

# Legal eagles

*The Words to Deeds conference on legal translation left participants feeling that they were soaring above the rest, reports Danaë Hosek-Ugolini*



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On 4 February, around 55 people met at the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, a hidden gem in the heart of London, for the Words to Deeds conference on legal translation. The conference was the first of its kind to bring together legal academics, lawyers and legal translators to discuss the legal translation profession, its trends, its challenges and the way ahead.

Words to Deeds is the brainchild of Juliette Scott, whose *Words to Deeds* blog enjoys a loyal following among legal translators. The location, the materials distributed, the catering – everything was of the utmost quality and professionalism. Legal translators deserve nothing less than to be treated with the same level of service and respect as lawyers.

Glancing around the room, I felt incredibly privileged to be sharing this special event with experienced legal translators from 24 different countries. Some participants were lawyers who had left their legal practice to work as legal translators; others were veteran legal translators. In addition, there were authors of some well-known legal translation 'bibles' and also experts working for European institutions. All came from different backgrounds, but all shared the same passion and values.

The morning was packed with interesting presentations. The opening keynote speech (by video recording) was from Advocate General Eleanor Sharpston QC (a vigorous champion of legal translators), who stressed that she could not do her job without the in-house and freelance legal translators involved in the EU institutions. Barrister Susan Belgrave

then explained how lawyers can learn from translators (communication and writing skills) and how translators can learn from lawyers (marketing, teamwork, networking, working pro bono). Juliette Scott ended the first session by reminding the audience of the importance of obtaining a full translation brief to ensure quality.

## Processes and methodology

The second session looked at the processes and methodology that legal translators follow. Legal academic Hanem El-Farahaty illustrated this with Arabic legal translations, and

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legal translator Samantha Cayron showed us translations of French and Spanish notarial documents. Finally, the quality manager at the Directorate-General for Translation at the European Commission, Ingemar Strandvik, reminded us that agreed standards can benefit translators as they give us credibility, allow us to be assertive, and help us to communicate better with clients. He also mentioned the upcoming ISO 20771 for legal translation.

The final presentations focused on the substance of legal documents. The first two were by 'pracademics' (translators also involved in

academia). Gianluca Pontrandolfo shared some tips and traps he had learned while translating the Italian Criminal Procedure Code into English, while Paulina Wilson compared the legal concept of negligence under English, German and Polish law. Finally, commercial lawyer Sahar Bhaimia stressed the need for clear language in consumer and data protection contracts.

After a thought-provoking morning, we all enjoyed a first-class buffet. To encourage stimulating conversation, Juliette had then organised a brainstorming walk in the private gardens. This enabled us to discuss a number of topics in smaller groups, such as how to professionalise legal translation, the best way to prepare for the future of our profession and how to raise the profile of legal translators.

## Refreshed and ready

We all returned feeling refreshed and ready for the afternoon's workshops. Each group discussed a different topic, but there were essentially three themes that emerged from all the groups. The first was the need to embrace new technology; the second was the importance of teamwork and collaboration; and the third was the need to maintain a critical eye, whether it is when we analyse the source text to spot inconsistencies, or when we search for resources online (as not all are reliable).

The conference ended on a very positive note. Legal translator Christina Guy demonstrated some impressive features of her CAT tool that can help boost efficiency when translating patents, and David Hutchins shared some tips from the point of view of an English solicitor.

The closing keynote was given by the president of the International Federation of Translators (FIT), Henry Liu, who drew an interesting and amusing comparison between machine translation and dating websites: even if everything seems to match in the programme, without the right person, it will not work.

Some of the participants then went on to visit Dennis Severs' House, followed by a dinner in Spitalfields. Everyone shared the hope that this would be the first of many Words to Deeds conferences on legal translation.