

neta news

October-November 1976 issue. The NETA News is the newsletter of the New England Translators Association. *

This issue was prepared by Alice Berglund, Peabody, Mass.

OCTOBER MEETING

The Translation Roundtable discussion this month involved a passage in French taken from the Translation Critiques in California at the ATA Convention this past August. The 2 pages involved a patent the subject of which was a storage battery for automobiles. Bill Grimes very appropriately attached a picture of said battery to his English version, plus a few items from various battery parts catalogs. After we discussed the difference between posts and terminals, nuts, screws, and bolts, we spoke a little on the "patentese" dialect. Isabel Leonard enlightened us on the subject of "the subject of the invention," "annular," "arcuate," and similar terms. Luay Awqatty was kind enough to supply the technical support, and Sam Stone helped us with the intricacies of the French "mot".

The Roundtable was held at the home of Alicja Kawecki, who kindly offered her hospitality both for the translation session and for the following INTERNATIONAL BUFFET, which we feel went over very successfully. The menu included: French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Russian, Greek, Austrian, and German delicacies as well as several different wines. We all ate, drank, and chatted the entire evening. Our thanks to Alicja and all who participated in making this anniversary meeting one of our most enjoyable ones!

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Charles Parsons of the controversial Guild of Professional Translators was our guest on September 7; his speech to us stirred up the following reactions from our members:

CHARLES PARSONS—THE MAN AND THE CAUSE by Bill Grimes

One thing is for sure—Charles Parsons is a man who's been hit, and hit hard.

It started when he worked in Ohio for the U.S. Air Force, translating Russian journals and documents. Everything was going well for a while; then the computer came along. Before Parsons knew what had happened, the group of translators with whom he was working had been declared surplus; he himself was lucky to be one of the two survivors.

But what did survival mean? To hear him tell it, it meant being enslaved to the machine: "The program for translating Russian to English by computer was limited in its vocabulary, and the dictionary that the computer used was on cumbersome disks which were awesomely expensive to edit or change." As a result, Parsons had to "post-edit" the computer's output to make it intelligible. When one considers that the input to the computer consists of a human card-puncher going laboriously through the Russian text, transliterating it into a machine-acceptable form, and that Parson's job consisted essentially of making the machine look good, the true monstrosity of what had happened becomes clear. To add insult to injury, his suggestions on feedback to the computer to enable it to work more efficiently were repulsed on cost grounds!

So Charles Parsons came to Philadelphia to work for a translation agency . . . and was hit hard again: no sooner had he settled on his new location than his new employers went bankrupt.

At this point, Parsons approached the ATA in the hope that they could do something to help free-lance translators like himself, to protect them against the hazards of being exploited as computer peripherals or victims of callous agencies. He was instrumental in assembling free-lance ATA members at a meeting in Philadelphia, at which guidelines were drawn up for standards of translation, an ethics committee with teeth, and so on. In his view, however, ATA was unwilling to act on his ideas. Undaunted, Parsons tried to take an active part in ATA by serving as editor of the **Chronicle**, but again was not given the freedom he claims he needed to do the job properly.

So he left ATA; not long afterward, the Guild was born. As Parsons outlined its history and growth, several things became clear: some encouraging, some sad.

The publication issued by the Guild, **The Professional Translator**, suffers from the serious illness of all magazines started by one man with a "CAUSE" . . . it is mainly his own angry writing. His words are too often inflammatory and negative; it is a very bitter view of translation, indeed.

On the other hand, **ProfTran** is doing something that the **ATA Chronicle** has been lax about recently: dealing with the problems and needs of the working, free-lance

*The NETA is a regional Chapter of the ATA—The American Translators Association, a national professional society.

translator and the beginner. There have been complaints that the Chronicle is too full of theory and not enough practice; a chatty newsletter for established agents and "gentlemen translators," leaving newcomers out in the cold. Parsons has published names and addresses of work sources, given information on rates, and blown the whistle on translation firms whose policies he considers unfair. He was instrumental, some say, in making JPRS admit its CIA connections. So he is filling this gap, albeit as a rather irritating gadfly.

