

# Whither the Language Industries

by Bertie Kaal





**W**hen I first started my job at Benjamins in 1988 I had already met Geoffrey Kingscott at *Ex-polangues '87* in Paris. He edited *Language Monthly*, a lively magazine for translators, and he ran a fast growing translation company. Around that same time, Benjamins actively began a publishing program in Translation Studies. We had taken over the FIT publication *Babel* from Akademia Kiado, and we published our first book for translation students, Mary Snell-Hornby's *Translation Studies: An integrated approach*. These publications fitted well in Benjamins specialisation in Linguistics and Pragmatics. But we sensed a need for a bridge between research, pedagogy, and practice to serve a growing number of universities offering translator training with high quality publications. I had begun to sense this in the early 1980s when I worked with Juan C Sager, editor of *Multilingua*, a journal under the auspices of the European Commission concerned with professionalising linguistic knowledge for a multilingual society.

That in mind, Geoffrey Kingscott's dynamic enthusiasm was inspiring. So when he asked us to take care of the publishing side of *Language Monthly* so that he could concentrate on being a regular news hound, we were ready for it. It was renamed *Language International* to focus on international developments and not much later Bob Clark joined to cover more of the globe.

It was a new publishing experience for Benjamins, but it was timely because the field was in turmoil, both professionally and academically, and in dire need of news as to how this would affect people's lives. The issues at the time: Machine Translation threatened to take over the noble

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work of freelancers; and Globalisation was demanding more, faster, and cheaper translation and qualified translators. *Language International* thus gave shape to Benjamins' bridging function between academia and the translation profession.

An industry was born. The time was ripe for a review of proper training and quality standards for individual translators, profes-

sional organisations, and translation companies. Translator training began to boom, especially throughout Europe, and companies were investing in the development and application of translation workbenches and other tools such as electronic dictionaries. It was a truly pioneering time with high expectations and fast developments that begged to be reported on to keep in touch with what others were up to and to take away the myth of the all-mighty Machine Translation threat.

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I vividly remember Bob Clark giving a paper at the First Language International Conference on Teaching Translation and Interpreting at Elnore in 1991 to a crowd of translators and trainers. He acted decidedly nervous, terrified that he would be lynched because he was trying to convince us that language processing by computer can be helpful and efficient in the translator's daily work. His hands trembled as he moved the slides over the overhead projector (and he assured us it was not Parkinson's that caused it). The audience murmured, then fell silent and the talk ended in an overwhelming applause. With a true view to the future he succeeded in convincing us that we could only benefit from all this new technology and from being at the centre of attention in software design.

Machine Translation did not deliver for the consumer market and so the flurry and fear were hushed. Nevertheless, developers continued to tackle the electronic challenges and this resulted in developing more specific translation tools at a more human pace. With it, the profession for which *Language International* was designed, became more and more diverse. Translation has become equally a linguistic and a computer-buff skill in which specialisation has been the key word for the past decades. Articles such as "Whither Translation" in *Language International* characterised the changes and uncertainty of the time in the early days.

Robert Sprung and Andrew Joscelyne, who took over the editorship of *Language International* in 1997, focused on the busi-

ness side of a broader array of language professions, giving evidence that translation was no longer a cottage industry but a full-fledged global industry worthy of the stock market and that it needed new approaches to live up to the needs of a globalising economy. The *Language Industry* had become a servant to the economy and a significant part of that same economy.

Bert Esselink and Bob Clark continued to report on the business side, on technological innovations, new specialisations, training and the ever present human aspect of cross-cultural communication in a mature industry consisting of various groups of specialists. The specialisations in the language industry have turned the second oldest global profession into many different professions that no single source can report on adequately. There is no centre to hold it now.

The Internet has become the best place to find information for quick and specific problem solving. Its liquidity moves smoothly with the ever-changing needs. There is little room left for broad or long-term visions in this fast changing world of global communication. But I, for one, will miss the one source where all these aspects

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come together, to reflect on how things came to be and where they are going.

It has been an exciting 14 years with *Language International* that we would not have missed for the world. We have witnessed the establishment of the *Language Industries*. Those who have shared their views in *LI* have done so with great dedication and pleasure and will continue to do so through other channels.

...and at Benjamins we continue to publish for the Translation Studies, Interpreting, Localization, Information Design, and Terminology specialists.

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Bertie Kaal was Managing Editor of *Language International* from 1989 to 1998.