



THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

November/December 2004

A Publication of The New York Circle of Translators

Au revoir!



Guylaine Laperrière
2004 NYCT President

Dear colleagues,

I would like to start this farewell letter by wishing each one of you a wonderful holiday and a prosperous and happy New Year. As we traditionally say in my native Québec, "Santé! Bonheur!

Prosperité!" — "Health! Happiness! Wealth!" I wish all of these blessings for all of you in the coming year.

It has been a privilege (and a challenge) to serve as president for the year. I consider myself extremely lucky to have met such wonderful colleagues and inspiring translators. I can't thank the NYCT board enough for working so hard all year long to offer great workshops and to bring such talented speakers to our monthly meetings.

I would also like to thank our speakers, who gave generously of their time and shared of their knowledge with our members throughout the year. Susanna Greiss not only gave an inspiring presentation about how to survive as a translator but also conducted a workshop with Rosa Codina about how to avoid common mistakes in the E↔S language pairs when taking the ATA certification exam.

Susanna, along with George Fletcher, also wrote a *Beginning Translator's Survival Kit*, and all proceeds from the sales of the book go to the NYCT. In March, about 35 members braved a snowstorm to enjoy Jon Ritzdorf's presentation on CAT tools and localization. In April, David Prottas shared with our members the results of his own recent study on the life of translators. In May, Steve Kahaner, a member of the board of directors of The Association of Language Companies, presented an update on the creation of quality standards for the translation industry.

May also brought the ATA entertainment industry seminar back to New Jersey, and the NYCT organized the second day of the seminar. Participants had the opportunity to learn from Ed Zad how to prepare a demo tape for voiceovers. In addition, Margarite Heintz Montez gave a presentation on how to translate advertisement and marketing (*continued on next page*)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Translating for the Singer	4
Holiday Party Photos	6
Translating Judeo-Spanish	8
Labyrinths on the Plains	10

material. As for myself, I had the pleasure of offering my own workshop on voiceover techniques.

After the summer break, New Jersey court executive Robert Joe Lee spoke to our members about that state's requirements for court interpreters. The October meeting was devoted to a summary of various workshops offered during the ATA conference in Toronto. Several members, including Milena Savova, Doug Hayes, Gloria Barragán, Marian Greenfield, and Susanna Greiss, shared their experiences with us. Finally, our last meeting gave us the chance to learn about audiovisual media. Our guest, Kevin Lauth, gave a very entertaining presentation supported by a wealth of video clips from different movies.

Finally, let's not forget our summer and holiday par-

ties! Both were extremely successful and well attended, with over 40 members coming to each one. Attendees also shared their "other" talents with fellow members by singing, playing guitar or drums, and telling funny stories. We are certainly looking forward to repeating the success of these parties next year.

This was a one-year term for me, but the rest of the board is staying on for a second year, and the next president will be able to count on the support of a very dynamic team. To find a president, however, we need to have a nominating committee as soon as possible. I would like to ask members to volunteer their time and energy for the next couple of weeks and help us find candidates both for president and for president-elect. Given the somewhat time-consuming nature of this task, a nominating committee composed of three people would be ideal. For those members kind enough to volunteer, please send me an e-mail at your earliest convenience. I encourage members to consult the Web site for a description of each board position's responsibilities.

There is still so much to be done. After numerous setbacks, our 2004-2005 directory should be out very soon, and dues will be adjusted accordingly for next year. There's also room to revamp *The Gotham Translator*, and our database could be made more user-friendly and intuitive. On the administrative front, the Web site could be modified to store letters and forms used by the board.

Finally, I would like to thank Jason Fargo, this year's editor of *The Gotham Translator*, for doing a great job of editing and revising all of our articles. Many thanks also go to Milena Savova, who recently resigned from her position on the continuing education committee, and Teresa Waldes, who stepped down from the certification committee. The board and I truly appreciate

THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

Editor

Jason Fargo
editor@nyctranslators.org

Editorial Board

Trudy Balch
Marian Greenfield
Nancy Wright

Design and Layout

Bahl Graphics
kbahlmann@austin.rr.com

Printing

Mail Boxes, Etc. South Orange NJ
mailboxso@mindspring.com

The Gotham Translator is published six times a year by the New York Circle of Translators, Inc., a chapter of the American Translators Association. The deadline for acceptance of contributions is the first day of the month preceding the month of publication. Articles and other materials should be e-mailed to the Editor at editor@nyctranslators.org. The opinions and views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or the policies of the NYCT or the ATA. All material submitted is subject to editing and becomes the property of the New York Circle of Translators unless accompanied by a copyright statement.

