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# Language Editing in English

## Lektoriranje v angleščini

### Summary

This article is an extension of the materials and approaches first presented at a seminar of the same title, organized by the DZTPS in Ljubljana, May 2003.

The four main sections are:

- I. Introduction
- II. General Principles and Approaches

Including:

- common typographical errors
- transcription of names and dates
- collocations
- guidelines for rewording and correction

- III. Word Order & Punctuation

A close study of one of the main problem-areas in language editing

- IV. Open Questions

Discussion of examples which contain different types of errors, and of sentences which, although not "wrong", could be improved.

A brief list of books and articles related to language editing is given in the concluding **Selected References**.

### Abstract

Članek je nastal kot nadaljevanje gradiva in pristopov, ki so bili prvič predstavljeni na seminarju z enakim naslovom, maja 2003 v organizaciji DZTPS.

Štirje glavni razdelki so:

- I: Uvod

- II: Splošna načela in pristopi, ki vključujejo:

- pogoste tipografske napake
- transkripcijo imen in datumov
- kolokacije
- smernice za drugačno ubeseditvev in popravke

- III. Besedni vrstni red in ločila

Podrobna obravnava enega od poglobitvenih problemskih področij pri lektoriranju

- IV. Odprta vprašanja

Razprava o primerih, ki vsebujejo različne tipe napak, ter o povedih, ki sicer niso napačne, a bi jih lahko izboljšali.

Kratek seznam knjig in člankov o lektoriranju je naveden v sklepnem razdelku Izbrane navedenke.



# I Introduction

This is an endeavour to synthesize the experience I have gained over several decades as a translator and language editor or *lektor*. I add the Slovene word *lektor* because it does not entirely overlap with the English expression “language editor”. Both terms cover the regular task of correcting language errors – from spelling and punctuation, through word order, word choice and tenses, to style and register – as well as final proof reading.

However, the language editor has somewhat more freedom than the *lektor* to propose changes in the presentation of thoughts, and to suggest necessary cuts or additions to the text. In the approach to this material, therefore, I have both terms in mind.

## The Material

All examples given are authentic and (with only a few exceptions) are derived from translations from Slovene into English, or from documents written directly in English by native speakers of Slovene. Where possible, or necessary, I have also given the Slovene original for comparison.

In selecting the examples, my two main concerns were that they should:

i) illustrate **typical errors**, and therefore serve as a useful guide for preventing similar

mistakes, ii) be drawn from a **wide range of (non-literary) sources** – company reports, official correspondence, Internet messages, medical, technical and political texts, publicity brochures, etc. – in order to suggest that the same type of language problem (e.g. ambiguity because of faulty punctuation) may occur in different contexts. In Sections II and III, the comments are focused mainly on individual errors, while in Section IV the range is extended to include “mixed” or multiple errors, and also sentences which are open to discussion, i.e. the suggested alternations are optional.

Although the title “Language Editing in English” does not mention the translator, it is understood that he or she is also a *lektor(ica)* or (self-) editor. All the questions raised are directly relevant to the translators’ work, since it is **their** difficulties with which the editor is dealing. This is why, in the second half, I have also spoken of the translator’s motivation. In a profession in which one more often receives criticism than praise, it can be disheartening – after a lengthy struggle with the text – to be confronted with the task of “entering the corrections”. Yet translators do not always complain. Some even admit to enjoying it “because it’s useful learning”. In that positive spirit, I trust that this article may be of practical help.

## II General Principles and Approaches

Much of what we call “seeing”  
is conditioned by habits and expectations.

(E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*)

When Gombrich refers to “seeing” he is speaking of the artist’s way of viewing the world, and of the viewer’s response to the work. He goes on to add that “the greatest of all the visual explorers, Leonardo (da Vinci) himself, has been shown to have made mistakes in his anatomical drawings. Apparently he drew features of the human heart which Ga-

len made him expect but which he cannot have seen.” And finally he notes that: “The world may be approached from a different angle and the information given may yet be the same.”

The language of art is not unlike the language of translation. It is partly bound by the “language” of the viewer: a **wave**, as painted by Hokkaido is, in a sense, a Japanese wave;



a wave depicted by Turner or Delacroix could also be seen as an English, or French, or "European" wave. Yet, in whatever "language" we describe it, a wave is a wave.

In translation, one is transferring not merely the meaning (or facts) from one language into another, but also the implications, reservations, nuances, stresses and emphases, marks of approval or disapproval, respect or disrespect. In short, many of the "fine details" which painters also include in their works to give "true colour" to the whole. As Rembrandt does in his use of gold ornamentation in both the positive and the negative sense. Gold can have many meanings.

For the language editor or "lektor", and for the translator, the two crucial questions are: 1. What may be being lost from the original, and how can it best be restored? 2. Does the translation have a natural flow, or is its course being too strongly directed by the source language? To both of these questions the answer most frequently given (by professionals) would be: "Improvements could be made- but we don't have the time!"

This is true. It is also the reason for my wishing to suggest, in this article, certain principles, guidelines and approaches which may help the language editor / translator to identify more swiftly the most frequently recurring deficiencies in translated texts. Or, to put it more positively, to focus on what often "goes wrong" - in texts of all kinds - and yet can easily be improved.

## What Can Go Wrong?

Or, What Can Go Wrong? **Typographical errors** are, of course, the most dreaded of all. Many good (and expensive) publications have been seriously damaged by a misprint on the cover of an otherwise flawlessly produced publication. The late Anthony Burgess even playfully referred to this on the cover of his book entitled "Language Made Plain", or LANGUAGE MAID PLANE. Printer's "gremlins" - as such errors are sometimes called - have a mischievous way of sneaking into the

text where least expected, particularly into familiar words such as *height, first, width, continuous, planning, believe, research*, etc. Recently, a Medical Research Institute arranged for the printing of a large number of attractive looking folders for holding documents at conferences and meetings. Sadly, it was too late when the mistake was noticed in the capital letters on the cover: MEDICAL RESERACH INSTITUTE. The entire batch of folders had to be withdrawn. Because **the eye tends to see what it expects to see**, the most glaring errors often occur where they are least expected:

i. In headings, captions, titles, lists of contents, addresses (the word *address* is itself often wrongly spelt), bibliographies and references. The use of capital letters - perhaps because they look so "confident" - seems to further increase the risk of error. For instance:

- FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
- CEREMONY IN FRONT OF THE PALACE OF NATIONS ON OCCASION OF...
- ACTIVITIES IN PRERATION

References in the Literature appendix also have a deceptively confident look. One feels that they can be trusted because (surely?) they have many times been checked and reproduced. But they are not "gremlin proof". For example:

- Kamrin R., Buchsbaum HW (1965) Large vascular malformations of the brain no visualized by serial angiography. Arch Neurol 13: 413 - 420. (*no* should be *not*)
- Kudo T., Tadokoro M. (1989) Experience with the ultrasonic aspirator in a cavernous hemangioma of the cavernous sinus. Neurosurgery 23: 629 - 631. (final *s* missing in *cavernous*)

Errors may also derive from the source language text, when a work is incorrectly cited, as here:

- **International Trust Found** je zazširil svoje delovanje na področju razminiranja v Jugovzhodni Evropi. (*Found* should be *Fund*.)

