

# Globalisation and translator training

An international symposium held at the University of Saarbrücken March 12-14 discussed the effect of globalisation on the practice of translation and interpreting, and on the university training of translators and interpreters. Speakers came from Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Conference languages were German and English.

The keynote address was given by Professor Wolfram Wilss, who looked at the history of the term globalisation and its implications for translation and interpreting. To illustrate his theme he quoted from a number of different authorities, but particularly from Dr Rose Lockwood's report, *Globalisation*. Although English had assumed a global role, he said, we should not lose sight of the fact that 70% of the world's population speak only their own language. He identified three current basic trends, globalisation, specialisation (and the consequent fragmentation) and growing use of technology to automate processes. There were centripetal tendencies (particularly with the development of English as a global vehicular language) and centrifugal tendencies (more and more translation into local languages). We were now living in a global economy, and could no longer afford to rely on the Eurocentric view. This would lead to changes in the language combinations taught in translation courses.

Professor Gerhard Budin (Vienna University) analysed the concept of globalisation and its relationship to other concepts such as standardisation (*Vereinheitlichung*), and to different levels of operation (individual, department, company, national level, intercultural level, international level). He concentrated on developments in the Internet, and its impact on multilingualism.

Britta Bergemann, director of marketing for Arthur Andersen GmbH, outlined the need for intercultural management competence at the head of European industries. Intercultural competence in management was also a subject dealt with by Professor Juliane House, of the University of Hamburg. English was becoming a culturally neutral lingua franca in international business exchanges, she said. There was a need for empirical research in order to obtain a realistic evaluation of the role of culturally universal versus culturally specific aspects of global management situations. In fact 'intercultural' was a word used during

the seminar almost as much as 'globalisation'.

John Graham, head of language services at Mannesmann

Demag, divided the linguistic map of the world into three zones. In zone 1, countries where world languages were spoken as a mother

tongue, there was a certain complacency and less readiness to learn foreign languages. In zone 2, the major industrialised countries, the nationals were well aware of the fact that their national language was not a world language, and that they needed to acquire another language, usually English. In zone 3, where the national language was virtually unknown outside the country, they learn other languages as a matter of course.

Professor Klaus Schubert described how the polytechnic college (*Fachhochschule*) at Flensburg was tackling the problem of training for technical translators when this translation activity was being stretched far beyond its original boundaries. A technical translator these days was sometimes more of a specialist technical author, at other times an information manager. Globalised communicator might be a better description. Employers were looking for a new type of flexible operator who offered a combination of management, language and specialist computer skills. At Flensburg new courses were being developed in response.

Other subjects dealt with during the wide-ranging symposium were tele-learning, the work of the translation and interpreting sub-group of the European Language Council, university didactics in the training of translators in Switzerland, training translation students in an 'extra' language, transcodal interference and particularly the use of English words in other languages, an analysis of multilingual instructions for use of household refrigerators with special reference to the electrical connections, the changing role of the interpreter, metaphors in German-Japanese translation, translation in Norwegian business, theories of interpreting and ways of assessing interpreting quality, or 'cultural filtering' in translation. ■



The photograph shows, left to right, keynote speaker Professor Wolfram Wilss, conference chairman Professor Heidrum Gerzymisch-Arbogast, and speaker John Graham.