



South African Translators' Institute

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SATI Prizes for Outstanding Translation and Dictionaries: Judges' comments on the winners

Agaat

The quality of the translation

The quality as well as the magnitude of the ST renders judging it a momentous task. It is an extremely intricate text on various levels. Although Heyns did work closely with the author, he has still created an incredible work of art in translating almost 700 pages consisting of different styles, registers, genres and narratives, nomenclature, streams of consciousness, etc. An inordinate amount of research must have gone into the recreation of Afrikaans children's rhymes, songs, hymns, poems, fiction, farming manuals and implements, works on embroidery, and so on. The translator has both retained and created literature. He has succeeded in capturing the atmosphere, the culture, the very intricate emotions in a completely plausible way without losing the flavour of the original.

The extent to which the translator/work succeeds in transcending linguistic and cultural barriers?

This is a remake of the ultimate *plaasroman* into English and it breaks all linguistic and cultural barriers between the two groups locally, but it also transcends international barriers. It really puts Afrikaans literature and Van Niekerk on the map. Heyns's intuitive renditions of Afrikaans cultural specificities retain the sound and rhythm of the original, and the glossary of Afrikaans words retained in the text will assist the reader in accessing their meaning and significance.

The extent to which the nominated work is able to stand as a text in its own right

The translation is eminently readable in English and can definitely stand as a work on its own because of Heyns's very creative translation. Proof of this is the fact that a prize for fiction was awarded to the translation and that it was short-listed for another fiction prize. It is undoubtedly on a par with the ST.

The significance of the work to the target language community

The translation opens the genre of the Afrikaans *plaasroman* to the target community, both nationally and internationally. It covers five decades of South African history from a white and coloured Afrikaans perspective. It is not only about apartheid, but also exposes the multi-layered relationship between farm owners and their labourers, opening up a largely unknown world to international readers in particular. Equally important is the fact that this novel is told by female narrators and reflects how they dealt with the situation in South Africa. This is highlighted by the title of the translation published in Britain, namely *The Way of the Women*. Moreover, the mere fact that it is a novel of high standing renders it significant to the target community.

Reception by the target community and contribution to promoting discourse on translation

The prizes, reviews and discussions all prove a very enthusiastic reception. The translation has already stimulated public discourse at certain festivals, as well as reviews in the press.

Such a monumental translation is bound to offer numerous opportunities for students of Translation Studies.

M Nelson

Charlize – Life's one helluva ride

The standard of all the entries in the non-fiction category was consistently high and the translators acquitted themselves very well. The panel studied each of the nominations in this category thoroughly and, although the diverse themes and language combinations involved in the translations made the task difficult, the translation by Elsa Silke of Chris Karsten's biography of Charlize Theron – *Life's one helluva ride* – emerged as the winner.

The original Afrikaans is written in straight-forward journalistic idiom, which on the one hand makes the book relatively easy to translate. The transfer from Afrikaans to English does not involve major problems, especially since the two cultures overlap to a large extent in South Africa. Nonetheless, there are still expressions that are not easy to transfer idiomatically between the two languages. The translator did an excellent job in this regard and the end product reads easily and flows well.

Elsa Silke has created a text that could most certainly be considered as a text in its own right. Although the source text, the Afrikaans, is followed fairly closely, it is done in a way that never makes one want to refer the original.

The strength of this translation lies in the consistency of the decisions made by Elsa Silke and in her meticulous crafting of a text that respects the unique features of English and Afrikaans. She shows her command as a translator from the first words of the biography, transforming the close connection between the compelling story and its Afrikaans readers into an equally compelling story written for an international audience.

The following extract from the report of one of the judges sums up the reports of all the panel members:

To assess the quality and the success of the nominated translations is problematic. Although this category is labelled as 'Non-fiction', the individual entries are certainly of different types, and that complicates any assessment.

