

# World in Motion

*Language International, 1989-2002*

by Bert Esselink





I really have no idea when I first saw *Language International*. It must have been some time between 1992 and 1994, when I started working in localization. I probably browsed through the magazine, stopping at the pages that discussed technology, and skipping all the conference reports, articles on teaching, and definitely all dictionary and book reviews. In fact, I probably didn't even read 10% of the magazine. Who could have imagined that six years later I would be reading every single word published in the very same magazine in the role of general editor? Well, I certainly didn't.

Working for *Language International* has been a lot of fun, both reading and editing the magazine. To evaluate the past two years as an editor, and to look back at 14 years of *Language International*, I asked the publisher to send me a copy of every issue ever published.

The day I received the big box containing all the issues from the first one in 1989 to the last one in October 2002, I was full of expectations. Would there be much to laugh about? Would the articles from the first years of the magazine be totally outdated and full of antiquated ideas and theories? Would I see pictures of my colleagues, except 10 years younger? To put things a bit in perspective, when the first issue of *Language International* was published, in January 1989, I was in my 2nd year of translation studies, 20 years old.

In this final contribution to this final issue of *Language International*, I have taken a close look at some of the articles and letters published in the magazine throughout the years.

### The PRAT Awards

In the 5/4 issue from 1993 I first learnt about the *Language International* PRAT awards (*Prize for Awful Translations*). Today

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each translation-related web site has "bad translations in hotel lobby" sections, but remember—back in 1993 there were not that many translation sites, if any at all.

Here are some of the nominees included in the early years of the magazine:



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"Klaus D. Leith, a technical translator in Cologne, sends us a picture of a machine with the inscription, in English and in German, 'Tür nur im Stillstand der Maschine öffnen / Don't open the door while running'."

"Stephen Cooper, of Flüh in Switzerland, has sent us several technical documents, including a pharmaceutical description translated from German into English Peculiar:

*The camomile flowers as heal-accelerating, inflammation-resisting drug is known since the former days and their application in form of overtapping at badly healing wounds, skin infections, eruptions etc. is popular. ... The arnica, also highly regarded in the folk-medicine since centuries as would-heiling plant, has claimed its place also in the modern medicament treasure.*

The particular interest of this submission is that it is stamped with the name of the perpetrator, a translation company in Thailand, and further stamped and signed as *Certified True Translation*."

The first issue of 1994 contained a letter to the editor by Chris Durban from Paris. She writes the following about the PRAT awards:

**"Don't open the door while running."**

"Surely it is symptomatic that a large majority of your 1993 entries were in the fields of tourism/catering, where budgets are notoriously low and amateurism rife. Having read LI's last "Endpiece" on EuroDisney, I wonder if there might not be an inverse relationship between linguistic skills and product quality in some spheres—at least in cases like food and



travel, where a large part of a product's appeal lies in its 'authenticity'. To take just one example, here in France I have often had the impression that awkwardly translated menus offer a guarantee—of sorts—that the restaurant owner was into cooking, not marketing, and seen bumpy travel brochures as a sign that tourists have

### **"A bad translation sort of implies a good product!"**

not yet arrived in such hordes as to remove all traces of a relatively traditional lifestyle."

This must be one of the most interesting theories on translation that I've ever seen... A bad translation sort of implies a good product! So the next time you browse a web site which is translated very badly, buy whatever they offer you, because, instead of focusing on non-core competencies such as translation, they have been busy improving their product or service...

Lionbridge CEO Rory Cowan expressed a comparable idea in the conclusion of his "Adrift in the Global Marketplace" article published in the April 1999 issue: "In other words, globalization becomes a successful enterprise strategy when the enterprise itself is free to concentrate on creating valuable products, confident that these can be effectively localized swiftly and consistently."

### **Cartoon Contest**

Those who think that *Language International* was only concerned with words, the cartoon contest in early issues of the magazine proved them wrong. Just take a look at the winner of the cartoon contest in Volume 2, issue 3, which is printed on the previous page.

### **Technology Developments**

As I mentioned earlier, I was expecting to laugh my head off looking at the old DOS-based versions of translation tools described in the first issues of *Language International*. I expected to find hilarious examples of people making predictions on translation technology that never came true. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I found was that in the early 1990s the "industry leaders" were talking about exactly the same ideas and challenges as we still are today. The tools'

interfaces have changed, but the basics remained exactly the same... Have we really not learned anything?

