

ITI weekend workshop, 20-21 April 2002

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Around 30 ITI members met up at the Milton Keynes campus of De Montfort University for this year's weekend workshop, ably organised by Andrew Kirby, ITI's Commercial Development Officer.

The serious business of the weekend began at 10 o'clock on Saturday morning, with Catherine Greensmith introducing Andrew Kirby and also Glen Wigley, ITI's Membership Officer, to participants who had not previously met them. Glen had volunteered to come along for the morning to lend a hand and meet members. Then Catherine introduced our first speaker, Magdy Abbas, a very experienced police and court translator and interpreter working with English and Arabic, who received a Chief Constable's Commendation for professionalism and dedication for his interpreting work in the Lockerbie case.

Magdy gave us a detailed account of the interpreter's task in interpreting for a suspect, including the briefing by the officer in the case, consultation with a solicitor, and the tape-recorded interview. His talk aroused a great deal of interest and so many questions from the audience that he eventually ran out of time, and the questions and discussion continued over our buffet lunch.

After lunch we were introduced to Alan Wheatley, ITI's new General Secretary, who spoke briefly about his ideas for the future of ITI. Then it was back to work – Andrew had brought along an EU text, the Practice Directions for the Court of Justice's Court of First Instance. He had managed to cover almost all the languages offered by participants, and we divided into groups of various sizes to work on the text, which was an extremely difficult one since inevitably it contained a certain amount of Europeak.

After a short break we reconvened to discuss the problems arising, most of which related to the highly specialised EU and legal terminology involved. Although the text we had is not a legislative act, we felt that the Interinstitutional Agreement on the quality of legal drafting should be applicable here too. Two of its principles are "Community legislative acts shall be drafted clearly, simply and precisely" and "Overly long articles and sentences, unnecessarily convoluted wording and excessive use of abbreviations should be avoided". The consensus among those present was that those drafting the Practice Directions had failed on both counts!

The working part of the day finished at around 5.15 p.m., and at 7.30 most participants met up for a visit to the Caldicote Arms, a lakeside pub in a converted windmill, for an enjoyable bar meal.

Next morning it was back to work, with an extremely interesting presentation by Andrew Figgins, a solicitor with BP Oil Limited. Having originally read for a BA in French and business studies, he was well aware of the problems encountered by translators with legal texts and was a firm believer in the importance of drafting clear texts, using simple language as far as possible. He was also aware that all too often legal texts are far from clear.

It is impossible to do Andrew's presentation justice in this necessarily brief report, but he took us through five specific pitfalls encountered by legal translators, including cutting-edge terminology which may exist in only one or two languages, working with lawyers (!), and unclear source text. He also told us what a lawyer wants from a translator: confidence, reliability, a professional approach, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, confidentiality,

consistency, [a translator who is] accredited or recommended and who contacts the client with queries and to check points, and who has professional indemnity insurance.

After a coffee break, Andrew talked us through a draft supplier contract, drawing attention to problem areas and standard terms and clauses. We were finally forced to bring a fascinating and highly informative session to an end, although Andrew continued to be besieged by questioners over the buffet lunch which brought the weekend workshop to a close.

Thanks are due to Andrew Kirby for his organisation of the event and for his efficient, helpful and friendly presence throughout the weekend.