Reflections/Directions In Technical Communication In Canada:A Panel Discussion

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ORGANIZING A CONFERENCE ON REFLECTIONS/DIRECTIONS in Technical Communication in Canada, a theme chosen to commemorate ten years of our society's meeting with the Learned Societies Conference, seemed an appropriate opportunity to schedule a general discussion of the field's development, current status, and possible avenues for development in future. Because discussions typically are ephemeral—of direct use only to the immediate participants—it also seemed important to try to capture this one in written form for a wider audience. In this way, those not present at the meeting would be able to peruse the ideas presented and perhaps contribute to the discussion by conveying their own views to this journal—or even better, to the society's more informal medium, the *CATTW Bulletin*.

As it turns out, the discussion held much of value for both society members and the field at large. The following report presents a record of the panel discussion on reflections/directions in technical communication in Canada to stimulate further thought, comment and discussion among members of the Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing/Association canadienne des professeurs de rédaction technique et scientifique (CATTW/ACPRTS).

Background

To facilitate reflection on the field in Canada, it first seemed best to have key members of CATTW/ACPRTS present their views for consideration by audience members and other panelists. With this in mind, I invited five people to act as panelists: Ron S. Blicq, Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu, Janet Giltrow, Michael P. Jordan, Lilita Rodman. This panel represents the range of technical communication approaches in Canada. Not only are panelists long-standing members of CATTW/ACPRTS, but most were also founding members of the society around 1980 when Joan Pavelich of the University of British Columbia decided that we needed a *Canadian* association of teachers of technical writing. Panelists' views, therefore, carry the weight of personal

involvement in the society for nearly 15 years. Since all the panelists had acted as president of CATTW/ACPRTS, their comments also reflect adminis-trative perspectives as leaders in the field. Furthermore, they have all pub-lished extensively, including books. Their views are therefore those of active researchers and writers in addition to teachers; moreover, through their book publishing in particular, they have greatly influenced the growth and direction of an otherwise small field and scholarly society in this country.

Finally, to help focus discussion, panel members prepared brief state-ments that ultimately reflected other facets of their experience with the field and in CATTW/ACPRTS itself: university and college teaching, French and English approaches, humanities and science concerns, and even consulting activities. In brief, their wide variety of perspectives promised lively discus-sion of issues important to the field in Canada. Each of the panelists' state-ments appears below, preceded by a brief introduction to place their views in biographical, if not intellectual, context. Following them is a summary of dis-cussion among panelists and some twenty audience members at the annual meeting of CATTW/ACPRTS held on June 5, 1994 at the University of Calgary. As readers will see, the discussion covered much ground and provided a fit-ting conclusion to a conference devoted to commemorating a significant mile-stone in the history of CATTW/ACPRTS.

Panelist: Michael P. Jordan, Queen's University

Formerly a technical writer and publications manager, Michael P. Jordan has been teaching technical communication and applied linguistics in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Applied Science, Queen's University at Kingston for 26 years. In addition to being a Professional Engineer, he holds a doctorate in linguistics. Prof. Jordan has published dozens of articles in major international and national journals, and his work is well known to readers of Technostyle. *Most recently, he has turned his attention to the nature of plain language. His two books are entitled* Funda-mentals of Technical Description *(Kreiger, 1984) and* Rhetoric of Everyday English Texts *(Allen and Unwin, 1984).*

Reflections

In the early days of the CATTW, Joan Pavelich gathered together teachers of technical writing in Canada in a loosely-knit group with a common interest in our subject. We had little aim or direction until Joan convinced organizers of the Canadian Learned Societies of accept us as a member.

I recall a long telephone conversation I had with Joan before agreeing to arrange the first CATTW conference as part of the Learned Conferences in Guelph in 1984. I expressed concern that the new CATTW would overlap with the work of the established organizations: the STC, the ABCA and the IEEE Communications Division. Her response was that we would be significantly different because of our affiliation with the Learned Societies. She felt that this connection would give us a French-language element and would ensure that we would become a scholarly society with high standards of research.