The Guild has also put out a directory of translators, in the hope of gaining work for its membership. Unfortunately, the manner in which this directory has been distributed appears inefficient at best and counterproductive at worst. When quizzed on this topic, Parsons said that he had been selling the directory to libraries and agencies. It is no secret that libraries always look for the least expensive source of translations, and while there might be some gain to Guild members through bypassing agencies, they might not like the rates they would get, even by approaching the libraries directly. Secondly, with the negative attitude the Guild has toward agencies and "agency", sending the directory to agents might provide them with a handy black list. One can imagine a "villainous" agent spotting translator Jones in the list and saying, "Aha! So he's one o' them too, eh? No more work for that guy!" Finally, Parsons admitted under questioning that he had made no effort to "clientize" industry, the best-paying if not the largest source of translation work in this country today.

As Parsons spoke, the audience got a picture of a protective umbrella being opened over every free-lance translator of whatever skill or qualification, all banding together in an effort to avoid exploitation. However, as the evening went on, Parsons had to admit that if his efforts at raising translation standards were successful (a project in limbo since the Philadelphia meeting), many of those same would-be translators would find themselves right out in the cold again. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Parsons.

In my opinion, American translation needs a Charles Parsons to shine a light into the darker corners of our profession. It is a pity that he could not find a more receptive ear within ATA, however; it isn't always easy to work "within the system", but with an organization as small and fragmented as ours is, especially in the eyes of the translation buyer it is counterproductive to fling mud in all directions by printing such stuff as the infamous Kroha letter.

ATA is changing; it is not the same group it was when the "great schism" took place, trying to respond to the questions asked by so many ATA members: "What's in it for us?" or "What is ATA doing for me, to justify my paying such high dues?"

If Parsons has accomplished nothing more than making ATA look at itself in the mirror and say, "Maybe there are some things we're not doing that we should," or giving local groups the encouragement to get together and talk over common problems, his efforts have not been in vain.

CHARLES PARSONS and the GUILD OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATORS Alice Berglund

Charles Parsons' talk at our September Meeting, gave us much food for thought. Although issues of the Proftrans newsletter and the many rumors of the "Great Schism" have caused us to wonder whether Mr. Parsons was some sort of mad translator waiting to get his teeth into any ATAer or agent he came into contact with, we were pleased to find him a pleasant, personable human being as well as a translator-professional taking a firm stand with regard to translator's rights.

The purpose of the Guild, we are told, is to give the professional translator some back-up, some sense of unity with other translators in his dealing with the all-too-often cold, cruel outside world. It is oriented to the individual translator and not, as Mr. Parsons stresses, to the "translator exploiter," as is, in his opinion, ATA.

The Guild has made some concrete achievements in protecting the individual translator. In one case, the Guild intervened and obtained payment of a job for a competent translator from an unwilling-to-pay client.

The Guild also insists that its member translators be competent translators, truthfully representing their abilities. If this is not the case, the Guild will suspend the member's registration in the Guild. And this has happened. In one concrete case, the Guild intervened between client and translator and found that the translation involved did not meet minimum standards. (Mr. Parsons compares this type of intervention, although similar in its intent to the ATA accreditation program, a more practical one, because it is dealing with the actual job, and not a hypothetical one.) In this way, the Guild presents its members as competent, reasonable translators and will take responsibility for its members' representations of their translating capabilities.

The name of the game is both familiar and simple: recognition and reasonable monetary compensation to the qualified professional translator. BUT— In a problem which seems relatively minor, i.e., the "credit to whom credit is due" issue or "Let's please find the translator's name on a published translation" is not to anyone else's interest except the translator's. Presently, it seems that in order to get a translator's name on a book or paper, the translator must (a) do the translation

gratis, but still have an advanced degree in the subject he is translating, or (b) Publish it himself.

Mr. Parson's personal experience has been with the government, and as many of us government translators have experienced (although in my own case, it is to a much lesser extent), the government does not even consider the translator a professional! However, although Mr. Parsons calls most 3rd party agents unnecessary, since they are "translator exploiters," because of the broadness and diversity of the commercial field (as compared to government and publishing), he admits that some agents are necessary, and it is to the translator's advantage to keep the good ones in business.

Another of the Guild's accomplishments is its directory of registered translator members; this listing is revised each year and is now in its 3rd edition. (Compare this effort with ATA's—the Professional Service Directory of the ATA has just recently been published and its last edition was, I believe in the late '60s!)