© 2004 by the New York Circle of Translators. All rights reserved. Nothing contained in this issue may be reprinted without explicit prior permission of the editor or, in the case of copyrighted material, the copyright holder.

all your hard work, dedication, and effort. I offer my appreciation as well to Slavica, Antje, and Lisa — your contributions have been priceless!

As for myself, I intend to remain an active participant in the NYCT. In fact, I already have some ideas for a workshop that I'd like to present to the next board. I encourage other members to offer their own ideas for workshops and presentations as well. This is our organization, and it will only be as good as we make it! For me, it has been a great honor to serve as your president for 2004, and I'd like to thank this past year's nominating committee for offering me this wonderful opportunity.

Have a wonderful holiday, and see you all next year!

Sincerely,

Guylaine Laperrière

Do you know someone who'd like to advertise in *The Gotham Translator*?

The newsletter is published six times a year and reaches a circulation of approximately 350-400.

Our ad rates are as follows:

Full page (7.5"x10") \$150
1/2-page (7.5"x4.75") \$80
1/4-page (3.5"x4.75") \$40
1/8-page (3.5"x2.25") \$20

Please note: All prices are for black-and-white, camera-ready copy.

To place an ad, please contact the editor at editor@nyctranslators.org no later than 30 days prior to the desired issue's publication date. Publication dates are Feb. 1, April 1, June 1, Aug. 15, Oct. 1, and Dec. 1.

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The last week in January

Participate in the life of your association—come to the annual business meeting! This meeting will review the NYCT's 2004 financial statement. The new board of directors (pending personnel appointments) will also discuss plans for the upcoming year and answer members' questions. The event will take place during the last week of January—we'll announce the exact date, time, and location soon. Member participation is the key to making this meeting a real success. We look forward to seeing you!

NEW YORK CIRCLE OF TRANSLATORS

(212) 334-3060

2004 Board of Directors

Guylaine Laperrière, *President*

Home: (212)569-5471 Work: (212)998-7028
president@nyctranslators.org

Lisa Barocas Anderson, *Secretary*

Home: (212)567-0732
secretary@nyctranslators.org

Antje Katcher, *Treasurer*

Home/Work: (631)324-0589
treasurer@nyctranslators.org

Slavica Zecevic-Pralica, *Program Director*

Pager/Mobile: (201)218-4784
programdirector@nyctranslators.org

Committee Chairpersons

Teresa Waldes, *ATA Certification*

Work: (212)769-9411
twaldes@ix.netcom.com

Milena Savova, *Continuing Education*

Work: (212)998-7033
milena.savova@nyu.edu

Anne Witt-Greenberg, *Mentoring*

(516) 487-6128
trlegdoc@aol.com



**Keep a song
in your heart...
and a good
translation
in mind.**

■ Translating for the singer

by Nancy E. Wright

'Tis the season...for singing! As the cacophony of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa melodies echoes in our eardrums, those of us who sing can undoubtedly recall good, bad, and amusing experiences of singing in English translation. This brief article highlights just a few examples of the challenges of translating for singers and singing in translation. While I limit my illustrations to English as the target language, the anecdotes and the suggestions are surely universal.

The failure to convey meaning accurately, of course, is an experience shared by both singers and audience. For example, Metropolitan Opera dramatic baritone Don Barnum recalls the laughter during a production of *Tosca*. During the scene in which Tosca is disturbed by the way Mario Cavaradossi is painting a portrait in the chapel, she asks him to repaint the eyes and make them black—that is, to give her "occhi neri." The English supertitle was translated as, "give her black eyes."

Moreover, in supertitles, as in life, timing is everything. Professional tenor and NYU translation certificate student David Ronis recalls entering the stage to an audience laughing at a line he had not yet sung. The supertitle translation had flashed on the screen before he'd had a chance to sing it.