These might seem to be minor, if bothersome details. However, no error in the References can be considered "minor", since it is in



this section of a scientific / academic paper that the author is “presenting his / her credentials” to the professional reader.

ii. In brochures, guides, programmes, time-tables, publicity material, etc. Errors in materials intended for the public are particularly unwelcome because: a) the texts will be read by many people, b) they usually contain a mixture of national, local and / or professional pride – linked to financial interest, c) printing mistakes demean the text. As here:

- (M.K.) is appearing as soloist with the Philharmonic Sting Chamber Orchestra in concerts by Vivaldi... (*String Chamber Orchestra, concertos by...*)

- ...has won first prize at the Competition of Tree Nations. (*Three Nations*)

- Summer Festival tickests are extempt from the Value Added Tax. (*exempt, tickets*)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF WASTE MANAGEMENT SUBGROUP LJUBLJAJA, SLOVENIA, APRIL 25 – 26, 2002 (A particularly nasty gremlin, fortunately spotted just in time! Ljubljana, of course.)

- In this guide for translators and writers into English the most typical and recurrent defects, errors and diffuculties are shown. (From the back cover of a book – which I wrote! – not without **difficulty**.) Indeed, we can all make mistakes.

iii. In official correspondence, press releases, website pages, etc. In letters, the errors will usually not be seen by many eyes, and may be even benignly overlooked. (After all, native speakers also make mistakes in their correspondence!) A few examples:

- We are looking forwad to welcoming you in Ljubljana. (*forward, welcoming you to...* If the main body of the letter is correct, the mistakes might be ignored.)

One mistake, however, which is less easily overlooked is that of confused spelling of a person's name.

For example:

- (letterhead address, correct) Dr. Várady László. (Opening greeting)

a) Dear Dr. Varadi,

b) Dear dr. Laszlo,

c) Dear Dr. Varady,

In a case such as this, the confusion is understandable. The writer of the letter may have met Dr. Várady at a conference and been given his visiting card: Dr. Várady László. (In Hungarian, the surname customarily comes first.) Back in Ljubljana, several months later, the writer wishes to contact Dr. Várady again. Subconsciously, she /he might be tempted to transcribe the surname as it would be in Slovene: a) Dr. Varadi. Or, perhaps to sound more familiar, b), might use the first name – Laszlo – but forgetting to add the (important) accents on á and ó, and instinctively using the lower case d for Dr. Likewise, c), the writer might opt for the “international” solution – Dr capitalized, Várady – no accent.

The issue of the correct transcription of personal and place names does, I know, deserve greater attention. Here, however, I should merely like to say that all names (in the Latin alphabet) should be written with their original diacritic marks and accents, and that the “international” tendency to omit these essential features should not be encouraged. The philosopher Descartes should remain *René* (not Rene); the tennis player Borg should be *Björn* (not Bjorn), and the composer Krek should be *Uroš* (not Uros). More will be said on this matter at the end of section IV.

Website messages, press releases and advertisements reach far more people than does official correspondence. Also, since the texts are usually relatively brief, any errors will be all the more noticeable.

For instance:

- Prime Minister Drnovšek resignes from the Office. (*resigns, office* – no article, no capital O)

- The participants found the database useful and supported the continuation of this activity. (*continuation*)

- The year 2002 was very successful for our company. This was the year of our lagrest investments in our 12 years history. (*largest, 12-year*)

- In our bank, special emphases has been laid on the increase in interest-free income and



development of new services. (*emphasis, development*)

• KEY WORDS: spatial planing process, sustainable development, physical space, inter-departmental linking. (*spatial planning, inter-departmental*)

iv. In graphs, charts, tables, lists of figures, "pie charts", etc., and also in the use (punctuation) of abbreviations. The main problem area is almost certainly that of the conflict between the English use of the decimal point (10.7%) and the European use of the comma (10,7%). Translators and editors have to be particularly careful to ensure that figures which appear in the text are given in *exactly the same form* in graphs and tables.

Likewise, the "house style" of a document, e.g. a company Annual Report, must be consistent. For example:

• 10. Share capital SIT 14,170,448 thousand  
Krka's share capital amounts to SIT 14,170,448 thousand.

This is correct usage, since the heading corresponds exactly to the first line of the text. If, later in the text, a more general statement is made, a different formulation might be acceptable, e.g.

• Considering that Krka's share capital amounts to *over 14 million tolar*s, we may expect that...

Consistency must also be observed in the writing of dates. Three equally valid options are still in use:

- a. March 31, 2003
- b. March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003 or 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2003
- c. 31 March 2003

My preference is for c., since it helps to avoid a clustering of figures by separating the day of the month from the year. (A fourth, less often used alternative is the Roman-style date: 31. III. 2003.)

My reason for beginning this article with what might seem like a statement of the obvious – i.e. that typographical errors persistently (and perversely) occur – is that I wished to draw attention not so much to the errors themselves but to the reasons *why* they are easily overlooked. One reason is that, as Gornbrich

suggests, we are inclined to see (and expect) familiar patterns. Some of these patterns are so "fixed" by usage that they do not tolerate disruption. For example:

- sooner or later / *prej ali slej*
- more or less / *več ali manj*
- black & white / *črno belo*

There is no particular reason why, for instance, a film or photograph should not be described (in either language) as white & black – but it is not. One follows the "unwritten rules". When an expression is common to both languages, but differs in word order, that difference must be respected in translation: Research & Development work / *Razvojno-raziskovalno delo*. (Comparable "fixed" combinations would be: Arts and Crafts, *kulturno-umetniško društvo*, Profit & Loss Account, *lektorsko-prevajalska služba*.)

Word choice is also governed by customary usage. For example:

• I read with *great* interest your article on "Hydrolosis..."

Could the word *great* be replaced by a synonym? For example: *big, vast, immense, large, enormous, huge, grand*. Out of the seven, only two might be acceptable – *immense* and (in the spoken language) *enormous*. Yet there is no "rule" which prevents one from saying *vast* or *huge* interest.

Similarly, in Slovene, one may say: *rahlo dežuje* (scattered rainshowers), but not *lahko* or *slabo dežuje* (literal tr. - it's raining *lightly* or *weakly*). Or: *lepo pozdravljeni!* (Welcome. / Greetings. / Hello, and welcome...etc.), yet not: *odlično* or *dobro pozdravljeni* (literal tr. – excellently or well greeted). Nevertheless, one does say *dobrodošli* (welcome) and not *lepodošli* (lit. beautifully come!).