Mr. Parsons has certainly been active in pursuing translators' rights, but one rather gets the feeling that his program might be somewhat idealistic, starting from the premise that translators deserve "recognition and financial reward." A more practical approach (given our capitalist economy) would be, I think, to put his efforts into a translator-user campaign on how the user can benefit—financially—from using a competent, professional translator and thus educate the user to view the translator as a valuable advisor in much the same way he would view another professional person—lawyer, banker, doctor, etc.. In this way, the translator would no longer be a gnome working alone and unappreciated in his garret, but would be recognized for the professional he is, and thus be entitled to the appropriate recognition and rewards. And this is what I believe translator guilds and societies to be all about!

ENGLISH LIKE HE SHOULD BE SPOKE

Isabel Leonard

We have all met well-educated foreign-born speakers of English who nonetheless make some very elementary mistakes, and repeatedly. Some insight into why this happens was recently provided by a book sent to me on approval entitled:

Dicionário de Termos Técnicos
Inglês-Português
Português-Inglês

by Benjamin B. Fraenkel, published in 1970 by the Escola Técnica Federal "Celso Suckow da Fonesca" in Rio de Janeiro. price \$5.00. It purports to assist Brazilians to write technical English by means of grammatical notes plus a listing of 6000 technical words.

I turned first to the section on English grammar, where I was surprised to be informed that the plural of swine is swain, and the male form of washerwoman is washerman (lavadora and lavador). "Sospender" is translated to dagle, "arrastrar" is to draggle, "entristecer" is to dark, "dar de ombros" is to shrud, and "Interrogar" to query.

The Brazilian is warned not to confuse homophones (words with the same pronunciation, but different spellings and meanings) such as beach, beech, and bitch.

The list of principal parts is particularly informative, in the sense that it contains forms of which I was totally unaware. For example:

slide slid slidden

Some of the English would appear to have come from the King James Bible, or the etymological entries in the OED. Examples:

dig digged
burst bursted
catch caught
rive rived riven

Some examples are not translated into Portuguese, and consequently the English leaves us quite baffled, e.g., "He has become a tracitor" (traitor? translator? both?)

Since this is also supposed to be a technical dictionary, I turned hopefully to the "technical" section. Alongside some quite useful, but not particularly startling entries, I found "oleo de quema lenta" translated as "long time burning oil". Long time no see anything like that, I thought. Overcome with mixed rage and laughter, I sent the book back on disapproval.

MACARONIC VERSE—Excerpted from the NY Times

Macaronic verse is ostensibly poetry written in many different languages—at once! B.F. Skinner, the well-known Harvard psychologist and professor emeritus sent the following poem to the NY Times:

There once was a frolicsome flea
Son chien lui delût comme abri
Er wollt' einen Kater
Sed observat mater
Non lasci i parenti cosi.
But he listened not to their prayer
Il quitta son père et sa mère,
Er springt' auf 'ne Katze
Sed haec rasitat se
Lo mangi, orribile a veder.
Around and about the gore flew
Aie pitié du petit fou
Mit lautem Geschrei
Vae mihi, o vae,
Il povero acese in giu.
The moral of this little tale
Ne tentez la force de vos ailes
Bleib' ruhig zu Haus
Sit domui laus
Alla casa dimora fedel.

Willard Espy, who wrote "An Almanac of Words at Play" aided by Mario Pei provided the following translation: (or as they called it, "approximation"):

A Flea, bored with Dog as a diet,
Heard of Cat, and decided to try it.
He cried, "Let me go,"
But his parents said, "No!
Stay at home on our Dog and
keep quiet."

The flea didn't heed them a mite;
He jumped on a Cat for a bite.
This maddened the Puss,
Who scratched the flea loose
And ate him—a horrible sight
The dying flea popped with a splat—
Oh, pity the poor little brat.
Crying, "Mom, take me back!
As, alas and alack,
He slides down the throat of the cat.
My Moral, dear friend, is a hot one:
What seems like a snack may be
not one;
If you live on a pup,
Stay at home and shut up;
Be glad of a home if you've got one.