We have, over the years, heard arguments against this scholarly aim, and there are still those who would like to see us become a "how to" organization sharing old and new teaching techniques. CATTW is clearly aware that actual teaching is a significant part of our members' interests, but there are other organizations where teachers of technical writing can continue to swap teaching tales. We have chosen not to take that route, and to leave such activities to the organizations that obviously do them very well and serve a real need in our profession.

Joan's vision was that we would be different because we would provide a form for original scholarly research, and it was on that basis that I agreed to organize and participate in the first conference in Guelph ten years ago.

Research Quality and Direction

The quality of papers presented at our conferences has been improving over the years. This is partly as a result of the SSHRC research requirement for travel funds to or conferences with the Learneds. I believe it is also because the scholarly standards of participants have improved and because those participating have grown to expect high scholarly standards in work presented at our conferences. Some of our members have recently completed graduate degrees in subjects related to technical communication, and their work has been recognized by promotions and appointments with their universities. Visiting scholars have also injected much-needed depth and breadth to our

work, exposing us to the work of many leading international schools in technical communication and making our work more accessible to international audiences.

Improvement in our journal *Technostyle* have gone hand-in-hand with the quality of our research. Under the capable editorship of Joan Pavelich, Jennifer Connor, Anne Parker and now Diana Wegner, Technostyle has become a journal of truly international caliber, both in terms of the quality of research and reviews it presents and the superb editorial work it represents. With such a strong journal, we can foresee related improvements in the less formal Bulletin for the publication of teaching materials, announcements, and association business. Under the editorship of Randy Harris and Pamela Russell, the special forthcoming JWTC issue on technical communication in Canada, while not officially a CATTW project, will be almost entirely written by CATTW members. These are clear signals of the scholastic leadership of CATTW and its members in technical communication in Canada—and a clear justification of our scholarly objectives.

Several visiting scholars, and also many members, have noted our scholarly strength in language analysis including discourse studies and corpus analyses. In recognition of the need to produce results of practical value for the teaching of technical writing, we have tended to concentrate on the analysis of language itself, rather than the psychology of the writing process, the sociology of audience analysis, or the business management of document use. I see language as the centre of our profession, and sadly perceive that many English teachers in schools and many teachers of technical writing lack an adequate language basis to provide language-based instruction in technical writing. I thus feel we have an important role to play in stressing the need for a greater understanding of the language of technical writing, rather than emphasizing method of teaching the established—and often questionable—principles. At the same time, as we see in the current issue (11/3, Fall, 1993), published work in Technostyle is making significant contributions to a more accurate understanding of the language principles of our profession.

The Future—Teaching and Research

In keeping with our tradition of researching compelling tasks of importance to our duties as teachers of technical writing—plain language, summaries, specific language features, translation, and special reports are just a few recent examples—we need to assess future teaching needs as the basis for new

research work. Several factors appear to be pointing to the need for instruc-
tion at more basic levels of writing skill:

    a. Professionals and governing bodies at engineering, technologist,
and technician levels all seem to be becoming more aware of
the importance of writing in technical careers. Technical faculty
in colleges and universities also seem to be coming to the same
recognition, and universities are beginning to refuse to graduate
those who are semi-literate in the language of instruction
(English or French).

    b. Canada has growing proportions of students whose mother
tongue is not French or English, and there is still a strong need
for English/French bilingual instruction.

    c. Severe cost cuts in schools have lead to reductions in Special
Education programmes for students who need extra language
help, and in some cases ESL/FSL programmes have been
eliminated.

    d. There is growing recognition that courses in literary analysis
provide an inadequate background for students who later have
to write functional documents; and some provinces and school
boards are looking to the possibility of teaching technical writing
in schools.

    e. Although the use of computers has great advantages, over-
reliance on spellcheckers and style guides is producing a
generation of students with serious weaknesses in basic
principles of clause and sentence structure.

