



TRANSLATION IN CANADA¹

LA TRADUCCIÓN EN CANADÁ

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Canada has been described as “a virtual paradise for translators”, “probably the place where the profession is most structured.”² But what do you really know about translation in Canada? Here are a few questions to test your knowledge of this topic, followed immediately by the answers. Note that translation is used here in its broad sense covering both written translation and spoken translation (*i.e.* interpreting).

1. WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN THE BEGINNINGS OF TRANSLATION IN CANADA AND A KIDNAPPING?

The earliest known “translators” were two Iroquois young men, sons of a chief, who were kidnapped by the explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534 and taken to France to learn the basics of French so that they could act as linguistic mediators between the French and the native Indians. When they returned to Canada with Cartier a year later, they became the country’s first interpreters.

2. WHY IS TRANSLATION GIVEN SUCH IMPORTANCE IN CANADA?

¹ I was asked by the Editor-in-Chief of the journal to write an introductory piece for this edition of *Hermēneus* and was given *carte blanche* as far as its content was concerned. Given that I have been involved with translation in Canada for over 50 years, I have chosen to make this the topic of my piece.

² Jean Delisle, “Canadian Tradition” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p.365

Canada was governed first by the French, then by the English who defeated them in 1760. This led to the presence of two languages, French and English, in the administration of the colony, necessitating translation to and from those languages. But despite the need for translation, it was done only on an *ad hoc*, unofficial basis from 1760 to 1867. However, with the enactment of the British North America Act of 1867, translation was finally given official status by the language provisions of the Act, which required that both languages be official in Parliament and in Quebec. In 1870, this provision was extended to Manitoba. In 1969, New Brunswick enacted its first Official Languages Act, making the province Canada's first, and only, officially bilingual province. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which became law in 1982, provides guarantees for the equal status of the two official languages in sections 16–23.

Official bilingualism is the term used in Canada to collectively describe the policies, constitutional provisions, and laws that ensure legal equality of English and French in the Parliament and courts of Canada, protect the linguistic rights of English- and French-speaking minorities in different provinces, and ensure a level of government services in both languages across Canada. It is official bilingualism that is the reason why translation is so important in Canada.

3. IS MORE TRANSLATION DONE IN CANADA FROM FRENCH INTO ENGLISH OR FROM ENGLISH INTO FRENCH?

More translation is done from English into French than from French into English. This is because there are more English speakers (termed Anglophones in Canada) than French speakers (Francophones) – approximately 34 million as opposed to 7 million in 2016. This disproportion leads to far more texts written originally in English and thus needing translation into French because of official bilingualism.

4. WHAT TYPE OF TEXT IS TRANSLATED MOST IN CANADA – LITERARY OR NON-LITERARY?

Because of the requirements of official bilingualism, non-literary texts are translated most in Canada. Literary translation has taken a back seat to the translation of administrative, legal and other non-literary texts. As late as 1985, one writer bemoaned the fact that “English writers in Quebec have remained buried in their tiny enclaves” and “the French have ignored major

literary events in Canada.” However, the same writer admits that literary translation has been “a bridge of sorts” linking the two solitudes. Since the early 1960s, the Canada Council for the Arts has been encouraging translation as an art form, and in 1972 the Secretary of State made subsidies available to finance translation of literary and scholarly works considered important. In 2008-09, the council funded 62 translations. In 2010-11, the number had risen to 111. In 2011-12, the council spent C\$1,012,100 on translations. With this support, literary translation has grown in importance and since 1975 has had its own translators association to promote such translation and to protect the interests of its members.

5. WHO IS THE MAJOR EMPLOYER OF TRANSLATORS IN CANADA?

Given the requirements of official bilingualism, it should come as no surprise that the major employer of translators is the federal government, and more specifically its Translation Bureau. Created in 1934, after much campaigning by bilingualism advocates for improved access to federal services in French, the Bureau was tasked with centralizing, standardizing and improving translation services, which had previously been very inconsistent across the various departments. The Translation Bureau now offers translation, revision, terminology and interpretation services and language advice to federal departments and agencies, Parliament and the Senate, and private-sector firms that have a contract with the federal public service. These services are offered in the two official languages, many indigenous languages in Canada, many foreign languages, as well as visual sign and tactile languages. The Translation Bureau also produces high-quality language tools and resources that are offered free of charge to Canadians. These various services are provided by over 1,000 language professionals, located across Canada.