These established usages are so familiar to the native speaker that they usually pass unquestioned – until they need to be translated. A letter or speech in Slovene beginning with the straightforward greeting *Spoštovani!* (lit. Respected persons) cannot be so concisely rendered in English. The safest, though not satisfactory solution is to begin with *Dear...* followed by a suitable noun: *Participants / Reader(s) / Colleagues / Guests*. In



each instance, a different solution needs to be found.

Another aspect of language which is also determined by “unwritten rules” is that of transferring, perhaps unconsciously, from the spoken to the written idiom. For instance:

- (letter from a doctor to the editor of a medical journal) This group of authors has **pretty good** neuroanatomical backup for their clinical work.

The expression *pretty good* is quite acceptable in speech, but in the written context it sounds too informal, even though this is a personal letter. More suitable words would be: **relatively** or **fairly**, or else the word could be simply omitted. Other expressions of a similar type are: **quite a lot** (of), **lots** (of), **a bit** (of), **doing fine**, **getting along well**, **super**, **tremendous**, **fabu-**

**lous**, etc. What may be charmingly direct in informal speech, and even in formal spoken presentations (e.g. at congresses), may not have the same desired effect in a printed article.

This is why writers, translators and editors need to be ever alert to language which does not sound “Quite right” in context.

In the following sections we will be returning again, from different aspects, to the question of: What is the most suitable formulation of words in a specific context? Context matters greatly, because if we do not know who the intended reader is we cannot properly assess the language.

Before turning to specific examples, I should like briefly to note some of the self-imposed principles or guidelines which I follow in language editing / *lektoriranje*.

## Guidelines

### 1. Target readers

Is the text intended primarily for the professional reader, the general public, or possibly both?

### 2. Style & Register

What should be the prevailing register: highly formal, official / administrative, neutral, semi-formal / relaxed, informal or even intimate? This is particularly important in determining the correct tone for correspondence, both official and personal.

### 3. Presentation & Format

Do any changes need to be made to the format of the original text? For instance:

- Are the **paragraphs** of suitable length (in translation)?
- Is the use of **upper case** (capitalization) consistent? Are **acronyms** (NATO / Nato, UNESCO / Unesco) and **abbreviations** (e.g., i.e., etc.) correctly and consistently transcribed?

- **Type-face** (or font): are stress-markers, such as italics, underlining, and inverted commas (“...” / ‘...’) actually needed and correctly used?

- **Punctuation**. Do the brackets (...) or /.../ begin and end in the right place? Should hyphens (-) be dashes (—), and should single dashes be double dashes? Which words should be hyphenated (long term / long-term investment)? Could linking words such as **and**, **but** or **also** be replaced by a semicolon (;)? Are exclamation marks (!) necessary? Are Roman numerals followed by a dot (IV International Festival / IV. International Festival)?

This list of questions could easily be extended. I wanted to point only to some of the main disparities that may occur.

Other general principles which are equally valid both for translating and for editing include:

### 4. Addition for the sake of clarity.

If a sentence is difficult to understand on first reading, it may be because helpful “lit-



le" words have been omitted. In addition to prepositions, these include: **which, that, it, this, both...and, however, do / does / did**, etc. Such words may have an important effect on the meaning, as is illustrated by this example (of correct usage) from a BBC report:

- Prime Minister Tony Blair noted *that* European countries exported more to Asia than *did* the United States.

The words *that* and *did* are both structurally important, and should not be omitted. Indeed, if *did* were left out the sentence would be ambiguous, i.e. it could also mean that European states exported more to Asia than *to* the United States.

Even when there is no risk of ambiguity, it may be advisable to add words for the sake of clarity, as here:

- Information on radioactivity and *work of* ARAO provided by the agency is *meant* to increase the public interest in nuclear issues.

Reword as:

- Information on radioactivity and *on the work of* ARAO provided by the Agency is *intended* to increase public interest in nuclear issues.

Or for the sake of accuracy:

- In 2002, the Supervisory Board met in *five regular and one irregular* correspondence session.

Reword as:

- In 2002, the Supervisory Board met in *five regular sessions* and one irregular correspondence session.

If there is any likelihood of ambiguity or misunderstanding, one should not hesitate – merely for the sake of elegance – to add or repeat clarifying words.

## 5. Deletion

There are few writers who use too few words, many who use too many. Usually, however, it is not the writer but the translator who is blamed for this diffuseness or "padding" as it is popularly called. In the spoken language, a certain amount of looseness is to be expected

and is often tolerated, even in formal situations. For instance, a speaker at a conference or symposium might, in order to strike a more informal note, use expressions such as: *what it all boils down to is...*, or *the fact of the matter is*, or *to be perfectly honest with you* (can one be "imperfectly" honest?), or *in my humble opinion* (really "humble"?), etc. In the written language, however, such expressions sound merely like clichés, which indeed they are.

Translators often claim, quite justifiably, that they do not have the right or the authority to "improve" on the original. However, I believe that translators do have the right to intervene if they feel that they can make the translation sound less clumsy than the original. One unobtrusive way of "silently editing" the text is to trim down some of the common ready-made phrases, e.g. *na področju, v okviru, kot je že rečeno*, which need not automatically be translated into English as: *in the field / area of, within the framework of, as earlier / already mentioned*. In the first two cases, the word *in* (without field or framework) is often sufficient; the third expression is usually redundant and can often be omitted.

When dealing with official documents it is advisable not to over-intervene, i.e. not to remove too many apparently superfluous words. In the example below, from an Annual Report, the translator has skillfully contracted the text without losing the "rhetorical flourish" at the end of the Director's Statement:

- Glede na našo dinamično politiko zaposlovanja in obstoječo kadrovske sestavo, so ti cilji gotovo uresničljivi, tako da z optimizmom in zupanjem gledamo na še eno uspešno poslovno obdobje, ki je pred nami.

- Given our dynamic employment policy and existing staff structure, we are convinced that such goals can be implemented; therefore we are looking forward with optimism and trust to *another successful financial year ahead*.

If the concluding words had been literally translated, the text would have sounded more cumbersome: ... *yet another successful business period, which lies before us*. The translator has neatly avoided the trap of overwording.



Repetition of a word or structure may pass almost unnoticed in the source language, yet seem clumsy in the translation. For instance, expressions in Slovene such as *čim manj, čim bolj, čim več, čim prej* have a convenient compactness, which may explain why they are often (over)used. The equivalent English formulation *as...as possible* is, by contrast, less concise (which may also explain why it is less often used).

An example:

- ... in vam hkrati želimo veliko sreče pri zagotavljanju neposrednih sodelavcev in produkcijskih partnerjev – tudi iz Slovenije – in čim manj problemov v realizaciji, da bi tako vašo multimedijsko serijo Evrope 2004 lahko videli čim prej.

