



# capital translator

Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association  
Vol. 21, No. 7 October 1999

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## The FIT Invasion of Mons

by Eric McMillan

When the International Federation of Translators (FIT) holds its triennial congresses, it generally meets in a major town: I had attended previous congresses in Warsaw (1981), Vienna (1984), and Maastricht (1987) but was unable to be in Belgrade (1990), Brighton (1993) or Melbourne (1996). So I wondered how Mons, with a population of less than 100,000, would manage to cope with an influx of hundreds of language professionals from around the world attending the XV World Congress of FIT.

Conceptually, Belgium is almost the ideal country for a gathering of practical linguists. While it is officially trilingual (French, Dutch and German), none of its three languages has its center of gravity within Belgium's borders. The country is divided into three increasingly autonomous regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the north; mostly French-speaking Brussels in the center as an enclave within Flanders; and French-speaking Wallonia in the south (plus the German-speaking *Cantons de l'Est*). Brussels is, of course, well on the way to becoming Europe's de facto capital. Maybe the

answer to the language question, at least in Brussels, lies in everyone's adopting English, but my ears provided little evidence of such a shift elsewhere in the country.

Mons (Bergen to the people of Flanders) is the capital of the Belgian Walloon province of Hainaut, not far from Lille in France. It is the center of the Borinage area, famous in the 19th century for its coalmines, where Van Gogh ministered to the poor in the nearby village of Cuesmes. But nearly all the heavy industry in the area has been shut down, creating severe unemployment. And anyone familiar with European military history knows just how many times French, German, British and other armies have surged back and forth across the indefensible frontiers. With so many armies having personal experience of the area, perhaps it is not surprising that Mons was also chosen as the site for SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe). Nevertheless, I was astonished to see how many old buildings still survive downtown.

The Congress took place on the modern campus of the UMH (Université de Mons-Hainaut),

which offered large auditoriums for concurrent sessions, and a restaurant serving academic food of astonishingly high quality. Unfortunately, university dorms could accommodate fewer than 200 people, so the rest of us were billeted in hotels up to 6 or even 10 km outside town. This created somewhat of a trans-

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## President's Corner

by Scott Brennan



The chapter meeting for German/English translators and interpreters at the Goethe-Institut Washington on October 18 (see announcement on page 3) is the first in what I hope will become a series of language-specific chapter meetings. As I have described previously in this space, the idea behind language-specific meetings is to give translators and interpreters the chance to get together, discuss special problems, and share experiences and expertise in a way they cannot do at language-neutral events.

Russian, Japanese, Italian: Want your language to be next? With enough member interest, the next meeting could be scheduled for as early as January. Give me a call and let's talk. First come, first served!

In the meantime, a last-minute reminder that the offices of NCATA President, Treasurer and Accreditation Chair come up for election at the end of this year (see last month's *Capital Translator* for details). Interested but want to know more? Contact the current officers at the numbers listed to the left. Candidates must submit a 150-word statement by October 5 to the election coordinator, Chapter Vice President Sangeeta Prasad; she can be contacted at (703) 369-2068 or [SSPrasad@aol.com](mailto:SSPrasad@aol.com). The candidate statements will be published in the *Capital Translator*, and the election results will be announced at the 1999 Annual Meeting held before the Holiday Party on Sunday, December 12. ✍

### NCATA Meeting for German Translators

NCATA will hold a chapter meeting for German-to-English and English-to-German translators and interpreters at the Goethe-Institut Washington on Monday evening, October 18, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. A series of short presentations by NCATA members—including Jan McLin Clayberg, Claire Haymes, Heide Crossley, Bill Keasbey and Angelika Spears—will provide a springboard for open discussion. The Goethe Institut Washington is located at 814 Seventh Street NW in downtown Washington DC.

**Metro:** Take the Red, Yellow or Green line to Gallery Place/Chinatown (7th and H Street Exit). The Goethe-Institut is just across from the Chinatown gate at 814 7th Street.

