Unlike writing translation is hardly a lonely work. There is no room here for the loneliness of a long-distance runner, it is much more likely to resemble a Canadian canoe with the author and the translator paddling in unison to reach the finish line. This metaphor, however, fails to give a precise description of the translation process, especially when we have in mind literary translation intended for publication. In this case the old saying “where two is a company, three is a crowd” ceases to apply. Literary translation is a coxed pair in which the coxswain’s place is given to an editor.

Translation is an art of making choices – of the right words, phrases, or metaphors – tens and hundreds of choices made at any given moment. Inasmuch as we can assume that a translator understands the text the translation of which he attempts, the chances that his choices are always the best ones (in literary translation only the best choices should be accepted as it always aims much higher than the commercial one) are fairly slim. In an ideal world translators should be their own editors combining an unlimited knowledge with a literary gift as well as – last but not least – a critical sense which would allow them to remove or simply avoid any mistakes and errors they might make. Were this possible, the publishers would simply love such translators. However, all those who come short of these expectations must resort to cooperation with editors.

What qualities and talents should we expect from a literary editor? Some degree of literary talent would do nicely as it would help the editor suggest better solutions to various literary problems. Such gems can be found among editors although the more seasoned translators meet during their careers many “professionals” who “edit” their texts but cannot
improve them in any way although they can be quite successful in spoiling it completely. A literary sensitivity is simply obligatory, an ability which allows the editor for example to see that a translation who seemingly goes against the rules of grammar, spelling, or punctuation cannot be any different because it is the only way to represent the qualities of the original text. Probably a much simpler way to put is this: an editor must love books.

An ideal editor should know the language of the original. For quite obvious reasons this ideal is seldom attained. Only translator working with such global languages as English and Spanish (in specifically Polish context sometimes also German, Russian or French) may reasonably count on such help. A working knowledge of the original language is most often sufficient, a perfect one can actually be counterproductive e.g. in such situations when translator leaves in his work phrases translated literally from the original. An editor who is very well acquainted with the source language may miss such errors as the erroneous phrase will be comprehensible to them. Naturally, true professionals will not make such mistakes.

Nevertheless, it seems quite reasonable to expect from an editor a basic working command of the language of the original, a knowledge which may be insufficient to allow reading literature for pleasure but it is just enough to get the message with the help of dictionaries. It also helps a lot if the editor is able to accept the fact that it is the translator who should have a perfect command of the language of the original. The editor, however, should have a perfect command of the target language.

It is quite irrational to expect an editor to know all languages of the world yet every language he or she masters can be of some help, especially when the original is written in a relatively unknown one. Such knowledge becomes especially helpful when the text in question has been formerly translated into other, more popular languages, and the translation can be used as a point of reference when the original becomes impenetrable. Naturally, we are referring here to a rather ideal but seldom encountered situation when such other translations are readily available. Knowledge of other languages also comes handy when the editor works on translation from a language related to one he or she knows – knowledge of German helps with Dutch, knowledge of Latin helps with Italian, knowledge of Spanish helps with Portuguese etc. This kind of help must not be overrated but it can get useful every now and then.

It is very important, however, that an editor should know at least one foreign language as such knowledge offers a new and fresh perspective on one’s native language, strengthening the awareness of possible differences. The very awareness of the existence of differences of such grammatical
structures as reported speech\textsuperscript{39} should attract the editor’s attention to strange sounding expressions in the edited text. Even if they are not aware of specific grammatical rules they should notice their possible presence.

Is it possible to learn how to be a good editor? Universities are apparently convinced it is so. The department of Polish studies of the University of Warsaw offers a specialized course of studies for future editors who prepare there for work in the press and publishing houses. The 360 hours long course includes a variety of specific classes and practical training which prepare for the job. Strangely enough a lengthy description as well as the detailed programme of studies which last for two years available in 2010 does not mention editing translation at all. In 2005 it at least included 10 hours practical classes on editing translation which apparently did not outlast the budget cuts and the introduction of the Bologna process. Although it did not seem much, it was exactly as many as there were planned for editing original literary texts.\textsuperscript{40}

However, no university can make you a good editor. In this respect editor is very much alike translator. The art of translation can only be mastered by practice. One has to go on translating, editing, listening to criticism and drawing conclusions, improving, correcting, and editing again. And again. The way to become a good editor is exactly the same. Experience is the greatest asset, practice is something that no diploma can replace. Naturally, it does not mean that I would rule out any candidates for the job who have nothing but a university diploma. My personal experience, however, very clearly suggests that I could expect much more help from people whose path to this profession was somewhat more circuitous.

