Translation: an ear for voice

“Trying to convey Alain Mabanckou's work to English readers depends on recreating a 'voice', not exact linguistic equivalence,” says the Guardian article Translators must read with their ears, which later points out that “The difficulty of translating fiction isn't finding the correct equivalent for each word. That would be like a pianist reading music and fumbling about for the right note on the keyboard each time: no music would ever be made.”

Find out more about Alain Mabanckou on his website and listen to an interview with Dominique Antoine.

2 from Translation Journal

Some time ago Marta Renau-Michavila published an article on incorporating Alexander Technique into interpreter training to combat psychological and physiological stress. “La propuesta que presento… pretende trabajar con un elemento que todavía no ha recibido la necesaria atención del mundo académico, pese a su repercusión: el uso del cuerpo en la interpretación.” Go to Del discurso del cuerpo: La técnica Alexander en interpretación.

It’s become commonplace to talk of the translation industry, but is the term appropriate? Jost Zetzsche tackles this thorny question in Industrious? Yes, Industry? Maybe Not.

A new monthly newsletter for and about interpreters

“The Interpreter’s Launch Pad is a free monthly newsletter. It brings resources, tips, and a bit of fun to the lives of professional interpreters.” The August issue has tidbits about the history of interpreting and interpreter personality types, as well as a note on AIIC’s new Facebook page.

And speaking of AIIC on Facebook, check out the page of the AIIC project to help interpreters in conflict zones. The ICZ team has been collaborating with the nonprofit organisation Red T on a field guide for interpreters and users of their services in conflict zones. You can also follow Red T on Facebook.

Interpreting for survivors of torture

From Freedom from Torture: “Language can be a significant barrier for torture survivors who are navigating systems and procedures in unfamiliar environments… For Freedom from Torture interpreters, cultural interpretation complements linguistic interpretation. Interpreters use
their background knowledge to explain what the client is saying. This is crucial for effective communication.”

**Interpreters outlive a filibuster**

“Almost 40 interpreters from the (Canadian) Public Works translation bureau's Parliamentary interpretation group worked 56 four-to-six hour shifts during the recent House filibuster… ‘It was a marathon, and people were pretty exhausted after that,’ senior interpreter Peter Douglas told *The Hill Times* last week.”

**Interning at the European Commission**

“To teach or to translate? That is the classic question that friends and relatives ask you on completion of your language degree, to which you reply 'no way' right? Don't fret; there is another way…Why not try interpreting!” Read Eve Elwell’s account of her time in Brussels on thirdyearabroad.com.

**What lurks behind pronouns?**

“Are there hidden messages in your emails? Yes, and in everything you write or say, according to James Pennebaker, chair of the department of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Pennebaker has been a leader in the computer analysis of texts for their psychological content. And in his new book, ‘The Secret Life of Pronouns,’ he argues that how we use words like “I,” “she,” and “who” reveal secrets of our psychology.”

Read the full interview with Pennebaker from Scientific American. You can also get more information about the book, exercises/tests, and links to videos on his website.

**Video on translation**

*Tradurre*: A 2008 documentary directed by Pier Paolo Giarolo (multilingual with subtitles, on Vimeo).

“Translators have to master not only a language but also what’s behind it: an entire culture and an idea of the world; that’s why we have asked ten translators to come with us in this journey through words and languages and take us to discover these worlds.”

**What happens when the subtitles are missing?**

At the recent Telluride Film Festival “the Brazilian movie ‘Passerby’ started showing to about 150 festival attendees. As the audience quickly realized, the film’s distributor had sent the wrong print to Colorado, with the entire film playing in Portuguese with no English subtitles.” Find out what happened next in this LA Times article: Telluride 2011: Who needs the English language, anyway?

**Examining language**

You’ll find many worthwhile podcasts on PRI’s *The World in Words*. I found this one on *Consciousness, Poetry and Bilingual Babies* impelling. And here’s a related blog post by Rhitu Chatterjee, one of the interviewees.

On a more topical note, ever wonder why a British band chose the name Gang of Four? Check out Pharaohs, Cantonese and the Gang of Four, where the band talks about phrases using the word “farm”.

**DNA of speech deciphered**

Researchers from the Université de Lyon examined 8 languages and concluded, "A dense language
will make use of fewer speech chunks than a sparser language for a given amount of semantic information.” As *Time’s Slow Down! Why Some Language Sound So Fast* adds, “In other words, your ears aren't deceiving you: Spaniards really do sprint and Chinese really do stroll, but they will tell you the same story in the same span of time.”

**That elusive link**

“Nearly 100 years of linguistics research has been based on the assumption that words are just collections of sounds - an agreed acoustic representation that has little to do with their actual meaning… Yet a spate of recent studies challenge this idea. They suggest that we seem instinctively to link certain sounds with particular sensory perceptions.” Get the details and take a test on sound/meaning associations in New Scientists’ *Kiki or bouba? In search of language's missing link*.

**Open culture**

I recently came across a series of 10 animated videos on the history of the English language, starting with Anglo-Saxon times and proceeding to Global English. It was produced by the Open University, and is available on the [Open Culture website](https://www.openculture.com), which also offers free downloads of audio books and links to 420 free movies online.

**Internet use and memory**

A team of scientists says that the “widespread use of search engines and online databases has affected the way people remember information.” On the good side, less memorizing of details seems to free up space for thinking about what they mean. Read more from the NY Times and listen to an interview with lead researcher Betsy Sparrow on the Science website.

**Mandarin rising**

Everyone talks about Globish as the world’s *lingua franca* for business, though we know it is not enough. Bloomberg ranks the most important languages for business and reports that “Mandarin, China’s official tongue, is also the top language worldwide for business other than English.” Behind it loom French, Arabic and Spanish. Read more from Bloomberg.

**Latin Lives**

It may be a dead language to the public at large, but Latin is still alive in some parts of the globe. “Xosé Antón Dobarro, profesor de Latín en el instituto compostelano Antonio Fraguas, obtuvo este año el título de traductor intérprete jurado de la lengua de Séneca.” Read more in La Voz de Galicia.

**From Japan Times**

“The lay judge trial of accused rapist and murderer Tatsuya Ichihashi… has captured a lot of media attention since it started July 4, but one element that has escaped notice is the quality of the language translation,” the paper claims in *Ichihashi trial bares translation woes*. “Experts say the problem starts with the lack of official professional training and proper certification criteria for court interpreters.”

**That’s Why Hair Grows on the Heart**

“Shinzo ni Ke ga Haeteiru Wake” could be translated as "That's Why Hair Grows on the Heart." Author Mari Yonehara (, 1950-2006) spent part of her childhood in Prague, where she studied Russian. She later worked as a simultaneous interpreter between Japanese and Russian, interpreting for both Yeltsin and Gorbachev. “The essay that lends the book its quirky title touches on the subtle differences in expression in different languages and how difficult it is for an interpreter, pressed for time, to do them justice. ‘That's why it is said,’ she wrote, ‘that a simultaneous
interpreter's heart is covered in bristles'. Read What a difference a friend's tales of 'hair on the heart' can still make.

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**Recommended citation format:**