All these trends mean that we can expect greater demands for teaching
functional writing at lower levels of ability, while still having to teach linguis-
tically-able students to become proficient writers.

    The CATTW has always defined technical writing broadly—not only
to include speech and diagrams as well as writing itself, but also to include
business, administrative, medical, and legal writing as well as all forms of
writing dealing with technology, science and engineering. That is, we have
accepted our mandate as including all forms of functional (or non-
fictional)communication as opposed to literary (fictional or expressive) writ-
ing. If we accept this broader challenge, our overall task is to teach students to
become better writers of French and English, the premise being that a good

writer can soon learn to write well in any situation or genre.

Thus the research challenge to meet the trends in the technical professions, schools and society is to derive a clearer understanding of the patterns and structures of groups, clauses, and sentences in Canada's two official languages. Just as we teach our writing students that what we write in a report is at least as important as how we write it, we must also recognize that what we teach is at least as important as how we teach it. Yet many teachers are still content to teach the same old principles that were in vogue early in the century, while calling for research and improvements in how we teach them. The tradition of language-based instruction is greater in French Canada than elsewhere in this country, and we need to follow their lead in this respect.

Sadly—in English at least—we do not really know what parallel structure is, how paragraphs are formed, how we create logical and related connections between clauses and sentences, how we achieve lexical continuity between elements of text, how the articles relate to audience perception, how we use implicit connection with discourse, how and when to dangle our participles, and a host of other fundamental questions about language use. These are the sort of compelling research questions we need to address if we are to meet the challenge of the new century.

CATTW is well positioned to take a leading role in the development of the necessary research to form the basis for language-based instruction in technical—and all non-literary—writing. How individuals decide they will teach the principles is a relatively insignificant issue; what they teach is fundamental. Through research, our association can provide further scholarly basis for the teaching of effective writing.

Panelist: Lilita Rodman, University Of British Columbia

Lilita Rodman has been a member of the Department of English at the University of British Columbia for over 20 years, teaching various literature, writing, and linguistics courses. Her research interests in technical communication focus on linguistic analyses and on graphics. Apart from articles on these topics in international journals, she wrote a textbook entitled Technical Communication: Strategy and Process *(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), which she is currently revising for a second edition. Prof. Rodman is currently Immediate Past-President of CATTW/ACPRTS.*

How has CATTW Developed?

In going to the first meeting to CATTW on June 5, 1984 in Mackinnon 230 at the University of Guelph I felt much as I did as a child going to a new school. Who would be there? What would the papers be like? No doubt others felt as I did, for this marked the first coming face-to-face of quite a number of teachers of technical writing in Canada. As some of you will recall, there were 13 papers on the program, and lunch was $6.25. Of those 13 speakers, six are still members: I, Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu, Michael Jordan, Anne Parker, Maureen Bogdanowicz, and Joan Pavelich.

In the decade since that first meeting, I see the following as the most important developments:

1. We have reached many technical writing teachers as the conference has moved from coast to coast.

2. CATTW has evolved a culture. Those who have been to one or two meetings know more or less what kinds of presentations and social activities to expect.

3. Although there was a strong French presence for some years, we seem largely to have lost it. Perhaps this could be reversed at the Montreal meeting next year.

4. The quality of papers has improved and become much more even. SSHRCC funding has made it easier to attract speakers, and a standard has been established by previous conferences and the examples set by the scholars we have invited as visiting speakers. I feel strongly that the Windsor meeting in 1988 at which Barbara Couture was our first visiting speaker marked a turning point in quality.

5. There are now more scholars in Canada studying professional writing or workplace writing than there were ten years ago, and many of them have joined CATTW. In part, this is a consequence of the rise of rhetoric instruction in Canada in the last 20 years.

