

Lettere al direttore
Letters to the Editor

TRANSLATION IN QUÉBEC, CANADA

Translation in Québec mushroomed in the 70s. The political context then existing was favourable to the development of this profession. Indeed, two successive local laws adopted by the National Assembly of the Province of Québec (namely Bill 22 and later Bill 101) made the French language the only official language in the Province of Québec. Since Québec has many dealings with business partners outside its own territory, from Ontario to British Columbia in English speaking Canada, and also in the United States, everything coming from the outside therefore had to be translated from English into French, and a small proportion of documents going outside the Province of Québec had to be translated from French into English. Since some of the English speaking business people do speak French, and also since most French speaking people in the business community do speak English, the need for interpreters is thereby significantly reduced.

Thus, the 70s saw an explosion of internal translation departments (sometimes even called linguistic departments) of large companies selling products or offering services, and of large legal and accounting firms. At the beginning, those translation departments even had terminologists who had to find the equivalent terminology of all the documentation that more often than not came from the United States, the Far East or even Europe. Some of them even went abroad for work studies in order to find out the particular context of a product or a service in France, Luxembourg or Switzerland, for instance. After a few years, the work shifted to an updating of the information gathered and we saw a curtailment of the workforce in this field. In the meantime, the translation departments of law firms and accounting firms continued to thrive, since their services were of a more continuing nature.

For example, in the event of a takeover bid, a company would set up a meeting with its own legal advisors and accountants who would then in turn hire other law firms in the Province of Québec to act as their agent and translate the documentation into French to satisfy Québec legal requirements. The translators of the legal firm and of the accounting firm would then liaise with the translation department of the companies concerned. Thus, all the parties to the transaction were thereby insuring the quality and accuracy of the information and the loyalty of their translators as their respective interests appeared. The system is now firmly established after some 20 years in operation and has proved quite

successful, as much for the employers as for the translators employed. This does not mean that there is no longer any place for freelancers. Indeed, the workload is sometimes so heavy that most major firms have to resort to freelancers with whom they keep close ties.

This type of profession is still highly in demand, and yet employers keep making the same complaint: translators or interpreters who have just graduated from university are totally unprepared and untrained for this very specialized field. Most of us already in place got our training on the job. However, the increasingly short deadlines we must face prevent us from spending the appropriate amount of time to train new translators or interpreters. In Montreal alone, we are approximately 40 translators involved in this field and most of us have been trained not only in translation, but also in law in some fashion or another. Some of us even have dual training, meaning that there are quite a few lawyer-translators. While it has been noticed in the past that you cannot make a translator out of a lawyer, the same is unfortunately true for a translator who cannot become a lawyer overnight. The legal field is indeed so vast that one has to be knowledgeable in commercial, securities, tax, inheritance, labour and several other types of law. Most of us therefore had to get some kind of training in law.

At the federal government level, for instance, the legal translators are also required to be lawyers or notaries as well. However, their work is entirely different from ours. They mostly translate judgments from the federal courts related to admiralty, intellectual and industrial property, liability of the State, citizenship and immigration, customs and income taxes and administrative law in general. They work for the Federal Department of Justice or the translation services of the Supreme Court of Canada and the Federal Court of Canada, and answer to Public Works and Government Services Canada (which replaced the Secretary of State in that capacity). Most of them (some 30) are based in Ottawa, the capital of Canada, although there is a small contingent (approximately 9) also based in Montreal, Québec.

It is needless to say that it would be a lot more difficult for this system to work so well if we did not have support from the currently existing infrastructures. Indeed, the Federal Government, through Public Works and Government Services Canada, issues every year a compact disc on CD-ROM called Termium, which contains a bilingual database of more than one million entries in bilingual form covering most technical fields. For information with respect to Termium, the person to contact is Mrs. Thérèse Lessard, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Translation Bureau, Client Services, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5, Canada, telephone: (819) 997-3712, fax: (819) 997-1993. This databank is also available as TERMDOK in a multilingual version, namely Danish, Dutch, English, German, Finnish, French, Icelandic, Italian,

Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish, but with some 200,000 entries only. It is offered by Scandinavia PC Systems, address: Mr. Kjell Westerberg, Tekniska Nomenklaturcentralen (TNC), Västra Vägen 9 C, S-171 46 Solna, Sweden, telephone: 0470 154 00, fax: 0470 235 37 (the information for TERMDOK might not be up to date, in which case I would advise you to contact Mrs. Thérèse Lessard whose phone number is indicated above). The corresponding body for the Province of Québec called the Office de la langue française is also equipped with the same kind of database called Clé-BTQ, which can be accessed by computer. It is to be noted that these two databases are not redundant, but rather complementary. For information with respect to Clé-BTQ, you can contact Mr. Pierre-Étienne Laporte, telephone: (514) 873-4466, fax: (514) 873-3488, address: Office de la langue française, Stock Exchange Tower, 800 Square Victoria, P.O. Box 316, Montreal, Québec H4Z 1G8, Canada.

These tools have proved to be tremendously helpful since the timeframes we face force us to work overnight or during weekends, when regular information sources are unavailable. Those of us who have more time will do their translations directly on computers, while others will dictate them on tapes which are then typed and reviewed. If we have the time, we will review our translations ourselves, otherwise others will do it for us. More often than not, the dictation process has to be done at the speed of reading in order to meet the mandatory deadlines.

Since we seem to have very little in common with the "9 to 5 translators" whose work is of a more general nature, we decided to create our own association called the Canadian Association of Legal Translators/Association canadienne des juristes-traducteurs which comprises some 90 members and has now been in existence for more than 5 years. If anybody would like to get some more information with respect to the above, they can either get in touch with me personally or with the Association, the address of which is: P.O. Box 919, Post Office "B", Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5P9. It is to be noted that, by letters patent dated August 28, 1991, the Corporation professionnelle des traducteurs et interprètes agréés du Québec - CPTIAQ (the professional association for translators and interpreters in Québec) is now recognized as a professional corporation regulated by the Professional Code, Chapter 26 of the Revised Statutes of Québec. The address of CPTIAQ is: 1140 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West, Suite 1060, Montreal, Québec H3A 1M8, telephone: (514) 845-4411, fax: (514) 845-9903.

I hope this brief outlook succeeded in quickly explaining what we do and how we do it. I guess we all have to be a little crazy to do this type of work since the hours are so bad (which one of us has not stayed at a printer's shop and needed a shot of black coffee to be revived at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning?) and the work itself is rather stressful, but we do it anyway because we love it.

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