



**Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association**  
*Cumann Aistritheoirí agus Teangairí na hÉireann*

# ITIA Bulletin

**March 2014**

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## Editorial

Certainly a hot topic in the past and continuing to be so this year is the role of technology in our profession as you will see reflected in the first article in this first Bulletin of 2014. Recent articles in Irish newspapers cover the wide range from the use of Bulgarian software to translate digitised 17th century English documents into modern English to the noted lack of translation of the works of the wealth of Brazilian writers, leaving English language readers world over definitely missing out. There - possible confirmation that literary translators at least are not yet a redundant species! Please also note that we will notify our readers of upcoming CPD events - there might be something that will appeal to you and add another string to your professional bow!

Anne Larchet  
Co-Editor

## Google admits 'garbage in, garbage out' translation problem

*Research suprema cops to Google Translate loop the loop*

Google's ever-so-clever Google Translate service may be falling foul of a problem known to grizzled engineers across the globe: garbage in, garbage out. The problem was discussed by Google's director of research, Peter Norvig at the Nasa Innovative Advanced Concepts

conference at Stanford, California on Wednesday, in response to a question by an audience member.

Norvig admitted that Google was "aware" of a problem caused by some sites using Google's services to translate their body copy into another language to create a localized version of their site. The problem with this cut-rate method (bare cupboards of out-of-work translators aside) is that if Google indexes this site, it may then factor the translation into the models it itself uses to train its own machine-translation engine.

This post-modern problem means that Google's machines may be training themselves on data generated by Google's machines, which means that rather than getting incrementally better with each new model, they just stagnate.

"It's not a big problem yet – it could get worse," Norvig said. "We mostly address it by judging the quality of a site. If you look good, we'll keep your examples; if you look sketchy we'll toss them out."

Google has already sought to make it difficult for spammers to pollute the web with poorly translated text by shutting down its Google Translate API. Norvig also disclosed an approach in which Google tried to fingerprint each translation through precise word and syntax choices that wouldn't be obvious to the reader, but would be obvious to Google's bots, but said the company had retired the scheme as it was not effective.

Jack Clark  
Original source: The Register.  
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## Man fails in bid to have bi-lingual jury for assault case

A MAN has failed in an attempt to have a bi-lingual jury hear his trial on assault charges without an interpreter.

Peadar Ó Maicín wanted the jury to be drawn from a specially designated area of Conamara, where most people speak Irish.

Yesterday, the Supreme Court, by a four-to-one majority, dismissed his appeal against a High Court decision that he was not entitled to have his case heard and decided by a judge and bi-lingual jury without assistance of a translator.

The dissenting judge, Adrian Hardiman, said the fact there were no laws requiring a juror to be competent in either Irish or English was "an extraordinary state of affairs" requiring "urgent legislative action". He described the State's actions in promoting Irish as "uniformly minimalist and grudging".

He also did not believe there is any other country in the world "in which a citizen would not be entitled to conduct his business before a court in the national and first official language, and to be understood directly by such court in that language."

All five judges agreed the case of Mr Ó Maicín, a native Irish speaker who lived in Rosmuc, Co Galway, most of his life but now lives in Lower Salthill, Galway, raised important constitutional issues involving balancing language rights against the duty of the State to prosecute crimes before representative juries. Mr Ó Maicín is charged with assault causing harm to a man in south Conamara on May 28, 2008, and with unlawfully producing a broken whiskey bottle during a fight.

The State opposed his application for a bi-lingual jury. It argued that even if it was possible to provide a jury who could all understand the case in Irish without an interpreter, which the State denied, there would have to be a test of competence in the Irish language which was a

legal impossibility due to the need for random jury selection.

In reserved judgments yesterday, the majority court noted Mr Ó Maicín has a constitutional right to conduct official business fully in Irish and was entitled to have his trial conducted in Irish and heard by a jury aided by an interpreter. The right to conduct official business fully in Irish was not absolute, four of the five judges found.

*...it had not been established it was possible to empanel a jury with sufficient competence in Irish to hear an important criminal trial...*

In some circumstances, because significant numbers of people even in Gaeltacht areas would not be sufficiently competent in Irish, that right must give way to the need to respect the rights of others to use English as an official language and the competing constitutional imperative that juries be "truly representative", Mr Justice Frank Clarke said.

As of now, even in Gaeltacht areas, it had not been established it was possible to empanel a jury with sufficient competence in Irish to hear an important criminal trial without aid of a translator without, at the same time, excluding a significant number of otherwise qualified persons from their entitlement to sit on that jury, he said.

