

Letters

Mind your Language

Annwyl Olygydd/Dear Editor

Caroline Tempest of the National Trust for Scotland (see 'Mind Your Language', Interpret Scotland, spring 2002) poses the question 'Is Gaelic interpretation an essential service to the Gaelic speaking community . . .?' but not the equally absurd question 'Is English interpretation an essential service to the English-speaking community?' It seems the rights of the English-speaking community are taken for granted, but not those of the Gaelic-speaking community.

Angus Peter Campbell, author of *The Blood is Strong* (1988), a booklet published to accompany the Grampian Television three-part documentary on the Gaelic Scot, was surely correct to assert that, 'A language is not just a means of communication: it is a vehicle for an entire world view, and it encapsulates the definition of culture. A language that dies takes with it a way of seeing, and a way of thinking.'

But, clearly, this is not a view shared by the NTS, who are only prepared, or so it seems, 'to provide translated interpretation' thereby ensuring that the English speaker's 'way of seeing and thinking' is maintained at the expense of a Gaelic world view. That language may be displayed, but its speakers are denied a voice. An English language world view rules, even in those places where 'The National Trust for Scotland... *attempts* to provide *translated* interpretation at properties where there is a perceived need for it' [the highlighting is mine].

On the question of policies relating to the use of languages other than English (of course!) in interpretation, the author is under the erroneous impression that the situation in Wales '...is much more clear-cut, with full Welsh translations required by law'. We, too, more often than not are force-fed translated Anglocentric texts but 'full Welsh translations required by law' are a far cry from reality. To quote the Welsh Language Board: 'What does the law say? In 1993, the Welsh Language Act was passed, which says that public bodies [but not those in the private sector] must develop ways to treat the Welsh and English languages on an equal basis in their services.' To this end, every public body is required to publish a Welsh Language Scheme.

So how, for example, does the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority ensure that the Welsh and English languages are treated on an equal basis in their interpretive publications? To quote their Welsh Language Scheme: 'Saleable interpretive publications will all have bilingual covers and will make reference to the Welsh Language wherever relevant ...' To suggest that Welsh speakers, like myself, who live their lives through the medium of Welsh should be satisfied with 'bilingual covers'

is deeply offensive. And I invite the English-speaking community to ponder the relevance (or irrelevance) of their language by substituting 'English' for 'Welsh' in the above quotation.

Finally, perhaps Caroline could be persuaded to write to the National Trust in Wales and impress upon them the importance of 'good quality translation'. To coincide with last year's National Eisteddfod, held on the site of the disused St David's airfield, the Trust published a bilingual leaflet entitled Yr [sic] Rhostiroedd Maes Awyr Tyddewi / The St. David's Airfield Heaths. The translated Welsh-language text is littered with typographical, spelling and syntactical errors, whereas the English-language text is error free. Sadly, the leaflet in question is not an isolated case.

Until interpreters eschew the tokenism typified by 'bilingual covers' (A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba beware!) and 'a [word] of welcome and an introductory sentence or two' in the vernacular for the 'natives'; abandon translations in favour of original texts; and grant indigenous language communities the same rights as the English-speaking community, Gaelic speakers in Scotland and Welsh speakers in Wales will remain second-class citizens in their own countries.

Yn gywir / Yours truly,

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The author replies

Dear Editor

Whilst I thank Dr Elis-Gruffydd for his interest in my article, I fear that its general point may have been mis-interpreted and unfortunately my quotations have been taken out of context, changing their meaning. My article raised issues about catering for a variety of non-English speaking audiences, not just Gaelic speakers, and raised the broad point about improving standards in translation. I understand Dr Elis-Gruffydd's pertinent point regarding interpreting a culture from a potentially differing world view, and I'm sure he shares with me a desire to see more lively and informative discussion on this subject.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Tempest

The National Trust for Scotland

"Technology is dominated by two types of people: those who understand what they do not manage, and those who manage what they don't understand."

Putt's Law