

March 12, 2018

Dear friends,

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about the development of the Translation Center during my many years there. The Center, when I started, was not new, but had been around since its founding in the mid-1970s by Fred Will and Warren Anderson, both professors of Comparative Literature. Pioneering in its vision, the Center offered paid translation projects to students and faculty of the Five Colleges. It also coincided with the founding of the Five College Faculty Seminar in Literary Translation and the founding of the journal *Metamorphoses*, which continues to publish, partially subsidized by the income from the Translation Center. I merely inherited a visionary program with a strong tradition.

But when I arrived at UMass in the early 1990s, the Center had fallen on hard times and was only generating a couple thousand dollars each year, barely covering its expenses. Further, there was limited quality control, so some of the translations were not up to par. Lee Edwards, then Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, consulted me, and I suggested that one could either close the Center or try to run it at a profit. Fortunately, she chose the latter, and the Center's growth and success has been a marvel. Lee Edwards envisioned a full-service center—offering major and minor languages, as well as small and large projects. Her model more than succeeded: not only have profits grown, but the educational benefits have proved enormous. Ironically, the educational benefits haven't been just for students, but for faculty as well.

In 1994, when I started, I thought I knew a lot about translation, having studied in both Europe (Free University of Berlin) and the United States (University of Iowa and Vanderbilt); but what I discovered immediately was the languages needed in the United States were not the languages taught by universities. In the United States, the top languages spoken include Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Chinese, all taught at UMass, but also Vietnamese, Khmer, Tagalog, and Haitian Kreyòl. I had to retool my own approach. In addition to my normal teaching duties, during evenings and weekends we also taught Vietnamese and Khmer word-processing, and standardized Haitian Kreyòl.

I feel very proud at the contributions the Translation Center has made localizing certain languages to better appeal to Massachusetts immigrant communities. For example, the Kreyòl that we offered was not the Haitian spoken in Canada, which is more French inflected, but a more recent version spoken in Haiti under Aristide in the 1990s. Or the Vietnamese that we taught translators to use was a combination of North Vietnamese, where many of the top universities are located, and the South, with its infusion of French and English cultural terms. The same could be said for many languages, including Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and even French. Indeed, the importance of localization in addition to standard translation during these early years significantly contributed to the success of the Center.

Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of the job was helping Massachusetts residents in their business endeavors. I remember one of our first jobs was helping a retired local resident translate product descriptions for a microscope manufactured in the Czech Republic. Our success translated into his success: the Czech microscope was of very high quality, similar to corresponding German models, but significantly less expensive. To make a long story short, with our help translating product information and marketing materials, this gentleman was able to sell to many of the largest hospitals in Massachusetts, netting him a nice nest egg for retirement. Our work in “lesser-known” languages became more widely known, and soon many firms were seeking our expertise. In the state of Massachusetts, over 90 languages are spoken, and the Translation Center did not discriminate against minor languages. During my tenure we provided translations in over 80 languages, taking great pride every time we added a new language.

We also didn’t discriminate against larger customers. Our largest during my period was General Electric, which enjoys an annual income higher than most nations. Here we needed to compete against the largest translation companies in world, with results measured less in academic terms, i.e. accuracy, and more in what has become known as cost-to-quality, which includes a blend of accuracy, speed, technology, and management. We did very well here, too. I remember a project in the early 2000s that dealt with executive strategies for multi-tasking, to be launched January 1 simultaneously in China, Japan, and Korea. There is no Christmas in those countries, and I made myself very unpopular by forcing my team to work over the holidays in order to deliver the translation on time. And what a team it was. We had translators, including both mainland and Taiwanese translators; technicians, as we not only used Chinese, Japanese, and Korean language kits, but also had Chinese operating systems on several computers; layout specialists, who adapted the many illustrations and embedded text in the appropriate boxes; and finally a wonderful project manager keeping track of the files being received, proofed, and then shipped all over the world. Hard work, yes, but exhilarating. Afterwards I learned that one of my mainland Chinese translators from the Isenberg School of Management had proposed to our Taiwanese translator from our own Comparative Literature program.

In sum, we had a wonderful ride, and my memories are all pleasant. I remember the birthday parties, weddings, defenses, graduations, and holidays, including lunar new year and Eid al-Fitr celebrations. I remember helping so many individuals with their problems and goals, including adopting children from abroad, deciphering mementos from ancestors, delivering babies in hospital rooms, protecting civil rights in courtrooms, offering any number of social services to immigrants, from healthcare to job programs, and, especially, helping small businesses open up new markets, whether it be the Latino districts of New York or Boston, or Canadian French sections in Montreal or Quebec.

While I have enjoyed great success in my teaching and research careers, the memories from the Translation Center, from the applied translation practices, stand out. We helped hundreds of individuals with their translation and interpreting needs, and the region, both socially and economically, is better off for it. Thanks to all the translators, interpreters,

proof-readers, project managers, technicians, and, especially, staff. You know who you are. You made my time at the Center the most wonderful years of my life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edwin Gentzler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edwin Gentzler