While these incidents are not necessarily desirable, they do evoke a laugh and an amusing memory. Distorted meaning, however, can have the more serious consequence of misleading singers and listeners. Regina Opera lead soprano and St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church soloist Deborah Ann Faw has noted as problematic the English text printed in the G. Schirmer edition, arranged by Johann

Muller and revised and edited by Nicola A. Montani, of W.A. Mozart's well-known and beloved "Ave Verum Corpus" for chorus. When I myself perused the English text, I was at once amused and annoyed. The text did not even approximate an accurate translation, but rather was a paraphrase of the eighteenth century hymn, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," which I have known since childhood! I have provided the series of texts below to illustrate the point:

Ave Verum Corpus

*Ave, Ave verum Corpus natum de Maria Virgine;
Vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine;
Cujus latus perforatum fluxit aqua et sanguine:
Esto nobis praegustatum mortis in examine.*

Following is a very accurate translation by Dr. Robert Ulery of Wake Forest University:

*Hail true Body, born of the Virgin Mary;
Truly afflicted with death, sacrificed on the cross for
humankind,
Whose pierced side flowed with water and blood.
May it be for us a foretaste in the trial of death.*

While it is true that the hymn paraphrase below is congruent with the rhyme and meter of Mozart's composition, unlike the translation above, the former nevertheless departs entirely from the meaning—and therefore, the true spiritual significance—of the Latin text:

*Saviour, source of every blessing,
Tune my heart to grateful, grateful lays;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for ceaseless songs of praise.
Teach me some melodious measure,
Sung by raptur'd saints above;
Fill my soul with sacred pleasure,
While I sing redeeming love.*

Finally, one can compare the paraphrase above with the actual text of the first stanza of "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing", which was written by Robert Robinson in 1758:

*Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.*

A noteworthy contrast is the English translation of Ludwig von Beethoven's setting of the first two stanzas of the poem "Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre," by Christian Furctegott Gellert. Below is the poem in the original German:

*Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre;
Ihr Schall pflanzt seinen Namen fort.
Ihn rühmt der Erdkreis, ihn preisen die Meere;
Vernim, O Mensch, ihr göttlich Wort!
Wer trägt der Himmel unzählbare Sterne?
Wer führt die Sonn aus ihrem Zelt?
Sie kömmt und leuchtet und lacht uns von ferne
Und läuft den Weg gleich als ein Held.*

Following is a translation by NYCT treasurer Antje Katcher, written for the purpose of comprehension, not singing:

*The heavens proclaim the honor of the Eternal [God];
His name travels onward in their echoing sound.
The whole earth proclaims his fame; the seas praise him—
Listen, oh man, to their divine word!
Who holds up the heavens' uncounted stars?
Who leads the sun forth from its tent?
It [the sun] rises and shines and smiles at us from above
and runs a course as befits a hero!*

Finally, note below Charles Haywood's English text, written to be sung:

*The heav'ns are praising His glory and splendor,
Their sounds proclaim His glorious name.
The earth and waters sing praise of His wonder,
Perceive, O man, God's holy word!
Who guards the stars in their journey through Heaven?
Who leads the sun across the sky?
With shining brilliance it smiles from the distance,
And like a hero soars on high, and like a hero soars
on high.*

The accuracy and integrity of meaning are preserved, and the English verse aptly accommodates Beethoven's composition. Moreover, words such as "soars", which are sung at the high end of the range, or tessitura, of the piece, contain vowels that are relatively easy to sing in the upper register of the voice.

This brings me to another critical point about translating for singers. Certain vowel sounds are particularly problematic in the higher register. For example, a sustained sung "ah" is much easier on the voice and ear than the English

short vowel sound "a" as in "at." Therefore, for example, when singing in English the opening chorus of Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, "Come, my daughters, hear my anguish," choirs will often be advised to sing "ahnguish" on the chorus's numerous melismas (passages of several notes sung to one syllable of text). In the case of the *St. Matthew Passion*, the word "anguish" is repeated sufficiently, and the audience typically is familiar enough with the narrative, that the modified word is still intelligible. This is not always the case, however, and when confronted with a vowel that lies awkwardly in a certain part of the voice, the singer is often forced to sacrifice intelligibility to achieve beauty.

As one might expect, Italian composers are particularly sensitive to this.

As Barnum, who is also minister of music at St. Charles Borromeo Roman Catholic Church, explains, "An Italian composer is aware of what vowel (or vowels) certain voices want to sing on a high note, and will try to accommodate that. They have that vowel in their ears when they write the vocal line. Therefore, that sound should be used, if possible, in the translation."