From the 5/6 issue of 1993 I quote Ian Henderson from Softrans Berlitz:

"Ian pointed out the dangers for the translation industry of market forces driving down the price-per-word of a successful tender thereby denying any profit margin for re-investment in research. He was keen to stress the importance of the time-to-market factor of which customers should be aware when employing translators. He went on to illustrate how a large project could benefit from a shared CAT tool to ensure that sentences which recur are not translated more than once, that style is consistent across a number of translators and how the tool can simplify the number of documents which have to be worked on simultaneously."

Today, almost ten years later, we are still using the very same arguments to explain the benefits of translation memories to customers who are new to translation and localization.

Recently, version 3.2 of the Unicode Character encoding standard was released. The primary feature of Unicode 3.2 is the addition of 1016 new encoded characters. These additions consist of several Philippine scripts, a large collection of mathematical symbols, and small sets of other letters and symbols. Now almost 60,000 characters are defined in the Unicode standard... which is quite a different situation from where we were back in 1992. Below the text from a book announcement in the 4/4 issue from 1992:

"Even if you know how to produce *all 1,893 characters* known by WP 5.1 on your monitor screen, or how to get your printer to print them; even if you know how to change the writing direction in WordPerfect so you can write Hebrew; even if you know how to define a clever keyboard for writing Japanese; even... then this book is bound to teach you a thing or two about WordPerfect. Language codes, hyphenation, language modules, character sets, keyboard definitions, the Compose key, the WP font editor, font generators; the list is too long to mention all the language aspects addressed here. This book shows the real potential of WordPerfect for the multi-lingual language professional. The book will also be available with a diskette containing all those clever keyboard definitions and macros explained in the book."

Don't we all wish we could go back to those WordPerfect "clever keyboard definitions"?

Obviously, translation memory developments were always closely monitored by *Language International*. One of the best descriptions of this new phenomenon I

### **"Don't we all wish we could go back to those WordPerfect 'clever keyboard definitions'?"**

found in one of the *Joscelyne's Jottings* by Andrew Joscelyne in 1994:

"Human memory worked pretty well for a long time, but the arrival of the computer has meant that we can finally offload part of this burdensome operation of trying to remember how to phrase something. Just as early man gained greater freedom of movement by domesticating beasts to carry larger loads than we could manage, so we can ensure higher textual consistency and productivity by letting the computer do a large share of the remembering. This seems to be the logic behind the gradual emergence of translation memory technology (notably the Trados workbench and IBM's Translation Manager/2). Over time, translation memory systems will become the natural environment for all sorts of translators, large and small, providing a new sort of benchmark for language standards, "correctness", appeals to canonical readings and so on. And with the emergence of 'intelligent' agents at play in the field of the Internet, we can presumably look forward to a time when such software robots will be scurrying around our networks or inside our stand-alone computers, doing the kind of jobs the memory engines now do but with even greater zeal and accuracy. Rather like Borges' character "Funes the Memorious", we will discover that everything we have ever produced will then become grist for the translator's mill. Faced with this sort of scenario, most translators would probably vote for a crash course in creative forgetting."

Andrew's predictions are closer to today's reality than he ever could have imagined.

### **"The Payment Issue"**

One of the main challenges for *Language International* since the very early years of its





**"The most versatile multilingual workstation available today."**

existence was the "policy" not to pay contributors. Not many people realize that the magazine was built entirely from contributions by people who considered it a privilege and honor to have their name in print, or those who simply thought they had something important to tell to the language industry.

In the fourth issue of *Language International* this resulted in a heated discussion between one of the contributors and the general editor at that time, Geoffrey Kingscott.

First, here is an extract from a letter to the editor:

"I was sorry to hear that you changed your mind about publishing my contribution

**However, the story about the fast food chain I found most intriguing.**

when you heard that I expected payment for it. [...] Your mistake seems to be that you expect something for nothing. If you refuse to pay contributors, then the only people who are prepared to write for you will be those who want to see their name

in print. You may be lucky enough to find someone who fits into this category and writes well, but somehow I doubt it."