In separate concurring judgments, Mr Justice John MacMenamin and Mr Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill also found against Mr Ó Maicín. Mr Justice O'Neill said the proposal to select a jury from a specially redrawn jury district of Conamara would involve exclusions of up to

20 per cent of people who would otherwise be entitled to serve as jurors. Mr Justice Donal O'Donnell, in his agreeing judgment, said it was a cause of regret the defence of this appeal relied on the fact the national language is not the vernacular language of all the people. However, the diverse nature of the population was also "an undeniable fact" and the Constitution mandated that juries be representative of the entire community, he said.

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## Child's death led to major reform, says ambulance chief

*No ambulance sent to scene of accident in which 23-month-old Vakaris Martinaitis fell from window*

The medical director of the National Ambulance Service has given a guarantee that there will be no repeat of a situation where it failed to send an ambulance for a child who was fatally injured after falling from an upstairs window in Co Cork.

Dr Cathal O'Donnell said he was confident there would be no repeat of what happened when the ambulance control centre at Cork University Hospital stood down an ambulance which was due to be dispatched for 23-month-old Vakaris Martinaitis.

### Serious head injuries

The child died at the hospital on May 8th last, two days after suffering serious head injuries when he fell from an upstairs window on to a concrete area outside the family's home at The Paddocks, Castleredmond, Midleton, on May 6th.

The child was brought to hospital by neighbour Kevin Hennessy in his car after an ambulance was stood down because the call-taker at the ambulance control centre at Cork University Hospital believed the child had suffered a simple fall in a green area and was not seriously injured.

Mr Hennessy and his daughter saw the child on a green area, not realising he had fallen from a window on to concrete but had been moved on to the grass by his Lithuanian father, Vidas, who had limited English.

Earlier this month, a verdict of accidental death was returned by a jury at Cork City Coroner's Court, which heard that the loss of a number of minutes through the failure to send an ambulance to the scene was not a factor in the child's death.

The HSE appointed a panel of independent experts last May to review the case. The review panel, chaired by Dr David McManus, medical director of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, noted the ambulance control staff at Cork University Hospital failed to assess appropriately the child's condition at the scene and failed to provide post-dispatch advice to the caller.

Dr O'Donnell said the ambulance service was already implementing some of the 12 recommendations made by Dr McManus and his team, including giving higher priority to cases where information is limited or the people involved in the incident have poor English, he added.

The ambulance service has contracted a third-party company that will provide translation services in live time via conference calls to assist with any 999 calls where the caller is someone with limited English, he said.

Among the other recommendations by the review team, which are also being implemented, are clear delineation of roles between call takers and call dispatchers and the appointment of a team leader at each call centre with the authority to decide on the appropriate response.

### External review

Speaking yesterday at the publication of the panel's report, Dr O'Donnell admitted that a mistake had been made but the ambulance service had moved quickly to address the issue by appointing the external review team to ensure a quality service and provide public confidence in the service.

“What happened should not have happened and we fully accept that, and I have apologised to the family. Our responsibility is that if a member of the public dials 999, we will send an ambulance every time – that did not happen on this occasion and it should have happened.”

Dr O'Donnell said that notwithstanding the mistake made on this occasion, people should be aware that the ambulance service handled 600 emergency calls daily and 230,000 such calls annually and the overwhelming majority of these were handled properly and in line with protocols.

Dr McManus said the review showed the mistake arose from the failure to follow proper protocols and had nothing to do with resources.

He said the ambulance service is moving from 12 ambulance control centres to two such centres and such a model with fewer centres dealing with higher volumes of calls has been found internationally to lead to a better service.

Barry Roche  
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## Two Voices in Diamond Square: Translating Mercè Rodoreda

Trinity College Centre for Literary Translation / Ireland  
Literature Exchange, March 5th 2014

The Centre for Literary Translation hosted the latest in its series of events recently with a meeting of two English translators of Mercè Rodoreda's 1962 Catalan novel *La plaça del diament*, concerning the experience of the Spanish Civil War in Catalonia. Irish academic Eda O'Shiel Sagarra completed her translation *The Pigeon Girl* in 1967, while *In Diamond Square*, a new translation by the renowned British translator Peter Bush, was published by Virago / Little Brown last year. (In between these two books, another translation appeared in America by David Rosenthal – *The Time of the Doves* –

which was published by Graywolf Press in 1989, affording further opportunities for comparison.)

Rodoreda is the pre-eminent Catalan novelist of the post-war period and her *La plaça del diament* is the most important Catalan work on the Civil War and one of the great prose works in the language.