- ... and wish you at the same time the best of luck in finding associates and production partners – also from Slovenia – and *as few problems as possible* in its implementation, so that we will be able to view your multimedia series Europe 2004 *as soon as possible*.

Reword the end of the sentence as:

- ... so that we will *soon be able* to view your multimedia series Europe 2004.

The removal of *as soon as possible* not only shortens the sentence but also brings it to a firmer conclusion. In cases such as this – and there are many – deletion of words is fully justified.

## Weak endings

As we have just seen, the focus of a sentence can be improved by ending on a firm note. Translators are often confronted with the problem of where to place qualifying words, usually adverbs, in the best position. Typical examples are: *too, also, as well, after all, immediately, respectively, lately, recently, directly*, etc. For example:

- Many studies have examined possible mediators of the coupling between neuronal activity and CBF, but only a few studies have examined the relationship between the CBF findings and neuronal activity *directly*.

By shifting the “weak” end-word *directly* to an earlier position, we not only give it proper prominence, but also make the sentence more immediately understandable:

- ... but only a few studies have *directly examined* the relationship between the CBF findings and neuronal activity.

Likewise in the following example, changes in word order and wording would prevent the sentence from ending on a “falling note”:

- Slovenia and Estonia share (the) common values, such as peace and security, human rights and prosperity, which is the foundation of their close cooperation at the multilateral level *as well*.

Routine diplomatic language, such as this is, tends to be even more wearisome because it lacks “bite” or tautness. In the sentence above, the wording could be tightened:

- ... which *also form* the foundation of their close cooperation at the multilateral level.

Or, more freely:

- ... which *are, indeed*, the foundation of...

The question of word order will be dealt with more fully in the following section.

To conclude this introductory part, however, I should like to add a few personal observations about the technique of language editing and “lektoriranje”.

## Approaches to textual correction

Correcting a text is not merely a matter of taking out a red pen and altering the errors. Indeed, I suggest that the colour red should be sparingly used. My reasons for saying so are that:

- Errors differ** – in type and in importance. They range from straightforward typographical mistakes, through missing articles, inconsistent tenses, faulty punctuation etc., right up to defects of style and register, and – perhaps hardest of all to correct – confused sense. A grammatically “correct” sentence is not necessarily free of error. Lengthy sentences, especially in legal and technical documents, can-



not always be shortened merely to make the text more readable. In formal correspondence, there may be clashes of register, even though the meaning is not unclear. For the person who receives the corrected text, i.e. the translator or editor, it is important to be able to distinguish between serious and incidental errors, between corrections which **must** be made and **suggestions** for improvements which **might** be made. If everything is marked uniformly in red, these distinctions are lost.

**ii. Context matters.** In language editing and revision one must always ask: Does the language suit the context? And, by implication, is it appropriate for the intended reader? For instance, would an emotionally charged word such as *provoke* – which is normally associated with violent acts or political disturbances – be suitable in a strictly medical context? Surprisingly, it can be used, as in: “the severe inflammation was **provoked** and further aggravated by the administration of non-prescribed drugs.” Here, *provoke* is being used in the Latin sense of *provocare* (call forth/challenge/bring out). It would be a mistake for the language editor to alter this to a more seemingly neutral word such as **caused**, **initiated** or **induced**. The language editor, therefore, must take care to check whether such an (unexpectedly powerful) expression is acceptable in medical texts.

One may also encounter expressions which, if one is not an expert in the field, may seem illogical or even incorrect. For instance, in financial reports, the expression: **negative goodwill** to describe the loss of goodwill, possibly from a takeover, or because of contractual disputes. Here, too, the editor would be wise to double check before making a correction which would, in fact, be wrong. After all, good translators can generally be relied upon to know the correct terminology. Also, in my experience, they will always mark in the text (by deep-shading or question marks) any expressions about which they are uncertain. This helps to establish a dialogue between the language editor and the translator, and again points to the need for more discretion in correction: red is not the only colour available.

**iii. Motivation.** Translators work under considerable and constant pressure. Not only do they have to meet deadlines – how appropriate is that grim sounding word! – but also they have to deal with often hastily written texts, last-minute alterations, complex terminology and convoluted structures. Their efforts to provide a good translation in time to meet the dreaded deadline often pass unacknowledged (“many a flower was born to bloom in the desert sands unseen”), yet any defects will immediately be noted. It is not praise but criticism that the translator most often receives. What is well done is not noticed, only the errors stand out. The language editor (or *lektor*) should, therefore, help to right this imbalance by also indicating in the corrections those solutions which work well (an occasional tick ✓ of approval is enough), and by suggesting **alternative** translations which the translator is free to accept or reject. In my own experience, this form of dialogue is most effective: once the main problems have been detected, they can usually be solved on the phone or by fax / e-mail, and often the best solution will turn out to be a **third idea**, sparked off by the dialogue.

### Colour system

For all the above reasons, I prefer to use a three-colour system for correcting texts:

- **red** for typographical / printing errors only,
- **blue** for general errors, e.g. word choice / vocabulary, tenses, word order / punctuation, etc.; and also for changes to be made even where there are no actual errors, e.g. adding / deleting words, improving the sequence of thoughts / sentence structure, etc.
- **pencil** for suggestions or points open to discussion, e.g. offering alternative expressions, which the translator / editor may or may not agree with; and also for raising queries if I feel that I have not properly understood the text – especially if I do not have access to the Slovene original.

Although this system may seem unnecessarily complex, I find it particularly helpful when doing the **second revision**, since it is then that I often find better solutions. Hence the useful-



ness of having some corrections in pencil – to allow for afterthoughts.

I should like to end this section by stressing the importance of the second revision. During the first correction, one's mind is attempting to cope with two different, though interlinked matters: **meaning** and **language**

### III Word Order & Punctuation

What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about.

(George Orwell)

The main function of punctuation is *to make perfectly clear the construction* of the written words.

(G.V. Carey, author's italics)

Word order is governed not so much by rules as by customary patterns, usage and expectations. Some of the so-called rules, e.g. to never split an infinitive (!), are today freely broken. One may have been taught that one of the basic rules of word order is **time, manner, place**, yet this is little better than a guideline. The order may be flexible, e.g. "Exhausted by the long delay at the border, the delegates finally arrived at the conference centre at 10.10, just in time for the opening ceremony." Manner (exhausted), place (conference centre), time (10.10) – the order is inverted, but the sentence has the right impact.

To follow the time-manner-place "rule" would be to sound textbookish: "At 10.10, the delegates, exhausted by the long delay at the border, finally arrived at the conference centre, just in time for the opening ceremony." The first version is definitely preferable.