**Bus:** Take bus lines 70/71/73 (Georgia Avenue, 7th Street line), 80 (North Capitol Street line), P6 (Anacostia-Rhode Island Avenue line), or X2 (Benning Road, H Street line) to the corner of 7th and H Streets, NW.

**Car:** follow either Massachusetts or Independence Avenue to 7th Street, NW. Parking is available either off-street or for hire in the basement garage of the Renaissance Hotel, accessible from 7th and 9th Street between I & New York Avenue.

No preregistration is required to attend the meeting, and nonmembers are welcome. For more information, contact NCATA President Scott Brennan at [sbrennan@csi.com](mailto:sbrennan@csi.com) or (703) 393-0365.

## Mons

...continued from page 1

portation problem, as the shuttle bus service provided was at best erratic. But translators always rise to a challenge, and many friendships were forged as we pondered the local public bus service or waited patiently for the promised shuttle buses.

The Congress started on Friday August 6 on a formal note in the Théâtre Royal, with official welcomes from a number of authority figures (some of whom did talk rather too long). Then we all adjourned to the beautiful Jardin du Mayeur next door for champagne and fingerfood on a perfect summer evening (totally untypical weather for that part of the world). The next 3-1/2 days were then devoted to the serious business of the Congress, both plenary sessions and concurrent specialized workshops.

This official opening had been preceded by the Statutory Congress, accessible only to the official representatives of FIT's member organizations worldwide. A new Council was elected, and officers chosen for the next three years. Full details will be published shortly in the *ATA Chronicle* and other journals. But let me report here that **Steve Sachs** stepped down after nine (9) years' valiant service as ATA representative (and latterly as FIT VP) and that **Peter Krawutschke** (past ATA president) has taken his place on the FIT Council, where he will also serve as Secretary General.

At the closing ceremony on Tuesday, August 10, rapporteurs presented brief outlines of what had been discussed at the seven different workshops: literary translation; sci-tech and commercial translation; interpreting; status and future of the profession; translation studies; training; and new tools). Official proceedings will be published, probably next year. A number of motions were introduced, notably one asking the Secretary General of the UN and

other authorities to increase security protection for translators and interpreters working in war zones, and also for court interpreters working on asylum and illegal drugs cases in national courts.

FIT also awards a number of medals and prizes at its congresses. As chair of one jury, I had the pleasure of awarding the "Aurora Borealis" Prize for Non-Fiction Translation to Risto Varteva of Finland for his many years as science correspondent for the Helsingin *Sanomat* newspaper and as translator of such works as Steven Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Amir Aczel's *Fermat's Last Theorem*. In a demonstration of his ability to explain science to nonscientists, Mr. Varteva used a black disk and a yellow disk to show us exactly what would be involved in Wednesday August 11's total eclipse of the sun. (Unfortunately, the next day's weather in Luxembourg was overcast, but I did get to experience the totally eerie darkness at midday.)

And, to end on a note of local pride, the US contingent was delighted to see the FIT Prize for Best Magazine go to our own *ATA Chronicle*. Jean-François Joly, chair of that jury, displayed copies of all five newsletters, bulletins and magazines that had been submitted, each undeniably prizeworthy. I should also report that ATA hosted an evening reception for all the ATA members we could identify (about 42), including of course a number of NCATA members.

As I think back on my Mons experience, what I remember most are my encounters with fellow professionals from all over the world (a Japanese living in Norway, a Frenchwoman living in Australia, a Croatian from Zagreb, a US citizen living in Poland) and the constant buzz of conversation over breakfast or waiting for the shuttle bus. And one memory for the permanent data bank is sitting in the Grand'Place in Mons on a sunny afternoon, sipping

a Grimsbergen brune beer, and looking across the splendid floral decorations to the 15th-18th century Town Hall.