It is highly advantageous for a prospective editor to be a graduate of a Polish department but love of books and respect towards translators is something one does not necessarily learn during courses in history of Polish publishing houses or their structure. It is quite difficult to explain but it often seems that diplomas give especially younger editors an unbearable and largely ungrounded self-confidence and belief in their own infallibility and intellectual supremacy over translators who can only show a BA or MA diploma in foreign language studies (thus indirectly proving that their knowledge of their native language is amateurish at best). Mutual respect is a necessary basis for any cooperation between a translator and an editor.

Work on an edition of a translation requires a lot of listening and considering other people’s opinions, a very difficult task if you do not

\textsuperscript{39} In Polish reported speech does not require a change in grammatical tense i.e. John said: “I love Mary” will be rendered as “John said he loves Mary”.

\textsuperscript{40} Current programme is available at: \url{http://www.polon.uw.edu.pl/studia/speczaw_edyt.html} (accessed March 5th 2010), the old one was available from \url{www.polon.uw.edu.pl} (last accessed May 2005).
respect them. Naturally, mutual respect is much easier to inspire when both parties have similar achievements and experience. The ability to listen attentively is the absolute minimum, *conditio sine qua non*. And yet all too often both translators and editors are characterised by self-righteousness and they fail to notice that in conflicts this particular personal trait causes the first to lose is always the translation. Which by no means should be taken as an advice to back away from possible conflicts. An editor should be as steadfast as possible in his refusal to accept just any (and this most certainly stands for any bad) solution even if it comes from a seasoned, first-rate, and awarded translator. Even the best make mistakes and, unfortunately, it is usually the best who are the most difficult to convince that such a thing happened.

On the other hand, however, such an attitude on the part of the editor must be limited to linguistic correctness. Translator has (or at least should have) an exclusive right to make any decisions concerning the artistic, aesthetic quality of his work. In the process of translation an editor is not another author, a second translator (although if their cooperation works well he may become a co-author of the final text). If he cannot accept this, he should try his hand at translation instead of attempts at back-seat driving.

The task of an editor is that of a spokesperson of the author and the future readers. The aim of the editor’s work is the creation of such a translation which will be true to the original author’s intent (although not necessary to his every word). The author and the readers must be skillfully defended against any excesses of translators’ misplaced creativity. On the other hand the editor should always have in mind the readers for whose benefit he should make sure that the final text of the translation simply reads well. A translated book must be a good one. Many Polish readers remember the infamous *Fredzia Phi-Phi*, a translation of Alexander Alan Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* prepared by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Lublin 1986). This translation is a perfect example of a book, the translator of which had both knowledge and a vision of her work, yet as the result of which she produced a book which can hardly be read by children while adults, most of whom had read the canonical translation by Irena Tuwim, find unpalatable.

An editor should avoid three major dangers which usually appear in the process of editing. The first is literal translation which can get even as bad as word for word translation. It is a problem which is equally difficult for the translator and the editor. Both can demand their choices to be accepted because “it is exactly so in the original” and while claiming to defend the original they stand by their mistakes. Unfortunately, it often happens so that convincing an editor that in order to retain the spirit of the
work it is impossible to stick to its every letter turns out an impossible task. Both sides of this conflict sometimes happen to defend the original’s “integrity” in order to hide their ignorance of its meaning or, even more probably, of its language. Ignorance, the second possible danger on the part of the editor, is rather naturally also not exclusive and both parts should watch the other’s work attentively. Excessive trust can also be dangerous.

The third possible danger is an abuse of power. It is sometimes so that translator’s influence upon the text ends when he submits his work while any later remarks are not considered at all. The first opportunity to get to know what happened to the translation arrives with the copies of the printed books (if the publishing house chooses to supply them as more and more prefer to save money and avoid problems with additional taxation) and by then it is too late to change anything.