6. Although it is an accident that so many scholars working on professional writing in Canada have linguistic training, it has led technical writing scholarship in Canada to have much more of a discourse analysis/close textual analysis slant than does technical writing scholarship in the U.S. The names that come

to mind are Michael Jordan, Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu, Janet
Giltrow, Candace Séquinot, Randy Allen Harris, Aviva
Freedman, Laurel Brinton, and I'm sure I've missed some.

How Has the Teaching of Technical Writing Changed?

1. A number of special programs to train technical writers have
   been established or have expanded, among them those at
   Douglas College, Mount Royal College, and the University of
   Waterloo.
2. Because many programs have matured in these ten years, there
   are obviously many more instructors with extensive experience
   in teaching technical communication.
3. Several Canadian textbooks and Canadianizations of American
   textbooks have been published.

How Should CATTW Develop?

I see the main function of CATTW as the professionalizing of the
teaching and study of technical communication in Canada. I think we need to
raise the profile and status of technical writing in our institutions. However,
before we can demand respect, we have to earn respect, and this requires that
we and CATTW continue to work to improve the quality of instruction and the
quality of scholarship in technical communication.

How can we improve instruction?

The majority of teachers of technical writing—in the U.S. as well as
Canada—are novices in the field who are being 'trained' by reading the text-
book from which they are teaching and perhaps by looking at one or two other
textbooks left by book reps. This is largely the result of how and why instruc-
tors are assigned to technical writing classes; when administrations don't value
technical communication courses, they slot in whoever is available. I think it
should be part of our mission to encourage ALL instructors of technical writ-
ing to do the following:

1. Read technical writing journals and anthologies of articles about
   technical communication. We should try to place *Technostyle*
   in as many Canadian libraries as possible and we should also
   disseminate information about other journals such as JTWC,

> TCQ, JBC, TC, IEEE, WC, and JBTC. *Technostyle* should reprint outstanding articles from these journals as space permits.

2. Attend conferences. We should encourage instructors to attend our conference when it is in their region and we should also disseminate information about other conferences such as CCCC, ABC, STC, and IEEE.

We should also think about means of providing or sponsoring in-service training. Perhaps we might organize post-convention workshops or regional workshops.

How Can We Improve Scholarship?

1. We should identify and recruit Canadian scholars who are investigating professional writing, including, of course, our graduate students. We should try again to have joint sessions and adjoining sessions with other groups at the Learneds to foster the exchange of ideas with members of related organizations.

2. We should continue to invite prominent guest scholars to our conferences and consider expanding the number for whom we seek SSHRCC funding. We are limited to only two remissions of conference fees, but we can ask for SSHRCC travel funds for as many speakers as we want. We should also urge these scholars to publish their work in *Technostyle*.

3. We should encourage instructors new to the field to participate in research.

4. We should publish our work in *Technostyle* and act as reviewers.

5. We should organize more ambitious research projects that involve collaboration among scholars at different institutions.

6. We should increase our profile in the U.S. by joining U.S. organizations and attending their conferences and by placing *Technostyle* in major technical communication libraries so that our work is read by a wider audience.

What Is the Future of Teaching Technical Communication in Canada?

1. In these 'practical' but also 'fiscally responsible' time the demand for instruction in technical communication will increase at the same time as institutions will try to cut what they may perceive as a frill. This will lead to continuing strife and instability in technical communications courses.

2. As the demand for technical writers continues, there will be more programs to train them.

3. As pressures on colleges and universities continue, I expect there to be wider use of distance delivery of technical communication courses using various technologies.

4. As desktop publishing makes it possible for each instructor to 'publish' professional looking materials, more instructors will choose this option. Although there are many obvious advantages to this approach, the danger is that the kinds of review and quality control that are part of conventional publishing will not be exercised and some of these materials may be much less reputable than one might think. A laser printer guarantees appearance only.

5. The number of ESL/FSL students in technical communication classes is likely to increase and create various linguistic and cultural challenges.