The next FIT congress will be held in a big city again, in Vancouver, British Columbia, on a still-to-be-determined date in the summer of 2002. So make a note in your New Millennium diary, and come prepared for a fascinating and instructive time meeting your counterparts from all around the globe. ✍

*Eric McMillan is a founding member of NCATA and is currently Mail Liaison Officer (he picks up and redistributes the mail sent to NCATA's P.O. Box in downtown DC). He is currently also Secretary of the ATA.*

**T**he *Capital Translator* is looking for volunteers to write a series of short profiles of NCATA's corporate members. Each month's assignment would require interviewing key personnel—especially those with whom translators and interpreters are likely to have personal contact—and gathering information about areas of special expertise, major projects, services offered, etc. The series is meant to give translators and interpreters the chance to put a face with the voice at the other end of the phone line, and corporate members the chance to showcase their operations.

Interested? Contact *Capital Translator* Editor Ruth Boggs at (703) 378-9305 or [REZB@aol.com](mailto:REZB@aol.com).

# You Can Quote Me On That

by Charles M. Stacy ©1999

Quotations are fun. Consider these:

*Man invented language to satisfy his deep need to complain.*

—Lily Tomlin

*Man does not live by words alone, despite the fact that sometimes he has to eat them.*

—Adlai Stevenson

*The thoughtless are rarely wordless.*

—Howard Newton

*We need a president who's fluent in at least one language.*

—Buck Henry

The world's languages have devised several ways of indicating direct and indirect quotations. English has developed a particularly complex system of tenses for indirect quotations that many foreigners find maddening. If John Doe says, "I'm coming [present tense] to the party," we quote him indirectly by saying, *John said he was [past] coming to the party*. If John says, "I will go [future] to the party," we say, *John said he would come [past future] to the party*.

Past future? Yep. That's what linguists actually call it. *Would come* is normally the conditional mood, as in *I would come if I had the time*.

In indirect quotations, it happens that English does not preserve the original tense. Russian, which does preserve the tense, says (translated literally), *Ivan said he will come to the party*.

Bulgarian even has special verb endings for indirect quotations. But the focus of this article is direct quotations.

Direct quotations are easy to spot because they are enclosed in quotation marks, as in "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

A quote within a quote is indicated with single quotation marks, as in "I thought I heard him say, 'Bush mangled yet another metaphor.'"

In English, the period falls inside the closing quotation marks when complete sentences are quoted.

Example: "Talk is cheap, because supply exceeds demand."

—Anonymous.

But when a *portion* of a sentence is quoted, periods and commas fall inside the quotation marks in American English, but outside in British practice. American example: She said "possible," but she meant "impossible." British example: She said "possible", but she meant "impossible". German follows the British pattern.

In traditional German, opening quotation marks looked like double commas, and the closing quotation marks looked like English opening quotes: „*Wer keine fremde Sprache kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen.*” Modern German quotation marks look the same as in English.

Interestingly, German can quote part of a compound noun, as in this example involving a mispronunciation of the word *Weltanschauung*: Er hat "Wert"-*Anschauung* gesagt.

French has its famous *guillemets*: « *L'état, c'est moi* ». Note the obligatory space *before and after* the 'chevrons,' and the fact that the period falls outside the quotes.

When portions of a sentence are quoted, periods and commas also fall outside.

But Spanish is the all-time champion when it comes to quotation marks.

As hard as it may be to believe, Spanish has *two* systems: (1) the conventional quotation marks as seen in English, which are used in non-literary newspapers, magazines and other publications; and (2) a traditional "literary" style for dialog in novels and plays.

Here is an example of the literary style:

*—Dentro de veinte días vendré por acá —decía el hombre—. Para esa fecha creo que estará listo.*

*—¡A trabajar! De ahora en adelante habrá que aumentar la ración de Pascual.*

*—¿Y a mí? —preguntó dándose un palmazo en la pierna de palo—. ¿Acaso no me duele la pierna?*

The literary system has a number of unusual features. For starters, it uses dashes for quotation marks. And when you've seen one dash, you've seen them all; i.e., in this system, opening quotation marks look just like closing quotation marks.

