

The translation profession in the United Kingdom in 1986: new developments

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Those of you who were at the last conference may remember that on that occasion I made one of the earliest public announcements of the proposed formation of a new body — the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (the ITI).

I should like to tell you what has happened since then, and to give you an account of the new Institute. I am not proposing to go at length into the background of the ITI. The story began in 1983 when the Board of the Translators' Guild of the Institute of Linguists decided to do some forward planning for the forthcoming three to five years, and set up what became known as the '5-year plan working group' (WG5 for short). From the outset, the working group contained members who did not even belong to the Translators' Guild itself, because it wanted to be sure not to adopt too narrow a view of the future. It was not long, either, before the group invited an interpreter to participate in its work. The first stage of discussions lasted over a year, and at the end of that period the working group reported back to the Translators' Guild Board. This was about a month before last year's 'Translating and the Computer' conference. It was too early, therefore, for me to be very specific when I spoke to you last year.

What did WG5 recommend? In a nutshell, to enlarge the horizon of translators.

In my opinion, and I believe this opinion is shared by most of my fellow-members of WG5, the breakthrough came at a meeting when we were debating, as only linguists can, possible names for the new organisation which we felt was bound to come. At first, all the proposals contained the word 'translators', with or without the adjective 'British'. Then one of the members said that surely what we should be focusing on was not translators, but translation, in other words we were not trying to

form a pressure group, a closed shop, a 'guild' in the mediaeval sense of the term, but a body whose principal aim was to be the enhancement of translation as an art, a science, a skill, a service, call it what you like. It then became clear that all kinds of people could and should associate themselves with the new body. These included users of translation services in the shape of organisations which require translations, whether or not provided by in-house translation staff, the growing number of people who teach translation at professional level in universities and polytechnics, translation bureaux, publishers, lexicographers, and very possibly people like those attending this conference today. Students would naturally be welcomed by the new body. In Shell, we used to call this 'growing our own timber' . . . Everything I have just said about translation applies to interpreters too. We had another of our marathon discussions about whether to use 'interpretation' or 'interpreting' in the title of the Institute. The consensus was that 'interpretation' had other widely accepted meanings, in the field of music for instance, whereas 'interpreting' could only mean one thing.

By the end of 1985, WG5 had disbanded and re-formed itself, with a slightly different cast of characters, into the ITI Steering Committee. Saturday 19 April 1986 was selected for the inaugural meeting, and the Royal Horticultural Society's small hall was booked for the morning of that day. The Steering Committee then set about the really quite monumental task of informing everyone about the launch. At this point, I should like to put on record the admiration I felt for my colleagues on the Steering Committee — their pooling of knowledge and expertise, their hard work and their dedication were tremendously impressive. The information which went out to all those who might be interested in the proposed new Institute attracted such a large response that we had to book the hall for an afternoon session as well. This led to some unexpected administrative problems, in that decisions had to be approved by two separate votes (a.m. and p.m.), but in the end the general keenness to get the new organisation off the ground was such that there was no doubt at all in the minds of the Steering Committee that we had been thinking along the right lines.

It was also gratifying for the Steering Committee to discover that many people were sending donations to the launch fund, in a practical and tangible expression of goodwill.

Immediately after the successful inaugural meeting, two things happened. One was that the Institute of Linguists notified the Translators' Guild that the Institute could no longer provide facilities for the Guild, which meant that the Guild had to think hard about its future. The other was that the Steering Committee of the ITI, with the consent of those present at the two inaugural meetings, transformed itself into the ITI Interim Council and set up a number of committees of its own.

The Translators' Guild ultimately took the decision to wind itself up, but happily for the ITI, many of those who served on Guild Committees

volunteered to fulfil the same role on the ITI Committees. Having said this, I must also make it clear that the ITI is not just the Translators' Guild reappearing in a new guise. To quote our President, Professor Sager, in his article appearing in the second issue of *ITI News* 'I believe that the creation of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting will in future be seen as a turning point in the history of the profession; it marks a new beginning, a new initiative by people who care for the quality of the work they are associated with and who want to have a forum in which to discuss their common interests.' In my opinion, this 'forum' is one of the most valuable features of the new Institute, and from my own personal point of view, I am particularly pleased to welcome universities and polytechnics into the fold.

Although it is not my intention to read out long lists of names, I think it would at least be useful for you to know the names of the members of the Interim Council. I have already mentioned that our first President is Professor Sager of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (he will be in the chair here tomorrow morning); the Chairman of the Interim Council is Dr John Sykes, and the Vice-Chairmen are Geoffrey Kingscott, myself and Marti Smith. The members of the council, in alphabetical order, are Peter Barber, Lanna Castellano, Norman Hutchison, Robin Inches, Claire Kahtan, Diana Keay, Jean Kirby, Pamela Mayorcas-Cohen, Albin Tybulewicz and Barbara Wilson. They represent a good cross-section of the world of translation, since they include both freelance and staff translators, a teacher of translation, an interpreter and the head of a translation company.

