

Getting it right

14 years after the first *Translation, Getting it Right* brochure appeared, author Chris Durban and many of the translators involved speak to *ITI Bulletin* about this ongoing and highly successful client education project

Starting small: Chris Durban on the evolution of *Getting it Right*

The first edition of *Translation, Getting it Right* came out in 2000 when I was still writing *The Onionskin* – a column that ran first in *ITI Bulletin* and later in both *ITI Bulletin* and the *ATA Chronicle*.

In the column, I looked into good translations and bad (but mostly bad – easier and more ‘fun’ in a way, since the bad was so bad), speaking to the people who had commissioned or performed them, identifying how and why the texts had skidded off track.

The *Onionskin* style was journalistic, the aim ‘educational’ but not schoolmarmish. That is, even though the column ran in a translators’ magazine, I was aiming for a fun, upbeat read that would educate (non-translator) readers. So I made sure to end each item with an uplifting, constructive tip on how not to fall into that trap again.

At one point Antonio Aparicio, then editor of *ITI Bulletin*, suggested a small-format summary of the tips and, since I’d already been working on something along those lines, I polished my text, he poured it into a small, square layout, and we were off.

Unfortunately that first brochure was so tiny that many ITI members probably pitched it out, unaware, when it slid into the bottom of the envelope that brought them that month’s issue of the *Bulletin*.

But there was also some good feedback, and we bumped the size up a bit for the next ITI edition.



The very first ‘small, square’ *Getting it Right* brochure, which measured 10cm x 10cm

The first foreign language version was French – only natural, since I live and work in France, and was active in the SFT (Société française des traducteurs).

In this case, however, the French text was created by a French copywriter working in the advertising industry, Adam Edery. A few French options proposed by translators were too timid or too schoolmarmish (that word again – by which I mean a kind of finger-wagging ‘naughty, naughty’ approach instead of the enthusiasm I was looking for).

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‘The aim is not to criticise, sigh long and hard and/or whine. The tone must be positive’

PRODUCING CLIENT EDUCATION MATERIALS: TIPS FROM CHRIS DURBAN

- Select a format that works (if your document won’t fit into a standard envelope, acknowledge that your layout choice has been... short-sighted).
- Get user-industry sponsors involved if possible, but tread carefully within the translation industry itself since translators can get tetchy if translation agencies seem to be taking the lead.
- A PDF version has (obvious) cost advantages and can be sent to users with a click. But a paper version has other pluses – people read printed material differently, and take the information within on board differently (more seriously?). In my own sector (corporate communications and finance) I’ve been in bankers’ offices where I’ve seen a copy of the brochure on somebody’s desk, and those people tend to have read it and understand the arguments. It’s hard to judge whether that would happen if it were only available in PDF format.

don’t get no respect’); rather it is to convince non-translator readers that even as their own texts are fascinating, so is the added value they can get out of translators. The tone must be positive, the message ‘now that we’ve brought this to your attention, we’re confident you’ll take our message on board’.

For added credibility, I got Adam’s French adaptation vetted and approved by *Le Monde*’s style editor, Jean-Pierre Colignon, who had worked with the SFT on other issues.

The Czech association was next – a very motivated group, and great fun to work with.

After that came US English. (I was active at the time in the ATA’s PR program, which involved client outreach.) It broke my heart, actually, to be reminded that UK English (as in the original edition) was simply not going to connect with the middle management decision-makers the ATA was targeting. But the adaptation went very smoothly; the ATA was an enthusiastic partner.

In those early days there were no funds whatsoever, so when we wanted a print edition either a motivated association found the money or (more often) I found myself going around cap in hand to find sponsors. One UK version was co-sponsored by a translation agency, and another agency bought the right to print its own branded edition. This was not my decision and I was not particularly pleased, but it is water under the bridge and those products are now



lost in the sands of time.

The Paris Stock Exchange, a client of mine, became an indirect sponsor of the first French version. This was instructive insofar as it opened a channel for distribution (copies were distributed to their members and partners at financial events) and made me more aware of the cost of distribution and how important it is to get non-translators involved.

Very concretely, I would sit at the back of the room at some Bourse meetings and press conferences and observe financial analysts and fund

‘UK English was simply not going to connect with middle management decision-makers in the US’

managers leafing through it when the speechifying got particularly boring. They’d nudge their neighbour and laugh at some of the examples and point them out, which was good: confirmation that our message was connecting/getting read.

Translation, Getting it Right is now available in multiple languages

15 languages and counting: the translators’ views

Holger Loddeke translated the original German version of *Getting it Right* back in 2003. At the time, he had been working in-house as a technical translator for seven years, and welcomed the project: ‘A colleague of mine had referred Chris Durban to me and, being a bit of a standards and process geek myself, I was immediately taken with her brochure,’ Holger says. ‘Working on the German version was a chance to dig up my creative skills again, which had been buried under tons of technical manuals as well as firmware and software strings for years.’

The German brochure was recently updated and redesigned, again with Holger as the translator. ‘It was quite interesting to see – especially in light of my increased knowledge of the industry – that even though there weren’t that many changes in terms of content, the brochure is still as relevant today as it was a decade ago,’ he says.