There are, of course, certain "unwritten rules" in word order, i.e. set combinations or patterns of words which are resistant to change, possibly because they are euphonically satisfying – as speechmakers well know. In expressions such as the following there is no clear reason why the word order could not be reversed, except that it would "sound

**correctness**. On second reading, with corrections already made, it is far easier to view the text as whole and to spot whatever one has (almost inevitably) missed. Just as, in an unfamiliar city, one always notices more when walking down a street for the second time.

wrong": **ways and means, aims and objectives, tried and tested, back-to-front, upside down, for better or for worse, more or less, ins and outs / ups and downs, a long, hot summer, pros and cons, a full, detailed report, a hard day's work** (or, in the Beatles' song, *A Hard Day's Night*), etc. We could say: **cons and pros, objectives and aims, or a hot long summer** – but we don't. Ingrained language patterns have a strong influence on the way in which we order our thoughts. In doing so, we often rely on connectives and qualifiers, e.g. **but / and / or, nevertheless, all the same, despite (this), in addition / furthermore**, etc. Where we place them, however, is often open to choice.

Let us now turn to some of the most frequent causes of word order disturbance. One of the commonest is what I would call "structure stretching", i.e. words which naturally belong together are kept too far apart.

#### Structure stretching

If the verb is separated from its subject or object by too much intervening text, the reader is likely to be confused. As here:



- *I propose that the date of your visit, which will provide an excellent opportunity for the exchange of our views on further development of bilateral cooperation between our two countries and on various issues and challenges the international community is facing be agreed upon later.*

One possible improvement would be to begin the sentence: I propose that we agree later upon the date of your visit, which will...

However, a better solution would be to divide it into two parts:

- Your visit will provide an excellent opportunity for...
- May I propose, then, that the date (of your visit) be agreed upon later?

In this way, the verb *propose* is directly linked to *what*, specifically, is being proposed.

Even in shorter sentences, the same approach should apply:

- Thank you very much for entrusting me to *share my opinion* regarding further treatment of Ms Mojca Oblak with you.  
(from a doctor's letter to a colleague)

Reword as: Thank you very much for entrusting me *to share with you my opinion* regarding further treatment of Ms Mojca Oblak.

The verb could be regarded as the tree-trunk of the sentence, to which all other parts – branches, twigs, and leaves – are directly or indirectly connected. As was mentioned in Section II, in English it is often preferable to place the verb in a strong position, after any adverbs, qualifiers or time-markers, particularly at the end of the sentence. As here:

- With Slovenia's integration into the European Union our international obligations will *increase further*.

Reword as:

- ... will *further increase*.

Or here:

- Now, six months after the onset of the disease, the patient is without pain, remains blind on the ipsilateral side, and the functions of nerves III through IV *improved only partially*.

Reword as:

- ... *have only partially improved*.

Or here:

- Due to the need for a final disposal of LILW, the final solution for the short-lived LILW is the key issue of radioactive waste management in Slovenia *at the moment*.

Reword as:

- ... *is at the moment* the key issue of radioactive waste management in Slovenia.

(In this example the time-marker, *at the moment*, comes after the verb – with optional commas.)

Conditional forms of the verb – **would, could, should... be** – do tolerate some “splitting” or intervening text, but helpful punctuation is required.

- (Natura 2000 sites)

Nevertheless, the requirements for ensuring the favourable conservation status of various EU-important forest habitat types and species *should be incorporated* in the plans *more explicitly*.

Reword as:

- ... *should be more explicitly incorporated* in the plans.

In the next sentence two solutions are possible:

- The plans *should* especially in Natura 2000 forest sites *deal* more with the preservation and establishment of key habitats.

Reword as:

- The *plans* – especially in Natura 2000 forest sites – *should deal* more with the preservation...

Or:

- The *plans should*, especially in Natura 2000 forest sites, *deal* more with the preservation...

## Source language influence

Following too closely the SL word order and punctuation may lead to confusion or misunderstanding. For instance:

- (Zavarovalnica Triglav) In 2001 especially university educated persons were em-



ployed. Compared to 2000 there were 27 more university trained employees. At the end of 2001 32% of all employees had university education, or 788 employees.

- (V letu 2001 smo zaposlovali predvsem kadre z visokošolsko oziroma univerzitetno izobrazbo. Tako je v primerjavi z letom 2000 zaposlenih 27 delavcev več z visokošolsko oziroma univerzitetno izobrazbo. Delež delavcev z visoko oziroma univerzitetno in višješolsko izobrazbo je ob koncu leta 2001 znašal 32 odstotkov vseh zaposlenih oziroma 788 delavcev.)

The translator has succeeded in reducing the length of the original by eliminating some of the redundancies in the text. This is a good example of the translator acting intelligently as editor, by considering the English reader of the annual report. Nevertheless, the translation as it is could be slightly improved.

Revised translation:

- In 2001, Triglav's employees were mainly university educated / ... we employed mainly university educated staff. ... At the end of 2001, 32% (i.e. 788 employees) had university-level education.

In negative sentences, confusion may be caused by placing the word *not* too far away from the words to which it directly refers. As here:

- The Journal seeks to embrace three processes: management concepts and processes, globalizations and transitions, *which are all not* specifically tied to one area or academic discipline.

(Koper Faculty of Management)

Reword as:

- ... *not all of which* are specifically tied...

Or here:

- The Port of Koper is one of Slovenia's most powerful traffic magnets, and one *which is not important* only for Slovenia, but also for Austria and all other East European countries.

Reword as:

- ... and one *which is important, not only for* Slovenia but also for Austria...

Opening and closing sentences, particularly in letters and official speeches, need to be carefully worded. For instance:

- I am representing a nation at this conference, which has numerous experiences – good and bad – with life in multicultural and multireligious countries. We had lived in the Habsburg Monarchy until 1918, and then in Yugoslavia until 1991.

In order to avoid ambiguity, the opening should be reworded as:

- *At this conference, I am representing a nation which has considerable experience – both good and bad – with life in...*

(Note: the plural use of *experiences* is also acceptable here.)

Likewise:

- Dear Colleague,  
*I received your letter dated 29 March 2002, in which you informed me on Bulgaria's intention to assume the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2004 and of the fact that it is a foreign policy priority of the Bulgarian Government...*

In this case, it is not so much the word order as the choice of words that matters – though both reveal clear SL influence. A more suitable opening would be:

- Dear Colleague,  
*Thank you for your letter of 29 March 2002, informing me of Bulgaria's candidature for / readiness to assume / the Chairmanship of the OSCE in the 2004, and of the fact that this is a foreign policy priority...*

The next example illustrates even more strikingly the natural tendency to follow SL word order patterns:

- Your Excellency  
*I have received the invitation of the Minister of Health of the republic of Poland to pay a visit to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, and I wish to thank you for it most sincerely.*

(pred časom sem prejel vabilo ministra za zdravstvo Republike Poljske, da v letošnjem letu obiščem Ministrstvo za zdravstvo Republike Poljske, za katero se iskreno zahvaljujem.)