The very open and rather daring reply from the editor was:

"I invited Mr G, in view of previous criticisms of *Language International*, to offer the sort of contribution he would like to see in our journal. He sent a language quiz, which was quite well composed, but which we did not think was worth a fee."

Ouch—that one hurts!

In case I forget to do so later on, I'd like to really thank all those who have volunteered to contribute to the magazine over the past two years, and of course all the years before... many writers offered up evenings and late nights to make deadlines that didn't lead to any financial compensation.

**Enter: Bob Clark**

Bob Clark, my current co-editor was first introduced to the magazine in 1991. Here's the announcement that introduced him, from the February issue of *Language International* in 1991:

"Computers and software editor appointed". *Language International* has appointed a subject editor for language and computers. The newly appointed assis-

tant editor will gather information on all subjects related to language and computers, such as hardware and software for translation and language training and the latest products that may be of particular interest to the language professions. He will keep you well informed on the subject and we hope it will help our freelance readers to find their way through these backwoods. Bob Clark is manager of the Software Support Centre, a British based company supplying software support for translation and multilingual documentation. He is an enthusiastic computer expert. Bob is an American who settled in Yorkshire after spending 12 years as a linguist with the US Air Force and Department of Defense. Since graduating from Leeds University (joint honours degree in Russian and Arabic) in 1975, he has worked as a translation administrator, as manager of a restaurant and fast food chain, and has acquired a background in computer programming and systems analysis utilising SSADM (Structured Systems and Analysis Design Methodology)."

It was only earlier this year, when I visited Bob in Leeds, that I uncovered the true history and background of my co-editor. I started raising my eyebrows when he told me about his Russian and Arabic language skills and his work for the US Department of Defense. However, the story about the fast food chain I found most intriguing. I have met many people in this business with diverse and very interesting professional or personal backgrounds but never had I met THE person responsible for bringing American fast food straight from California to the outskirts of Leeds! I could not believe his story until we drove past one of his restaurants in Leeds, very appropriately called "The Damn Yankee"!

**Enter: Robert Sprung**

Robert Sprung, general editor between 1996 and 2000 was first introduced in an interview with Geoffrey Kingscott in the 8/3 issue in 1995 as: "Mr Sprung, a summa cum laude BA graduate in Modern Languages from Harvard University, and an MA in Modern Languages from Cambridge University (England) is an enthusiast for quality and training in translation, and has written a number of published articles on the subject."

In the same article, the working conditions at Sprung's company Harvard Translations were explained as follows:

"There are also guidelines for how translators should spend their 'downtime'. Harvard take the rather unusual view that



## Major users of translation form group

A number of major users of translation services, particularly in the field of software localisation, have come together to form a new association, the International Industries Translation Standards Association (IITSA).

Founding members of the association include representatives from the multinational companies Ashton Tate, DEC, Microsoft, IBM, Hewlett Packard, Lotus, Oracle, Rank Xerox, Softrans International, Berlitz International and NCR. Two translation companies, INK International and Mendez Translations, have also been involved from the start, and other major translation companies are to be asked to join. The European Community's Directorate-General XIII has shown a close interest, and sent a representative to the inaugural meeting.

The initiative in forming the association came from INK International, which brought the representatives together at an informal Round Table, held in Amsterdam in November 1990, to discuss problems of translation demand and supply. It was decided to form an association "dedicated to upgrade the language processing industry by helping to create, support and promote industry standards for the development of products and supporting information which meets the language requirements of the users of these products — this includes all literature, labels, packaging, controls,

downtime, if properly utilised, can be a part of a translator's working day which can be the most valuable."

Robert rapidly changed both the face and the content of the magazine after he started as general editor in February 1996. In his first editorial with Andrew Joscelyne the message was: "North American readers and others can look forward to a dynamic new angle on that increasingly multilingual continent and much else." The subtitle on the cover of the magazine changed from "The magazine for the language professions" in 1989 to "The magazine for language professionals" in June 1997 to "The business resource for a multilingual age" in June 1999, which was representative of the shift of focus Robert and Andrew gave to *Language International*.



Michael Anobile

software and or machine readable information published as part of a multiple-language production process". It was agreed that membership should be targeted at "large end-users and producers of multilingual technology, production tools, and translation and localisation services".