The two biographies, i.e. *Trevor Manuel – 'n lewensverhaal* and *Charlize – Life's one helluva ride*, can certainly be compared and compete with one another, although the competing entries are in Afrikaans and English respectively. The work by the Bakkes brothers can also be compared. Although C. Johan Bakkes in *To hell and gone* favours an autobiographical approach with an I-narrator, his brother Christiaan does not in *In Bushveld and Desert – A Game Ranger's Life*, and at times even creates a character that represents him. These relatively short stories, reminiscent of anecdotes, are based on reality, but whether they can be labelled as 'non-fiction' in their totality is debatable. The work by Dana Snyman, *On the backroads*, is equally problematic from this point of view. There are certainly sections of his work that could be regarded as fiction, although one accepts that he in reality met with all the characters he so vividly describes. The other problem his original Afrikaans work displays so well is the many references, quotations and short poetic sections pertaining to the unusual characters he met along his many journeys. When these are translated into English, they come across in standard English, so that all the quaint and peculiar features of the Afrikaans in the original are lost. The translator battled tremendously with this aspect, often leaving out seemingly 'untranslatable' sections. One may rightfully ask: should Snyman's work be translated? The Xhosa work is unusual in that the translator uses his first language in the translation, having created an English text first. This might even represent a category on its own. Although it is autobiographical, it really focuses on one specific dramatic event in the narrator's life only, and cannot be compared in an (auto)biographical context with the works on Trevor Manuel and Charlize Theron.

None of the translations is poor, although the translators at times did not always choose the best options. One should also bear in mind the length of the works: can one sensibly compare works that vary in length from 126 pages (the shortest) to 597 pages (the longest)?

In five entries the language combinations were English and Afrikaans, and in one, English and Xhosa. The possible cultural barriers are fairly easily dealt with moving between English and Afrikaans, and one might even say that such barriers do not exist in the biographies. In the works with an element of fiction the challenges are greater, and in Snyman's work far more challenging than in the others. In the Xhosa entry such challenges would generally be considered as more daunting, but having written the work in English first, the translator, being Xhosa-speaking, did not have many difficulties. One should also note that all the main events and therefore the bulk of the book take place in an urban context that could be considered as cosmopolitan and not really culture-specific.

W Liebenberg

Willemien en die geel kat

South African translators of children's books have never received the acknowledgement and credit that they deserve. Years ago the South African Institute of Library and Information Science, as part of their CP Hoogenhout Award for Afrikaans children's books, biannually also compiled a list of honourable translations into Afrikaans. However, with the dissolution of the Institute in 1996, this token acknowledgement also disappeared. The important work being done was to a large extent invisible until SATI decided to acknowledge it this year.

It is strange that it took so long for our children's book translators to be honoured in this way. After all, everybody will surely agree that children's horizons should be broadened, that they should always be encouraged to look further than their immediate and local surroundings. Children's book translators play an important role in opening windows to a wider world and opening the minds of children. SATI is therefore commended for instituting this category for translation of children's books.

The process of translating for children, like all translating, poses a complex challenge wherein the translator tries to retain the original sense and meaning of a story in another language. The important task of the translator is to try and create a work in such a way that it reads as though the author had written it for the "new" intended audience. In the case of children's books there are certain obstacles that are not at play in the case of translations for adults, amongst others the fact that children are not yet linguistically competent, that their vocabulary is not yet fully developed and that there are certain taboos with regard to children that cannot be broken in certain communities. However, translators of children's books are usually also "allowed" more freedom to change, add to or leave out from the original text – of course only if the changing or adapting makes the text more applicable to or accessible for the reader in the target language.

In the case of picture books – and most of the books submitted in this category this year were picture books – the translator has to deal with additional issues that a translator of books for adults does not have to cope with. With such an iconotext, formed by words and illustrations, the translator has to pay specific attention to the verbal and the visual, and the relationship between the two should be interpreted and expressed. The new text should not only reflect the original text but also the illustrations. The illustrations are an integral part of the translation. They can also help the translator in giving clues as to how to express the time and place, what the characters look like, their relationships, etc.