Attempts to cut costs by the publishers are by no means limited to the number of free copies available. As I mentioned above, from the point of view of a publisher, a perfect translator does not require an editor (or a proof-reader, preferably neither) at all. One of major changes which took place in Polish publishing after 1989 was outsourcing editors employed full-time. They were either offered possibility of cooperating with the publishers or replaced with younger and less experienced candidates who could offer (seemingly) the same services for less money.

The most courageous publishers went as far as to demand from translators providing edition and proof-reading as part of their job at no extra fee. I can still recall with some amusement an offer of translating a popular course of history of Poland into English at a very modest fee which was supposed to cover also edition and proof-reading of the text made by an English-language native speaker. Fortunately, serious publishers discovered rather sooner than later that this policy is extremely short-sighted and returned to employing editors on a full-time basis. Even though outsourcing gave some short-term savings, in the long-term it was extremely damaging to their reputation and those who failed to notice this on time very often had to move on to other businesses.

The change in the status of editor within a publishing house was nevertheless irreversible. Famous editors such as Irena Szymańska (1921-1999), who combined editing with writing and translating, forming personal relations with authors and translators, would have a hard time trying to fit in this new reality. After a period when edition was treated as a necessary evil or a costly luxury came a period when this task was

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41 A few years ago Polish Ministry of Finance decided that free copies of books traditionally available to authors and translators should be taxed as a part of their income. In order to save money and paperwork several publishing houses chose not to offer such copies any more.
entrusted to first year students of Polish studies who sought any possibility of supplementing their meagre incomes but could actually do very little beyond reading and returning an “edited” text without any substantial changes.

They either had to master their trade on their own or they were gradually replaced by people with more skills coming from various walks of life. The next stage was an increased professionalization, more and more publishers would either expand their market presence and increase the number of published titles (as the print-runs were decreasing) which increased the demand for editors as a result of which it became cheaper to keep editors busy nine to five for a regular salary rather than to pay for each edited book. Other publishers seek niches on the market and they require highly specialised editors who can expect safe and steady working environment in return for their qualifications. Inasmuch as one can hardly complain of the necessity to deal with professionals the re-professionalisation meant also that many highly qualified specialists who were not interesting in full-time or even part-time positions gave up editing.

I have so far limited these remarks to professional editors (although I have quite vivid memories of collaborating with people who were paid for their editing services but the quality thereof was rather unprofessional). However, any translator must not seek their help only. Especially in the early stages of translator’s career or even before any real career starts it is highly advisable to put your attempts to the test of your colleagues’ literary tastes. It is the easiest for students of departments of foreign language studies and applied linguistics who dream of becoming literary translators and who can count on the help of their fellow students.

Every reading of a translated text helps remove faults and mistakes which the translator missed. Every reading of a text translated by a fellow student helps notice mistakes which one can make or makes in their own work. Peer correction should be an opportunity when we can expect an honest and direct criticism of our work (not of ourselves) and we should learn how to offer this kind of criticism to others. It is much easier to accept criticism from people we like and respect, creating a network of peer correction is also an important stage in preparation for translator’s career.

The ability to accept criticism becomes more and more important when we decide to choose translation as our job because then we have to face criticism (the good part is that translation is quite seldom the object of reviewers’ attention but it can be a limited consolation) coming from professional reviewers who may be more competent but usually are less friendly and much less inclined to turn a deaf ear to our mistakes. Every translator should be aware of the fact that criticism, no matter whether it comes from editors or reviewers, has (or at least should have) one clear aim
– improving the quality of the translation and protecting readers from the bad ones. If someone cannot handle criticism, they should look for another source of income.

What attitude should a translator adopt towards editors? One can decide that editor’s participation in the process of translation is a necessary evil. Collaboration may be for us one of those trials and tribulations to which we habitually apply the saying “what kills us not makes us stronger”. Yet we must bear in mind what I have just said – a good editor protects both translator from reviewers and readers from translator. If he is an evil, we should at least agree that it is a lesser evil after all.

For translators it is much better to try to accept the arguments of editors and, if possible, become friends with them. Every translated book means many hours spent together discussing possible changes and improvements. Such hours pass much faster when spent with someone we like striving towards a common goal. Sometimes it takes a lot of effort and humility but it is always worth it. It is seldom possible to reach the finish line fighting with the coxswain.