6. In terms of curriculum and approach, we will probably follow trends in the U.S., such as the following:

    a.   The case approach will be abandoned, except as the basis of short assignments such as memos and letters. Current thinking is that it is much more useful for a student to actually investigate a real problem than to work with a 'case'. (Paul V. Anderson and Jone Rymer expressed this view at the CCCC 1994 in Think Tank FG2: Meeting Common Concerns in a Complex World Community: Rationale and Methods for Developing Case Studies for Teaching Technical Communication.)

    b.   Students will routinely use personal computers.

    c.   Students will collaborate in preparing at least some of their assignments.

    d.   Ethics, document design, usability, and global communication will become standard topics.

What Is the Future of Research in Technical Communication?

The field will probably progress more in the direction of recognizing the complexity of professional communication and the applicability of other disciplines to its study. The distinctions between business and technical communication will blur even more. I anticipate the following developments in the coming decade:

1. Increased interest in global communication and increased understanding of the variety of national business cultures. We will think more about the criteria we can/should use to assess effective business or technical communication in other cultures. When offering training in professional communication in other countries, North Americans have tended simply to impose their forms, conventions, and assumptions on other business cultures. I see this as cultural colonialism stemming from a failure to recognize all but the most trivial kinds of diversity among cultures. There is no reason why the forms, conventions, and assumptions stemming from North America should apply elsewhere. For example, there is every reason to believe that Finnish business communication practice is going to be much better suited to Estonian needs than Canadian practice can ever be. The Estonians and Finns speak very closely related non-Indo-European languages, are neighbours, and share many cultural principles.

2. Further exploration of the social and political dimensions of professional communication. There should be an increased emphasis on organizations as social structures and an interest in applying insights and techniques from social science research to professional communication. An obvious area of related research that has been neglected is sociolinguistics.

3. More sophisticated analyses of how documents are generated and function in organizations.
4. More work on usability/readability, graphics, and ethics.

Panelist: Janet Giltrow, Simon Fraser University

Janet Giltrow is currently President of CATTW/ACPRTS. She has taught in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University for more than ten years, particularly courses in writing, language theory, and style in literary and non-literary texts. Her research interests in technical communication deal mainly with genre, and her articles have appeared in Technostyle *as well as other Canadian and international journals, and in edited collections. Her book is entitled* Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose *(Broadview Press, 1990), a second edition of which she is working on now.*

New Maps For The Study Of Technical Writing

In the 1980s, many people educated in literary studies found themselves teaching technical writing. In its first decade, CATTW/ACPRTS helped such teachers orient themselves to their new professional roles. So did the tech writing curriculum itself. That curriculum has been a stable orientation to the field, and a means of transforming the values of literary study into practices more serviceable to applied disciplines. Companion to the curriculum, the textbook tradition has also been a well-structured, reliable and comprehensive guide for teachers of technical writing.

The tradition embodied in curriculum and textbook develops through a corridor linking classroom and workplace. This corridor opens on to certain forms of writing which we could think of as metonymic: the genres on which curriculum and textbook focus represent the world of work. In the world symbolized by these genres, people perform rhetorical actions. They propose and report; they inquire and complain, and respond to inquiries and complaints.

They do so methodically, their rhetorical efforts delivered and received sym-
metrically, evenly. Rarely are these self-possessed communicators troubled
by dissent, for they share similar interests. And rarely are they harassed by
power differentials. A subordinate may take care not to make a nuisance of
himself with a longwinded memo to his boss, but, in all, these people occupy
similar positions in the social order.

      In this same decade, while textbooks and curriculum have continued to
consolidate their representation of the world, some research in the field has
continued to measure the fit between curriculum and the actual practice of
these genres (for example, what are the parts of an engineering report, or an
auditor's report?). But other research has scouted beyond the boundaries of
curriculum. Reflecting on the kinds of presentations we have heard at our
meetings, or the work our members have done, I come across diverse objects
of inquiry: the stylistics of science and the knowledge-making genres; the
tensions amongst the genre sets of a veterinary college; the political torque of
accident reports or advocacy; letters of inquiry issuing from ill-defined rather
than well-defined positions; the rhetoric of collective agreements. I wonder
how curriculum will accommodate the finds of this kind of research, how it
will represent a more contingent and less symmetrical world of work.

