

Tower of Babel

Karen Tkaczyk reports from the multilingual and multinational International Technical Translation Conference in Lisbon, Portugal



Mathilde Fontanet spoke on translating technical English



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Thirty-six nationalities were represented by the 200 translators present at this two-day conference held in Lisbon on 28-29 May 2010. That alone made it a stimulating environment for any member of the T&I community, even before we consider the technical sessions. English was the language of almost all of the sessions, but the hallways and meeting areas exhibited great diversity. Conversations were sometimes held in several languages at once, it seemed. There were people from many European countries, and from most of the Portuguese-speaking countries. There was also a delegation from China.

Tradulínguas are developing a reputation for putting on excellent conferences. Organisers João Roque Dias and Lina Gameiro had been very responsive and well organised in the run up to the event, and it ran very smoothly, so they and their team are to be congratulated. It is worth mentioning that the coffee breaks, on-campus lunches, and conference dinner improved the overall experience in giving us a flavour of Portugal. Delicious *pastéis*; Portuguese pastries, were served during the breaks, and a lively (perhaps even boisterous as the evening wore on) conference dinner was held at a location within walking distance of our hotels. I would highly recommend future Tradulínguas events.

So what did I learn?

I had chosen to attend because of the specialised technical content, and combined it with a visit to my parents in the UK. I am a highly specialised

technical translator and I crave good training in the area. It is not easy to find such training, even if you are willing to travel. Medical translation, legal translation, even financial translation, are commonly catered for. Technical translation is not often the focus of conferences. Since this one sold out and had a waiting list, it suggests to me that there is a market for other similar events.

I arrived with decisions to make, as the programme was two-track apart from keynote speakers. We had good choices, as each time slot had a session on a technical subject, then

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there were other options on building your business and terminology management, for example, for those who wanted a more general programme. There were sessions that were of direct relevance to my work, and several that were not directly relevant but left me with a sense of satisfaction afterwards. I felt 'well fed' intellectually after the two days.

My conference began with a member of the in-house translation department at CERN in Geneva, Mathilde Fontanet, talking about the common difficulties of translating technical English. Oh, those noun

pairs! As well as the huge value to the obvious 'out of English' audience, there was a lot of food for thought for those of us who work *into* English.

UN translator Prof. Marie-Josée de Saint Robert gave an excellent session on how terminology must be defined within the UN, in her case for work into French. It was an eye-opener to see how decisions must be taken. I think it is best explained by an example, which I hope I relate faithfully. In one area of automotive technology (as I recall the context was anti-lock brakes), manufacturers were using a variety of phrases to describe a new technological concept in English. The equivalent French phrase had to be defined for a new standard, and a study was made of the French phrases in common use. It was then important to consider whether those phrases were used exclusively by one auto manufacturer. Selecting that phrase would not do! So not only was the meaning of the terms important, but so too were the accepted phrasing in the industry and the degree to which a phrase was accepted by only a part of the industry, before an 'official' French translation was selected.

I was looking forward to a session on translation for technical journalism, as it is an area in which I wish to develop my skills. This is a very hard area, as the translator must both have the technical skill set and be able to write excellent marketing copy. Presenter Steve Dyson met my expectations and may be the only translator I have ever met who is more narrowly specialised than me! His field is translation of naval defence-related

Back to basics

ITI's popular 'Starting Work as a Translator or Interpreter' event is packed with invaluable advice for newcomers to the profession, says Louise Souter



Louise Souter is a French and Spanish into English translator specialising in business and tourism. She is currently studying on the MA Translation Studies at the University of Portsmouth.

The 'Starting Work as a Translator or Interpreter' (SWATI) event from ITI is now in its third year. This 'Routes into Languages' initiative, organised in conjunction with the University of Westminster, was held on Saturday 5 June. This well-attended seminar provides students, graduates and career changers with information about what is involved in translation and interpreting, what qualities are needed to work as a translator or interpreter, training opportunities, how to get started in their career and how to break through the 'no experience – no work' barrier.

Understanding the basics

Havla Peck, Director of the Centre for Interpreting and Translation at the University of Westminster, welcomed participants by explaining about National Networks for Translation and Interpreting. Paul Appleyard gave an amusing introduction in which he clarified the difference between translation and interpreting, provided an overview of translation, explained where translators and interpreters work and the skills needed for both translation and interpreting. He then outlined the advantages and disadvantages of freelance and

'Joanna Waller discussed an issue of major concern to many novice translators: how to break through the "no experience – no work" barrier'

in-house work, described the different types of interpreting and gave his view on machine translation (it is quick but leave the real job to the professionals!). Jane Jones, Stran Leader for Translation on the postgraduate languages courses at the University of Westminster, spoke in for Stella Cragie, giving an overview of the training options available to translators and interpreters. She began by expanding on what Paul had said, outlining the skills needed by translators, interpreters and project managers. She went on to give an overview of the qualifications available in translation and interpreting, such as BAs and MAs, using the University of Westminster's courses as an example; the options available to potential translators and interpreters with no first degree or one in a non-foreign languages subject as well as career changers; and also the Institute of Linguists qualifications available. She finished by highlighting the importance of having good resources such as dictionaries and continuing professional development.

In her talk 'Starting out as a translator', Sarah Griffin-Mason gave an account of how she came to be an established translator and then used her experience to detail several strategies which could be followed by budding professionals, such as the importance of knowing your market, networking and making career plans. She explained that the translation market is not a single entity and suggested novice translators contact translation companies in the country of their source language(s).

