

LOST IN TRANSLATION

NOVEMBER 12, 2013 TIPS 4



Lost in Translation

Reading gives me pleasure, but there are a few things that would make me stop reading before I reach the end: messy storylines, boring characters and bad grammar. As a reviewer, I have been given advanced reviewer copies when the book has a later release date, and the author or promoter would like an advanced review to pull in potential buyers. Advanced or published book, I will expect near flawless spelling, since I am a novice in grammar myself.

Bad spelling throws people off balance. I might be reading along when a mistake trips me up, leaving me confused: "What is the author trying to say?" Even if you have an editor, it is best to recheck your work, no one is perfect. I have been talking to authors, telling them to check their work again, which was riddled with errors such as 'their' vs. 'there're' and 'you', 'your' vs. 'you're'; and most of them already had been checked by an editor. Little mistakes show that your book might not be worth the read, as you have failed to master basics of grammar.

Another thing that some new authors do, which I am guilty of myself: clicking on synonyms in Microsoft Word and picking their choice of substitute words without really understanding the semantics. Words that are widely used are the main victims of careless substitution.

There are free dictionaries online that you can use to make sure the substituted word is suitable. So, unless the remark is witty and funny, 'quip' is not a suitable substitute for 'say.' As Catherine Drinker Bowen once said: "For your born writer, nothing is so healing as the realization that he has come upon the right word."

For translators, the art of converting from one language to another requires not only skill and experience, but good vocabulary too. As a speaker of five languages, and reader of three, I can tell you in confidence, that translating is a tough job. Take *rQ84* by Haruki Murakami, the title itself is a Japanese homophone, Q sounding like Japanese for 9. Without understanding some

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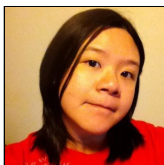
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Japanese, some would wonder why the author had named the book this way. Murakami named the book that way in reference to George Orwell's 1984 and also based part of his story off the book.

Then there are words that cannot be translated, it is impossible to translate 'petrichor' into Chinese, and you will struggle to find a fit for the word 'manja' (Malaysian and Indonesian) in English. Words are not the only thing of concern; a translator also has the need to preserve the impression of the original work. It would do no good if the original work was meant to be funny and the translation had failed to capture the essence of the joke. Conversations in accents and cryptic jokes make good translators hard to come by, but when you have one it will open your world.

Works that are lost in translation frequently find themselves left behind by readers, because no one understands what the author is trying to say. For writers and translators, the challenge is always keeping the reader's attention with words that you pick. If you loathe reusing an expression, describe it or make it into a conversation, that way you could keep your audience engaged too. Depending on your target audience, choosing hard to understand words might prove as detrimental to your work, as no one seems to be reaching for the dictionary nowadays.



Lost in Translation is written by: Ailyn Koay. You can find more from Ailyn at her blog, [Penny For My Thoughts](#).

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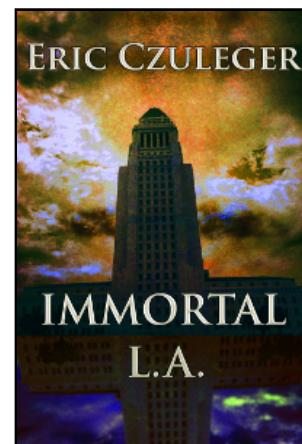
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