Mr. Pei notes that the macaronic verse was a medieval technique called 'contrasto plurilingue.' It was used in particular by the Provençal poet Rambaut De Vaqueiras. Professor Skinner mentioned he has used the technique practically, in informing a friend where a house key was concealed: "I figured that a translation would be beyond the ability of the average break-in artist."

Re: "MU #ON"

Contributed by Mike Stacy (Lewisville, Texas)

"You are 99% correct treating it as muñón. Although I can't say for certain that Ñ corresponds with the number symbol on Venezuelan Telex machines, I can say that é typed on Algerian Telex machines comes out \$ on our machine.

My company (Otis Engineering) uses # 3 to mean "number 3" and 3 # to mean "3 pounds." No other language uses the symbol at all to my knowledge. Spanish uses núm., French uses N^o, German uses Nr. and Russian uses №. By the way, # is a sharp in music, not a natural.

ABOUT RATES by Isabel Leonard

"The Writer", a magazine intended to serve the professional writer and particularly the freelancer, has recently been publishing a series of market reports showing what magazines are willing to pay for articles. I read these with some interest with a view to a comparison with rates paid for translation.

Many magazines quoted lump-sum fees. Others gave per-word rates which ranged from the 10 cents/word paid by a prestigious magazine like Saturday Review down to ground zero (rien, nichts, nada). When you consider that before sitting down to his typewriter a writer frequently has to go out and interview people and/or assemble source materials; that a reviewer has to read at least some of the reviewed book and think about it (one hopes) before committing himself to paper; and if my own experience that writing takes at least three times as long as translating is any guide, then I think that, in comparative terms at least, translators are not doing so badly.

WORK

Wanted French-English, English-French technical translator, full time. Experience in electronics terminology an advantage. French mother tongue. This is a fulltime in-house position. Call Liliane McGee 272-4600, x 189 or 168.

NETA MEETING, November 9, 1976

We are planning our November meeting at Harvard again. (Room will be noted above, just before the News is mailed out.) Our topic will be the ATAMeeting in New York. You may recall some of the questions suggested for discussion with regard to the "Business of Translation":

1. What are they charging and why can't I get as much?
2. When I'm out to get new business, to whom do I write?
3. How high a quality can I afford?
7. How should I charge anyhow—words, pages, or job?
12. How much must I invest in capital expenditures in order to keep competitive?
13. What percentage return can I expect on advertising? etc., etc.

Prior to our meeting proper at 8:15 p.m., we will have a translation roundtable at 7:15 p.m. as usual. The subject will be a technical Russian passage which is included as an insert to this issue of the News.

NETA MEETING, December 7, 1976

Our December meeting will be held at Brandeis University, Usdan Student Center, Conference Room C and its topic will be a refreshing change from our previous business and technical-related subjects. A panel of literary translators, headed by our own Professor Harry Zohn, will discuss the problems and the satisfactions of translating the "great books" of our time.

Our roundtable discussion will center on a suitable passage from the German—this is also included as an insert in this month's News, so that we may get a head start on this fascinating subject.

An apology from your Editor—due to the very uneven nature of a free-lance translator's workload, I am unable to promise delivery of the News on a regular monthly schedule. At times such as these, I will have to opt for the combined issue.

ON-GOING EDUCATION FOR TRANSLATORS

The National University Extension Association offers the opportunity for independent home study in a variety of subjects from all disciplines. The liberal arts, social sciences, sciences, math, engineering, business, professional and vocational training are all included in the programs which are offered by leading colleges and universities throughout the United States. Teaching materials include tapes, cassettes, records, TV, and written assignments. Fees vary with the individual schools. The average course offers 2 to 4 undergraduate credits upon completion of 16 to 24 assignments.

Of special interest to translators are the language courses which include Basic through Advanced Language, Literature, Reading, Technical and Commercial, and Linguistics, e.g., the U. of Wisconsin offers two 2 credit courses in Scientific German. Languages range from Arabic to Swahili with major emphasis on French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese.

