

# World class at Warwick

*Sarah Bawa Mason and Lindsay Sullivan report from different literary translation language tracks at the first Warwick Translates Summer School*



Sarah Bawa Mason MITI is a translator, editor and part-time senior lecturer in Translation Studies with 20 years of experience in the field, based in Portsmouth. She chaired ITI from May 2016 to May 2019, and she speaks and writes regularly about the future of the translation and interpreting sector.



Lindsay Sullivan is a freelance Mandarin Chinese to English translator, based in South Wales. She has recently completed an MA in Translation Studies, after previously gaining a PhD in Theology and Literature. She is also a part-time Mandarin tutor at Cardiff University.

As a prize for my three years of service as ITI chair, I gave myself until the end of August to decide what to do next. So I've spent the summer exploring the three main options open to me, including diving into the almost entirely unfamiliar pool of literary translation. And how better to test the waters of all things literary than to spend an intensive five days on the campus of Warwick University at the Warwick Translates Summer School?

## Star-studded line-up

Warwick University is bucking the general trend among UK universities by investing in language and languages as a key area for future development. The university is expanding its school of creative writing under the great writer and translator Maureen Freely, and, as part of that initiative, it provided kick-start funding for the literary translation summer school in early July. This support, coupled with the expertise of Amanda Hopkinson and Ros Schwartz, allowed them to assemble five days of intensive workshops led by a stellar list of proven literary experts: Arabic, led by Ruth Ahmedzai Kemp; Catalan, led by Peter Bush; Chinese, led by Nicky Harman; French, led by Ros Schwartz; German, led by Katy Derbyshire; Italian, led by Howard Curtis; Russian, led by Robert Chandler; Spanish, led by Rosalind Harvey; and Theatre, led by Paul and Trine Russell Grant.

As a Spanish speaker, I had the immense pleasure of working for a

week with Rosalind Harvey (prizewinning translator of Juan Pablo Villalobos, Guadalupe Nettel and the likes), who helped us get to grips with an extended translation of one of Nettel's rather creepy 'Pétalos' stories in the morning sessions, while boggling our brains in the afternoons with a selection of texts that forced us to consider challenging issues such as homophonic translation, code-switching poetry (a text combining the Portuguese of the Paraguayan

*For a largely commercial translator, accustomed to clear, concise writing and economic style, the week felt like an extended tea party of gorging on all the delicious cake of what language can offer*

border with interjections from Guarani) and the translation of hip-hop flamenco fusion songs. For a largely commercial translator like me, accustomed to clear, concise writing and economic style, the week felt like an extended tea party of gorging on all the delicious cake of what language can offer, and I left Warwick on the Wednesday with a reading list as long as my arm and a two-page to-do list.

## Off track with other groups

Obviously, I couldn't attend all the language sessions, but, using industrial espionage techniques,

I extracted excellent feedback from participants in all language groups (I was also very impressed to find almost half of all attendees were ITI members). Most groups contained a good balanced cohort – from students at undergraduate level through new freelancers to long-established veterans – and the cooperative manner of shared working under the guidance of generous experts made for learning all round.

I did drop out of one session to take a cheeky peek into the Theatre strand, and I was not disappointed. Paul and Trine's approach to the reading of scripts has a lot to offer translators both thespian and non-thespian. The physical storyboarding of scenes and character motivations provided great insight into the needs of the reader and actor and demonstrated how much these depend upon the content of the writing (and, by extension, the reader of any translation).

Outside the classroom there was plenty of time to socialise and network, with lunchtime and early-evening talks from publishers, editors and other experts, along with a Catalan translation slam between Peter Bush and Jennifer Arnold. Ros Schwartz gave us the low-down on how to pitch to publishers, and the publishers and editors each added their own advice to the mix. The word 'passion' sounded like a refrain throughout, combined with pragmatic advice on how best to make this work for your pitch in a balanced and convincing manner.

So, in conclusion, this event offered students like me the chance to plug into the literary translation network with the crème de la crème of the British scene at a very reasonable £525 per head!