The English translation, though quite correct, sounds colder than the Slovene original. The reason is, most probably, that the opening words "I have received the invitation" ... seem to suggest that a negative response might follow, e.g. ... "but, unfortunately, owing to prior commitments, I am unable to accept." To ensure that the right message is conveyed from the start, one would "put the good news first":

- Your Excellency,  
*I should like to thank you most sincerely for the invitation I have just received from the Minister of Health to visit /pay a visit to/ the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland.*

One final word on openings in correspondence: the expression with / by this letter (*s tem pismom*) is less frequently used in English than in Slovene. For example:

- Dear Prof. Paladino,  
*With this letter I would like to invite you to participate as an examiner at the board examination...*

Alternatives:

- (warmer)  
– *I have the honour of inviting you to...*  
– *I should be most grateful if you would accept the invitation to...*
- (neutral)  
– *On behalf of the Klinični center I should like to invite you to...*  
– *I would be glad / grateful if you would accept an invitation to...*  
– *My reason for writing is to invite you to...*

## Punctuation:

"to make perfectly clear the construction"

In writing, punctuation serves much the same function as the characteristic markers in speech – hesitations (erms/ums), pauses for side-thoughts, interjections, vocal stresses, rhythmic changes, questions and semi-questions (vocal parentheses), etc. Since I have already dealt in detail elsewhere (Into English, DZS, Ljubljana, 2000) with the main differences between Slovene and English

punctuation, here I shall concentrate mainly on the relation between punctuation and **meaning**. Or, to put it differently: how punctuation can help towards more precise understanding.

In the first example, added punctuation would help to tighten the structure:

- (On the siting of radioactive waste depositories)

The suitability assessment in the Area Survey Stage is planned in two steps: at first on the basis of geological recommendations potentially suitable areas have to be identified and in the next steps these areas will be further evaluated.

Change to:

- ... is planned in two steps: at first, on the basis of geological recommendations, potentially suitable areas have to be identified; then, in the next step(s), these areas will be further evaluated.

When two different statements are made part of one sentence, a comma is usually not strong enough to separate them:

- The participants were encouraged to prepare their contributions *before the meeting*, 6 contributions were received.

Change the comma to a semicolon, or link the two parts with *and* after the comma. In the next example, a link is provided by *and*...

- Everything that is European is often linked with the European Union *only and* there are but a few who know that a certain document originated in the Council of Europe.

Here, a comma is needed after *only*, in order to indicate that these are two different statements. The word *and* should be replaced by *yet*.

The main function of the comma before *and* is to prevent the eye from reading together words which do not belong together. For example:

- These lesions, when they are large, represent a serious problem for surgery and complete resection is not possible in all cases.

Here, a comma is essential after *surgery* in order to avoid the combination of *surgery and complete resection*. Two other words which



frequently need to be preceded by commas are *as* and *or*.

- The pituitary adenoma presented has not been removed *completely as* one can see in fig. 10B.

Comma before *as*.

- It is actually an enormous relief to get from one side of the park to the other without being mugged, beaten up, *run down or gassed* by the lakeside fog.

(The Spectator)

Strictly speaking, a comma is needed before *or* (since one does not expect to be *run down* by the lakeside fog!).

Although it is customary in technical writing not to punctuate over-generously, the (non-expert) reader would at times appreciate some assistance – especially in the form of commas.

- If the nonlinear static function is multiplied by a nonzero real constant *c* and if the linear part is divided by the same constant the resulting model has the same input-output behaviour. This redundancy of basic parameters can be resolved for example by fixing the gain of the linear dynamic part.

This would be somewhat easier to read in the form below:

- If the nonlinear static function is multiplied by a nonzero real constant *c*, and if the linear part is divided by the same constant, the resulting model has the same input-output behaviour. This redundancy of basic parameters can be resolved, for example, by fixing the gain of the linear dynamic part.

The general points being made here are that:

- i) when there are two (or more) *if*-clauses in the sentence, they need to be separated by commas or by dashes, ii) when *for example* occurs in mid-sentence it is usually marked off by commas.

When incidental or “footnote type” information is included in the body of the sentence, the use of the double dashes (- ... -) may be preferable to commas, particularly in long sentences.

- After surgery, *which may (and usually does) go very well*, the patient is wakened and extubated, but he/she may have (motor) tetraparesis, which may lead to insurmountable problems with the lungs.

Since there are several explanatory comments in this sentence – and therefore many commas – the opening side-remark could be given between dashes: After surgery – *which may (and usually does) go very well* – the patient is...

Likewise, if the opening statement is separated from the main verb by a lengthy “footnote type” interjection, the reader may be confused by the use of commas:

- *Participation of the target public* in PCB disposal, although to a lesser extent oriented towards PCB equipment containing more than 5 dm<sup>3</sup> PCBs or PCB oil fillings, *is preferential* and significant in particular for the manufacturing and energy sector.

If the commas were replaced by dashes, the reader would more easily absorb the incidental information:

- *Participation of the target public* in PCB disposal – although to a lesser extent... or PCB oil fillings – *is preferential*...

Even in shorter sentences, the same strategy may be appropriate, as here:

- (Meetings of the Presidents of Central European States)

These meetings have considerably expanded the initial framework established when *four presidents from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Germany met* in Salzburg in 1993.

Change to:

- These meetings have considerably expanded the initial framework established when four presidents – from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Germany – *first met* in Salzburg in 1993.

The addition of the word *first* (met) also helps to clarify the focus of the sentence.



## IV Open Questions

Errors cannot be neatly compartmentalized. In any given sentence there may be several different aspects of language which need to be corrected or modified. There may also be – indeed there often are – sentences in which nothing is “wrong”, yet one feels improvements could be made. It is these open questions that we shall be looking at here, in the final section.

### Style

#### i. Word choice

In the examples below, alternatives are suggested for the expressions underlined; where necessary, other alterations are also made.

- (Invitation to a wine-tasting ceremony)

Fifteen samples that you will taste today *are the best* that Slovenia can *muster* in its wine production.

(Petnajst vzorcev, ki jih boste poskusili danes, je najboljša, kar Slovenija zmore na vinskem področju.)

Rewording:

- *The fifteen samples* that you will taste today *are the very best that Slovenia can provide* from its wine production / the very best that Slovenian wine producers can offer.

Note: The word *muster* has strong military associations, and is close in meaning to *mobilize*. Too strong in this innocent context. The word *very* (best) has been added to give a positive stress.

- It is crucial that politics does not prevent the media from access to information. The media, on the other hand, must be *professional enough* to avoid tailoring information and to *take care* that their articles are *credible*.

Rewording:

- ... The media, on the other hand, must be *sufficiently professional* to avoid tailoring information and to *ensure* that their articles are *reliable / trustworthy*.