The inaugural meeting of the new association took place at Ashton Tate's offices in Slough, England, in March 1991.

It is hoped that the new organisation will act as a lobbying body, will facilitate exchange of knowledge and experience in terminology, and will have an influence on the work of service bureaux. Secretary of the association is international translation consultant *Michael Anobile*, of ConsulCom SA, Geneva.

Address: ConsulCom, 7 Chemin Phuton,  
CH 1208 Geneva, Switzerland.  
Tel: +41.22.492222.

After this first issue in 1996, the magazine was fully redesigned and started to develop the overall structure & layout it still has today. For example, the first *Lost in Translation* was published by Robert and in this final issue of *Language International*, we have included the last one. We have really lost Robert now in translation because he has picked up a new career in international marketing in New York City.

Below I selected some of my personal favorites from the *Lost in Translation* columns:

"Turbo Translator? The 1997 Guinness Book of World Records repeats its claim that the world's fastest human-translation job was carried out by the Egyptian Salim Wakim who, between June 4 and 7, 1980, ostensibly translated 70,000 words from

English into Arabic. Although no details are given about whether this was a record-breaking bid or a one-off dare or even what the text was, it sounds exactly the right length for a 250-page book. Before we gasp in disbelief, consider this scenario... Salim has a three-day deadline to deliver a book on a subject he knows well—say a good thriller. He allows himself a generous five hours sleep a day, giving him a total of 57 hours working time, plenty of coffee on hand, no telephone and a Dictaphone. His baseline task is to translate 1,228 words an hour—a word every three seconds for the rest of his waking hours over the three days. Physically it is possible to speak for such lengths of time—think of the marathon speeches popular with Fidel Castro or Kemal Atatürk or even Thomas Aquinas dictating vast reams of his *Summa* to his team of exhausted scribes for hours at a time. So, although any normal translator would be simply unwilling to work like this for obvious reasons, it is not an impossible task. What of course we didn't know is the quality of the output, whether the time frame was meant to include revision, and so on. Anyone willing to challenge Salim's claim to fame? *Language International* will be happy to hold the stopwatch and make the coffee. But for goodness' sake, don't let your customers know you're doing it."

"The question on many wordsmiths' minds: How does 'the artist formerly known as Prince' fill out his tax returns?"

"Having a bad-hyphenation day?"

"But I for one feel that all the basic and sadum tortumise, all the professional getesimus and tortum kimaflay will precipitously aggregate so that peace shall reign. I want

**From "The magazine for the language professions" to "The business resource for a multilingual age"**

to make that perfectly clear." - Harry Stanley quote.

"Me Tarzan, You Dictionary"

"And this is Satan, our Office manager... The *New York Times* offers the latest on a curious trend in Asia: the popularity of English proper names. A certain Ms Zhou Chen 'found the perfect name for herself' while flipping through a dictionary -



Satan. Despite the protestations of her office colleagues, she fully intends to keep it, given its exotic flavor and mellifluous sound. In the six years since she adopted the name, "I have yet to meet another person named Satan." Some of the other names on display among Ms Zhou's work colleagues: Bison Zhang, Jekyll Ji, Redfox Cui, Cherry Ge, Echo Zhang, Feeling Chen, Three Sun, and Seven Lee."

**"And this is Satan, our Office manager..."**

"In this crazy, violent world, one can do worse than playing Scrabble socially."

"A German crew providing translation services for a United Nations conference on development financing went to the wrong city. The interpreters—from Brähler ICS in Germany—showed up this March in Monterey, California, rather than Monterrey, Mexico. Brähler pinned the blame on the travel agent."

"And, of course, the granddaddy of them all, from a Japanese car rental company's brochure: 'When a passenger of the foot hove in view, tootle the horn, trumpet at him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage tootle him with vigor'."

Robert—thanks for all the work you have done for the magazine, thanks for the great sense of humor, and thanks for the Lost in Translation columns that will be sorely missed by many!

Before I really start to sound like an Oscar winner, some words about how the changes in the translation and localization business were reported in *Language International*.

