

## **BABEL MARCH 2015 – ANNUAL REPORT TO FIT EC & COUNCIL**

### **CURRENT SITUATION (16 March 2015)**

#### **PUBLICATION:**

Babel 60 (2014): 1 & 2 = available

Babel 60: 3 = first proofs returned to Benjamins (Amsterdam) – second proofs expected by end of March – issue available by mid-April (?)

Babel 60: 4 = first proofs to be expected this week

Babel 61 (2015): 1 = all documents should be ready to be sent to Benjamins by end of March 2015

Babel 61: 2 = scheduled to be sent to A'dam by end of May 2015.

Babel 61: 3 = scheduled to be sent to A'dam by end of July 2015.

Babel 61: 4 = scheduled to be sent to A'dam by end of September 2015.

**ATTENTION:** the production of the journal always takes much time (at least 2 months).

#### **For your info:**

Babel 60:1 (composed by René Haeseryn): sent to Benjamins on 27 AUG '14 and afterwards followed up by myself (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> proofs). Issue became available in DEC '14.

Babel 60:2 (composed and followed up by myself): sent to Benjamins on 02 NOV '14. Issue was made available in FEB '2015.

Babel 60:3: sent to Benjamins on 13 JAN '15 – currently waiting for 2<sup>nd</sup> proofs. Issue available by mid-April?

Babel 60:4: sent to Benjamins on 12 FEB '15 – currently waiting for 1<sup>st</sup> proofs.

Babel 61:1: will be sent to Benjamins by end of March '15.

**= total of 5 issues in 7 months (27 AUG – end of MAR).**

**I do hope we can complete volume Babel 61 (the 4 issues normally scheduled for 2015) before the end of the year and thus eliminate the backlog in publication.**

## **CONTENT:**

The content of Babel 60:1, 2, 3 and 4 and even 61:1 and 2 is composed on the basis of papers which have been approved by Dr Haeseryn (some of the texts going back as far as 2011). Articles in 61:2 date from early 2013.

From Babel 61:3 on, selection will be based on new reports from experts.

## **SUBMISSIONS:**

Currently, more than 100 papers are waiting for reading, evaluation and possible publication on basis of geographical diversification. With an average of 25 pages per paper, it means some 2500 pages.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

As for most journals, the number of subscriptions declined over the past years from 440 paid subscriptions in 2007 to 349 paid subscriptions in 2013. However, electronic consultation of the journal (separate articles) is successful with no less than 16 098 full text downloads and 137 837 abstract consultations in 2013-2014. However, also in this field, efforts should be made to strengthen Babel's international name: Royal Swets & Zeitlinger Holding NV, a group of information services companies operating worldwide as an intermediary between publishers and libraries, is our most important customer with 7 271 full text downloads, followed by University of Leicester with... 458 full text downloads. Among the top 10 customers, there are 4 universities from the UK and two from Hong Kong. To be followed and examined ...

## **ADMINISTRATION:**

Since my appointment as editor in chief (21 October 2014) I worked a lot on improving contact with authors and other interested people:

- Standardized letter with acknowledgement of receipt of article submission (confirming title of article, number of files and format, announcement of duration of evaluation procedure);
- Status report (including title of article, date of submission, date of version which will be used for publication, scheduled Babel issue of publication, copyright assignment, abstracts in EN and FR and bio note);
- Official Certificate of acceptance and publication;
- Copyright assignment;
- Evaluation sheet FR and EN (translation offered by Marion Boers) to be used by experts for their feedback on articles;
- New updated guidelines for articles and book reviews;
- Accompanying letter for first proofs including instructions for authors;
- Electronic (and updated) files for ads to be included;
- Standardized form for returning requested corrections;
- Preparation of new (updated) style sheet.

## **EXPENDITURES:**

In consultation with FIT EC / Council, payment of a fixed fee to the editor in chief was terminated. Necessary operating costs (translation of abstracts EN-FR by a member of the Belgian Chamber of Translators and Interpreters, sending of books for review, paper and ink cartridges to print all electronically submitted articles, 1 trip per year to Amsterdam to attend editorial meeting at Benjamins : intercity train (not HST) second class, 65+ ticket, no hotel...) will be submitted to FIT EC / Council for approval.

## **FUTURE (based on Skype conversation with Sabine COLOMBE, secretary general)**

### **Change the existing structure of Reading and Scientific Advisory Committees**

With all due respect to the hard work of my predecessor, Dr René Haeseryn, Babel can no longer remain a one-man job. Submitted articles cannot be kept in drawers for 2 to 3 years, they need fast quality assessment according to the established quality benchmarks and a concise and concrete report for the author. Currently, Babel has a Reading committee and a Scientific advisory committee. How often have the members of both committees been consulted? As far as I am aware, once in the past two years. This was undoubtedly the result of several unfortunate events which occurred in Dr Haeseryn's life over the same period. However, I don't see Babel's future this way. We cannot announce (and make believe) that all submissions are subject to double blind-peer review and then not honour our own principle(s). **PLEASE, IN YOUR CAPACITY AS MEMBER OF FIT EC / COUNCIL, I HOPE YOU WILL KEEP THIS INFORMATION CONFIDENTIAL, THANK YOU!**

FIT had a Publication Committee in the past which was turned into the Bibliography Board in 2008 when Dr Haeseryn had reached the maximum of 9 years as member of the same committee. The change of Committee to Board (what's in a name?) made it possible for Dr Haeseryn to continue his work as editor of both Babel and Translatio Bibliography. Fortunately!