Note: In formal writing, the word *enough* is usually replaced by *sufficient*(ly); this is an example of the not-clear-cut distinction between spo-

ken and written usage. Since a formal tone is expected here, *ensure* is preferable to *take care*. The word *credible* has the meaning of believable – but not necessarily true. Here, the stress is on accuracy, veracity – hence my preference for *reliable* or *trustworthy* (or *accurate / dependable*).

The next example is taken from the text of a speech:

- (Knowledge of microbiology is of the utmost significance. In our company, special attention is devoted to food safety control.) We have established *all tools* for prevention of any risk to our consumer. *With this* our highly qualified experts and *adequate* laboratories are of key importance.

Rewording:

- We have established all measures to prevent any risk to *the customer*. *Our highly qualified experts and excellent / well-equipped laboratories are, therefore,* of key importance.

Note: *Tool(s)* is a much overused word, and one does not usually *establish* tools; here, *measures* would be more appropriate. *Our customer* – I prefer the more neutral *the*. *With this* would be clearer as *therefore* (especially in a speech). *Adequate* is a semi-false friend: in English it tends to have the meaning of sufficient, suitable, appropriate – but not much more (e.g. “adequate accommodation” would be a room suitable for a short visit – bed, desk, washing facilities, but probably no view!). The *laboratories* must be more than “adequate”, hence the suggestion of *excellent / well-equipped*.

- Our company is aware that only motivated and qualified employees can attain *quality and business excellence objectives set up*.

Rewording:

- Our company is well aware that *the already set / established quality and business excellence objectives* can be attained only by motivated and qualified employees.

Or:

- Our company fully realizes that it is only motivated and qualified employees who can



attain the already established quality and business excellence objectives.

Note: In this ritual sentence from a company annual report, one needs to end on a bold, conclusive note. The phrasal verb *set up* is not happy with its "last word" role. The two alternative rewordings suggest how either of the two main points – *qualified employees* or *business excellence objectives* – could be given greater prominence by occupying the dominant final position.

## ii. Repetition and redundancy

When translating, particularly under pressure, it is often difficult to find time to refine the wording of a sentence. The closer the deadline, the more likely it is that the translation will be faithful, but not elegant. The language editor, who **does** have the time for reflection, should therefore be considerate in making corrections, and also avoid the temptation to over-correct. In some cases, the text may have been written directly in English, i.e. not translated; if so, the editor needs to be alert to subconscious SL influences:

- (Refurbishment of the Central Interim Storage for radioactive waste materials)

Optimistically it was expected that the reconstruction and refurbishment *will be* completed by the end of the 2003, now we *will be* happy if the paper work *will be* concluded and approval received by the end of the year. As soon as the licence for reconstruction *will be* granted the activities *will* start.

Rewording:

- Optimistically, it was expected that the reconstruction and refurbishment *would be* completed by the end of 2003; *now we would be* happy if the paper work, at least, *could be* concluded and approval received by the end of the year. Once the licence for reconstruction *has been* granted, the activities will begin /... work on the Storage can be started. /.

Note: The repeated used of *will* is most probably a reflection of the Slovene *bo / bodo*. The rewording suggests other possibilities (*would / could / can*), and also a change of punctuation (;) and the addition of *at least* for emphasis.

- The hotel is located at the most attractive point on the bank of the lake with a marvellous *view*

*on the Bled Castle and its staff* will look after the well-being of the presidents and ensure excellent *accommodation conditions* for its distinguished guests during their stay *there*.

(Hotel, ki stoji na najlepši točki tik ob jezeru s čudovitim pogledom na blejski grad, bo s svojim osebjem skrbel za dobro počutje predsednikov in za odlične pogoje bivanja eminentnih gostov.)

Rewording:

- The hotel is located at the most attractive point on the lakeside, with a *splendid / marvellous view of Bled Castle*; its staff will attend to / look after the wellbeing / comfort of the presidents and *ensure excellent conditions* for the distinguished guests *during their stay*.

Note: The translator has wisely avoided imitating the Slovene structure, beginning *Hotel, ki stoji...*, since this would lead to too many clauses marked off by commas in English. However, to avoid the curious statement "with a marvellous view of Bled Castle and its staff", stronger punctuation is needed, e.g. a semicolon. Two words have been omitted – *accommodation* and *there* – because both are self-evident.

The need for a punctuation mark before *and* is again illustrated here:

- Slovenia signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Union and the general atmosphere here in Athens is *correspondingly solemn*.

(Slovenija je podpisala Pristopno pogodbo k EU in splošno vzdušje tu v Atenah je temu primer-no slovesno.)

Rewording:

- Slovenia has signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Union, and the general atmosphere here in Athens is *correspondingly / suitably / appropriately / ceremonial*.

Note: Slovenia did not sign the Treaty *and* the general atmosphere! Hence the need for a comma. The word *slovesen/slovesno* should not be automatically translated as *solemn*. In English, *solemn* is usually reserved for events such as funerals, commemoration services, swearing-in ceremonies, etc. (OED: adj. formal and dignified, not cheerful or smiling, serious.) In this example, *ceremonial* is more appropriate.



- It is a great honour and privilege for me to unveil the statue of the Slovene poet Dr France Prešeren at *such a reputable* and important institute *such as* Columbia University.

Rewording:

- ... the statue of the Slovene poet Dr France Prešeren at *an institution of such renown and importance as is* Columbia University.

Note: The word order has been changed to avoid repetition of *such as*. *Reputable* is most often associated with high moral quality; here, *renowned* or *of renown* would be more appropriate.

- (Funds needed from the national budget for implementation of requirements under the present Operational Programme are estimated at a total of ca. 26 million SIT,) principally for *development* of more detailed plans and *setting up* of the requisite records as well as *implementation* of the target public awareness raising campaigns.

Rewording:

- ... principally *for developing* more detailed plans and *setting up* the requisite records, as well as *for implementing* the target public awareness raising campaigns.

Note: The pattern *for (the)...* of, as in *for development of*, is somewhat ponderous in English, especially when repeated several times in the same sentence. The use of the *-ing*-form – *developing*, *setting up*, *implementing* – gives welcome briskness to the wording, and also cuts down on the length.

A comparable example of "heavy" wording would be:

- (Statement by the Management Board)  
Our long-term goal is *the satisfaction* of our customers and associates. *However, such a goal can be achieved on the basis of* constant training, research, *discovering* of our customer's wishes, *by the adaptability* of our offer *with the view to fulfilling* the wishes of the users of our services, *as well as* by fast and deliberate decision-making.

(Zadovoljstvo naših strank in sodelavcev je naš dolgoročni cilj. Za doseganje le tega je potreb-

no neprestano izobraževanje, raziskovanje, odkrivanje želja komitentov, prilagodljivost ponudbe z namenom izpolnjevanja želja uporabnikov naših storitev ter seveda hitro in preudarno odločanje.)