While achieving the combination of accuracy, meter, and "singability" can be formidable for the translator, the rewards are great for all involved. Chair of the Department of English at Western Michigan University and NYCT member Arnie Johnston recalls, "One of the more rewarding experiences I've had was when I attended the New York revue, *Brel: L'Escapade de Musique*—that featured my translations. I knew that some English-speaking Belgian and French visitors were seated nearby in the audience, and when the performers began to sing, I heard gasps of pleasure and delighted laughter from them as they reacted to English lyrics that actually came close to the originals." He further recalls an occasion when a native Parisian and member of the French faculty at Western Michigan University informed him that she had been listening to his *Brel* CD and had actually forgotten that she was listening to English. Johnston remarked, "High praise, I thought."

As the "high praise" that befits this holiday season continues to surround us in song, I hope that this article will inspire a New Year of enhanced dialogue among composers, singers, and translators committed to translations that fulfill the ultimate in the meaning and beauty that are the essence of language and music, as well as the language of music. ■

Holiday Party



NYCT members enjoy a chance to gather and share stories.

Photos



Susanna Griess and George Fletcher present a check to president Guylaine Laperrière. The two authors donated the proceeds of their book, *Beginning Translator's Survival Kit*, to the NYCT.

Ladino Lives! Translating Judeo-Spanish

by Trudy Balch

The crash you just heard was my telephone receiver hitting the floor after the voice on the other end said, "Hello, this is Jim Kingsly from Acme Translation Specialists." (All names but mine have been changed to protect...well, nobody's guilty of anything here, but you get the idea.) "Are you the Trudy Balch who translates from Ladino?"

OK, so maybe I only imagined that I dropped the phone that day. But my shock was no less palpable. Understandably, the traditional language of the Sephardic Jews did not usually interest translation companies, whose bread and butter comes from other types of projects.

"Well," the voice continued, "we saw your name in the New York Circle of Translators directory, and we have some documents that we're told are Ladino, but nobody can read them. The writing looks a little like Arabic. Would you like to take a look? We can send you some scans."

Fifteen minutes later, my computer screen flashed up a series of scanned post-cards written in *solitreo*, the cursive Hebrew script—with graceful curves and lines that do indeed bear

some resemblance to Arabic—in which Ladino was often written since at least the 19th century. All had been sent by members of a large family that once lived in the Balkans to a young relative who had emigrated to the United States, and a descendent had brought the cards to Acme to inquire about having them translated. When I saw the dates on the cards, a shiver went down my spine. They ran from 1926 until mid-1940, just about nine months before the Nazis invaded this particular area. Very few Jews there survived.

By this time, you may be wondering: What is Ladino, and what does any kind of Hebrew script have to do with it, let alone the Balkans? *Vos ekspliko*. ("I'll explain to you.") Ladino (also known as Judeo-Spanish, Judezmo, Spanyol, Spanyolit, and various other names) is the traditional language of the Spanish ("Sephardic," from "Sepharad,"

which is Hebrew for "Spain") Jews who settled in the Ottoman Empire and environs after being expelled from Spain in the late 15th century. They continued to speak Spanish in their adopted land, but over the centuries borrowed words from other languages spoken or used around them, such as Turkish, Greek, French, and Hebrew. Morphological and other changes took place as well, though in a number of ways their Spanish stayed the same while Spanish on the Iberian peninsula changed. In fact, many speakers of modern Spanish say that listening to

someone speak Judeo-Spanish is like bumping into a reincarnation of Miguel de Cervantes. (Close, though definitely not a cigar.)

Though the number of speakers has dropped dramatically in the years since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and since the Holocaust, pockets of Sephardic Jews around the world—particularly in Israel and the United States—still speak *el espanyol nuestro* ("Our Spanish"). Remember, to the Jews of Ottoman Turkey, "Spanish" was a language spoken only by their fellow Jews. Many Sephardic families who left Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans for Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, and other Spanish-speaking countries tell stories of arriving in their new countries and at first thinking everyone was Jewish because they spoke Spanish, even though it sounded a bit different!

Today, even the Internet has gotten into the act. In late 1999, Izmir native Rachel Amado Bortnick (now a resident of Dallas, Texas) and a group of colleagues founded

What is Ladino, and what does any kind of Hebrew script have to do with it, let alone the Balkans?