Four books were submitted for this first award for children's book translations – three of them translations from Afrikaans to English and one from English to Afrikaans. The winner of the first prize for the translation of children's books is Jaco Jacobs for his translation, *Willemien en die geel kat*, of *Ottoline and the yellow cat* by Chris Riddell.

The judges were impressed with the manner in which Jacobs succeeded in remaining true to the very original source text and ensuring that the original author's "voice" was retained while at the same time leaving his own mark on the text – in particular in his dry style of writing and humour. However, he does this very subtly. Since he is himself a writer of children's books, there is a risk of his own voice becoming too distinct. This does not happen. His translation is extremely creative but it is Riddell's voice the reader hears – in modern, idiomatic Afrikaans.

Jacobs takes his target audience into consideration as far as the text is concerned, but just as important as the text is that the original style and tone of the book are also retained. Jacob's Afrikaans text matches the illustrations perfectly, which is important because the illustrations play an extremely important role in this book. It is often said that there are very good books for toddlers and teenagers in Afrikaans but that there is a dearth of good reading material with more to it than the average junk that is written for the group of readers between these two, the children who are starting to read independently (roughly the primary school child). Jacob's Afrikaans translation of Riddell's book is therefore an important addition to the reading material available to the young Afrikaans reader.

TB van der Walt

Understanding Concepts in Mathematics and Science: A multilingual learning and teaching resource book in English, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Afrikaans

While the Afrikaans is at face value the most successful of the three translations in terms of succinctness, this is largely attributable to a relatively highly developed target language that, in this case, is easily paralleled with the source text. Furthermore, an Afrikaans translation of this nature would be backed by a readily available pool of translation tools (dictionaries, lexicons, subject textbooks, etc.), making the work less demanding. It could be argued that, while excellent in itself, re-rendering in Afrikaans posed no significant challenge in execution and would by itself not characterise the end product as particularly 'outstanding' in this context – which is the central focus of the SATI Prizes.

The isiXhosa and isiZulu versions on the other hand were extremely demanding in that the translator(s) had to play a complex, multifaceted role of translator, terminologist, subject expert, etc. armed with virtually nothing beyond a grounded understanding of the source and target languages and the subject matter under discussion. Of necessity, the creative interlingual conversion in such uncharted territory required much dexterity, even though during the juggling of the many balls some inevitably fell somewhat off the mark in terms of accuracy and/or consistency.

Given the scarcity of (and, by inference, a huge demand for) technical literature in the South African indigenous languages, this seminal work is deemed to have the potential to change the South African educational landscape forever and to provide a powerful incentive for many more similar endeavours.

While at a purely linguistic level the publication has scope for significant refinement with regard to the indigenous target languages involved (which the next edition can easily take care of), the adjudication panel is of the opinion that its daring and pioneering nature (in the absence of more refined rival entries) qualifies it as deserving of an award.

Commenting on the specific factors considered in the assessment:

Quality of the translation

The Afrikaans is excellent while the isiXhosa and the isiZulu, despite commendable neologisms, require some honing and streamlining to attain the level of accuracy and consistency that befits a scientific text.

The extent to which the translator/work transcends linguistic and cultural barriers

In the main, word choice and/or creation of terminology are above 'good' (thus excellent). Nonetheless, as technical material, the isiXhosa and isiZulu texts could have employed

transliteration a little more liberally to avoid or minimise the gap in clarity of meaning that is often created by a puristic endeavour to confine the naming of scientific concepts to natural everyday vocabulary.

The extent to which the nominated work is able to stand as a text in its own right

Where 'text' refers to the translated portions of the nominated work, Afrikaans experiences no visible obstacle in accurately paralleling the source language in all aspects. As traditional outsiders to the domain of technical communication, the isiXhosa and isiZulu counterparts would need a significant operational definition of the concepts involved before the respective texts could be proclaimed as adequate stand-alones.

