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Foreword

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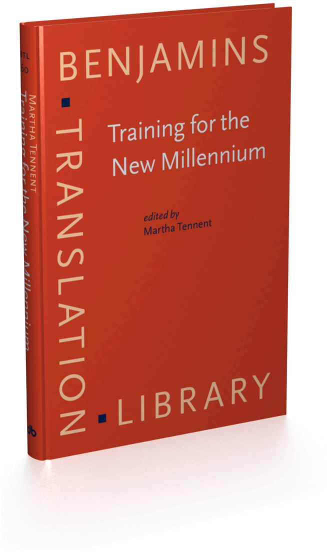

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Foreword

Eugene A. Nida

Present critical developments in European multilingualism have brought to the fore the growing importance of training translators and interpreters and the need for a more innovative, less teacher-centred approach. This volume would therefore seem all the more strategic now. It is the natural development of the Vic Forum which took place in the spring of 1999 and in which I had the pleasure of participating. The conference provided the site for valuable debate on new insights in communicating principles and procedures for translator/interpreter training.

Of the twelve essays in this volume, I have selected a few that I would like to discuss in this brief foreword. Andrew Chesterman's article is on causality in translator training and provides a helpful way of examining and evaluating the static model, the dynamic model, and the causal model of interlingual communication. As a result, readers can view more objectively Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence, Pym's discussion of Aristotle's four classical causes, the skopos theory with its obvious causal dimensions, and Gutt's relevance-theoretical approach. There is thus no necessary conflict between hard empiricists and soft hermeneuticists, because translation research needs both kinds of hypotheses.

María González Davies is primarily concerned with improving the product, a clear reference to causality, by exploring alternatives in traditional translation training. She is particularly concerned that so few schools are involved with existing pedagogical approaches, and she pleads very effectively for more relevant and empirical research.

González is a highly creative expert teacher, and she spells out her concerns for transforming the traditional classroom setting into a hands-on workshop by (1) transforming the classroom into a discussion forum, (2) involving professional translators, (3) designing programs with specific aims, (4) respect for different learning styles, and (5) including real life situations. I have visited her classroom at various times, and I must admit that I have never experienced a more exciting and relevant manner of teaching.

Most people think that interpreting is always the same kind of activity, whether in a booth or a huge conference hall or in helping foreigners receive justice in court. But public service interpreting, as described effectively by Ann Corsellis, requires an even wider range of interlingual experience. Such interpreters must often interpret for emotionally frightened people who use typically local dialects that include words and idioms that never get into dictionaries.

Public service interpreters must not only understand languages thoroughly, but they need to know how to comprehend the scenarios in which their skills are so strategic, for example, a tourist reporting a stolen wallet in a police station, a pregnant woman visiting a medical clinic, parents and teachers talking about a child's learning problems, social workers discussing care of the elderly, and police arresting a vagrant. Here is where issues of fidelity, confidentiality, integrity, and professional impartiality are so crucial.

Daniel Gile always has something relevant to say because he knows from personal experience what he is talking about. His concern is primarily the operation in comprehension, which can only then be reformulated into another language. This means that a person needs to keep abreast of developments in his or her passive languages. Unfortunately, there is a serious lack of competent teachers for interpreting.

Gile recognises the importance of interpreters improving their speaking skills because they are paid not only to reproduce the meaning of an oral statement, but to do so in a manner that will be acceptable and convincing. Too many interpreters swallow their words, add too many hesitations, and even confuse an audience by waiting too long to produce their interpretation, which often comes out so fast that many listeners cannot comprehend what is meant.

Richard Samson has the extremely difficult task of teaching people how to use computers effectively in the process of translating. Unfortunately, some experienced teachers simply do not know enough about computer expertise to teach students who are often far ahead of their teachers in this area. The generation gap in computer knowledge will hopefully soon pass, but the effective application of computers to the task of interlingual communication will continue to concern us all for another generation.

But the essays that I have mentioned are by no means the only or even the most relevant ones. I have personally enjoyed reading all the chapters in this volume, and I congratulate Martha Tennent for putting together this first-class collection that expresses in many ways her own experience and insight into interlingual communication.