

Editor's foreword

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Teaching Translation and Interpreting 4: Building bridges

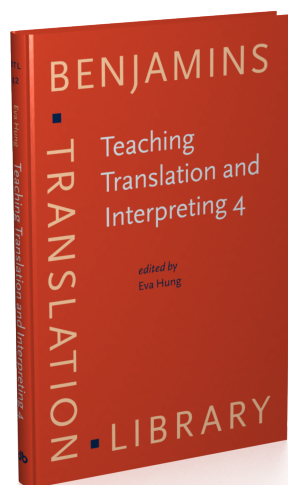
Edited by Eva Hung

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Editor's foreword

This volume contains selected papers from the Fourth Language International Conference on 'Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Building Bridges' which was held in Shanghai in December 1998. The Language International conference series, conceived as an Elsinore-based biannual event and started in 1991 in Denmark by Cay Dollerup, has now gathered truly international momentum. After the first three conferences held in 1991, 1993 and 1995 respectively, the fourth conference took place in Shanghai, and the fifth in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 2001.

Shanghai is a city built on cultural cross-currents — the very forces which create and sustain translation activities. Founded in the mid-19th century as a result of East-West conflicts,¹ the city benefited from an influx of economic and administrative resources as well as human talent and grew rapidly into a metropolis of world renown. By the early 20th century it was a place where the cultures and systems of East and West lived side by side, sometimes acrimoniously, but mostly in mutual accommodation. Shanghai was also the centre of China's translation activities in the first half of the 20th century — activities that contributed significantly to the success of a revolution in 1911 and the emergence of a new culture in the 1920s. After an enforced isolation imposed by the People's Republic of China for some thirty years, in the last two decades the city has again become the hub of international activities and an engine for change, with a corresponding increase in its translator population. Thus both in terms of Asian history and current development, it was a most fitting choice as host city for our conference.

The Shanghai conference of 1998 played host to 100 participants from twenty-two countries, representing all five continents. As expected, there was a much stronger Asian presence — both in terms of participants and in terms of languages — than in most other international T/I conferences. It also represented an attempt at using two working languages in the parallel sessions. While the use of Chinese had the advantage of drawing in more local participation, it also resulted in a slight sense segregation because Chinese presentations were not accessible to non-Chinese speakers. That large-scale academic conferences (even those on translation and interpreting) often cannot afford the kind of professional interpreting necessary for truly bilingual or multilingual

dialogue is indicative of the constraints faced by the field; at the same time this also shows the potential for future development.

The papers in this volume are all related to issues of teaching and the development of the translation and interpreting professions. They are divided into four groups. The first group of papers deals with the application of theory to and its influence on teaching and practice. Both Theo Hermans (U.K.) and K.K. Sin (Hong Kong) examine current discourses on translation. Hermans reviews the current perception and self-perception of translation, translators and translation theories, revealing the discourses about translation in other cultures as neither neutral nor value-free. As translation studies struggles to extend its theoretical discussions beyond the European tradition and its languages, Hermans' investigation proves essential and timely. Sin challenges both the product-oriented and the more recent process-oriented approaches in translation studies, and advocates the use of a socio-cultural perspective in teaching. Chunsen Zhu (Hong Kong) addresses the perennial question 'Is translation theory useful' through a critique of existing modes of theorizing about translation in China, and illustrates the positive role of theory through concrete and clearly argued examples.

The second group of papers concentrates on what happens in the classroom and contains a substantial number of case studies. The computer and the Internet, which have become an indispensable part of the translation profession, now feature more and more strongly in teaching. Judy Wakabayashi (Australia) explores the new perspectives brought to teaching by the use of Internet mailing lists. Sue Zeng and Jung Ying Lu-Chen (Hawaii) made the World Wide Web part of their task-based training model. Ingrid Kurz (Austria) reviews the interpreting programme in the University of Vienna, focusing on the importance of cooperation between different language departments within a university, collaboration with prospective employers, and the use of new technology.

Two papers in this section introduce us to training for specific purposes. Birgitta Englund Dimitrova (Sweden) points out that training is not just necessary for prospective T/I practitioners, but also for prospective T/I teachers. Her paper discusses a course tailored to the needs of the latter. Annelie Lotriet (South Africa) presents a unique case study of training interpreters within an extremely limited time frame for a specific job — the Peace and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa — and examines the conditions necessary for the success of such target-specific programmes.

Quality assessment is one of the main concerns of teachers and professionals alike. Kinga Klaudy and Krisztina Károly (Hungary) conducted a pilot study of markers of cohesion in a set of original and translated texts, and concluded that the repetition model may be a good quality indicator for assessing translation quality. Alessandra Riccardi (Italy) focuses on the difference between the usual assessment of a professional interpreter's work vs. that of a student's, and proposes a list of parameters for student assessment.

The third group of papers are concerned with the role of literature and culture in the T/I classroom. Viggo Hjørnager Pedersen (Denmark) undertook a detailed study of children's literature in Danish and English with his M.A. students in an attempt to give literary translation its rightful place in the history of a national literature. Judith Woodsworth (Canada), on the other hand, draws on her personal experience as literary translator to explore with her students the disjunctures between some recent translation theories and market pressures and demands. Paul Levine (Hong Kong) uses his experience of teaching Chinese undergraduates in Hong Kong as the basis to present possible ways of contextualizing cultural knowledge for T/I students.

The fourth group of papers looks at various aspects of change and development in the T/I professions, which will of course have a direct impact on how translation and interpreting will be taught. Roda Roberts (Canada) examines the possibilities and limitations of community interpreting as a separate and distinctive profession. Yang Cheng-shu (Taiwan), drawing from her experience in managing various forms of TV interpreting in Hong Kong and Taiwan, maps out the landscape of this fast-developing niche which requires a combination of translation and interpreting skills as well as specialized training related to TV presentation. Alain Piette (France) relates his experience in and assessment of television and film dubbing. Mabel Erasmus (South Africa) studies how the T/I requirements of a conscientious government with limited resources and a liberal language policy can be fulfilled. Lastly, Lin Wusun (China) surveys the current translation and interpreting scene in China, and looks forward to the prospects of the field in the new century. Most contributors take note of the fact that professionals will be increasingly required to be multi-skilled and to fulfil various types of T/I jobs. It is therefore likely that the current segregation of various sub-disciplines within the T/I field is set for a major change, and that flexibility and innovation will be keywords of the future.

Note

1. China's defeat in the Opium War (1840–1842) led to the Treaty of Nanjing, which specified the opening up of five coastal trading ports, including Shanghai.