

# Academic Scholars: Lost in Translation

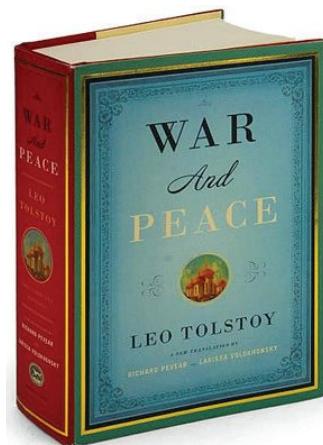
*of Belgium; a Bantu language; the English language; translation /træns'leɪʃn/ rendering of something into another language or into another language.*

At the scholars' meeting this week, Mr Henderson let us into an episode of his past; that of his aspiration to become a spy after studying French and Russian at Cambridge University. Unfortunately, this was not meant to be, for he ended up failing the personality test! In his defence, Mr Henderson proudly recalled being one of the select few who actually remembered, as instructed, to bring a pencil to the test. Sadly though, the pencil was not enough.

Speaking to the scholars about the significance and brilliance of language and translation in our everyday lives, Mr Henderson introduced the idea that there must have been a time when the human species was united by a single, root language and was thus more united. Now it appears as if humans are divided by language, creating a barrier between cultures, nationalities and ethnic groups.

Translating a text in this day and age is becoming increasingly helpful and far more accurate. Many of us will use 'Google Translate' and other technological advancements where texts can be quite reliably translated into different languages by a simple scan on our mobile devices. This can act as a link between cultures.

Mr Henderson told us that, fundamentally, there are two approaches to translations: literal and free; the difference being, rather than directly translating what is written (literal), we can also capture the essence of the words (free). To demonstrate this, we were given a sentence in Russian from Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace as part of an activity. After Mr Henderson helped us with the literal translation, the audience was asked to do a creative free translation of the same sentence. It is incredible how a simple sentence, of which the meaning is known, is unlikely to have two exactly similar translations.



What Mr Henderson's activity taught us is that translations of literature are a reflection of a variety of different factors, such as the individual's mood that day, their cultural background, as well as their own vocabulary. In essence, the translation represents a snap-shot picture of the translators themselves.

What I derived from Mr Henderson's talk was that translation is both an art and a science. Being unable to communicate with other cultures is holding society back. The skill of translating is highly relevant in today's increasingly divided (and divisive) world, with various communities interlinked by common interests and needs.



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