And if this is not confusing enough, the literary system works on an unstated assumption: the end of each paragraph implies the end of the quotation. Note that none of the three paragraphs in the example given above ends with a closing dash.

In most languages, quotation marks occur in pairs around quoted utterances. But Spanish dashes work more like toggle switches. This fact, coupled with absentee dashes at paragraph's end, means that a given paragraph usually has either one or three dashes, not two or four. In our example above, the middle paragraph has one dash, and the other two paragraphs have three dashes. Most other languages use quotation marks in pairs.

The spacing of these dashes is stranger yet. Only the opening dash is put where a foreigner might expect it. *The closing dash is separated from the utterance quoted by a space and attached to any following phrase that is not part of the utterance.* See the first and last paragraphs of the example. If we applied this to

English, we would have something like: –I see –he said–, but are you sure?

Read on: it gets even weirder. The dash indicating a resumption of the quotation in the same paragraph immediately follows an unquoted phrase (*he said–*). The next item after the resumption dash is usually a period or a comma, *followed by a space, followed by the quotation being resumed!* In our example: *he said–, but are you sure?* In other words, the dashes around words that are not part of a quote, as in *–he said–*, function (and are punctuated) as if they were parentheses. The purpose is to remove the words *he said* from the quote.

In non-literary contexts, Spanish uses standard quotation marks: *El ministro señaló que Cervantes escribió, “El hambre es la mejor salsa”*. [The minister pointed out that Cervantes wrote, “Hunger is the best sauce.”] Note that the period falls outside.

Now for a zinger that will test your credibility. The other day while surfing the Net I found this virtuoso quote in the Argentine on-line newspaper *Clarín*:

*“A la hora de decidir –dice–, pesarán más los atributos reales del producto –comisión, rentabilidad, servicio a los afiliados– que los llaveritos o sombreros con logotipo que puedan regalar”, señala.*

As expected, since the context is not literary, the English-style (for lack of a better term) quotation marks are used. But they are used *in combination with dashes* around *dice* [he says] to remove this word from the utterance being quoted. So much for our conclusion above that quotation dashes do not appear in pairs!

Before an awe-struck foreigner can recover from this one-two blow, *a second set of dashes* is used around *commission, profitability and affiliate service*. These dashes indicate a sort of parenthetical phrase *within* the quote, rather than toggling out of the quote and then toggling back in.

Such virtuosity puts English quotation marks safely in the shade. The only trick that conventional quotation marks can play in English looks feeble by comparison. It is this: when several consecutive paragraphs are quoted, quotes are placed only at the beginning of each paragraph. Closing quotation marks appear only after the *last* paragraph of the quote.

The reasoning seems to be that quotes only rarely extend to several paragraphs and a reader’s attention span is short, so quotes should be repeated at the beginning of each paragraph as a reminder.

*Don’t quote me; that’s what you heard, not what I said.*

—Lawrence Frank

*Reprinted from the  
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with the author’s permission*

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## Meet me in St. Louis, Louis...

*by Ann G. Macfarlane, ATA Conference Organizer*

Fans of Judy Garland will recognize this old song, which 95 years after it was written still has a ring to gladden the heart. “Meet me in St. Louis, Louis” was the signature tune for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, a splendid exposition that put the city on the map and symbolized the hopes for progress of the new century.

The 40th Annual Conference of the American Translators Association, to be held November 3-6, 1999 in St. Louis, has not been planned on so grand a scale. It promises many pleasures nevertheless. NCATA members are all warmly invited to join colleagues for educational sessions, networking, social get-togethers with those working in your language or specialty, and a varied menu of tourist attractions.

Our conference will be held at the Regal Riverfront Hotel, just minutes from the waterfront and the famous St. Louis Arch. The hotel has ample meeting space and, equally important, a very attractive room rate (\$118 single or double).