The novel, which is told through a stream of consciousness, is set in Barcelona before, during and after the Civil War. It presents the struggles of a young woman in life, her difficult relationships with two men, and her progression from a position of submissiveness to greater maturity and independence. It's not often that two translators of the same book have the opportunity to meet and discuss their versions, so this was a very interesting opportunity to compare texts and approaches.

The 47 years that have passed since Sagarra's translation have not dimmed her memory of completing the work and she presented an interesting and stimulating account of how her version came to fruition. Both she and Bush have Catalan spouses, so both relate to the culture on a particularly intimate level – an intimacy that may well be essential to the work of any literary translator. Moreover, the novel itself had a personal resonance for Bush as it told the story of a woman on the home front during a war – a situation his own mother had found herself in during the Second World War and which exerted a considerable influence on him growing up.

For the translator, the novel presents various challenges. Pigeons, for example, are particularly important to the work and both translators described the challenges that the various pigeon vocabulary posed. (Interestingly the American translator Rosenthal appears to have side-stepped at least some of these issues by changing the breed of bird to doves!) Of course the availability of research tools to translators has changed dramatically since the time of Sagarra's translation, and Bush acknowledged how helpful Google has been to his work in this respect.

Nevertheless, on the topic of the rigorousness of research, Bush emphasised that ultimately in translating the novel, he wanted it to be read by the general reader, rather than producing a text exclusively for an academic audience. When asked what readership she had envisaged for her translation, Sagarra stressed the importance of the novel for women and acknowledged that if she had a reader in mind when she completed her translation, it was probably a female reader. It was good to see Sagarra's translation being acknowledged in this way, particularly as it has been overlooked in much of the Anglophone critical literature on Rodoreda since the publication of Rosenthal's version (several critical studies quote the 'standard' English title for the book as *The Time of the Doves*). It looks possible that Rosenthal's dominance may continue in certain regions – Bush revealed somewhat surprisingly that his translation will not be for sale in retail outlets in the USA (though of course it may be purchased online) because of the deal that Rosenthal arranged when he published his version. Regardless of the relative merits of each translation, it would be nice to see the novel being referred to in English by a title closer to its Catalan title and Bush's *In Diamond Square* does certainly satisfy on this point.

The meeting was chaired by Sinéad Mac Aodha, Director of Ireland Literary Exchange (which co-organised the event). Sinéad finished by announcing a series of further events in the coming months, a full list of which is available on the Centre for Literary Translation's website: <http://tinyurl.com/qehpog2>. For more information on Ireland Literary Exchange see <http://tinyurl.com/nenogd>.

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## Joining the ITIA

The *Irish Translators' & Interpreters' Association* is pleased to welcome new members to the association. We currently have the following categories of membership:

- Professional
- Associate
- Institutional
- Student
- Honorary

**Professional Membership** is awarded to translators or interpreters who meet the strict criteria of the ITIA based on qualification and level of experience.

Applicants must also achieve a PASS in the annual Professional Membership Examination (translator or interpreter) set by the ITIA.

**Associate Membership** is available to translators and interpreters who are starting out on their careers and to those who do not work full-time as a translator or interpreter. Many members avail of Associate Membership until such time as they have acquired the requisite experience and/or qualifications to apply for Professional Membership. Associate Membership is also availed of by people with a professional interest in the professions of translation and interpreting (e.g. terminologists, translation/interpreting tutors etc.) and by those who have a general interest in these professions.

**Institutional Membership** is available to bodies that do not function as commercial agencies, for example university centres for translation and interpreting studies or cultural institutes. Application documents for Institutional membership are currently being prepared.

**Student Membership** is available to persons undertaking undergraduate studies in any discipline or those undertaking postgraduate studies in translation or interpreting.

**Honorary Membership** is awarded by the ITIA AGM to persons in Ireland or abroad who have distinguished themselves in the field of translation or interpreting.

For further details and application forms, please see our website at <http://tinyurl.com/y65bgtb>

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## Community Interpreting Workshop Report

Last month I was invited by Context translation agency from Galway to participate in a workshop for community interpreters. As being a community interpreter usually means working in a team of one, I always rejoice at any opportunity to socialise (in the old fashioned, pre-Facebook sense) especially when this social activity involves professional development and meeting my colleague interpreters. However, the main reason I went out of my way to attend this gathering was that a few years ago I had already attended another workshop by Context and I found it very enlightening and useful. It was enlightening for a number of reasons. The obvious one is that any professional development workshop is designed to help its participants improve certain professional skills, gain new knowledge or develop a better understanding of whatever profession they practise - and that workshop did exactly that. A less obvious reason why that particular workshop was beneficial is that it helped me understand where I was as a professional on the continuum stretching from being a complete amateur to being a master in the field. I find placing oneself on that continuum is an inherent problem in this profession as there are so few reference points against which to measure one's performance. The lack of clear professional yardsticks for community interpreters is a corollary of the status of our profession in Ireland. Being totally unregulated our profession resembles God's playground where anything goes. Mixing God into all of this is not entirely inappropriate considering the nature of our work - after all we often interpret in life or death situations, which emphasises the need for regularisation.