Today, I would like to ask the FIT EC and Council the creation of a real Babel Board, not as part of the Bibliography Board but as a new, independent Board.

Why a Board and not a Committee?

As far as I remember, the mandate of Committee members is equal to a 3 years term which can be renewed twice. In total, the same member/expert would thus be able to serve for 9 years in total after being "evaluated" and/or "re-appointed" every 3 years.

I should like there to be no misunderstanding: I don't ask a favour for myself. I am almost 67 years old and I don't think I shall serve Babel as long as Dr Haeseryn. The day-to-day executive management of the journal is a very demanding job and I don't think I can promise FIT to serve until the age of 80 – suppose I would ever reach that high age. So, what I ask is not for me personally. However, I would prefer the creation of a Board without limit of duration for the participation of its members. It is indeed extremely difficult for an editor in chief to attract a range of experts and convince them to choose for Babel, the oldest journal in the world of translation, terminology and interpreting and not for journal X Y Z, when at the

same time he has to announce that their participation to the editorial work of Babel is – officially – limited to 3 years but *may be* extended. In the academic world, this is a kind of Not Done. All present members of Babel's Reading or Scientific advisory committee have been there for years and years. Some are so old that we do not have contact addresses anymore, let alone an e-mail address. Of course, when in the newly created Board, a member would no longer be active or cooperate in the way we expect, editor in chief and EC/Council must be able to intervene.

I would propose to build the new Babel Editorial Board (in replacement of the current Reading and Scientific advisory committees) around 7 pillars. This idea is based on my analysis of the frequency and number of submitted papers over the past decades dealing with one of the following subjects:

Translation theory

Translation practice & pedagogy

Translation history

Interpreting (theory, practice & pedagogy, history)

Terminology

Literary (cultural – religious – philosophical etc.) translation

The profession of translator / terminologist / interpreter: evolution (new disciplines - growth – recognition – code of ethics – protection...) and the T & I sector's prospects

I would ask each member of the new Board to apply for max. 2 area of interest.

Moreover, the workload for the experts should be realistic and manageable. The purpose intention of the evaluation form (see above under “administration”) is to obtain uniform information about submissions for publication in Babel, and significantly facilitate the task of those who have to make the final decisions. For this very reason, the form was designed to show all relevant information on the article at a glance and allow easy comparison of the experts' findings. Experts would no longer be asked to correct the complete text or check the layout of the article or compliance with the guidelines, style sheet and referencing system. That has to be done anyway by the editor in chief at the end of the evaluation procedure and after acceptance of the paper. Following an initial period during which Board members may (and will) be asked to help a little bit more in order to examine as soon as possible the more than 100 articles, each member would only receive an average of 5 articles per year to be evaluated.

Where am I looking for potential (new) Board members?

- Among the members of the current Reading and Scientific Advisory Committee. However, the contact data of some of them seem to be lost.
- Among the FIT members (perhaps more especially among the Associate Members, very often universities & colleges);
- Among members of our partners (CIUTI – EULITA – AIIC – EST for the moment);
- Among the members of our FIT Committees with academic background.

Per pillar (see above), I think of 4 members which makes a provisional Editorial Board of 28 people. We shall see if we need more. Those members would be “fixed” members. Among the 4 members, there should be – when possible – a representative of a FIT Committee. This way, the FIT Committees would automatically be more involved in FIT’s academic publication. Of course, when the composition of the FIT committees change after Statutory Congress, the representative of a Committee may change after 3 years. The Editorial Board would thus become *partly* dynamic which is perhaps new.

There is more. If we want each submitted article to be double blind peer reviewed, we also need the input from external scholars. That is what other important T & I scientific journals do: they invite famous scholars to read and comment submitted papers and publish their names once per year in the final issue with all due appreciation and respect. I DO HOPE THIS WILL ALSO BE POSSIBLE FOR BABEL. I know that members of a FIT Committee (and Board) need to be member of a FIT association or FIT partner (currently so-called observers). Those external experts are not member of a FIT association but at the same time are not regular member of the Editorial Board. They are like occasional observers.

If we can do that, I am sure we shall be able to maintain – even improve? – Babel’s excellent image in the ever more growing and competitive world of T & I journals.

### **Change the language policy**

FIT has consultative relations with UNESCO. For publication in Babel, mainly papers written in English and French and occasionally in German, Spanish and Russian are accepted. Why not Arabic and Chinese, two of the six working languages of the UN? Moreover, we receive many papers for publication from the Arab World or the Chinese speaking area.

