

## REVIEWS

E.E. Viljoen, F.W. Wolff and J.D.U. Geldenhuys. *Finansiële Teksvertaling*. Pretoria: Terminology Association of South Africa, 1983. 151 pp. R26,10. (Enquiries: telephone Johannesburg 3318971).

*Finansiële Teksvertaling* is the combined effort of three authors who are certainly not lacking in credentials for the task they undertook in writing this book. One is grateful for their much-needed effort to assist translators of financial documents. However, one fears that this work, like many others before it, might also end up forgotten on some bookshelf instead of becoming the standard reference work it hopes to be. Attempts at standardizing translation practice and terminology are likely to succeed only under the aegis of a recognized professional body. A first step towards creating such a body would be to standardize the training of translators by creating a nationwide system of accreditation for translators and ensuring that it is adhered to. Secondly, effective channels for communication and negotiation must be established and maintained between employers and such a central coordinating, representative body. One cannot over-emphasize the need to establish a properly organized base for the profession of the translator before producing literature aimed at standardization.

The authors' attempt to justify the bias of their book in favour of persons translating from English into Afrikaans, at the cost of those doing it the other way round, reflects a general pre-occupation among translators with Afrikaans rather than English. This may be due to a biased demand, as the writers point out;

certainly most of the demand for translation pertains to work that is written in English. However, equality of emphasis seems no more than just and is also a practical necessity. Regardless of the frequency of translation into English, all relevant information is as necessary to such efforts as it is for translation into Afrikaans. One way to correct the language bias somewhat, and to improve reference in this work, would be to provide a glossary and an index. These are indispensable in view of the method of presentation: the terminological material is contextualised in actual documents - English versions alternating with the Afrikaans.

The writers' appeal on page 1, 'h Mens moet skryf soos wat 'h mens praat', expresses a view that probably derives from the days before Afrikaans was recognized as a language, when Dutch and English were the official languages. This slogan referred to the radical and absurd difference between the conventions of written and spoken language at the time; it was also fraught with socio-political and cultural significance, heralding the birth of a new language, and hence of a new culture and nation. It was therefore most appropriate at the time. However, it must be applied with great circumspection today because the circumstances in which it was so appropriate no longer exist, and because spoken language today is so varied. Moreover, spoken language owes a great debt to written language as a stabilizing and standardizing influence for the language users - a function for which translators are partially responsible. Clearly a compromise between written and spoken forms is called for, as they exist in a symbiotic relationship that is vital to both. Of course, written forms will lag behind spoken ones, but while the latter must be allowed to set the pace, the former must act as a moderating influence that promotes the creation of a standardized language. Instead of mere simplicity, then, economy and aptness of expression should be sought. However, these qualities may not be appropriate or even possible in every context. (I am reminded of an anecdote from the life of Mozart who, when accused of having too many notes in a certain composition, replied with some asperity that it contained *exactly* as many notes as were required for his purpose!) The writers of *Finansiële Tekstvertaling* emphasize the necessity of choosing terminology in accordance with its context; they therefore qualify their otherwise misleading advocacy of simplicity on p.1: 'skryf soos wat 'h mens praat.'

Apart from providing terminological and background information in its field of concern, this work offers guidance on general translation issues. Some are old familiars (e.g. the rigid rule of placing the verb at the end of the sentence in Afrikaans),

and one is surprised at the persistence of these popular misconceptions. It is unfortunate that this fresh attempt at eradicating them does not have the influential support of a body that represents the translation profession.

Nevertheless, it is commendable that the relevant misconceptions have been identified by practising translators who plead for a more rational, unprejudiced approach to translation. However, their admonitions, hints and suggestions, which may be useful guidelines if applied circumspectly in the spirit of their original intention, should not be elevated to the status of unalterable rules to be mechanically applied. Translators should thus guard against misinterpretation or oversimplification of theories and hypotheses on language issues. This applies equally to the points made in *Finansiële Tekstvertaling*, for example, those concerning the use of various stylistic devices to convey meaning, which is one of the main preoccupations of the book. I therefore strongly recommend that the general comments on popular misconceptions in translation, and especially the advice on translation in Chapter 5, be adapted for incorporation in a work of much wider compass in the not too distant future.

I should mention that although the sentences quoted on pp. 5-6 illustrate a type of construction that need not always be avoided and may even be necessary, the point should not be missed that they also represent the typical stilted, inflated quality of officialese. (In a recent review of a work on Tudor history the reviewer complains of the 'orotund obscurity' of Henry VIII's style, and offers the aside that 'Tudor government needed the plain English campaign as badly as the modern Civil Service'. This gives some idea of how ancient and widespread the problem of officialese is.) This type of stylistic grotesquerie will be with us for some time yet, and underlines the need for an authoritative professional body whose guidance on terminology and translation practice will be respected.