For further information: the NUEA publishes a GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT STUDY listing all correspondence courses offered by its member institutions. Copies may be obtained for \$1.00. To provide a resource for adults who wish to explore part-time degree opportunities, the NUEA also publishes a DIRECTORY OF US COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY DEGREES FOR PART-TIME STUDENTS, cost \$1.95. Both are available from:

NUEA, Suite 360, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036

FOREIGN FILMS

French Library: The Cine-Club of the French Library (53 Marlborough St., Boston) has programmed two post-war French films for showing in November and one in December. THERESE RAQUIN (Carne, 1963), Nov. 3; THE PASTORAL SYMPHONY (Delannoy, 1946), Nov. 17. Film and date for December had **not** been settled at press time. Ticket prices are \$1.50 for members of the library and \$1.95 for non-members. The films are sub-titled. For further information call the library at 266-4351.

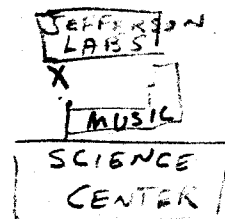
Goethe Institute: The Goethe Institute regularly shows recent films from Germany without charge, often before they are shown in commercial theaters. This fall the Institute will sponsor the following programs, all at 7:00 P.M. at Harvard's Carpenter Center (19 Prescott St., Cambridge): Oct 30: WHY DOES MR. R. RUN AMOK? (Fassbinder, 1970); Oct. 31: KNIFE IN THE BACK (Runze, 1975); Nov. 6: BY AND BY (Wenders, 1976); Nov. 7: NORTH SEA, MURDER SEA (Bohm, 1976).

ELSEVIER LIST

Isabel Leonard will be glad to lend, for xeroxing, the Elsevier list mentioned in the Convention Chronicle.

NOVEMBER MEETING PLACE

The November 9th NETA Meeting will be held in the Jefferson Lab #263. The Lab is in back of the Music Building, which is behind the Science Center. Please use entrance farthest to the left (side of building facing Harvard Square. PLEASE BE ON TIME, AS SOMEONE WILL HAVE TO STAND AT DOOR TO ADMIT YOU!



ATA BUSINESS MEETING

The 18th ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING OF ATA combined with an Open-Participation Panel-Directed Discussion of THE BUSINESS OF TRANSLATION will be held Saturday and Sunday, November 6 and 7, 1976 at the Statler-Hilton Hotel in N.Y.C. There is NO registration fee. Luncheon (optional) is available for \$10.00.

There will also be an opportunity to take the accreditation exams. See ATA Chronicle.

This meeting is the best opportunity ATA offers for its members to speak up about matters that concern them. It does not do very much good to say, for instance, why doesn't ATA set minimum fee schedules, or sell dictionaries at a discount, or develop glossaries, or protect its members from exploitation by agencies. Although these are legitimate questions, they need discussion (based on factual information), followed by implementation. In many cases, the mechanism to resolve these and other questions already exists by means of one or other of ATA's committees. Some of the committees have fallen into desuetude because the issues which they were supposed to resolve appear no longer to be of concern, or because the wheelhorse of the committee left the country or changed jobs. So the threads are there to pick up; one merely has to speak out.

Unofficially, and perhaps more important still, ATA meetings offer the opportunity to meet congenial people with interests similar to one's own, to make business contacts, to find out where the work is, and pick up all the information that drifts around but never makes it to the Chronicle.

Isabel Leonard

ACCOMMODATIONS: Statler-Hilton Hotel (ATA Hotel)
7th Ave. and West 33rd St.
New York, N.Y. 10001 Tel: 212-736-5000

Rooms: Single - \$36 and up
Double twin - \$50

Sheraton - Midtown = may have rooms available

Single : \$20

Twin : \$27

For further information on Sheraton,

Prices are subject to update. call Isabel Leonard. 749-0772, 749-1540.

The TWA Getaway Guide to New York (price \$1.50) is available at bookstores. It lists, describes and classifies hotels in N.Y. from first class to budget. Includes locations, prices, meals and other pertinent details.

HOW TO GET THERE? To rent an Econo-car van seating 12 people will cost \$175 round trip, or \$20 per person (round trip). This includes rental, mileage, gas, and tolls. Other means: bus \$23, train \$33, air weekend excursion \$47, regular air fare - too much!

If you are interested in riding in the Econo-van with the NETA Group, please return the enclosed form (blue sheet) to Isabel Leonard before November 1, 1976.