**ESLT 2022**

*From 6 to 9 September 2022, forces with the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT), the San Pellegrino Foundation and the PETRA-E Network to organise the seventh edition of the ESLT Summer School. Course participant Hilda Schraa reports.*

The sixth edition of the summer course of the European School of Literary Translation (ESLT) took place from 6 to 9 September 2022: the third one to be fully online. The first three editions were physical events that had taken place in Rome. I remember seeing the announcement in my inbox at the time, but I’d never taught literary translation before and thought it probably wasn’t meant for me. Added to this, I’m no stranger to the ‘imposter syndrome’: I have been teaching at the ITV School of Interpreters & Translators for more than 10 years now but still occasionally feel that I will be exposed as an imposter one day ... when everyone will find out that I’m not actually that great. Fortunately, I’m a little older now and see things a little differently.

In 2021, I was asked to teach the basic Italian course at the Vertalersvakschool. Although it was great fun, I did find it difficult to incorporate the theory into my classes. I wanted to add more variety to my classes as well. Usually, a literary translation course involves presenting students with a piece of text to translate at home, after which the various versions are discussed in class. So, when I received an e-mail about this year’s ESLT summer course, I decided to register and was then accepted to participate. There were 16 course participants in total, from about 10 different countries (ranging from Japan to Egypt and from India to Italy ... in short, from countries all across the world). Some were university educated and had a wealth of experience, while others had learnt their trade hands-on or were just starting out in their careers. It was a good mix.

Duncan Large, Academic Director of the BCLT and one of the event’s organisers, wished everyone a warm welcome, which he did with verve. I watched with admiration how he was able to put everyone at ease. If you are a little more of an introvert, it can often be quite easy to stay invisible online, but thanks to Duncan, everyone was happy to speak up. Plenary sessions were alternated with workshops in break-out rooms, where we were set to work by ourselves. For example, to prepare an ideal class based on the [Framework for Literary Translation](https://literairvertalen.org/leerlijn) (PETRA-E Framework). I was in the Dutch-speaking group, with two colleagues from the Netherlands and one from Italy. The workshops were a pleasant change because the programme was quite full all in all.

## **Day 1**

This year’s theme was ‘Translators working with others’; [the first speaker was Ros Schwartz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7RWjK8GNpc). She has been translating from French into English for more than 30 years and also gives workshops and master classes and promotes the visibility of translators. She spoke passionately about the different forms of collaboration, drawing on her own experience. You can rewatch it via the link above.

The image of translators as lonely individuals who are trapped behind their computers is no longer accurate. Their work also involves dealing with authors, publishers, editors and colleagues and the need to be at the heart of life. With this in mind, she always tries to make contact with authors (if they are still with us, of course). She prefers to meet them in person, to get a feel for the voice behind the words she is translating.

My approach is different: I put together a list of questions during the translation process. If there are any questions that I haven’t been able to resolve, I submit them to the author when I’m nearing the end of my translation. I must admit that I’m not as proactive as Ros Schwartz because I still find it difficult to profile myself like she does. I’ve noticed that the reactions I get are very different: sometimes an in-depth answer with photos and drawings and other times just a short and businesslike reply (yes, no, good) via the author’s agent. And everything in between.

Co-translators were discussed as well. I have worked on a number of co-translations myself. When you’re just starting out in the translation industry, it’s great to have someone to spar with, someone to encourage you to translate something a little more freely when you might otherwise hesitate. You also complement each other and cover each other’s blind spots, which only benefits the ultimate translation. However, you do have to be able to put your ego aside: for example, when you have spent hours struggling with a difficult passage and your co-translator translates it in no time at all. But both of you stand to benefit if you work well together. It’s all very familiar.

What I learnt most from Ros Schwartz’s lecture: be proactive, get yourself out there, build a network (that includes people who work in completely different sectors) and use it, be visible (for example, read from your own work. On Translators Aloud on YouTube, for instance). If you are working on a text that is being translated into multiple languages, try to touch base with the other translators and brainstorm about certain translation problems together. Ros Schwartz describes this as “a simple form of cross-fertilisation.”

Translators also have an ambassadorial role: bring books to the attention of publishers (you’ve got the best chance of a positive response from smaller publishers), but do your homework first. Make sure you know which books might interest a particular publisher and stay informed on what is being published in ‘your’ country. Translators can also make an important contribution to the promotion of translated books: via events in bookshops and promotion via social media.