I submitted the idea also to our colleagues from Benjamins when I visited them the second time on March 2 of this year. Publications in as many languages as possible may be ideally fantastic, especially for an organization with a global vocation and mission such as FIT. However, economically spoken, it is not the best initiative to develop. Each country has its own institutions that will publish documents in various fields (so, also T & I) in the local language(s). But for the publishing house, a multitude of languages in one and the same publication is mostly a financial disaster. Things being what they are, English is – with a few exceptions - the language number one for most scientific publications. And if we want also our stuff to be sold (and read!), it is in our own interest to bear that in mind.

At the same meeting of 2 March, we agreed that per issue only 1 article in a not too small other language than English would be accepted. This is a very fair solution which still enables us to accept **officially** the 6 UN languages.

### **Language quality**

Most articles we receive for Babel are written in ... English. In English or in some kind of English? Articles coming from China and the Asian region, the Arab World, the real Hispanic areas or more in general articles which are produced in English by non-natives can be judged on their academic and scientific value by other non-natives experts but what about the language quality? On the evaluation sheet, there is a short question on the language quality (of *publishable quality*? OR *needs revision*?) but how do I interpret the answers when they come from non-natives?

Of course, Babel is not a university journal. **META**, the other most popular journal (celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and thus the second oldest journal in the modern T & I world - we beat them by some 6 months) is edited and published by Montreal University. They have language advisors and proof readers for EN - FR and ES. Actually, they simply ask their young academic staff members (young PhDs) to do the job. It is part of their contribution to the academic status of the university. Same for **PARALLÈLES**, the electronic journal of ETI University of Geneva.

What and how can we do with(in) Babel? What I would need so much, is a more accurate estimation of the language quality. We cannot expect that all articles in a foreign language (ex. written in English by a non-native) are linguistically perfect. Many (most? – I am not so sure) of the authors will ask a native speaker to proofread their paper but others don't and I cannot find out who does and who doesn't. I can do it for French but 90% of the published papers are in English...

My idea is to set up a small pool of language advisors. They would receive a copy of the articles (per 1 article = only 1 advisor! and not per 1 article = 3 or 4 advisors) written in English by non-natives, proofread and correct the abstract (= max.20 lines but these should be PERFECT) plus another 2 to 3 pages chosen randomly throughout the paper and then just send their simple advice: *OK for publication* (= acceptable, good level, ok some mistakes but who is perfect...) or *NOT OK: ARTICLE NEEDS TO BE REVISED BY NATIVE SPEAKER AND RESUBMITTED FOR LANGUAGE CHECK*. No report, no written comment, no specific explanation. The advisor is a native speaker and decides on the acceptability of the language for publication in Babel. The content is judged by other peers. And the author is finally responsible for both content AND language.

I don't think that this implies a heavy workload for a native. I am sure it would not take more than 30 minutes per article (which would perhaps mainly be spent on improving the abstract) + a short e-mail to me, indeed.

For me, it would be a wonderful help. Today, we still publish articles which have been accepted by René and very often only by him and more than once, I feel uncomfortable with what I read, not because of content, but because of the language! I would like to see Babel move to the higher level of ensured quality.

For this small pool of language advisors, I think in the first place of FIT's honorary advisors and if more help would be needed, advice from volunteers among FIT office bearers would be welcome.

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **Priority action**

Catch up with the regular schedule of publication before the end of 2015. This means that all papers to be published in Babel 61 (year 2015) should be sent to Benjamins by the end of September 2015 which is not a mission impossible. However, we have no further control over the final production of the journal. In other words, if we manage to complete the composition of the 2015 issues on time, it does not mean that Babel 61:4 will indeed be ready and available by 31 DEC 2015.

In order to reach OUR objective, we need to focus on:

The composition of the new Editorial Board – preferably in accordance with the wishes as described above;

The fast assessment of all submitted papers so far;

The guaranteed double-blind peer review: 1 evaluation by a fixed board member + 1 evaluation by an external scholar (a so-called observer, perhaps even someone who published in Babel before – the names of those observers will be published in the last issue of the year);

The help from honorary advisors (and other FIT office bearers) for language quality of the selected papers for publication.

Anyway, with more than 2500 pages currently to be evaluated, we need to adapt our requirements. From Babel 61 (2015) on, Benjamins offers at least 600 pages per year (150 pages per issue – which was agreed on when I participated in the editorial meeting last year in Amsterdam in my capacity as associate editor). Even then, assuming that we would accept all submitted papers, with an average of 25 pages per article, we can publish 6 articles per issue x 4 issues per year = 24 articles per year... versus a total of more than 100 on our desk...

Our evaluation has to be correct but our quality standards have to become more demanding. That is an important challenge.

### **Other future actions**

Work on Babel's presentation on FIT website (currently just a link);

Work on the e-management of the journal (at the request of Benjamins) (= in the pipeline);

Elaborate ORCID and KUDOS for authors (at the request of Benjamins) (= action started);

Work on FIT-related content in Babel issues;

Follow Babel subscriptions, consultations;

Focus on Babel's impact factor (currently 0,146);

Follow Babel's international indexation (cf. Abstracting Services – inside cover of the journal);

AOB.

**Frans DE LAET**

**Editor in chief**

**16 March 2015**