provincial parliament in South Africa, and at the UN and the European Union institutions. These meetings have been strictly professional but they have also – all of them – left the imprint of people concerned with their translation and interpreting, with issues in practice, who were dedicated to improving communication and international cooperation, with passing

on information from one culture to another. Interviews have taken me from international projects to university departments operated by one or two persons who had translated professionally in quiet offices or noisy rooms.

It is hard to appreciate the enormous changes that professional translation has undergone since 'Language International' first appeared and today. Compared to today's powerful translation memories, I feel that – at least spiritually if not in fact - translation work was then undertaken with quilt pens. The amount of translated texts has increased prodigiously: Who would have translated all that stuff ten, let alone 15 years, ago? But here we are, it is done. So much translation.

The ranks of those concerned with language work have swelled. Of course there are poor translations – lots of them. Nevertheless, I contend that in terms of translation products, the average overall quality has improved (provided we disregard the Internet translations).

This is because, even in largest countries and the highest circles it is now realised that all nations are interdependent in today's globalised village. And that the strongest bonds are established by interaction which ultimately depends on professional translation.

'Language International' contributed more than its mite to that awareness, it helped globalise it. And it has indeed also promoted the status of professional language workers.

The academic world

In the academic world, I believe that 'Language International' also helped establish ties. Initially there were more academic contributions and there is little doubt that the conference proceedings which were published in relatively large numbers in the first issues, disseminated important information and contributed to the formation of an esprit de corps among translation scholars.

The regular conference calendar certainly brought attention to many meetings that would previously have had a somewhat dubious claim to being "international" with only a token couple of foreigners.

I believe that 'Language International' thus brought together a number of diverse academic experts in translation and in this way furthered numerous associations. I do not know how the 'Benjamins Translation Library' came into being, but I guess that part of the reason was that the positive response to 'Language International' demonstrated that translation was a growth area.

'Teaching translation and interpreting'

The crowning days of my own participation in 'Language International' were the three Elsinore conferences. They were to put in focus the teaching and training of translation and interpreting. Taking place in 1991, 1993, 1995, each brought together c. 100 participants for 48 intense hours in beautiful surroundings by the sea, close to the castle of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Each time more than 25 nations were represented.

As the need for discussing the same topic arose elsewhere, the torch from Elsinore has moved to Hong Kong (organiser: Eva Hung 1998) and to South Africa (organiser: Annelie Lotriet 2000). These conferences will continue even after the demise of 'Language International' in cooperation with John Benjamins.

Saying ‘goodbye’

Few journals have depended more on time and circumstance than ‘Language International’. It appeared at the right moment, it had a considerable impact on the world of professional language work, not only in Europe but worldwide.

It is not all that glitters that is gold, but ‘Language International’ has indeed been gold to the language profession: it made professionals more aware of their colleagues, of the global society, and by publishing contributions about and from far-flung corners of the globe, it did not only bring Russia, Uzbekistan, South Africa, and Uruguay to the attention of the European consciousness, but also to one another’s. And most notably, that of outsiders to translation.

‘Language International’ – the publishers and editors behind it – achieved something tangible and important for the language professions worldwide during its years of publication. By focusing on the all-important language work, it contributed to strengthening the professions that make the world a better place for human beings.

A delicate mission has been accomplished. Well done.

It has been a fine and rewarding experience, a privilege and an honour to contribute to ‘Language International’ over the years.



A canal in Amsterdam, the home of ‘Language International’