In recent years, translators of new language versions have been aware of *Getting it Right* well in advance of working on the project. ‘I use it every chance I get to help potential clients see what translation is all about,’ says Catherine Christaki, who has just translated the brochure into Greek. Danilo Nogueira and Kelli Semolini, meanwhile, worked together on the translation of the Brazilian Portuguese version, edited and updated (in line with the most recent English version) by Maria Marques. ‘We have known and admired GiR for a long time,’ says Danilo. ‘It is a lucid and brilliant view of the translation market and its problems.’ Maria adds: ‘The defining moment in this project was when Chris and I got together to review the first draft of the translation. I really enjoyed being part of this project – it was a great opportunity.’

Localisation and design

While many clients will have some level of English, translation of *Getting it Right* into their mother tongue – and localisation to the specific market in their country – has many benefits.

‘There was a definite need for a guide for translation buyers in Greece as there was no such resource

available in Greek,' says Catherine Christaki. 'Apart from being a great way to explain the translation process to our clients, I think the guide is also an excellent marketing tool. It can be used as a giveaway at events, as the basis for presentations at industry expos and conferences, and even as a bonus gift in emails to potential clients.'

Gauti Kristmannsson recently translated the brochure into Icelandic. 'The guide will benefit the translation industry here in Iceland because it is small in scale, and many translators are close to their clients, so they will be able to distribute the guide to many of those who might need it the most,' he says. 'It is also very important for us all to have such a clear and precise guide for our new clients, who often simply ask for a "translation" and are dreamily unaware of what they really want when asking.'

The update to the German edition involved a re-work of the section on professional translators only working into their native language, says Holger Loddeke. 'This text hasn't really changed in the English edition,' he adds. 'However, since the German industry associations felt very strongly about this being too strict and not realistic for the German market, we rewrote it and made it a "guideline" instead of a "basic rule".' Holger also researched into-German examples to illustrate the points made. 'In 2003 I used the "Fuchs Spürpanzer" as an example for an illustrated parts list because that

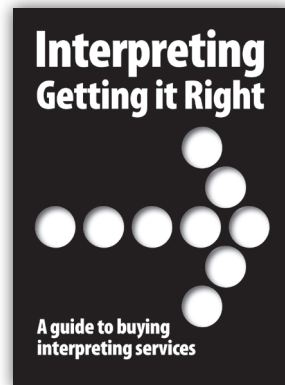
German tank had been in the press a lot back then due to a political scandal,' he says. 'In the new German edition I replaced this with a reference to the unmanned military aircraft "Euro Hawk" that has made a lot of waves in the German media recently.'

Mark Richardson, the art editor of *ITI Bulletin*, has worked with Chris to create all the versions of the brochure (aside from Japanese and Russian) published since 2011. 'I wanted a design that was easily identifiable as coming from the same source (Chris Durban), so came up with the arrow motif,' Mark says. 'I chose a font that was legible in many languages and had plenty of special characters!' – essential when working with languages as diverse as Icelandic, Greek and Brazilian Portuguese.

The Russian version was created by Igor Vesler, an English into

'The brochure is still as relevant today as it was a decade ago'

Russian translator, who developed a grid that breaks down the headings and sections of page content into boxes. This grid system, which is now used for all the language versions, makes translation and layout far more straightforward than previously – although there are challenges involved. 'To ensure the booklet style of the Greek guide would match the English guide, we



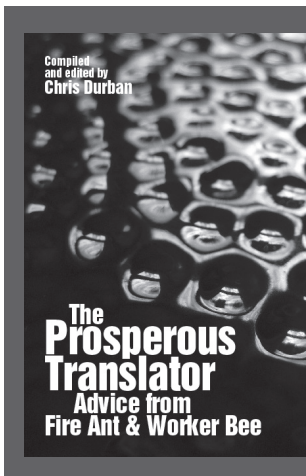
had to keep the word count close to the English,' Catherine Christaki explains. Greek is usually 20-30% longer than English, so Catherine, Chris and the proofreader, Emilia Prekate, decided to do the translation first and deal with the word count issue last, before sending the text to Mark for design.

15 languages is clearly not enough, and FIT is encouraging its member associations around the world to develop further language versions: upcoming versions include Luxembourgish, Chinese and Polish. 'I would be very interested in Scandinavian languages and more Eastern languages,' Chris adds.

Enthusiasm for the project, while welcome, must be coupled with experience. 'A number of translation teachers in Europe have approached me to suggest enthusiastically that their students might produce their country's version,' Chris says. 'I love the enthusiasm – such a nice voice of confidence in their students! – but such offers ultimately underscore the gap that exists between universities and the real world: sure, the brochure is an 'easy read' (that's the whole point). But reproducing that easy read in a compelling way for the client world is not something that students can do; they simply don't have the experience or skills at that point. After all, writing/translating for publication is hard. Which is as it should be. That's why translators who can produce compelling work to deadline get both comfortable remuneration and respect from their clients.'

Companion piece: the first edition of *Interpreting, Getting it Right* was published several years later and the guide is now available in both English and French

FUNDING THE PROJECT



'I contribute my time, since I think it's a fun project,' Chris says. 'In 2010 I published *The Prosperous Translator* and have, since then, been receiving between 100 and 200 euros each month in royalties ("Don't spend it all on beer!" a colleague warned). Hardly a bestseller in global terms and not enough to bankroll early retirement, but nice for a niche market. Because the brochure project interests me (I actually think it is both fun and useful for translators), I've been earmarking this "free money" for layout and translation costs. This helps cut out the financial to-ing and fro-ing and fussing with underfunded associations.'

Download *Translation, Getting it Right* from the ITI website at www.iti.org.uk/about-industry/advice-buyers/getting-it-right.