Coming back to the workshop though, it was the first time I was able to see other interpreters, or aspiring interpreters, in action. During one group interpreting exercise I was working with a colleague who clearly kept focusing on particular words rather than on the overall meaning of the message. As a result he would get stuck every now and again and was unable to continue with the interpreting task. This made me realise how crucial this skill of focusing on the meaning, rather than on the words, is and that it should not be taken for granted. I still could not be sure how far I have gone on my professional path, but at least I knew I was past that pivotal yardstick, which was quite reassuring.

This workshop focused on interpreting in a medical context, particularly on the roles and boundaries of the interpreter. We were divided into random groups of about 5 people throughout most of the training and let me just say there was a lot of brainstorming. The wealth of experience that five interpreters with years of work behind them can bring to the table is truly astonishing. A lot of this experience was echoed within the voices in our group as well as the other groups. However, at the same time there was a lot of variety and everyone shared stories and observations which were eye opening to the rest, which is a testament to the variable nature of community interpreter's daily work always full of surprises. For me personally the most eye opening aspect was that we all had similar concerns and fears regarding interpreting in a medical setting. It turned out that I am not the only one who finds medical assignments extremely emotionally draining. We all identified this emotional exhaustion, which often accompanies working with patients and doctors, as number one issue. More importantly though during the workshop we learnt some strategies which we can apply to protect our emotional wellbeing during such challenging assignments. To help us understand how to use these strategies we were shown a training video of an ideal medical interpreting assignment. It was great to see a truly professional community interpreter in action - not

a sight we are likely to encounter in real life as we usually work alone. Even though there was a collective agreement that real life is different from the video scenario and that it was more of an ideal situation, I strongly believe that there were great lessons to be taken from the video. Yes, real life often does not afford us the opportunity to follow certain procedures of professional conduct, as presented in the video, but it is so good to know where we should be headed. Reality can be brutal, but at least when you know the direction you should follow and providing you are willing to change your old habits, you can now try to re-examine your reality and see if there is any scope for improvement.

At the end of the workshop we had a chance to listen to a representative of the medical profession who works with interpreters. He presented to us his point of view regarding working with language professionals and talked about what is expected from interpreters. It was great to hear how our work is perceived by those main actors in the medical care sector even if it confirmed that a large gap exists between their and our own understanding and perception of the interpreter's role. I firmly believe that mutual understanding among various actors that play different roles in providing medical care to patients can only lead to a better overall service and greater patient satisfaction. Such initiatives can therefore only be applauded and let's hope that Context's plans to continue with such endeavours work out.

All in all the workshop was a very positive and engaging experience. In fact for the 3 hours of training I completely forgot about my Facebook friends. It is a pity Context is the only agency (that I know of) that makes the effort to organise such events. Perhaps if other translation agencies were also doing their bit to increase professional standards among community interpreters, one would meet "aspiring interpreters" less and less often at such workshops, and judging solely by their English there were some present on the day.

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## What's Hot, What's Not?

### What's HOT...

The Galician translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* has finally been published by the Galician publishers, Galaxia. Sections of 'Ulysses' had been published in the magazine *Nos* in 1926, the first translation into an Iberian language of a pivotal work of 20th century western literature. A gift from Celts to fellow Celts?

### ...What's NOT

The team of translators started the project in 2004 and were ready to publish in 2006 but were prohibited from doing so by Joyce's heirs. So much for spreading the word!

## Worth a click

'12-hour rape ordeal' trial aborted. *u.tv.*

<http://tinyurl.com/oq7a5c8>

Khurram Sher terrorism trial: Defence attacks RCMP translation. *Ottawa Citizen.* <http://tinyurl.com/od3yhyh>

US gold medalist's 'stoked,' 'sick,' technical lingo lost in translation? *Aljazeera America.* <http://tinyurl.com/mj9suu2>

Court interpreting firm Capita fined thousands. *BBC.* <http://tinyurl.com/puzs6d4>

The Brazilian front: rich ground for the pioneering reader. *Irish Times* <http://tinyurl.com/pzrcw73>

Mapping the past: old worlds being opened up by technology. *Irish Times* <http://tinyurl.com/ohrmqv9>

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