Proposals for conference presentations received to date promise a variety of valuable sessions, covering the waterfront for beginners and offering new insights for the more experienced. The various ATA Divisions are planning language-specific sessions and anticipating many opportunities to socialize.

We will have the annual Networking Session on Thursday and the Job Exchange throughout the conference, both occasions to get to know your colleagues and establish valuable personal links. And of course, a full hall of exhibitors will try to tempt you with dictionaries, software, and other tools of the trade.

As Conference Organizer I think the elements are falling into shape for a professionally valuable, interesting, and lively conference. I do hope many NCATA members will make the trek to Missouri and, even if your name isn’t Louis, “meet us in St. Louis!”

## NCATA Corporate Member Profile

# Translingua, Inc. of Columbia/Maryland

*Profile by: Susanne Martikke*



In 1984, when the translation industry was still more or less dominated by a few big agencies, Mary O'Neill and her husband Klaus Schopmeier decided to turn part of their tiny apartment into a translation agency. "We were born the year the Macintosh was born," says Mary O'Neill recalling the inception of Translingua, Inc., sitting in the sun outside of her company's spacious office suite. Klaus's interest in computers and DTP and Mary's background in college-level language instruction made them a perfect team to venture into the budding translation services market, and the Macintosh "put multilingual computing and DTP into the reach of small companies." From a two-person team that received prospective clients in their living room and initially specialized in German translations, Translingua evolved through "slow but steady growth" into what it is today: a company specializing in multilingual projects with a staff of 17 people.

From the very beginning the objective was to be more than mere "envelope switchers." In order to deliver publication-level work and excellent customer service, Translingua employs in-house editors for Italian, French, Spanish and German—up to now the most frequently requested languages. Recently, the emphasis has shifted slightly towards Japanese and the Eastern European languages.

At this point, there is only one full-time project manager, so most projects are managed by the editors. And although Mary O'Neill would like to hire a few "dedicated individuals" solely as project managers, the idea will remain the same: having employees at all levels of the process, from source text to end

product, who have first-hand experience with languages. This attitude does not only result in a quality product—direct customer contact increases the commitment to quality in Mary O'Neill's experience—but is also reflected in the relationship the company maintains with its contractors.

O'Neill considers clear communication to be at the heart of a good business relationship. In a process with as many steps as turning a source text into a multilingual product ready for the press, communication is even more important. For Kevin Ward, Translingua's contractor coordinator, communication skills also rank very high on the list of qualities a good translator should have. Out of 1,600 translators listed in the database, only approximately 50 belong to the circle of people who are used more than 20 times in a year. "You don't want to have to reinvent the wheel all the time," says Ward. But after winning the trust of Translingua's editors by consistently providing a quality translation on time, the contractor, too, can count on a "certain amount of loyalty."

Tere Rogers, the editor for Spanish, wants translators to be aware of their own limitations and be honest. "It is no use if a translator accepts a big job and then tells me one day before the deadline that he can't do it after all," says Rogers. Translingua specializes in technical material, such as technical documentation, food packaging and biomedical labeling, so that translators are in turn highly specialized in the technical and medical fields. But of course, nobody is perfect and communicating problems involving terminology is encouraged by Rogers and the other editors. Mary O'Neill's

ideal image of a project manager is somebody who "doesn't only shuffle paper, but who knows the challenges of the project and answers questions from translators."

Following this approach with its emphasis on valuing the skills of every individual contributor to the overall process, while closely honoring individual client specifications and offering complete layout and pre-press services, has enabled Translingua to maintain long-term customer relationships with clients such as Hershey, Becton Dickinson and Black & Decker. For the future, there are plans to extend the focus more to software localization and website translation, as well as to further strengthen and perfect the utilization of translation tools.

