

## Teacher's Report (WS 2011-12)

In the previous three semesters, the students in my translation class already had some translation experience. This semester, most of the group had little translation experience and, for a couple of students, it was their first serious piece of translating. A Vermeer text as your first translation job is, of course, rather daunting. I am pleased to report that no one ran away screaming!

As a teacher, I set the same tasks for all those participating in the Vermeer Project, but I adjust the class and working conditions to the level of the group. As I knew I had a more inexperienced group, we spent far longer on the initial preparatory stages. The students had longer to read through the parallel texts than the groups from previous semesters and they began by producing a summary of the entire text before I let them begin with the translation work. This helped them to gain an overview of Vermeer's complex arguments in this semester's text ("Erst die Unmöglichkeit des Übersetzens macht das Übersetzen möglich", in Renn, Joachim + Straub, Jürgen + Shimada, Shingo (eds): *Übersetzung als Medium des Kulturverstehens und sozialer Integration*; Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus (2002), 125-143). It turned out to be a very valuable exercise, as some students did not have a clear idea of how to produce a summary. As *précis*-writing is an essential skill for translators and technical writers, I spent the time needed on this task with the group.

As there were three non-native English speakers in the group, I split the students into groups of two and three for the summary and translation work. All groups translated the introduction to Vermeer's text and then we kept the "best" introduction, i.e. the one which set the best tone and style for the rest of the text. One group captured Vermeer's somewhat formal and slightly literary style in this text very well and their introduction served as a good model with regard to style for all the groups when it came to translating the rest of the text. Each group was then responsible for a different section of text, including researching the terminology for its particular section.

We had a chief terminologist who coordinated the research of each group by giving each group feedback on their work and making suggestions for further research (both of which I also did, but to a lesser extent because the chief terminologist did such a good job). Due to a lack of experience, some students found it hard to distinguish between terminological issues at text level and translation issues which needed to be sorted out at sentence level. I think, however, that everyone had a clearer idea of what types of terms belong in a glossary after their terminological research for this text.

At the end of the semester, I came to the conclusion that the main challenge for a relatively inexperienced group is the reception stage. As Vermeer often stresses in his works, the translator first reads and receives a text, and only then can he begin with his translation. Some students needed to have spent far longer making sure they understood the text before beginning with their translation and needed to have asked more questions. In such a theoretical and philosophical text, it is essential to have grasped the author's ideas so that the translation is clear, coherent, consistent and "flows".

Although it was probably perceived as a painful process by some, I was pleased with the progress made by the members of the group. Not only did they learn a great deal about the translation process, they also learned a great deal about effective teamwork and clear communication. As I stressed many times to my students, as a teacher I was less interested in the end product (although it was not irrelevant!) and more interested in how students went about producing the best text they could for their level of experience.

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