After a short refreshment break,

subject matter for that industry's professionals, and his discussion of the issues involved in marketing technical subject matter was the highlight of the conference for me. His technique is emulation, and he immerses himself in that industry's publications to build up his expertise.

A Belgian professor from the University of Mons, Viviane Grisez, gave us a great session on how French scientists usually write English papers, giving insight into what to look out for in the area of revising English texts written by non-native speakers, which is a reasonably large field for scientific translators like me. Major areas of consideration were modal verbs and tense use, then other smaller issues that we all recognise were mentioned, such as hyphenation, or the difference between 'make' and 'do', and the dreaded 'realise'.

There were sessions on specific technical areas including high-speed rail, bearings, my own session on the chemical industry, and a very popular session on translating manuals. There were also more general sessions on tools, terminology and building a business. Renato Beninato gave a lively presentation on the state of the translation industry and how old we all were – literally, but more importantly figuratively, in how we think about the business and the way it may change in the near future. The conference ended with sessions from the head of the Portuguese team at the European Commission, and the last Q&A was a lively one that scratched the surface of the current ferocious debate on the potential reform of the Portuguese language.

And back to work

This was a stimulating, well-run conference where I met many interesting people. It left me enthusiastic about my chosen niche in the profession, and eager to return to work. There was even an added bonus! The CD-Rom with which I returned home was chock-full of reference material in addition to the presentations. This was a superb professional development event. ☺



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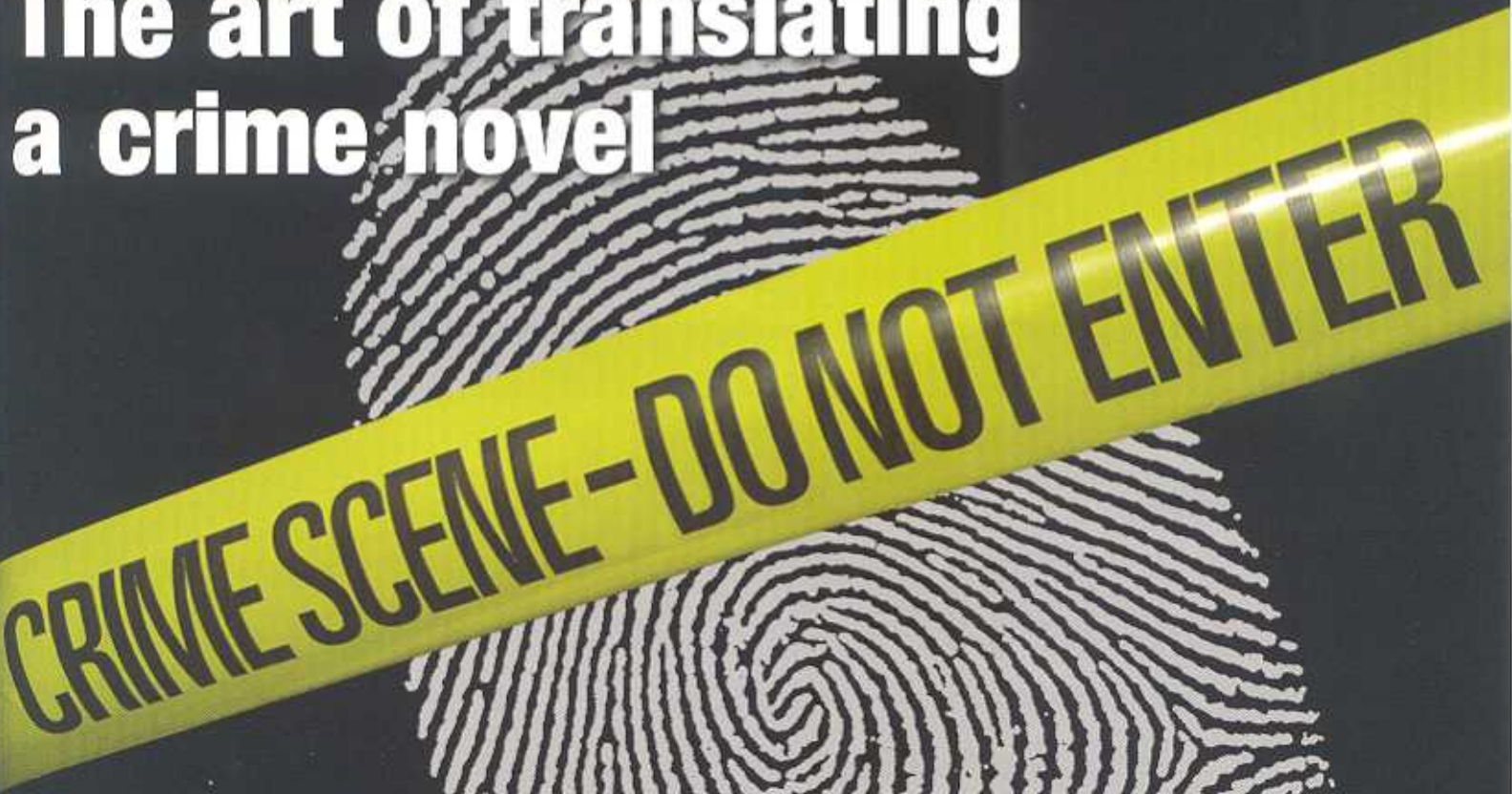
ITI's annual 'starting work' event is a huge success

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