

Preface and Acknowledgements

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Translation and Interpreting in the 20th Century: Focus on German

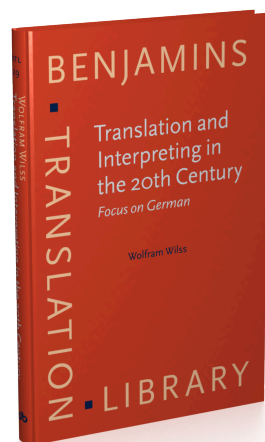
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Preface and Acknowledgements

I have intended for some time to write a short survey of the development of language mediation (translation and interpreting) in the twentieth century. I first wrote on this subject in 1974, covering only the post-1945 period (Wilss 1974). My other contributions from the 1970s and 80s are listed in Arntz/Thome (1990), while the titles of those published in the 1990s are available in the “Jahresbibliographien der Universität des Saarlandes, Saarbrücken” (Annual Bibliographies of the University of the Saarland, Saarbrücken).

It was the editors of the handbook “Translation” (Snell-Hornby et al., 1998) who indirectly provided the impetus behind the present study. My colleague Peter A. Schmitt (Leipzig) was especially instrumental. I had originally intended to produce only a short article on the history of language mediation in the twentieth century for the handbook, but my research uncovered enough material to merit a separate book. Language mediation transcends the boundaries of languages and disciplines. It is an activity which is so widespread today because information from abroad is just as important in man’s understanding of the world around him as that produced at home.

Language mediators owe their existence to the simple fact that mankind is multilingual — and, according to legend, has been so since the Tower of Babel. This means that the world consists of different linguistic and cultural communities which cannot communicate with each other without the assistance of translators and interpreters, and which think and act in ways which are unfamiliar to members of other communities. In ancient Greece the discovery of other languages led to the arrogant distinction between Greeks and barbarians (e.g. in the *Iliad*, where Homer described the “Karer” from Asia Minor as a “people of barbarian tongue”, at least in the German translation by Heinrich Voß). In later Greek philosophy, which was always especially interested in language philosophy, the dogma of the fundamental difference and unchangeability of languages was unshakeable, even after

sophistic thinking replaced the dogma of difference with that of the original identity of all languages.

But this dogma, too, was short-lived, as becomes clear when one considers the religious, political, economic, administrative and cultural conditions which have dominated international communication since antiquity. In the ancient and medieval worlds, Latin was the “lingua franca”, at least in Europe. It served as a corrective to the persistent multilingualism of Europe, which, as the linguistic situation in the EU shows, significantly impedes the political integration of the European countries as one large federation of states united by a common language.

In the 18th and 19th centuries French became the “lingua franca”. There were political, sociocultural, literary-aesthetic, philosophical and (social)-scientific reasons for this development. They can be traced back to the French Revolution, which promoted a political structure that provided a clear direction for democratic behaviour, literary education, philosophical thought and scientific knowledge.

The domination of French as a “lingua franca”, at least in international diplomacy, ended with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, when English was established as a second conference language enjoying equal status. This diplomatic bilingualism was at that time politically necessary, but it was not to last long. Since the San Francisco Conference of 1945, where the UN charter was adopted, the principle of multilingualism has been operative, recognizing six official languages: Arabian, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, in alphabetical order. What at that time was a diplomatic novelty is now a thing of the past, at least when seen in a European context. The EU now has eleven official languages, and how the situation will develop in future is not yet clear.

The present study is based on interviews with people involved in language mediation in Germany, Austria and Hong Kong; on discussions with experts in Belgium (Brussels), Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland; on my own experiences and observations gained during forty years of practice, research and teaching in translation; and finally on extensive archival research.

The following kindly made themselves available for interview: Franz A. Becker (ZF Friedrichshafen), Dr Ilka von Braun (Bayer/Leverkusen), Professor Hildegund Bühler (University of Vienna), Dr Hans Bühler (conference interpreter and University of Vienna), Wilhelm Gattinger (Siemens Hong

Kong), Dr Wolf-Dieter Haehl (former director of a large translation agency in Stuttgart), Volrath Hoene (Bayer Hong Kong), Friedrich Krollmann (former chief interpreter at the Verteidigungsministerium in Bonn and director of the translation department at the Bundessprachenamt in Hürth), Hermann Klusterer (former chief interpreter at the Auswärtige Amt), Professor Ingrid Kurz (conference interpreter and University of Vienna), Hofrat Professor Viktor Petioky (former conference interpreter and University of Vienna), Brian Robinson (VW Hong Kong), Hinrich Sasse (former head of the language service at the Wirtschaftsministerium in Bonn) and Eberhard Tanke (former director of the language services of Siemens/Munich).