### **Some Business History**

The 4/4 issue from 1992, a special issue on Provo in Utah, contained some interesting historical facts on ALPNET, one of the leading translation suppliers which was acquired by SDL International earlier this year. An article entitled "ALPNET - major player in translation" reported the following:

"As a young man, Richard Warner had joined the Bennette Motor Company, who were Ford dealers in Salt Lake City, starting as a mechanic's assistant but gradually rising through the ranks until he became co-manager. In 1965 he started to

buy out the company, which eventually changed its name to Rick Warner Ford, and became one of the top dealerships in the whole of the United States.

As one of the wealthiest men in Utah, as a prominent member of the LDS Church (he holds the position of bishop), and as someone who had already been converted to the immense potential of computers (he had backed a company started by his brother marketing computers for medical diagnosis), he was convinced that the old TSI (Translation Sciences Institute) project could be made the basis of a successful enterprise.

Richard Warner, who is still today chairman of the board of ALPNET, raised considerable investment capital, and set about organising a management team. 'Richard Warner has been the prime moving force behind ALPNET since the beginning', Tom Seal told me. 'He is the

force that keeps the company moving forward. He has a firm belief that what we are doing is for the benefit of mankind'."

**"He has a firm belief that what we are doing is for the benefit of mankind."**

Unfortunately, it seems mankind does not pay very well, as apparently ALPNET was on the verge of bankruptcy prior to the merger with SDL International. On another note, it's striking that, given the Rick Warner Ford connection, SDL recently announced: "SDL International supports



launch of Volvo Pan-European dealer information system.”

One of the first companies covered in detail by *Language International* was INK International. The 4/5 issue in 1992 reported the following about what many consider as the first true multi-language localization vendor:

“INK International, the Amsterdam-based international translation group, has been discussing detailed plans for collaboration with Donnelley Documentation Services of Chicago, said to be the world’s largest printing company, with an annual turnover in excess of \$4 billion. The two firms have discussed how they can contribute their particular resources to the production of multilingual computer manuals, with Donnelley providing the production and printing expertise and INK the Software Localisation and translation expertise. The complementary nature of their activities has also led the two firms to explore the possibilities of closer working arrangements and even a merger. At the time this issue of *Language International* went to press these discussions were still in progress.”

Well, we all know what happened to INK, although the family tree keeps confusing me. It seems everyone who explains the INK, Stream, Donnelley, Lionbridge situation is confusing who acquired whom and exactly in which order. An interview with Lionbridge CEO Rory Cowan in the 9.7

**I never really understood how  
to write a dictionary review  
anyway...**

issue in 1997 sheds some light: “Lionbridge was recently spun off from Stream International, which itself had emerged from R.R. Donnelley’s acquisition of INK.”

Hopefully someone at some point will draw up a family tree of companies who have existed—and some still exist—in the translation and localization industry.

In the same interview Rory stated that the industry’s allure goes beyond mere dollars and cents: “Other industries may be more profitable, but they’re boring. This industry is anything but boring.” When I recently asked him to comment on this five-year-old quote, he said: “Yes, I still feel the same way, but I now feel that it can achieve the profitability of other industries. As with most maturing businesses, we have moved

from the fragmented stage (SLVs), through the dream stage (the \$250,000,000 GMS debacle), to the mature phase of pragmatic customers, pragmatic players, and a natural three-party structure. People now have the time and the need to actively re-engineer their processes. Customers understand that US\$ 1,000,000 projects cannot be entrusted to companies with inadequate insurance, inadequate capital, inadequate global presence, inadequate engineering capabilities, etc. Curiously, the more mature industries are reaping the benefits of this new sophistication. They have, for example, a history of process re-engineering, a history of cost reduction, and a history of multi-year change programs. For the first time during 2000–2002, the Techs have felt the sort of cost and process pressures that the Industrials have experienced for most of their natural lives! The Techs are no longer competing with the industry, they’re trying to build upon it. That is a sea change of attitude which will result in lower system costs and more rapid integration of technology. When I joined the industry in 1997, I was simply excited by the potential based upon intuition and not much else... Now I am optimistic about the future of the industry based upon experience and traditional business rules!”