As the 21st century approaches, in Mary O'Neill's opinion, translators should no longer hesitate to perceive themselves as business people who provide indispensable services to global communication and deserve to be paid fairly. "There's no earthly reason why translators should be paid less than accountants." But at the same time that requires translators to do their part in the business relationship, namely to keep up with terminology and technology developments and "become part of the profession" by supporting the activities of the ATA and local chapters. ✍

*Susanne Martikke is currently working as a German editor and freelance translator. She graduated from the University of Frankfurt with an M.A. in American Studies in 1995 and worked as a journalist and editor. After frequent stays in the US for travel and study, she moved to the Washington area in January 1998.*

## Announcing a premier ATA conference event!

Join Dee Dee Myers, former White House Press Secretary, political commentator on *Equal Time* on CNBC and editor at *Vanity Fair* magazine who will appear with an activist panel of translators from the U.S. and Europe to discuss the public image of translators and translation at the ATA national conference in St. Louis

**Title:** "Translators and the Media: A Public Forum to Consider the Image of Translation and Translators in the Popular Media"

**Date:** Friday evening, November 5th from 5:15 to 6:45 PM at the 40th Annual Conference of the American Translators Association at the Regal Riverfront Hotel, St. Louis. This event will be a conference-wide session in the Main Ballroom. There will be no other conference events or sessions scheduled during this time period.

**Content:** This evening showcase event will feature an activist panel of translators, media and public relations experts to review and assess the current public image of translators and interpreters and explore strategies for promoting translators' and interpreters' image with clients and elevating their visibility in the press and media.

### Panel Members:

Dee Dee Myers, former White House Press Secretary, political commentator on *Equal Time* on CNBC and currently political editor at *Vanity Fair* magazine;  
Kevin Hendzel, translator and author, COO, ASET International Services Corp.;  
Chris Durban, MITI, translator and author (*Onionskin, ITI Bulletin*, London);  
Janet Fraser, Senior Lecturer in Translation, University of Westminster, and  
Manouche Ragsdale, chair, ATA Public Relations Committee

This session will be heavily promoted in local media in St. Louis and nationally through ATA publications and regional associations. Possible national exposure through C-SPAN or PBS affiliate coverage, currently in development.

**Sponsors:** ASET International Services Corp., Rencontres Traduction Financière, Paris, and the American Translators Association.

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## Kafkaesque translation

In Philip Roth's novel *The Professor of Desire*, (1977) the protagonist travels to Prague, where he meets a Czech professor who was forced to retire after the Soviet occupation. During a discussion of Kafka, the professor states:

"I translate *Moby Dick* into Czech. Of course, a translation already happens to exist, a very fine one indeed. There is absolutely no need for another....

"Now, as you might imagine, this ambitious project, when completed, will be utterly useless for two reasons. First, there is no need for another translation, particularly one likely to be inferior to the distinguished translation we already have; and second, no translation of mine can be published in this country. In this way, you see, I am able to undertake what I would not otherwise have dared to do, without having to bother myself any longer worrying whether it is sensible or not. Indeed, some nights when I am working late, the futility of what I am doing would appear to be my deepest source of satisfaction."

Contributed by Frank Dietz  
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## Help Us in St. Louis

Will you be attending the American Translators Association Annual Conference in St. Louis this year? If so, consider volunteering an hour to help staff NCATA's table and talk to colleagues and prospective members about our chapter. Contact Chapter Vice President Sangeeta Prasad at (703) 369-2068 or [SSPrasad@aol.com](mailto:SSPrasad@aol.com).

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# Calendar

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
October 18, 1999	6:30-8 p.m.	NCATA Meeting for German Translators	Goethe-Institut, 814 7th St., NW, Washington, DC Contact Scott Brennan at <a href="mailto:sbrennan@csi.com">sbrennan@csi.com</a>
November 3-6, 1999		40th Annual ATA Conference	St. Louis, Missouri Contact ATA at 703-683-6100
December 12, 1999	12 noon	NCATA Annual Meeting and Holiday Party	Old Ebbitt Grill, Washington, DC Contact John Vázquez at 202-487-7878

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