      And I wonder if the tech writing curriculum, with its implicit contract
with the managerial classes, will ever be able to accommodate the study of
interest (and I wonder what will happen to it, in these times, if it doesn't). Let
me give an example of what I have in mind. Many agree that documentation is
the growth sector in technical writing. Accordingly, efforts of researchers and
practitioners go towards discovering the principles that will overcome the
intransigence of people who seem to wilfully misuse their equipment, or
misunderstand their manuals, or refuse to pay proper attention to instructions,
or even to read them at all. But maybe we should not direct our entire efforts
to controlling these readers. Maybe we should inquire into the conditions of
resistance and competing intentions, and ask whose interests are served by
such control. Maybe we should inquire into the way documentation represents
technology itself: how does its language interpret work and action, routine
and power?

      And, in an effort to understand the communities of interest tradition-
ally served by technical writing, we may profit from inquiry into the genres
which neighbour the canonical, curricular ones. Let me give another example,
this time a kind of document situated in the managerial habitat and, with its
intricate, opaque wording, stylizing an ethos of management. It's a paragraph

advertising a "Senior Consultant" position with "Canada's leading supplier of
motor vehicle and marketing information services to the automotive industry
and its allied businesses":

> Our services for the automotive industry include market performance
> evaluation and benchmarking, network planning and location analysis,
> customer profiling studies, and support services for direct
> communication and customer retention programs. ("Careers", *The*
> *Globe and Mail*, May 9, 1994)

With nominalizations and agentless expressions, this writing seems to
defy dictates of clarity. It appears tacit and covert rather than accessible and
direct. What interests and values are signified by this way of speaking? Its
features resemble those which Halliday and Martin (1993) attribute to sci-
ence, and what they call the "language of the expert": what are they doing
here? This kind of document should be included in the study of "business
writing."

Recently, I showed a sample of documents like this to an overseas
audience. They were amazed and mystified by the stylistic densities. They
regarded these documents as artifacts from a strange and inexplicable tribe.
Their reaction suggests that technical writing—despite reputed goals of uni-
versal clarity and efficiency, and a kind of a-rhetorical innocence—can be, in
fact, heavily coded with social information and social definitions.

Perhaps, as specialists in workplace literacy, we need to reflect more
on those social definitions—on their exclusions and suppressions, and, in the
broadest sense, their political motivation. Any set of genres is an interpreta-
tion of the world, constructed from a certain position in the world, and so is
inevitably exclusionary. But perhaps we should inquire as to what exactly *is*
excluded from the business and technical genres, and from traditional study of
them. We should begin by acknowledging that these genres configure a mana-
gerial world, and represent the interests of the managerial classes as universal
rather than relative.

How can we find out about the differences and resistances which these
genres suppress? Two research reports come to mind - neither from the tech-
nical writing section itself. Each offers a glimpse of working literacies remote
from managerial domain. A decade ago, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) described

the reception of official, written information on childcare by a woman in a black working-class neighbourhood in the Piedmont Carolinas. According to this well-known account, the recipient of the letter read it out loud to a circle of friends, each of whom contributed her experience of the world to interpreting the letter and determining the course of action to be followed. I know of no episode in the traditional tech writing curriculum which predicts the complexity of such reading behaviour, or the fullness of understanding these people reached—on their own terms (although Karen Schriver's usability testing has been turning up socio-political diversity in the audience for health care information). More recently, a Master's thesis in education by Katherine Alexander (1993) investigated the "literate practices" at a mental health boarding home, where workers recorded in a logbook the events of their shift. Even more strikingly than Heath's, Alexander's work illuminates the outer rims of the world of work, far from the managerial centre, where reading and writing go on nevertheless, with passionate, professional and even forensic consequences.