6. HOW MANY TRANSLATOR TRAINING PROGRAMS ARE THERE IN CANADA?

There are too many to list individually. There are undergraduate programs and graduate programs; a student can start at the BA level, then move on to the Master’s level, and finally even to a PhD in Translation Studies. There are part-time and full-time programs, ranging in length from a year to over four years. There are professional programs, more theoretical programs, as well as culture-focused programs. The University of Ottawa, in

the heart of the National Capital Region, was the first Canadian institution to offer professional translation courses at the university level in 1936. This training was formalized in 1971 when the School of Translation and Interpretation was founded. In the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of the translation programs were located in Eastern Canada. However, now they are found in many different parts of Canada, including the Far North.

7. IN WHICH PROVINCE IS THE MOST MULTILINGUAL TRANSLATION DONE?

While English-French translation dominates in Eastern Canada, in British Columbia (BC), Canada's most Western province, the focus is more on other languages, both Eastern and Western. Translators in BC work with languages as diverse as Russian, Chinese, Punjabi and Spanish. This province has attracted a large number of immigrants, particularly from the Far East and Middle East, which explains the need for multilingual translation. The only multilingual interpreter training programs in Canada were offered for many years at Vancouver Community College on the west coast. This underlined the importance of multilingual translation in BC.

8. WHICH ARE THE MAJOR TERM BANKS IN CANADA?

There are two major term banks in Canada, both government run: Termium Plus and the Grand Dictionnaire Terminologique.

The biggest is Termium Plus, the Government of Canada's terminology and linguistic data bank, consisting of terms, synonyms, acronyms, definitions, phraseology units, examples of usage and observations in a wide variety of fields in four different languages: French, English, Spanish and more recently Portuguese. It includes almost 4 million English and French terms, more than 18,000 Portuguese terms, more than 200,000 Spanish terms. Originally developed at the University of Montreal in 1970 and named Banque de Terminologie de l'Université de Montréal (BTUM), it was acquired by the federal government Translation Bureau in 1975 and has been operated and further developed by the latter since then.

The other major term bank is the Grand Dictionnaire Terminologique (GDT), formerly known as the Banque de Terminologie du Québec. This online terminological database contains nearly 3 million technical terms in French, English, and occasionally in another language, in 200 industrial, scientific and commercial fields. It was produced by the Office québécois de

la langue française, a Quebec government institution established in 1961, whose mission is to promote the use of French in Quebec.

9. WHAT ARE TRANSEARCH AND PORTAGE?

They are translation technology tools created in Canada.

TransSearch is a bilingual online concordancer created in the 1990s by RALI (Recherche appliquée en linguistique informatique) a research group at the University of Montreal. This tool lets you quickly search for commonly used equivalents of terms and phrases in the text and translation of Canadian House of Commons and Senate debates (Hansard corpus), as well as the text and translation of rulings from Canadian courts and the International Labour Organization. Its databases contain over 500 million words in total in French and English. When you enter a term in TransSearch, the application displays all instances of the word or expression in context, indicating translated text in white and original text in grey. It also prepares a list of equivalent terms, sorted by number of hits. TransSearch uses statistical algorithms to automatically locate terms in the target language.

Portage is a statistical and neural network automatic translation software, developed over the last ten years by the National Research Council of Canada. Portage helps translators boost productivity and improve the quality of their work by generating automatic translations that draw on their own documents. Using statistical machine learning technology, Portage creates ever-more accurate translations the more it is used. Because Portage uses your archives rather than external resources, the translations it generates are considerably more accurate than with other automatic translation systems.

10. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE CANADIAN TRANSLATORS, TERMINOLOGISTS AND INTERPRETERS COUNCIL?

The Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (CTTIC) is a federation of provincial and territorial associations representing translators, terminologists and interpreters (collectively known as “language professionals”) in Canada. Its mission is to ensure high-quality communication across linguistic and cultural communities in Canada through national standardized examinations. In fact, CTTIC now administers national certification examinations in translation, terminology, conference interpreting, court interpreting and community interpreting.

Now that you have learned more about translation in Canada, do you agree that it is a translator's paradise?