Ladinokomunita, an all-in-Judeo-Spanish e-mail list that now has more than 500 members worldwide. Some grew up speaking and writing Judeo-Spanish, some grew up speaking modern Spanish and became interested in Judeo-Spanish, and others studied Judeo-Spanish and/or modern Spanish as a foreign language. Many members are Jewish, but a number are not. What we share is our delight in the beauty of this language, a desire to exchange information and vocabulary (yes, Judeo-Spanish has a number of dialects and pronunciation patterns) and a fervent wish to keep it alive.

Why? For those who come from a Sephardic background, it is their personal heritage. For me, descended (as far as I can trace) from Yiddish-speakers in Ukraine, Poland, Belarus and nearby areas, it brings a different kind of joy. It is a window onto a recognizable yet different and beautiful world. I first learned about the language as a child, and later studied it at Columbia University, where we learned to read and write in Rashi script (a type of printed Hebrew alphabet) and *solitreo*, memorized vocabulary, read pre-20th-century archival materials, and studied Judeo-Spanish grammar. Who knew this course would someday enable us to help others unlock the keys to their past, or even write English subtitles to films with Judeo-Spanish dialogue? Back in the stagflation-plagued 1970s, people just asked why we were studying a dead language that would never get us a job. Our teacher, then a graduate student, went on to join the faculty of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is today a renowned expert.

In prewar Europe, newspapers, pamphlets, novels, translations, and religious literature in Judeo-Spanish abounded. One of the most famous is the *Me'am Loez*, an 18th-century popular commentary on the Bible. But Judeo-Spanish is part of the history of early 20th-century U.S. Jewish communities as well. Cities in the United States with sizeable Sephardic communities had Judeo-Spanish newspapers printed in Rashi script. Some U.S. Sephardic synagogues

kept early records in *solitreo*. I once translated a stack of them and learned—among other things—that one congregation helped pay for members' medical and funeral expenses during the great influenza epidemic of 1918–19.

Today, Judeo-Spanish is almost always written in phonetic transcription. (This explains the frequent appearance of the letter "k"—largely nonexistent in modern Spanish—in Latin-alphabet Judeo-Spanish documents.) Contemporary publications in Judeo-Spanish include the all-Judeo-Spanish *Aki Yerushalayim*, published in Israel, and the U.S.-French *La Lettre Sépharade* and Brussels-based *Los Muestras*, both of which have articles in English, French, and Judeo-Spanish. Kol Yisrael (Israel Radio) has had a Judeo-Spanish broadcast for decades, no doubt originally intended to help Sephardic immigrants feel more at home, and now to help preserve their heritage. New dictionaries and glossaries have become available, in addition to reprints of older works. Sephardic folklorist Matilda Koén-Sarano has published several bilingual

In prewar Europe, newspapers, pamphlets, novels, translations, and religious literature in Judeo-Spanish abounded.

Judeo-Spanish/Hebrew collections of folktales plus two anthologies translated into English. Some modern poets and writers now write in Judeo-Spanish, and in

New York City the "Ladino Players" theater group has presented everything from original works to Molière to Yiddish writer Shalom Aleichem in Judeo-Spanish. Countless people sing music from the rich repertoire of Judeo-Spanish folk music, from "only-in-the-shower" types to Spanish opera star Victoria de los Angeles to Sarajevo-born Flory Jagoda, who composes her own music and Judeo-Spanish lyrics as well. Israel has established a Ladino Authority that funds teacher training and other programs. And, in June 2002, UNESCO sponsored an international conference on Judeo-Spanish that attracted delegates from around the world. ■

© Trudy Balch 2005
Trudy Balch translates from Spanish and Judeo-Spanish into English, specializing in journalism and the arts/humanities, economics and finance, social sciences, and law. Her e-mail address is tbalch@pobox.com.

Labyrinths on the Plains

by Paulo Schiller
translated by Tom Moore

I learned Hungarian at home, in childhood, from my parents who had recently arrived in Brazil. The precariousness of their Portuguese at the time allows me to say that Hungarian was my first language. There are those who affirm that there is no other way of assimilating this unusually structured language, although there are rare exceptions.

Hungarian belongs to the family of Uralo-Altaic languages, also represented in Europe by Finnish and Estonian, to which its resemblance is only in the area of grammatical structure. They share nothing in the way of vocabulary, but they have a remote kinship with some dialects which survive in remote corners of the north of Siberia. Hungarian is an agglutinative language—that is, suffixes look after that which in other languages requires two or more additional words. A singular musicality results from the vocalic harmony that tunes the suffixes to the same sonority which resonates in the vowels of the roots. Further, the accented syllable for every word is always, without exception, the first. Hence the grave, minor-mode music evoked by the writers, and the pentatonic scale which marks the folk music collected by Bartók in the villages of the interminable plains extending to the east of the Danube. The tonic accent on the first syllable is the unmistakable mark which accompanies the Hungarian in every foreign language which he learns—"a Hungarian can lose everything except his accent."