After exchanging tips & tricks with each other in separate working groups in the afternoon, they were shared with everyone in a plenary session. This generated a whole arsenal of valuable advice and ideas. I noticed that everyone without exception said they would have liked to have learnt more about what the job of a literary translator involves when they were training for the role: working from home, contacts with colleagues, publishers and editors, contracts and trade fairs, etc.

## **Day 2**

The second day started with a fairly theoretical lecture by Anthony Cordingley (University of Sydney) about ‘collaborative translations’ through the ages. What I remember most about Cordingley’s lecture is his observation that CAT tools (Computer Aided Translation) impoverish translations. A CAT-tool translation makes it seem as if there is just one ‘neutral’ version of a text and all kinds of cultural nuances are lost.

This brought us nicely to the presentation by Christophe Declercq (Utrecht University), who gave a compelling lecture about machine translations (MT). DeepL and Google Translate create a false sense of security. If 45% is correct, 55% is not! MT doesn’t look at the image or context. Use your brain. Google Translate can only be used as a check, no more than that. As a literary translator, it’s important to play with the language, Declercq says.

His words were music to my ears: quite by coincidence, I’d seen a DeepL, Italian-Dutch translation this year and was ‘shocked’ by the quality; the translation was reasonably good. Fortunately, there’s no need to worry about the survival of our profession just yet. Declercq presented us with examples showing that good literary translations rely and will continue to rely on human input. To quote his words: “MT is not getting better, it’s getting less worse”.

In the afternoon, Ilse Feinauer from Stellenbosch University (South Africa) gave an interesting lecture on proofreading: either by the translator or an external third party. The latter needs to keep perfectionism at bay and constantly ask him/herself: is it necessary to improve the text? And not: can I improve the text? With this in mind, Feinauer believes that proofreading should be part of every literary translator’s training. Firstly, because students must be able to proofread their own translations and the translations of others. Secondly, because they need to get used to having their translations proofread. She shared a detailed step-by-step plan with us, which I will certainly use (in part) in the future.

## **Day 3**

The third day focused on the PETRA-E Framework, otherwise known as the [Framework for Literary Translation](https://literairvertalen.org/leerlijn). Duncan Large talked to us about its origins and purpose. Anna Mioni (University of Venice) and Vanda Miksić (University of Zadar) gave numerous examples of how to implement the various competencies in your classes. Ideally, you will ask students to translate something that will actually be published: this will motivate them to do their best and they will experience every aspect of the literary translation process.

Although I was already familiar with the Framework, I did gain some ideas on how to incorporate the various competencies into future classes. We were also given the opportunity to explore our ideas in separate workshops. I really enjoyed seeing how everyone highlighted a different aspect.

## **Day 4**

The last day of this inspiring course. The week had flown by. Earlier in the week, most course participants had said that they would have liked to have learned more about what the literary-translator profession involved when they were training to become translators. I’m not sure if it was a coincidence but Friday started with a [panel discussion](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RqoAGJ1yWQ) (which was open to course participants and non-course participants) that focused on how to prepare students for professional life. The panellists were translator Lara Hölbling Matković, who was representing CEATL (the European Council of Literary Translators’ Associations) and translator Johanna McCalmont, who was representing the Emerging Translators Network (ETN). The moderator was Leonardo Marcello Pignataro (CEATL).

The panel discussion considered the various professional associations and networks that translators can join. Both translators explained how these associations and networks had and still were benefiting them. The ETN is primarily aimed at translators who are new to the profession (mainly English-speaking). The CEATL website is a great source of information on subject including best practices, news about trade fairs and events and interesting articles.

The Dall’italiano al mondo event was touched on as well (which was very interesting for me as someone who translates from Italian). Last year, this event - which is organised especially for translators who translate from Italian - was organised in Turin for the first time, at the initiative of the Salone Internazionale del Libro. This year, the event will take place online, on Friday 11 November 2022. I have registered and am already looking forward to it. The [event website](https://saltopiu.salonelibro.it/) is worth heading to for interesting interviews, podcasts and videos, etc. and definitely a good source for all translators from Italian into other languages.

Conclusion: did the four days live up to my expectations? Definitely. Without a shadow of doubt. My classes will definitely be more varied next year. I’m intending to go through all the documents again at my leisure, to see which tips I think could work for me and take a look at all the sites mentioned. Naturally, you miss the personal contact with other course participants - during breaks and before and after sessions - when you are attending an online event. However, I was still able to get to know many interesting colleagues who might not have been able to attend if it had been a physical event. Next year’s seventh edition may be a physical event. Who knows, maybe I’ll be there too!