

Food for thought

The ITI Scottish and Food & Drink Networks joined forces for this highly successful workshop on 5 June

We all know something about food and drink. But translating in this field is a different matter – they are perhaps the clearest possible indicators of cultural difference, and expressing the concepts in a foreign language thus presents special linguistic challenges.

In this workshop in Inverness, the beautiful 'Capital of the Highlands', three speakers, each with their unique experiences of food and drink translation and writing, introduced attendees to the joys and challenges of this specialist field.

Karen Stokes: Translation à la carte and in the kitchen, part 1

Karen Stokes, co-founder and former coordinator of the ITI Food and Drink Network, was the first speaker at the event. Karen has had an interest in food since childhood, fostered by her mother, and she previously worked as a food buyer at Sainsbury's. No wonder that her career as a translator focuses on this area.

Over the past decades, we have seen two opposing trends regarding food – one is globalisation, while the other development is a revival of local sourcing. Food is something deeply embedded in culture, and this is where things become interesting for us translators, as we have to bridge the cultural gap. Cultural squeamishness comes into it as well – not many British people would order a 'gizzard salad', whereas the French may start drooling over '*salade de gésiers*'. What do you do as a translator? Karen quoted Ros Schwartz for a rule of thumb: 'If supermarkets sell it under the foreign name, you can leave it.'

How hard it can be to explain even certain types of bakery products to the uninitiated was demonstrated in our first exercise, which included food items that were either particularly English or Scottish. There was a lot of explaining to do for Scots, Sassenachs and foreigners!

For the second exercise, we split up into language groups to translate traditional English menus – lots of pies, Yorkshire pudding and the like. What do you call a pie in other languages? Maybe leave the word pie – after all, the client will want to order in English – and add a little explanation.

Then came the puddings, and we found that words like 'sticky' were rather off-putting to Spanish speakers. The German group also decided they would have found a more 'crunchy, crisp' dessert menu more appealing. This would be a job for a language/cultural consultant to discuss with the chef.

Renate Fitzroy MITI

Karen Stokes: Translation à la carte and in the kitchen, part 2

After a cup of tea and a good natter, we regrouped and reported back on the problems and solutions we had encountered working on restaurant menus. Issues such as how to translate traditional fare like Yorkshire pudding or spotted dick challenged the non-native English translators, while the others struggled to make ingredients such as lard sound appetising to a British reader. In all our attempts, we had to try to find a way to explain what the dish was without losing too much regional character.

Next, we repeated the exercise looking at recipes. My group of Spanish to English translators found the main stumbling block to be the lack of detail in Spanish recipes, which assume a certain knowledge of cookery that can't be taken for granted with the British cook. We agreed that the best

'Translating menus, we had to try to find a way to explain what the dish was without losing too much regional character'

solution would be to make contact with the client – or get the apron out and try it for ourselves! Another concern was that some local ingredients might not be readily available in Britain, in which case alternatives could be suggested, albeit at the risk of making the dish less authentic.

Karen then told us a bit about working as a translator in the food and drink industry. Taking into account the amount of research usually involved in this type of translation, she pointed out that working for a word rate is not usually particularly profitable, so if an hourly rate can be negotiated, so much the better.

Above all, Karen made it clear that a passion for food and cooking, in both target and source cultures, is vital. Working in this area can sometimes be more of a labour of love than a gravy train – but it is a fascinating area for anyone willing to roll their sleeves up.

Beth Fowler

Lulu Norman: Translating Lebanese Cuisine

This talk was about a co-translation Lulu had undertaken with another translator, Sophie Lewis, of a cookery book, entitled *Lebanese Cuisine* (published by Saqi Books), originally written in French by two Lebanese cooks. Lulu opened by saying that she feels that as a literary translator you should 'share the same breath as the writer, not just inhabit their words'. Therefore, in her ideal world she would have gone to Beirut, cooked all the recipes and sourced the ingredients. However, in reality, she had to be content with speaking to the author on an almost daily basis – mostly via email.

As regards the style of the translation, this was Lulu's first venture into cookery so she spent some time reading many different cookery books looking for a style. However, she found this more helpful in identifying the style she didn't want! Interestingly, the language of this particular book was, in a sense, already a translation as the author was born in Lebanon but had lived in France for many years.