The significance of the work to the target language community

In terms of available alternatives, this work is deemed to be of great benefit to all target language communities but significantly more so to the affected indigenous segment of South African society. Given the magnitude of the specific segments (isiXhosa and isiZulu), which in terms of numbers are a very large majority in the country, and the deficiency of such texts in these languages, one can deduce that works of this calibre should have a major significance in laying a foundation for effective mother-tongue educational instruction for all. This would visibly enhance the current official status of the historically 'unofficial' national languages.

Promotion of discourse on translation

Beyond the classroom, for which it is primarily designed, this kind of work should also be of profound value to other stakeholders. For scholars and students of Translation Studies, the novel publication should help point the direction for the exploration of the whole question of the standardisation of scientific terminology in all affected languages as well as in defining strategies to be used for such standardisation.

M Khulu

Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary: Northern Sotho and English

All four of the dictionaries were worthy nominations for this competition. It is interesting that three of the four are aimed at the school market, that one is a specialist dictionary, but that there were no general bilingual dictionaries.

The quality of the dictionaries was satisfactory to good throughout. The specialist dictionary (*Multilingual Modern Political Dictionary*) is not in the same league as the three dictionaries from Oxford University Press as far as appearance, layout and structure are concerned, but this dictionary has as an important benefit the fact that it is a multilingual dictionary that brings together the terminology of the specialist area in question in various languages. An innovation is also the series of eight dictionaries (*Oxford First Bilingual*) that present a very limited basic vocabulary in the various languages but increase the transfer of lexicographical information through the extensive use of colour illustrations. Oxford's English/Afrikaans bilingual school dictionary also acquits itself well.

The committee was unanimous in recommending the *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary: Northern Sotho and English* as the prize-winner.

As a school dictionary, the *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary: Northern Sotho and English* (ONSE) had to comply with specific typological criteria. This means that it is essential that the target user is clearly identified and the lexicographical functions indicated, to ensure that the structure and content of the dictionary are in line with them. This is the case with this dictionary. The title page already indicates that the dictionary is aimed at learners of both English and Northern Sotho. This is a broad user group, but the functions that are formulated for the dictionary make it clear that this is a polyfunctional dictionary, with text reception and text production as communicative functions. The outer texts included in the back matter section in particular also contribute to the achievement of the cognitive function. In the front

matter section the table of contents gives a good indication of what is included in this dictionary as a carrier of text types and that it deals with far more than simply an alphabetical listing. The large numbers of outer texts in both the front and back matter sections bring to the attention of the users of this dictionary the fact that the value of a dictionary as a receptacle of knowledge is not limited to what is given in the central list. The front matter section also contains a clear explanation of how the dictionary should be used and the schematic presentation of a number of dictionary articles with the different article slots and data types marked on them contribute to the easy access that target users of the ONSE have to the data on offer.

The choice of the macrostructure items for this dictionary was not made randomly, but on the basis of usage frequency resulting from an analysis of a representative corpus. This makes the choice of lemmas relevant for the user group in question. The choice of lemmatisation in the section with Northern Sotho as source language also reflects a user-friendly approach in that a word rather than a root-based method is used. In this way the lexicographers rightly prove that the dictionary is in the first instance a practical tool and not a linguistic textbook.

The microstructure of the dictionary leaves room for the types of data that the target users of a school dictionary typically need. Orthographic, pronunciation, grammatical and semantic data play a significant role in this regard. Thanks to an integrated microstructure, illustrative sentences are immediately linked to specific distinct meanings of lemmas. This increases the ease with which information can be extracted from the data on offer.

The layout of the dictionary, in terms of its framework structure but also its article structure, is highly professional but at the same time also functional. This contributes to the success of the book.

The *Oxford Bilingual School Dictionary: Northern Sotho and English* enriches the South African school dictionary collection – not only quantitatively, but also and in particular qualitatively.

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