A new map of the workplace would include such sites, and call for a post-colonial perspective—one, that is, which recognizes that curriculum in technical writing has typically served and sustained the managerial centre, and relegated other work and workers at distant provinces. Should curriculum eventually reach those provinces, I hope it does so in full post-colonial consciousness, so that the Piedmont women and the health workers become not simply new objects of managerial knowledge but, instead, respected constituents of the workplace, situated in their own communities of knowledge and practice. And, making the metaphorical map literal, I would extend this hope to the workplace as it is being redefined under expansionary trade and investment policies. Let's not imagine ourselves recolonizing the world with the formal report.

Panelist: Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu, Université D'Ottawa

Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu has been a member of the École de traducteurs et d'interprètes at the University of Ottawa for over 20 years. Her teaching and research focus on the French language and French style, although she has taught professional writing within these subjects. She has published many articles in Technostyle, *among other French-Canadian journals, and her two books entitled*

Exercices pratiques de style *(PUQ, 1990) and* Exercices pratiques de français *(PUQ, 1984) have been adopted in many courses in Canada.*

Une enquête

Au Canada, on parle toujours relativement peu, en 1994, des rédacterus techniques ou des rédacteurs professionnels francophones. Dans ces circonstances, trois professeurs de deux universités canadiennes (Sherbrooke et Ottawa) ont mené une enquête pour savoir dans quelles conditions et par qui la rédaction en français était effectuée au Canada. Nous avons envoyé questionnaires et obtenu 112 résponse.

Nos répondants, qui travaillent pour la plupart au Québec et en Ontario, se répartissent en quatre groupes:

- services ou employés du gouvernement fédéral
- services ou employés du gouvernement provincial du Québec
- entreprises privée
- rédacteurs indépendants

Rélexions préminaires

Nous procédons actuellement à l'analyse des données; les réflexions que nous présentons ici résultant d'un examen préliminaire des réponses reçues. Cependent les chiffres et les commentaires fournis démontrent d'ores et déjà l'originalité de la situation de la rédaction professionnelle en français (RPF) au Canada par rapport à son pendant anglais.

La RPFC au Canada est indissociable de la dualité linguistique du pays. Elle est liée d'une part au fait que le Québec est francophone mais situé sur un continent anglophone et, d'autre part, au bilinguisme du gouvernement fédéral et des gouvernements de l'Ontario et du Nouveau-Brunswick. La plus grande parties de la RPF se fait à la fonction publique fédérale et au Québec; ailleurs, dans le secteur privé, elle est faite en fonction des besoins du marché québécois.

It est intéressant de noter que, dans le cas des rédacteurs québécois, la RPF est parfois sentie, par les répondants, comme un moyen de défendre la langue française (même dans les publications scientifiques).

Ailleurs qu'au Québec, dans les entreprises privées et au gouvernement fédéral, la RPF est sentie comme une obligation imposée par la *Lois sur les*

langues officielles et elle est souvent liée à la traduction. Certains réacteurs doivent être parfaitement bilingues puisqu'ils doivent travailler à partir d'une documentation fournie en français comme en anglais et réviser des textes traduits de l'anglais. Dans le cas des indépendants, la rédaction semble être assez souvent une activité parallèle à la traduction quand ce n'est pas un sous-produit de la traduction.

Exigences des employeurs

Notre enquête porte, entre autres, sur les diplômes, les compétences et les aptitudes que doi8vent posséder les rédacteurs. Tous les employeurs s'accordent pour exiger d'abord et avant tout une bonne connaissance de la langue français. Viennent ensuite la capacité d'écrire en fonction du client, puis celle de travailler sous pression et, assez loin derrière et presque à égalité, la connaissance du domaine et la créativité. Et, on l'a vu, dans certains cas, l'employeur demande au rédacteurs d'être bilingues.