By describing to you something of the work of the ITI committees, I hope to give you an idea of how the new Institute is tackling its various self-imposed tasks.

The Activities Committee, chaired by Jean Kirby, has already been busy: the first event was a Vin d'Honneur, on the principle of starting the way you mean to go on ... But the next event it organised, taking over from the Translators' Guild, was the recent weekend workshop in York. This really is work, but most enjoyable too. The ITI has also taken over from the Translators' Guild its participation in the planning of the conference you are now attending. Next on the list is a half-day agriculture workshop to be held later this month, followed by an informal 'end-of-year' get-together in December.

The Admissions Committee, which I chair, has been concerned with a variety of questions, particularly the qualifications for Membership with a capital M (by examination or by assessment), and whether every applicant should be interviewed, etc. Then there is the question of Associates: are they solely to be aspiring translators, or could they also be people who for instance just do the occasional translation and would never want to be Members (capital M) anyway? We have also been looking at other cate-

gories of membership (with a little m): honorary members, fellows, corporate members, and what we currently designate as subscribers. The Admissions Committee has been greatly assisted in its work by the two sub-groups it set up — one to consider in detail the question of admission by examination/assessment, and the other to concentrate on the specific question of the admission of interpreters.

The Constitution and Legal Committee, chaired by John Sykes, has been dealing with the drafting of the new Institute's Memorandum and Articles of Association. It has to take legal advice, of course, before it can regard its main task as completed.

The Finance and Planning Committee, chaired by Marti Smith, is mainly responsible for the management of the Institute's resources. Cutting the ITI's coat according to its cloth is another way of putting it. One of its knottier problems is to arrive at a sensible subscription structure. This has to be graded to reflect the different categories of membership, and at the same time the level of subscriptions must bring in the necessary funds without being so high as to put people off!

The Publicity and Publications Committee, chaired by Pamela Mayorcas-Cohen, is among other things preparing five pamphlets: 'How to become a translator or interpreter', aimed principally at school leavers and students; 'A career as a staff translator', aimed at students; 'Employing a translator', aimed at employers; 'How to set up as a freelance translator', aimed at qualified students and late starters; and 'Information technology and translation', aimed at everyone! Another task undertaken by the Committee has been the revision of the application form. Anyone who has ever tried to devise a form will know how complex and demanding a task this is; and to anyone who has not, I would say, just you try! The Committee has also analysed the membership so far, with some interesting results. One of the most interesting, in my view, is the fact that almost one-sixth of the members work as interpreters — this proportion certainly surprised me. Another noteworthy fact is that almost one-third of ITI members were not previously affiliated to any professional organisation for translators or interpreters.

The ITI publication, *ITI News*, has appeared twice so far, and a further issue is due out in late 1986. Robin Inches has been the editor since the start. *ITI News*, which is *not* the definitive journal of the Institute, is currently being issued free of charge to anyone expressing an interest. This, however, will not go on forever, and the successor to *ITI News*, for paid-up members only, will probably come out in January 1987.

I have kept till last the activities of the Conference Committee chaired by Geoffrey Kingscott, which is at this stage concentrating on the planning of ITI's first annual conference and annual general meeting, to take place from Friday to Sunday 1-3 May 1987 in London. As you can see, the date of the conference is nowhere near the traditional autumn timing of the

'Translating and the Computer' conferences, nor will it attempt to encroach upon this well-established territory. Machine translation will not be a conference theme, though more mundane translation aids such as microcomputers and electronic typewriters will be covered. The emphasis will be on the practical side of translation, as can be seen from the title of the conference: 'The Business of Translation and Interpreting'. Even in the early stages of the planning of the conference, it aroused widespread interest abroad, and we already hope to welcome a large proportion of delegates from overseas, just as we do at the 'Translating and the Computer' conferences. One of the major speeches is to be by Hans Schwarz of the German translators' association, the BDÜ, on the role of the translator.

On the subject of the interest stimulated abroad by the creation of the ITI, the aspect which seems to have attracted most attention is the fact that ITI sees universities and polytechnics (the educators), and the companies (the commissioners) as a part of the translation and interpreting profession. It might be said that the seeds of this concept were sown years ago, when the 'Translating and the Computer' conferences first brought together people who had hitherto barely been aware of each other's existence and certainly had not spent time in discussion.

Little did we members of WG5 know, back in 1983 or 1984, what our deliberations would lead to — and even the ITI is bound to evolve as time goes by. It may develop into something which is quite different from its present form. What I can say, though, is that the encouragement received by the ITI from every quarter has made it clear that we must press on with our efforts.

In conclusion (and to prove that I *do* read *Aslib Information*), I should like to quote from 'The IT Column' on page 233 of the October 1986 issue. The writer refers to a phrase he coined: 'walking forwards while looking backwards'. The ITI should of course walk forwards, but it must also look backwards, partly to avoid past mistakes, and partly to build on past achievements. But I would like to add a further element: not only should the ITI look backwards, it should look forwards too, if only to see where it is going!

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