**Translation Teaching**

Articles on translation teaching published in the first issues of *Language International* could easily be reprinted in today’s issue... and still be valid. For example, this quote I took from a conference report in 1993:

“The attitude of translators to language technology was described by consultant Veronica Lawson and *Language International* editor Geoffrey Kingscott. Veronica Lawson described the progress made in the last 16 years. Geoffrey Kingscott called for university training courses to be more language technology oriented, for recruitment to such courses to be from subject specialists as well as from linguists, and for technical translation to be seen as a component of multilingual product documentation.”

At most academic translation conferences that I attended in 2002, exactly the same arguments could be heard. Has really nothing changed in the world of translation education?

I suppose the biggest change is that now something actually seems to be happening in translation teaching in some countries. Pioneers like Anthony Pym in Tarragona, Spain, have managed to link academic translation theories to the real-world of lo-

calization. In many other universities across the world, translators are trained in the use of translation memory, terminology databases, and online references.

Although most training programs are still in their infancy, it looks like tomorrow’s translator will be better equipped to start working professionally in technical translation or localization. However, it should never be forgotten that the core skill of a translator should always be *language*, not technology. To quote myself, from the *Trained for Tomorrow* article that I wrote for *Language International* in August 1999: “A localization vendor who needs to translate

**We received e-mails and letters  
from people all over the world who  
wished to contribute.**

medical texts using Trados Translator’s Workbench will always prefer working with a medical translator who has no Trados experience to working with a translator who knows Trados, but has no medical expertise”. To learn how to translate well takes years of intensive training and practice; to learn how to use a tool should not take longer than a few days.

**Come & Go**

Some items that were included in the first issues of *Language International* gradually disappeared from the magazine, others were more persistent. Dictionary reviews, for example, were plentiful in the first years of the publication’s existence. In the past 5 years, hardly any dictionary reviews were published. I never really understood how to write a dictionary review anyway... for example, where do you start? No one will read a dictionary from cover to cover, unless you really want to learn a language, have all the time in the world, and the patience of a saint.

Also obituaries disappeared from the magazine. The first 5 years of *Language International* had several obituaries in each issue, of “important linguists” or “respected translators”.

The conference reports included in *Language International* have always been short and factual. If conferences really had not been worth the time and money, *Language International* would not shy away from saying exactly that. A conference report



covering the Third *Language International* Conference in 1995 ended with a look behind the scenes: "The Elsinore series had been masterminded by Professor Cay Dollerup, of Copenhagen University, and the conference ended on an unusual and informal note, with the whole attendance bursting into the song 'For he's a jolly good fellow'."

Well, to the magazine, Cay has definitely been a good fellow because he has been one of the most dedicated and faithful contributors, reporting language trends and situations around the world. For example, he extensively covered the language situation in South Africa and the translation work done at the European Union institutions. Thanks Cay!

#### **And now, the end is near...**

But I won't face the final curtain. *Language International* has been a tremendous experience for me. The past two years, the core *Language International* team of Per (design), Isja (advertising), and Bob and I (editing), has managed to create a magazine with very diverse content and a continuously improving layout. Some issues worked out particularly well, such as the "multimedia"

issue in 2001 (remember the Ninja Turtle on the cover?) and the "dubbing & subtitling" issue in 2002.

To me, the biggest challenge of working for *Language International*, has been to combine it with the day job at Lionbridge, extensive traveling, and family life. One of the aspects that characterized *Language International* was the fact that many contributors were international. We received e-mails and letters from people all over the world who wished to contribute. The drawback of working with non-native speakers of English is that they normally require intensive editing. Not only to sometimes clarify their message, but also to create a somewhat consistent style and English language use for the entire magazine. And intensive editing is not always easy when all the time you have is in the late evening hours, after the kids have gone to bed and really all you want to do is... do nothing.

But I really should not complain. There were many, many highlights, such as a lot of very professional articles, and the PDFs sent out by Per showing his design suggestions for each new issue. A professional photographer and localization veteran, Per

really elevated the magazine's look and feel. He and Anjo van den Broek gave meaning to the pictures and produced great visuals to the words. Thanks Per and Anjo!

So what's next? After two years of crazy travel schedules, far too many nights with a laptop in my lap, and hardly any real vacation, I am going to take it easy, as far as working for Lionbridge allows it to.

Oh, and yes, early 2003 I will start working on the new edition of *A Practical Guide to Localization...* some people just never change.

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*Bert Esselink*  
Amsterdam, December 2002