Lulu feels that every translation is 'an enquiry into your own ignorance', and so she was meticulous in checking queries with the author. In fact, she would exchange images with the author to ensure she had the right translation of an ingredient. She gave us the example of 'green onions', which she and the author had discussed at length; Lulu ended up sending an image of what she thought were 'green onions' (which turned out to be



Above: Ute Penny takes a break amid the mist during the Sunday morning walk to Abriachan. Right: The workshop was held in Inverness, which boasts a historic cathedral overlooking the River Ness

spring onions) just to be sure.

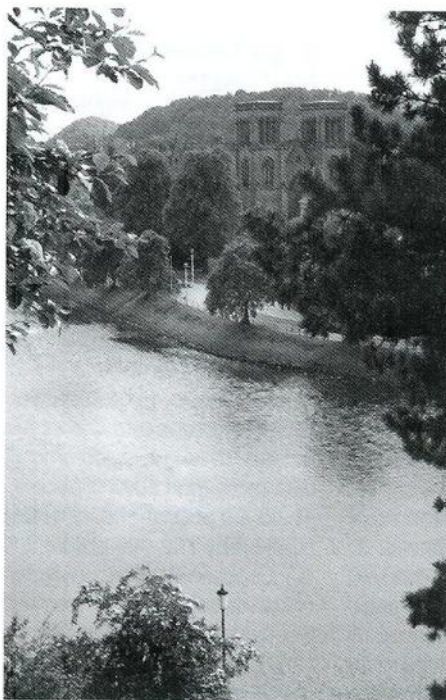
The whole translation process took around four months of fairly intense work and the end product was available for us to leaf through and get a taste of. It looks very appetising and is all the more interesting when you understand some of the story behind it.

Anneliese Garvie

Norma Tait: My experience – distilled

Traff butt wort mash-tun hogshead. One might assume that this incomprehensible barrage had been launched by a slurring drunkard. Not so. Norma Tait is a Brazilian-born English to Portuguese translator and interpreter specialising in the whisky industry. This is her language, and it is one that most of us are largely unfamiliar with. Understanding the language means understanding the processes involved, and the conference attendees were willing students. After all, it seemed fitting that after the long lunch of workshops and talks on a variety of international cuisines, a truly Scottish subject was the boozy finale to the day's professional proceedings.

While working for Diageo, and later Academia Chivas Regal, Norma was



given the task of establishing Portuguese terminology for whisky, as there was no definitive glossary at the time. Her strategy was typically to borrow words and provide a gloss, which aroused considerable interest from the group.

The role of a translator as an expert in intercultural communication is truly tested in an industry in which the microclimate and unique geography are so crucial to the quality of the final product. The session

'It seemed fitting that a truly Scottish subject – whisky – was the boozy finale to the day's professional proceedings'

finished with a workshop-style assessment of translation issues in whisky descriptions and tasting notes. What classifications were/are allowed by law? What is official terminology and what is poetry? Does this poetry attempt purely to describe tastes or evoke moods and images?

Drunk on intellectual debate, time was eventually called on the conference. For the time being. The last word on Scotch whisky? Drinking it doesn't improve your Scottish dancing.

Jack Corrigan

Time to socialise

After the workshop closed at around 5pm, there was time for a short tour of Inverness and then an evening meal and ceilidh.

Our conference room had been transformed into a dining room with round tables and pink lights, and pretty printed menus. As usual the conference was overwhelmingly female, but enough partners emerged in the evening to make numbers nearly even. Easier dances were replaced later on by more difficult ones, which included lots of laughter. Scottish dancing is like riding a bike, it all comes back even if you have not done it for years. They had to throw us out at midnight.

The next morning, a walk at Abriachan Forest had been organised. Led by Anneliese, our guide, we set off on foot through the forest along the Great Glen Way, marvelling at the swathes of cotton grass. We continued up a fairly steep track to the cairn at the highest point, where we admired the view of the mist and the occasional fresh green pine tree seedling and were assured that there was a glorious view of Loch Ness on a clearer day. After posing for photographs, we commenced our descent as the rain began.

Lower down, the pine seedlings became much more numerous, and bigger too, while plenty of wild flowers stood out from the lush greenery in the mist.

Many thanks are due to Anneliese for the lovely, picturesque walk. An excellent way to wake us up after the exertions of the night before and get the blood flowing before the journey home.

Juliet Hammond-Smith and Jackie Jones

PHOTOGRAPHS: JACKIE JONES