By reason of the scarcity of translators and the lack of interest by publishers for "lesser" languages, the Hungarian author has always worked in the "solitude of the language". In spite of an immense literature and some of the greatest writers of poetry and prose of the twentieth century—among them Imre Kertész, the 2002 Nobel Prize winner—Hungarian literature is little-known in the West, and published often in the form of indirect translations.

My Hungarian is the household language, of everyday life, the language spoken in Hungary at the end of the forties. I learned to read in Portuguese. With the exception of a few short texts, I spent most of my time far from Hungarian literature. I never wrote in Hungarian and had no formal notions of grammar.

In taking on the challenge of translating *O legado de Eszter* by Sándor Márai, I could guess at some of the difficulties that would present themselves, although I did not suspect that the first of these, and perhaps the oddest, would be given me by my dictionaries. At the beginning, I counted on a little Hungarian-Italian dictionary, a survivor from my parents' journey through Italy on their way to Brazil. As quickly as I could, I bought the only Hungarian-English dictionary in the vicinity and

ordered another one that, according to the description, seemed more inclusive. One day, leafing through travel guides in one of those bookstores that seem more like a supermarket, with minutes of wisdom and razor blades for sale at the cash register, my eyes lit on a large volume whose brilliant red and green cover looked at me, saying: *Magyar-Portugál kéziszótár, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1993*. Having renounced the temptation to question the chance encounters which destiny bestows upon us, what is important is that I found myself in front of the third edition of a Hungarian-Portuguese dictionary, published in Hungary, which I had not only never heard of before, but would never have imagined finding in a place like that, where it seemed only logical that it should be lodged on the wrong bookshelf. The letters on the covers, the cataloging information and the preface were all in an indecipherable tongue—the word "Portugal" must have induced an employee to shelve it with the tourism guides for the Iberian peninsula.

From childhood on, I was constantly exposed to the affirmation, both curious and proud, that Hungarian was the only language in which the words were pronounced exactly as they were written. I didn't really understand what that might mean, and never delved further into something I found rather surprising. I reflected that, in Portuguese, as in other languages, words also were pronounced according to their spelling. My answer came by way of my Hungarian dictionaries.

From the very beginning, the dictionaries seemed to be poking fun at me. In looking for additional meanings for the word *csalódás* (disillusionment), I came upon *cövek* (post) and then *cucli* (pacifier). If I looked for other senses for *szemtelen* (insolent), the last word beginning with the letter s was *svung* (rapture). At first, obfuscated by my ignorance, with fleeting and uncharitable thoughts about the poor quality of the dictionary, I would open another, and at times, had the luck to immediately discover a page which displayed a long list of words beginning with cs or sz. Gradually, the mystery was revealed: words beginning with cs (sounding ch), sz (our "s", as in "safe"), zs (sounding like the "z" in "azure"), and ö and ü (as in German) were found in separate sections which followed those of the letters c, s, z, o, and u respectively. The same was true for dz, dzs, ny, ly, ty, and gy (as found in Magyar—they say that in order to know if someone is

Hungarian one need only hear how he enunciates the combination of these two letters). I cannot dare to imagine the graphic representation of *ty* and *gy* in Portuguese. But there are those who say they resemble the manner in which an affected Briton would pronounce the initial syllables in the words "tube" and "Duke".

That was not all as far as snares were concerned. It all happened over again when the letters or pairs did not come at the beginning of a word. Thus *tö* (root) came after *toxin*, and *fotel* (armchair), before *fő* (principal, to boil or head). The Hungarian would say that *sz* is the "letter es" and *cs* the "letter tch". Thus, the Hungarian alphabet has a total of 44 letters, some of them "double" or "triple", of which 14 are vowels.

And so finally, the vanity of the language in which "one says exactly what is written" became clear: in all situations, the simple or compound letters always represented the same sound. Not like the Portuguese letters *s* and *x*, or many others, which represent (as in other languages) different sonorities depending on the position in which they appear. It also took me a while to get used to the fact that the verbs do not appear in what would be the impersonal infinitive, but in what to my ears was the third person singular of the present, a personal infinitive.