Official statements by Management Boards are, in any language, prone to rhetoric, grandiloquence, and statements of good intent. The language also tends to be uniform: the same pious words could be used, with only minor changes, by almost any company. (The example above happens to be drawn from the Annual Report of a bank.) It is not surprising, then, that the translation may sound dutifully good, but weary. There are no errors, merely the familiar word-blur. One might ask: is it worth trying to revise such a text, since it contains little that deserves careful reading? Probably not, but let's try:

Rewording:

- Our long-term goal is *to satisfy* our customers and associates. *Achievement of this goal requires:* constant staff training, research, discovering our customers' wishes and adapting our services accordingly, and also rapid, yet well-considered decision-making. Note: The original translation has been reduced in length from 59 words to 37, i.e. by **more than one-third**. This does not, however, mean that the revised version is better; it is, merely, shorter. Nevertheless, if we consider that these two sentences represent only a fragment of the Report, then one could argue that the final Report might be approximately one-third shorter. That could be a welcome gain. On the other hand, the revision of just these two sentences took 15 **minutes** – and still may not be satisfactory. Therefore, the additional time invested in thoroughly revising the full report would be **one-third more** than that required for an honest (if unambitious) piece of editing.

**Conclusion:** The time invested by the language editor/translator will directly reflect the importance of the content of the text. Routine thinking, alas, deserves routine translation.



## Summing-up

In 1947, George Orwell published one of his most notable essays, "Politics and the English Language". His comment on "modern English" is still relevant today: "Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits, one can think more clearly." In his well-known novel 1984, he even invented a word for politically manipulated language: **Newspeak**, in which "old" expressions are deliberately eliminated, and the meaning of the new words is dictated by "Big Brother". (One wonders how he might have reacted to some of the excesses of present-day Eurospeak!)

The main aim of this article has been to show that the most frequent **types** of language error can be identified, and therefore avoided, even though they may appear in different contexts. Although there are few rules, there are several sound strategies which an alert translator/editor can adopt. To summarise the guidelines given in section II, I would give prominence to the following:

- i. **Overall style.** Formal, semi-formal, colloquial (written/spoken), informal? Who is the intended reader?
- ii. **Purpose/Intent.** Or, why is the translation needed? This question is rarely asked, because the translator naturally assumes that it **must** be needed. This is not always true. If the purpose of the text is known, e.g. for display on the Internet, or for use in publicity material, the entire text might not need to be translated. To quote from my own experience, I have several times been asked to translate (very convoluted) press reviews of theatre performances, only to find that just a few "snappy quotes" made their way into the final brochure. Work wasted. Translators should protect themselves against unnecessary workloads.

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

(George Orwell)

- iii. **Time & Motion Study.** In the three-colour scheme for language editing, I was suggesting that this work involves not just correction but also medication. Each sentence has to be given "special treatment": if, as Orwell says, "one is willing to take the necessary trouble". The real cost of language editing should be based not on the number of pages corrected, but on the number of hours invested.
- iv. **Consulting with the author or publisher.** When working on books, reports, longer articles, and illustrated works (e.g. tourist publications), the translator/editor can greatly help to improve the final quality of the publication by having preliminary discussions with the author or publisher about the overall style and layout. Among matters that should be discussed are:
  - the use of *italics*, underlining, bold print, etc.
  - **abbreviations**, especially in tables, graphs and captions to photographs and illustrations,
  - **capital letters**, particularly in headings, tables of content, and titles or positions (President, Manager – M or m?)
  - translation or retention of **SL words and expressions** (SAZU, Prekmurje, Narodna galerija, Prešernova nagrada, Zelena pot, kozolec). On the whole, I am in favour of retaining the Slovene word wherever possible. If, for instance, SAZU appears several times in the text, when it is first mentioned the English translation may be given in brackets (Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts). Thereafter, the acronym SAZU should be retained, and not the strange-looking anglicised SASA.

I am also in favour of retaining the words **ulica** and **cesta**, as in **Rimska ulica** (not Roman street!) and **Slovenska cesta** (not Slovenska road). After all, even the English will refer to **rue des Ecoles** (not to Ecoles



street) or **Place St. Michel** (not St Michael's square!).

Following on from this point, I should like to make a special plea for:

v. Retaining the diacritic markers: š, ž, č

If there is no sound technical reason for omitting the diacritic marker (ˇ) on š, ž, and č, it should not be arbitrarily left out, for the mistaken reason that the word will somehow be easier for the foreign eye to absorb. It will not. In fact, removing the diacritic makes it even harder for the foreigner to come close to at least an approximate pronunciation of the Slovene word. The diacritic serves as a helpful signal to the intelligent foreigner that this may look like an *s* or a *c*, but it has a different, fuller sound - *š* and *č*. After all, sports commentators and the general public now have relatively little difficulty in pronouncing the name of former Wimbledon champion Goran Ivanišević.

Two further reasons for defending diacritic markers, in other languages as well, are that:

- the general policy towards them, particularly in the press, is uneven. The French **accent aigu** (é) is usually retained, yet the identical marker in Hungarian is most often omitted – the composer Bela Bartok is, in fact, Bartók Béla in Hungarian.

The Scandinavian ø (as in København) is fairly often used, yet the Polish ł (as in Łódź) is less often seen. The Latin cedilla ç / ș is usually retained in writing French, Spanish and Portuguese words (e.g. Alençon, Curaçao), yet often left out in Romanian words, e.g. Timisoara, Sighisoara (ș). This regrettable imbalance will become worse if Slavic speakers, for instance, voluntarily dispense with their own diacritic markers.

- With the expansion of the European Union it has become even more important that specific features of the languages of all countries which use the Latin alphabet be correctly transcribed and used in their proper form. Otherwise, if they are not respected and not used, these important markers will

gradually disappear. We will then just have to accept that the beautiful Soča river is, less euphonically, the Soca, or that the words of the national anthem were written by the poet France Preseren.

To end with, I should like to return to a word mentioned earlier – **motivation**. Although language editing/**lektoriranje** does focus mainly on correction or improvement, rather than approval or praise, it should still be seen as positive, not negative. In my experience, the corrections are usually received with interest and gratitude, not with resentment. There are, for instance, scientists and research workers who may have to submit their papers as many as three times for language revision, in order to comply with changes required by the reviewers. Yet, in the end, a good work properly presented will be published. There are also translators who say that they continually learn from corrections to their work, by becoming more sensitive to where the “danger areas” lie. Publishers are becoming more willing to insist on (and pay for) the essential second revision of the final proofs. This is important, because the quality of publications – from brochures to books – is seen as a first indicator of the quality of goods or services offered. A carelessly printed conference programme, or a badly presented tourist guide, does no good to the city's esteem. Language editing helps to preserve local pride.

I leave the final word to my dentist, who once remarked: “In a sense, our work is similar. We correct the obvious defects, on the outside; but only the patient knows what improvements have been made inside.”

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