I was given access to the archives at the Auswärtige Amt, Bayer/Leverkusen, the Fachhochschule des Bundes für Öffentliche Verwaltung, Abteilung Berufsgeschichte, Mannheim, Mannesmann/Düsseldorf, the Österreichische Staatsarchiv Vienna, Siemens/Munich, the League of Nations Archive in the UN Library in Geneva, and at the university interpreters' institutes in Heidelberg and Saarbrücken.

I was able to hold discussions with representatives of the German sections of the language services of the European Commission (Reinhard Hoheisel) and the European Council (Barbara Stork and Ingrid Stürz-Faupel) in Brussels, at SYSTRAN and the European Parliament in Luxembourg (Dr Achim Blatt), the language service of the Bundeskanzlei in Bern (Dr Werner Hauck), Bayer/Leverkusen (Renate Gudehus), IBM/Böblingen (Johanna Possemis), SAP/Walldorf (Dr Georg Hage-Huelsmann), INFOTERM in Vienna (Christian Galinski), the Bundestag in Bonn (Sylvia Hofheinz), the Bundessprachenamt in Hürth, the Geheime Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin (Dr Iselin Gundermann), the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen at the University of Bonn, the Institut für Übersetzen und Dolmetschen at the University of Heidelberg and the Fachrichtung Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft sowie Übersetzen und Dolmetschen at the Universität of the Saarland, Saarbrücken. The archive of the University of Leipzig, the Bundesanstalt für Arbeit in Nürnberg and the UN language service in Vienna (Dr Sergio Viaggio) also provided me with information. I am indebted to the Verteidigungsministerium in Bonn for information on the four command languages of the EUROCORPS and to the Bertelsmann Foundation in Gütersloh for details of their author and translator scheme. Thomas Vogelsang (Rank Xerox Cologne) drew my attention to the frequently cited "Ovum Report". Professor Zuzana Jettmarová (Prague) kindly sent me the final report on "remote translation" (UN Crime

Congress, Cairo 1995).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed directly or indirectly to the production of this book. I received an unexpected amount of help wherever I turned during my enquiries. Equally unexpected was the appearance, at the last minute, of a sponsor for the project, the ASKO EUROPA-STIFTUNG, just when I was about to give up the project after having borne all initial costs myself. I am grateful to Peter Strittmatter (educational studies, University of Saarbrücken) for putting me in touch with the sponsor. The ASKO EUROPA-STIFTUNG made a generous contribution to my travel costs. The Fachrichtung Angewandte Sprachwissenschaft sowie Übersetzen und Dolmetschen at the University of the Saarland, where I have been Professor Emeritus since 1990, helped me to the best of its financial ability. I am extremely grateful to both sponsors for their generous assistance, without which the project would not have been possible. It would have been most unfortunate if I had been forced to abandon the work: in the course of my investigations I uncovered information which is not merely of interest to specialists, but also sheds light on problems and trends in international communication for an interested general readership.

This book appears in an “official” English and an “unofficial” German version. I am grateful to the ASKO EUROPA-STIFTUNG and the University of the Saarland for support in the preparation of the German version. The ASKO EUROPA-STIFTUNG kindly bore the translation costs, and the John Benjamins Publishing Company (Amsterdam) provided financial support for the production of the English version. I am grateful to my former colleague, the award-winning translator Dr David Horton (University of the Saarland, Saarbrücken), for his competent translation of my original manuscript into English. My wife Ingrid gave me her unfailing support by undertaking enormous amounts of correction work. I am also very grateful to Mrs. Bertie Kaal who suggested that I should write this book for John Benjamins, which I was delighted to do.

I am fully aware (and hope that the interested reader will agree) that a one-man project on such a complex, diffuse and multi-faceted topic such as that dealt with here must inevitably focus on some aspects while neglecting others. I have attempted to the best of my ability to outline both the global and specific sociocultural, economic and technical factors which have decisively influenced the activity of language mediation (especially translation) as it has moved towards the status of an acknowledged profession. The process of

language mediation is flourishing not just in Germany or in Europe, but throughout the world. To trace this development into the next millennium would be a project best undertaken by UNESCO. Whether such a project can ever be realized is a different question. For the moment I take the view: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”.

Saarbrücken, July 1998

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