In spite of an innate desire on their part to play tricks on me, my increasing mastery over the perversity of my dictionaries made them ever more complete. And, little by little, the difficulties which I had first been anticipating became evident.

Hungarian has a single verbal tense to express the past. Verbs are not conjugated in the future. There is no verb "to have". There are no prepositions. There is no distinction of gender in the article.

In the midst of this deceptive simplicity, the snares and the unexpected are awaiting elsewhere. For example, one sentence can contain all verbal tenses without any restrictions.

In the act of translating, the unique past tense had to be divided up into the various preterites of Portuguese. The solutions chosen depended on the context of the narrative, always with the risk of stumbling, especially in long paragraphs or ambivalent passages. The future is deduced from a compound verb or an adverb. The Hungarian says, "Tomorrow I read the book," or, "Tomorrow I am going to read the book," or even, "Tomorrow read I am going the book".

Roughly speaking, the verbal tenses are divided into indefinite and definite. Thus, "I see a bird" would be indefinite; "I see the bird", definite. Yes, verbal tenses, since what determines the difference is the spelling of the verb "I see" (*látok* or *látom*) — and not the article. The nomenclature of the verbal tenses bears only a distant relationship to that of the languages which are more familiar to us: conjunctive-imperative mood, definite or indefinite, conditional present, definite or not, augmented by recourse to an infinity of suffixes which give them special characteristics.

The absence of prepositions opens the main passageway to the labyrinth. Post-positions, suffixes, preverbs, irregulars, sometimes unforeseeable, since they do not depend on a rule, are multiplied to infinity. To glimpse a fragment, let us take a look at the word *szem* (eye):

<i>szemet</i>	the eye
<i>szemben</i>	in the eye
<i>szembe</i>	in the eye or in front
<i>szemből</i>	of the eye or from the front
<i>szemen</i>	in the eye
<i>szemről</i>	from the eye
<i>szemre</i>	in the eye or toward the eye
<i>szemnél</i>	in the eye
<i>szemtől</i>	of the eye

The choice of variant depends on the vocalic harmony and on the presence of "unstable vowels" when the words are combined. Paulo Rónai, a Brazilian translator of Hungarian descent, says that luckily the natives learn the language without having to think about it.

Let's take a look at some of the possible inflections of the word *asztal* (table):

<i>asztalom</i>	my table
<i>asztalod</i>	your table
<i>asztaluk</i>	their table
<i>asztalunk</i>	our table
<i>asztala</i>	his table

and further:

<i>asztalomban</i>	on my table
<i>asztalaimban</i>	on my tables

Furthermore, different words may be formed by the agglutination of other roots, post-positions, prefixes or suffixes:

<i>főasztal</i>	head table
<i>asztaltárs</i>	dinner guest
<i>asztalkendő</i>	napkin

And there are a few dozen more, bearing the same root, spread through various pages of the dictionary. It has been said in jest that the original language consisted of only a few words which were susceptible to being combined as the inventor saw fit.

Guimarães Rosa evokes this example—one among many—which fascinated him: *legeslegmegengedhetetlenebbekkel* —which means "with the most inadmissible of all". An infinity of words like this, constructed by juxtaposition or agglutination, are not to be found in the dictionaries. They have to be teased out with a little patience and luck. ■

THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR



The New York Circle of Translators (NYCT) is a New York State not-for-profit corporation grouping independent translators and interpreters as well as companies and organizations. It is a chapter of the American Translators Association (ATA) which is, in turn, an affiliate of the International Federation of Translators (FIT).

NYCT members work in a variety of languages and specialties. Our members are committed to the exchange of ideas and mutual support. One of our goals is to educate the general public about the professional nature of interpreting and translating.

NYCT members enjoy the following benefits:

- Free monthly meetings featuring speakers on all aspects of the translation profession
- Networking opportunities at monthly dinners and annual holiday party
- Professional development workshops and seminars
- Subscription to our newsletter, *The Gotham Translator*
- Listings in the NYCT Online Membership Directory and the annual NYCT printed Membership Directory
- Referrals (if you indicate that you accept them, existing members may direct work requests to you or clients may contact you directly)

Visit us at www.nyctranslators.org and join online!

THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

PO Box 4051
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163-4051