The authors' discussion of terms and concepts also calls for comment. Firstly, a *term* and a *concept* obviously do not have to be coterminous. The statement that the translation of a term *is* the translation of a concept is an understandable but misleading short-cut to saying that a term representing a concept in a source language is rendered by another term in the target language. The definition of a term given on p. 21 ('a term is a word representing a concept ...') is therefore incorrect: firstly, it may create the impression that a term has nothing more to do than to represent a concept, and is no longer an intrinsic part of the relevant language; and secondly, it implies that a term cannot consist of more than one word. The definition in the *Collins English Dictionary* is more satisfactory. It reads:

1. 'a name, expression or word used for some particular thing, especially in a specialized field of knowledge', or 2. 'any word or expression'. This definition is wider and more flexible, allowing for an undefined number of words. The words 'used for' instead of 'representing' imply that the 'thing' or concept referred to is not inseparable from the term, i.e. allowance is made for the independence of words and concepts. Clearly the real problem does not lie with concepts in themselves so much as with how one conceives the representation of concepts by means of words or terms, and how such terms are translated. I agree with the procedure suggested in the following sentence from p.21: 'What should be done is probably to decide the meaning of a term in one language, render it in the other, and re-check to see that both are conveying the same meaning.'

The factual information contained in Chapters 2-4 can be put to direct use and will meet a pressing need. However, in my view, the use of the terms 'Romaans' and 'Germaans' in Chapter 3 is unhelpful, as some words (e.g. 'butter' and 'cheese') in the Germanic languages were borrowed from Latin so long ago that their original Germanic counterparts have been lost in antiquity; this borrowing has been going on right up to the present. Distinctions on the basis of 'Germaans' and 'Romaans' are therefore on very shaky ground. Further, certain suggestions and findings incorporated in these chapters are not necessarily the last word on the subjects concerned. Consider the example of the Afrikaans term 'surplus' which is preferred to 'oorskot' because the latter is perceived as conveying a negative meaning. One may with equal justification maintain that the meaning is neutral or positive, because on closer examination the '-skot' of 'oorskot' seems to have the same meaning in this context as '-schuss' in the German (not the Germanic!) 'Überschuss', the latter being translated in *Cassell's German Dictionary* as 'surplus' or 'balance' or 'profit', and in the *Wahrig Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* as: (1) 'Gewinn ohne Abzug', or 'clear gain' or as (2) 'das, was über ein bestimmtes Mass hinaus geht' or 'that which exceeds a specific measure'. The positive meaning of 'oorskot' is also convincingly borne out by the example given in the *Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* of the application of this term in a financial context: 'Vir hierdie geldjaar is daar 'n mooi oorskot.' In fact, I feel that a negative meaning can only be attributed to the word if it is not understood in context - an error which this work, ironically, aims to eliminate. It must be remembered that words not only can but often must have different meanings in different contexts; or, as Wittgenstein would have it, 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'

The different approaches to translation, illustrated by means of practical examples in Chapter 5, are actually different stages in

translation, from the most superficial initial rendering to the polished final stage, which is the only valid translation because it is the only one that does justice to the original text. This practical illustration of the translation process should prove useful to translators - perhaps not quite as much to rank novices as to those who have some experience and can better appreciate the problems involved.

A number of matters should be attended to in preparing the text of any future version of this book. For example, the use of the words 'lugubrious' and 'salacious' in describing the results of efforts to translate the term 'equity account method' seem somewhat peculiar. The sentence at the top of p. 13, which also occurs on pp. 3-4, should be improved, particularly as it is being used for demonstration purposes. There is also a rather unfortunate omission of part of the text at the top of p. 136. I do not wish to dwell too much on these matters which could easily be remedied by conscientious editing and proof reading. However, much of the argumentation in this book (mainly in chapters 1 and 5) could be generally simplified and streamlined. It is a bit of a patchwork at present.

Notwithstanding the above, *Finansiële Tekstvertaling* is a spirited work, breathing a freshness and enthusiasm that is most welcome. If this energy can be properly harnessed, great strides should be made in the field of translation in this country.

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*Evans Technical Dictionary*. London: Evans Brothers, 1982. 138 pp.

Intended primarily for second-language speakers of English who are studying in technical fields, this compact, clearly-written dictionary will also appeal to anyone else who may have wondered uneasily just what, for instance, a manifold is. In the space of 138 pages, about 1 000 terms are explained and, in many instances, illustrated by means of clear line drawings. The defining vocabulary is limited to some 2 000 general words, and any technical words that cannot be avoided in the definitions are themselves defined elsewhere in the book.

The entries are all nouns and cover hand and machine tools, general workshop equipment, parts of a car, engineering-drawing