I have come home from Warwick with a whole new band of literary friends and colleagues, a far better idea of how the sector works, and a great gamut of potential leads to work on should I choose to pursue this option in the future. Instead of looking upon literary translation as a tiny niche for the fortunately privileged, I can now see it as a potentially joyous pursuit for any and all translators wishing to explore their literary bent. I have been equipped with all the tools I might



**A whole new band of literary friends and colleagues**

need for a strong start in the right direction and am considering setting up a Southampton Spanish Literary Translation Salon in my kitchen to keep the momentum going...

Having said that, somewhat more reliable plans are under way with the core Warwick Translates 2020 team – so keep your eyes peeled for next year's offering!

**Sarah Bawa Mason**

### Choosing the Chinese track

The 12 participants on the Chinese literary translation stream included master's and doctoral students in translation studies, freelance literary translators, and translators considering adding literary translation to their specialisations.

Over the five days we looked at seven texts. In the morning sessions we worked on a chapter from the novel *Happy Dreams* 《高兴》, written by Jia Pingwa (贾平凹) and translated by Nicky Harman. In the afternoons we worked on shorter texts including an extract from a short story by Chen Xiwo (陈希我) from his collection *Life and Fate*; a section from a series of blog posts by Xu Zhiyuan (许知远); an extract from Dorothy Tse's short story 'Woman Fish'; an extract from *China Along the Yellow River*, a sociological work by Cao Jinqing (曹锦清); and an extract from a book by documentary film-maker Zhang Zhanbo (张赞波), who went undercover to film the construction of a road in Hunan Province in central China. The final afternoon session was spent looking at two texts

for back-translation: the sci-fi short story 'The Girl-Thing Who Went Out for Sushi' by Pat Cadigan and translated into Mandarin by Dave Chan, and a Mandarin translation of *Alice in Wonderland*.

We discussed important aspects of literary translation, such as which tense to use and how to choose the correct register. For example, in *Happy Dreams*, Jia Pingwa uses a lot of 'he said' and 'I said', but we found that omitting a lot of these phrases

*Food specific to the local area included “羊肉泡馍”, which could be transliterated as “yangrou paomo” or translated as “lamb stew” or “mutton stew”*

and changing the text into direct speech brought a lively pace to the narrative and produced a smoother read. In the same text, the issue of register came up often. One example is the word '欺负', which is often translated as 'bully'. In the context of the chapter, the phrase is used of a security guard and his behaviour. 'Bully' didn't seem to fit the context, and so we discussed using 'giving you a hard time' or 'giving you grief' instead. These are more colloquial and better suited both to the relationship between a security guard and a visitor, and to the relationship between the two main characters.

Another challenge was how to choose appropriate verbs. Jia Pingwa's text read: '转了几条街才买到的', which translates as 'pass/turn – aspect marker – several – measure word for road – roads – only – bought – possessive marker'. The character '才' implies that it was only after passing through several streets that the character Wufu was able to purchase the pack of cards, a fact also indicated by the verb-complement pairing '买到'. We brainstormed verbs that would convey Wufu's exertions in purchasing these cards, and came up with many options: tramped/traipsed/trudged up and down, scoured the streets, and so on.

The text also made mention of a group of elderly ladies talking, and we could choose between using 'chit-chat', 'chinwag' or 'natter' in British English or 'jaw' in American English. Nicky pointed out to us that English is rich in verbs, and that one verb in English can be used to translate verb-adverb pairings in Chinese.

### Particulars and playfulness

We also talked about how to translate words for items that don't exist in the target culture. The first example of this was '一副花花片', which is a Shaanxi card game, which the protagonist of *Happy Dreams* tells us has 'simpler rules than poker'. We decided against either using a footnote or domesticating it for the target audience; in the end most groups translated it as 'a pack of hua hua cards'. Similarly, there were several mentions of food specific to the local area, including '羊肉泡馍', which could be transliterated as 'yangrou paomo' or translated as 'lamb stew' or 'mutton stew'. (By the way, as well as the workshops, the group also made time for a Chinese meal, arranged by Warwick University PhD student Di Zhao.)

One of our favourite quotations as a group came not from one of the texts but from a delegate attending a scientific conference. He said that he felt he could not do our job because he was uncomfortable with a situation where there were 'so many right answers'. His comment made us laugh; because for us it is this freedom which brings a sense of joy and playfulness.

**Lindsay Sullivan** 