



Translation under the spotlight in Malaysia

I was honoured as FIT president to be invited to attend the 12th International Conference on Translation in Malaysia as a guest speaker. This conference is held every two years and this year took place on the island of Penang between 18 and 20 August 2009. The theme of the conference, which this year was hosted by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia), with the Malaysian Translators Association, the Malaysian National Institute of Translation and the Language and Literature Agency as co-organizers and under the patronage of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education, was 'The Sustainability of the Translation Field'.



The Malaysian Translators Association (MTA) is a new FIT member, having been ratified as such at last year's statutory congress in Shanghai. MTA has around 1 400 members and works closely with the Malaysian authorities in providing for the country's translation needs.

The conference was attended by around 200 participants from 24 countries, although the majority were from the Asian region. Just over 100 papers were presented by 94 speakers. Several internationally recognised scholars had been invited to present plenary papers, which were preceded by position papers by local experts. Twenty-two parallel sessions were held, with between three and five papers presented in each.

Position papers

The first position paper was given by the chief executive officer of the Malaysian National Institute of Translation (ITNM), **Mohd Khair Ngadiron**. The ITNM is a government-owned company that focuses on the management of translation, interpreting and the publication of translated books in the country. He outlined the history of the institute, the work that they do and their hopes for the future. One of their aims is to stimulate the translation industry in Malaysia and they do this by undertaking the translation and publishing of a certain number of titles each year. Their target for 2009 is publication of 144 titles; this increases to 156 in 2010, 168 in 2011, 192 in 2012, 240 in 2013 and 300 in 2014. They work closely with their translators and try to assist in developing the profession in Malaysia by offering regular workshops and other events. It is their belief that knowledge and culture are transferred by translation and for this reason they translate Malaysian works into foreign languages as well as foreign works into Malay.

The keynote address at the opening ceremony was given by the Vice-Chancellor of the Universiti Sains Malaysia, **Prof. Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak**. His topic was 'The Sustainability of Translation: Policy and Principles of USM' and he spoke very eloquently about the fact that knowledge has over thousands of years been spread through the translation of books by current dominant scholars. In the past this could be done freely and so translations of Arabic scholarly work brought Europe out of the Dark Ages, for example. Today, owing to copyright issues, it is far more difficult to make knowledge readily available to all through translation, and to bridge the divide between the information-rich and the information-poor. The Universiti Sains Malaysia is developing a new translation centre which will work on determining the best ways to transfer knowledge.



Prof. Emeritus **Abdullah Hassan**, president of the Malaysian Translators Association, spoke in his position paper about the Malaysian bilingual education policy. Since 2003 there has been a policy of teaching maths and science in English at school level, with other subjects being taught in Malay. It is a controversial policy and there is a strong feeling that it has not been successful, as neither teachers nor students are properly equipped for this. It has also led to a fall in the number of academic texts translated into Malay. Prof. Abdullah Hassan felt that it would be advantageous to return to instruction in Malay and pledged the MTA's support in producing the relevant translations to achieve this.

The final position paper, by **Dato' Termuzi Abdul Aziz**, chief director of the Malaysian Language and Literature Agency (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka – DBP), dealt with the importance of translations and books in the transfer of knowledge and the work of the DBP. The Institute aims to translate works by all Malaysia's national laureates in order to expose the world to Malay writing, which has a rich history – there are even famous Malay texts that predate *The Canterbury Tales*. Similarly, it also translates world literature – from a range of languages, not only English – into

Malay in order to expose its citizens to this cultural heritage. This all helps to build up a literary tradition in the country and is used in the promotion of a culture of reading.

Plenary papers

I spoke in one of the plenary sessions about the system of accreditation in South Africa and the challenges that it faces. Other plenary speakers were:

- **Prof. Yves Gambier** (University of Turku, Finland), who gave an overview of the field of audio-visual translation, mentioning various new developments
- **Dr Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady** (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, Malaysia), who considered the importance of translating mainstream Islamic intellectual discourse into local languages to ensure that non-mainstream ideas – which are available in the local languages – are not taken as the mainstream position by the man in the street
- **Prof. Anthony Pym** (University of Rovira i Virgili, Spain), who veered away from his paper printed in the proceedings and talked instead about the usefulness of Google's new translation toolkit and its value to and effect on the profession
- **Ainon Mohammed** (PTS Publications and Distribution, Malaysia), who talked about trends in the marketing of translated books and made the point that sales of English books in Malaysia have been flat over the past seven years while Chinese and Malay titles are selling at a rate higher than the economic growth rate
- **Monique-Zaini Lajoubert** (National Centre for Scientific Research, France), who talked about the challenges she had faced in translating a Malay novel for a French audience

Working papers

The working papers presented in the parallel sessions covered a very wide range of themes and subjects. Some were presented in Malay and some in English. The themes presented were as follows:

- Translation and Interpreting Theories
- Machine Translation
- Translation, Localisation and Sociolinguistics
- Translation and Media
- Translator Training and Translation Career
- Translation for Special People
- Interpreting and Internationalisation
- Translation in Publishing
- Arabic Translation
- Translation of Specific Texts and Official Documents
- Glossaries and Dictionaries
- Translation of Literature
- General
- Cultural Elements in Translation
- Translation and its Sustainability (Service and Technology)
- Translation and Ideology
- Translation in Business
- Translation and Education
- Translation in Linguistics
- Translation and Popular Culture



Sounding the gong to signify the opening of the conference

The aims of the 12th International Conference on Translation included encouraging the exchange of ideas and experience in the field of translation, stimulating intellectual and professional discourse and exploring techniques, issues, perspectives, practices, research and accreditation in the field of translation. The wealth of information made available in the conference presentations undoubtedly achieved these aims. Delegates were presented with a set of proceedings at the start of the conference, which means they will be able to appreciate even the presentations they were unable to attend!

I found it most interesting to meet translators and interpreters from Asia in particular, as well as other areas, and become aware of trends and concerns in that part of the world. I thank the organisers of the conference and the Malaysian Translators' Association for inviting me to participate and exposing the International Federation of Translators in this way.