

Culture Committee – CC-09-02(p1)

Date: 1 May 2002

Time: 9.00am-12.30pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales

WELSH LANGUAGE REVIEW: TRANSLATION

Introduction

The issue of translation was raised at the Committee's first meeting of the review on 2 May 2001. It has cropped up periodically since then, but was the subject of specific Committee discussion on 23 January, when evidence was taken from Dr Roy Thomas (CC-3-02 (p4) and the Association of Welsh Translators (CC-3-02 (p5). More recently Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, in commenting on the Chair's position paper (CC-05-02(p2a), have included an extensive passage on translation. This note summarises these key papers as well as other contributions .

The Evidence

Dr Thomas suggested that no one would dispute that publishing Welsh language materials can:-

- "convey information to some Welsh speakers more effectively than if the information were conveyed in English
- lead to an increasing use of the Welsh language in committees and meetings
- contribute to producing a workforce that is able to work bilingually
- have a positive effect on people's image of the Welsh language".

No one indeed did dispute the need for translation, although some contributors hoped that the demand for it would decrease as bilingualism increased. There were comments too that the Assembly and others saw investment in translation as equivalent to investment in the Welsh language. It was noted however that human resources for translation services are scarce and, at the Committee's first meeting of the review, the Language Board suggested that they were not necessarily being targeted in the right direction.

Dr Thomas, and others supported this view and cited examples of low readership (or any at all) of Welsh language versions of bilingual documents. Technical documents in particular are "often wholly unreadable and unintelligible, mainly because those responsible for translating the documents are unfamiliar with the subject matter, and do not have the opportunity to consult with the authors of the original texts". It was also felt that when Welsh language versions of documents are published separately, especially when they appear some time after the English version, they are often never seen by anyone, let alone read. "No one ever asks for them, and no one seems to know what to do with them".

This was disputed by Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg who argued that there is no strong evidence to support this claim. Even if the argument was true, they felt that there were a variety of reasons why it might be so, thus challenging the quote cited in the Chair's position paper that "there is considerable wastage of valuable human resources in processing translations of all documents".

Despite this, it was suggested that there are dangers in attempting to translate all documents. Given the shortage of translation resources, it was felt that the Welsh Language Act and the total bilingual requirements of the Assembly, could prove to be the kiss of death to the language.

Against this background there were a number of calls for **prioritisation** and better targeting of scarce translation facilities. An argument against this was that it would be impossible to know where to draw the line. Others were quoted as suggesting that any retreat from the principle of full bilingualism, would provide organisations with the excuse that producing Welsh language versions of documents would be too costly and would not be sufficiently used. Dr Thomas felt that neither argument had much force and that whilst knowing where to draw the line is difficult, this is a problem encountered in all policy areas and on a daily basis.

Dr Thomas suggested that a clear set of **guidelines** were needed to which all public bodies would be expected to conform. He suggested that the guidelines should refer to such factors as visibility, the number of expected readers, and, possibly, to differentiate between internal documents and those intended for public consumption.

The Association of Welsh Translators went further and suggested that an **all Wales strategy** for translation was required because of the vital part it has to play in the development of bilingualism. The Association reported that the Language Board had agreed with this view.

Apart from commentary on the use of translation facilities, the Association gave evidence on the **wider picture**. In commenting on the growth in demand for translation services. they quoted from Lord Gwilym Prys Davies 1996 report from the Panel for Official Welsh:

"translation is an industry in Wales which is growing at a tremendous pace without

being subject to any control whatsoever. Anyone can set up his or her own business to offer a translation service for a fee without having any recognised qualifications to do the work".

In that broader context the Association brought the issues of Training, Standards, development of the commercial sector, and of Information Technology, to the Committee's attention.

Standards

It seems that the situation has not moved on since Lord Prys Davies' report. The Committee were told that no body exists to monitor translation standards, even though the number of complaints would suggest that there is a real need for such a body. The Association suggested that it might be able to utilise the expertise of its members and offer an advisory service on standards in translation.

Training

The Committee have been told that whilst there are various courses on written and simultaneous translation, and on subtitling, there remains a need for structured training programmes for the professional development of English-Welsh translators. When the Committee addressed this in January, it made the point that an opportunity had been missed by the educational establishment, in what was (and is) a rapidly growing area.

Information Technology

The following is an extract from the Association of Welsh Translators evidence:

"The action taken to develop IT to further bilingualism has so far occurred on an *ad hoc* basis. While the Welsh Language Board have funded projects conducted by **Canolfan Bedwyr** and the **Centre for the Standardisation of Welsh Terminology** to develop vital resources such as **CySill** (a Welsh language spellchecker) and **CysGair** (a fairly elementary dictionary) and are currently working on a project to computerise **The Welsh Academy English-Welsh Dictionary** and a project in machine translation, the field needs to be reappraised before any further developments are embarked upon. For example, consideration should be given to the creative use of computer developments such as voice recognition software to facilitate, promote and improve the quality of textual translation. Similarly, video conferencing systems could be developed to make simultaneous translation available on a far larger scale. Developments such as these could be vital to the success of community translation services".

Conclusions

In the light of the evidence, the Committee may wish to come to a view on:

- The need for prioritisation
- The need for an all Wales Strategy or guidelines
- How to address the lack of standards, training provision and developments in IT.

Committee Secretariat April 2002