

The clichés

These are the ready-made arguments, the vacuous, thought-preventing piles of hopping frogshit that grow like cross-eyed fairy mushrooms in the heads of ignorant and pathetic “regular folk” (RF). It is our mission to destroy all this and replace it with an understanding of T&I so that we can help them. That’s teaching. And we need to learn how to do this. That’s learning. Once we have done this those people will become the best clients. That’s making money.

No employee or representative of CPT may embrace, espouse or tolerate any of these on company time.

1. “language can be right or wrong” (prescriptivism) versus “Language is always changing” (Descriptivism)

A popular debate amongst RF, largely meaningless. Language is constantly changing and we have a duty to know why, when, and how it changes, and how the changes affect the interests of parties to whom we have a commercial or ethical obligation. None of this negates the perfectly reasonable process of assessing the quality of the results of some human activity (such as the production of speech or text) by some fixed standard. Both things are true without contradicting one another but this is lost on RF.

2. Back translation is useful

As defined by regular folk, it isn’t. It is a waste of time and can be completely misleading. We must define it carefully, along with “metalinguistic commentary”.

3. There is such a thing as “Literal” translation”

There is, but that’s not what RF mean when they say it. First learn what a “figure of speech” is. This is the only thing that may be translated “literally”. All of these ideas are simply founded on a prescriptivist view of language; on the desire for formal equivalence at the lexeme level, and this in turn is based on *pre-medieval* superstition of the magical power of words, arising out of the fact that in the olden days the only literate people were fantastically privileged and controlled the keys to heaven.

4. Legalese (or any other type of text) is “needlessly” complex

Rubbish. Except for instances of poor writing, the complexity of legalese is a precise reflection of what everyday people need in order to preserve their rights within a given legal context.

Every text has a different intended function, and the quality of the text must be judged according to this. If you want simple and interesting language, read a novel.

5. Single words mean something

No single word out of context “means” anything. Lexemes contribute to the overall meaning and pragmatic effect of a particular text or utterance. It is only these things that “mean” anything.

6. There is such thing as “the word for...”

There is no word in any language that is, in every possible context, translated into one and only one word in another language. The expression “The word for...” reflects the RF expectation that foreign languages are identical to their own in every respect except how each word is pronounced. If that were true, you and I would most certainly be doing something else for a living.

7. Translation is possible/not possible

This RF expectation is revealed every time someone says “Apparently there is no word for [X] in [language Y].

A translation must meet a long list of ideal criteria and each word, phrase, sentence in a translation achieves a certain percentage of this ideal. It is a spectrum, a scale of success.

8. Technical terminology is the most difficult thing for T&I

People often say to us “you must find all the technical terminology so difficult”. This is rubbish and you must not allow the person who said it (especially if they are a client) to continue labouring under such a misconception. Find a polite way to say “No. It is relatively easy. There are many other things that make my job difficult but either they are invisible to you or they do not strengthen your territorial claims and so harping on about them will not interest you.”

9. Languages are “alive” and we must “preserve” them

Crap. Languages exist only because people want to use them and people want to do things that are in their interests.

10. Language = culture

What twaddle! I rebut it. See “The Distraction of Culture” published on this page.

11. Multilingualism in the general populace is an asset

This is bona fide newspeak. It is not an asset; it is a cost, and the necessity to translate diminishes the efficiency and effectiveness of any process that requires numbers of people to cooperate.