

Painting with words

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How translating and writing interact

- ❖ Many great writers honed their skills by translating. This practice goes back 2000 years!
- ❖ At least to the first century AD when the Roman orator Quintilian taught his students to translate from Greek into Latin to practise speechwriting.



Pleasure was paramount

The 17th century *belles infidèles* school promoted the concept of pleasure.

- ❖ Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt and his followers saw translation as a mode of writing.
- ❖ They thought the pleasure readers derived from an elegant text was paramount.
- ❖ But in the 19th century, French translators reverted to literalism (Littré's Dante was in 14th C French).



Other French examples

- ❖ Chateaubriant translated Milton into French
- ❖ Mallarmé translated Poe.
- ❖ Voltaire translated the first three acts of Julius Caesar. He even wrote three plays emulating Shakespeare.
- ❖ Baudelaire was a bit naughty. He translated an English story and passed it off as his own.



In Germany meanwhile

- ❖ Shakespeare was popular with the *Sturm und Drang* movement
- ❖ This was a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment
- ❖ Through the Schlegel-Tieck translation, Shakespeare became part of the German literary canon.



Some thinkers had a negative view of translation

Montesquieu (writing in 1721) described a meeting between a mathematician and a translator, who said

“Il y a vingt ans que je m’occupe à faire des traductions.”



The mathematician replied:

- ❖ Quoi! Monsieur... Il y a vingt ans que vous ne pensez pas! Vous parlez pour les autres et ils pensent pour vous.!”
- ❖ In other words, he thought translation stopped you from being creative.

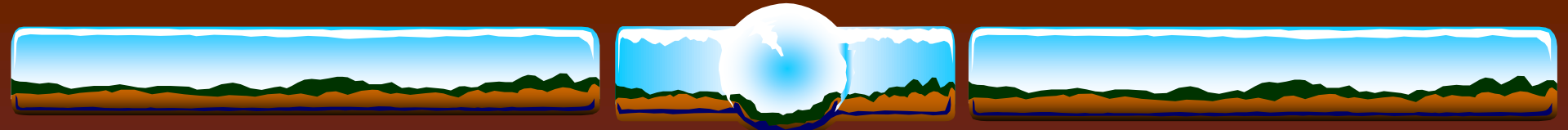


The Modern view

Back in 1999, Peter Newmark argued that the main feature of translators is that they are *writers*.

A similar view is expressed by Chantal Wright in her book *Literary Translation* (2016, Routledge)

- ❖ The twentieth century saw the emergence of the translator-poet or poet-translator, e.g. the Mexican Nobel prize-winner Octavio Paz; the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (translator of *Beowulf*), and Michael Hamburger (translator of Enzensberger's poems)



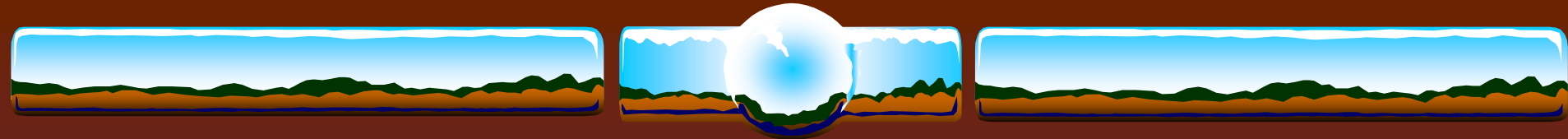
When I started writing, I made a surprising discovery

- ❖ **Indulging in creative writing makes you a better translator!**
- ❖ I wanted to share my findings with other translators.
- ❖ This was a new approach to translator training, where linguistic theory plays a key role.



Finding the words

- ❖ The problem was it had taken me a long time to find the words (at least 25 years!).
- ❖ In the end the words found me.
- ❖ To help other translators get writing, I needed a shortcut.
- ❖ I started by looking into how the brain works.



Exploring the two halves of the brain

Left-brain and right-brain thinking

- ❖ Neurologists used to say the left brain was the logical hemisphere and the right brain the creative, imaginative half.
- ❖ Now some experts think that the left brain focuses on detail and the right on the whole picture.
- ❖ The debate continues....



Let's try both: starting with detail

Being precise is one of the tricks that writers use to create a believable world (e.g. Platform nine and three-quarters). This is known as ‘suspension of disbelief’. With Harry Potter, it’s the authentic details that make the reader believe in a boy wizard. Other tricks authors use are the rule of three, ‘show don’t tell’, and ‘hooks’ to draw the reader in.



Writers' tricks

- ❖ The rule of three: 'I came, I saw, I conquered'
Repetition is okay if done three or even five times
(Max Gallo wrote 'Il est le Maître' four times, then said 'Napoléon est le Maître'.
- ❖ Hooks 'In the crypt of the abbey the monks were boiling their bishop'. Start with a bang!
- ❖ Show, don't tell. 'Don't say the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream'



The whole picture

Many writers draw you into a whole imagined world by appealing to the senses. This is what we are going to do in the hands-on session.

In translation too, you need to see the wood from the trees! You have to get the trees right too but that merits a whole presentation to itself.



How can writing help you?

As translators you are wordsmiths.

You can add new tools to your
wordsmith's toolbox and learn how to
use them!



Group writing session

Creating characters

Ask someone to draw a large outline of a character.

You have 15 mins to fill in the details.

Birthday, age, birth-sign, where they live, what they love/hate, their aim in life, what they have for breakfast, what languages they speak.



Fun session with sensual stimuli

- ❖ What memories did the pictures, smells, music or objects you touched or tasted evoke for you?
- ❖ Some of the writing you sent me evoked a special place or person.
- ❖ Did anything in our recent session remind you of a special time in your life?
- ❖ You have 15 mins to write about it.



Feedback

Did you write in the past or the present tense?

Did you write in the first person or third person?

Was this in the UK or in a different setting?

Try rewriting your piece from a different perspective
(more objective or subjective, or at a different
time, in a different cultural setting)



Your turn to be translated

- ❖ Jot down all the issues in the texts on screen that throw up translation problems.
- ❖ What kind of problems are they?
- ❖ Are they problems for your macrostrategy or your microstrategies as translators? (Wood or trees?)
- ❖ Final advice: Read, read, read. Write, write, write. Join a writers' circle. It's fun. And you could become a top translator!



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