**Judit Kálmán**

*A good translator is invisible. “As if it had been written in Hungarian”, we think as we read a good piece of translation. Similarly, we cite our favourite film quote or punchline giving all the credit to the director, disregarding the one who translated it into Hungarian – who knows, it might just have been dubbing dramaturg Judit Kálmán, who also works as a literary translator and interpreter.*

At secondary school, she specialised in maths and physics, but soon came into close contact with films after she had been asked to run the school film club. She acquired a good command of English thanks to the teaching methods of Péter Medgyes, and following an exchange programme in Moscow, where she suddenly found herself in the midst of previously learnt Russian words, she knew that from that time on, languages would play a very important role in her life. She earned a degree in Hungarian–Polish–Russian studies at Eötvös Loránd University in 1979.

She spent several years in Poland working as a reviser for Hungarian at the University of Warsaw, then as a teacher of Hungarian as a foreign language in Cracow. After she returned to Hungary with her daughter in the year of the political changeover, she started to work as a freelance translator and interpreter. In the meanwhile, she also learnt Italian. She discovered this particular field of the film industry thanks to an unexpected job opportunity: she became a reviser again, this time at Pannónia Filmstúdió.

At present, she works at Hungarovox Stúdió, which offers courses in various fields; Judit is a teacher of film and literary translation.

**“Lifelike” translations**

Translations should sound lifelike, and it especially applies to films – let they be dubbed, subtitled, or given a voice-over. The text is supposed to “stand alone”, and this is what enjoys priority over faithfulness when revising the translations (were it not for the lack of time and capacity the industry is suffering from). This is particularly the case with English movies, given the difference between the length of English and Hungarian words. Together with realia, these present the biggest challenges of the profession, but students at Hungarovox also get an insight into other interesting aspects of film translation, like how to align the text with lip movements.

**“It is a question of attitude”**

She believes this course is a great opportunity for those “still in search of the right path”. There is no entrance exam; it very soon turns out if someone is not suitable for this profession. “It is a question of attitude”, she says. She usually develops a very good relationship with the students; during our talk, she had a couple of phone calls from students whom she helped willingly. After completing the course, the majority finds a job in the film industry. A few even ended up founding a publishing company.

**From Jockie Ewing to air fresheners**

As a film translator, she made many brilliant pieces of the international film industry available to the Hungarian audience, including those of Italian and Polish filmmakers. When asked about some of her specific works, she mentions Dallas, ER, and Don Matteo, but points out that to her it is more important that the piece suits her personality. She is a great admirer of Andrzej Wajda, and she has also translated many of his works.

She also translates prose, dramas, and children’s books. “I have a diffuse personality”, which I already ascertained in the first minute of our encounter when she told me about her latest interpreting work. She has gained a lot of interesting experience in consecutive as well as simultaneous interpreting, the worst so far being a work in a factory where toilet air fresheners are packaged. “One can rarely afford to choose between jobs”, she says as she recalls the trouble the dubbing of Latin-American soap operas has caused to her.

She warns me that in contrast with big countries like Germany where translation and interpreting are quite separate from each other, Hungary is too a small country so that we only focus on one of them.

**“It requires a certain level of reading”**

The amount and variety of literature she reads are another proof of her versatility, as also proven by the number of books I have seen in her flat. She only buys prose if she wants an own copy after reading the library book; her latest buy was Törésteszt by Anna Szabó T.

Not only is she a great fan of Ádám Nádasdy’s work but she also holds him in very high regard at a personal level. Of foreign authors, she mentions Krzysztof Varga.

A good translator is invisible. To Judit, it relates at many levels. She does not think marketing is that important: as long as her work is of the expected quality, she will always receive another request. And there will surely be another time when someone picks her translation right next to her in a bookstore. She might as well tell them it is her work, but this is not the reason she is doing it.

*“I consider myself lucky for having a job that I like.”*

Barbara Simon

Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2017