Quant au diplômes exigés, ils varient. Une seule université - celle de Sherbrooke - décerne un baccalauréat en rédaction et les titulaires travaillent surtout à la fonction publique fédérale et provinciale (québécoise). Les entreprises recrutent aussi des candidats titulaires d'un diplôme (B.A. ou maîtrise) en traduction, en français, en communication ou en journalisme. Dans d'autres cas, c'est un diplôme dans une discipline pertinente qui ouvre des portes.

L'Avenir de la RPF

Il est difficile de le prévoir puisque cette activité est liée en partie à la politique. À l'extérieur de Québec, il tient à la volonté de bilinguisme des différents gouvernements. Quant au domaines technique et scientifique, comme on le sait, la langue de travail y est surtout l'anglais. Et il n'est pas rare que les textes techniques soient d'abord rédigés en anglais (au Canada et aux États-Unis)pour être ensuite traduits en français. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que des employeurs lient traduction et rédaction. Pour ce qui est des provinces autres que le Québec, il semble que le besoin de former des rédacteurs qui feraient uniquement de la rédaction en français n'existe pas. En ce que concerne le Québec, où le besoin de rédacteurs francophones est indiscutable, une analyse plus attentive des données de l'enquête indiquera la voie que devraient suivre les établissements qui offrent des programmes de rédaction professionnelle.

Panelist: Ron S. Blicq, RGI International, Winnipeg

*Ron Blicq is well-known as an active promoter of technical com-
munication for several decades. Following his retirement as Head,
Technical Communication Department at Red River College in
Winnipeg, he has consulted full time in the field both nationally and
internationally. His many textbooks have achieved wide circula-
tion throughout North America:* Technically-Write, *now in its fourth
Canadian edition (Prentice-Hall, 1992), a book originally published
in the United States;* Guidelines for Report Writing, *about to come
out in its third edition (Prentice-Hall, 1990); and* Administratively-
Write *(Prentice-Hall, 1985), among others. His recent* Handbook
for Report Writing *appeared in Estonian and Russian translations
specifically geared for audiences in those countries (published by
ILo Ārikultuur, 1993, and by International Centre for Scientific and
Technical Information, 1992, respectively).*

This is a wonderful time to be a teacher of technical writing (I write in
the spring of 1994), for the field is expanding rapidly and in several direc-
tions. There is an increasing demand for teachers, not only in the traditional
university and college setting, but also in high schools, industry, the profes-
sions, and developing countries. CATTW members should be positioning them-
selves to meet this challenge.

A Little Bit Of History

In the beginning there was Joan Pavelich and her innovative dream to
establish a *Canadian* Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, separate
and distinct from the larger Association of Teachers of Technical Writing al-
ready established in the United States, coupled with Joan's drive to bring her
idea to fruition. Then, a couple of years later, there was Joan's plan to associ-
ate the CATTW annual conference with the Learned Societies' conference,
which provided a prestigious, inexpensive, and logical venue for us, plus an
extraordinary social context for our meetings. And still later there was Joan's
thrust to obtain travel funds for teachers of technical writing. Sadly, it was
shortly after this that CATTW began to lose its focus.

Along the way we had to define "technical writing", because there are

two distinct groups of technical writers:
> - Practitioners, to whom technical writing is a dedicated profession, and
> - Non-practitioners, who are engineers, scientists, and technicians to whom technical writing is an adjunct to their profession.
> It was, we decided, the latter audience we would be addressing.

Consequently, CATTW members now teach undergraduate engineers, scientists, and technicians to communicate information about their work to audiences of varying technical knowledge. Although the title of our Association implies that we teach them to *write* well, in effect we have broadened the scope of our mandate to include the teaching of oral and visual communication.

The Current Situation

So, how did CATTW lose its focus?

In linking itself with The Learneds, and focusing on the need for speakers to present the results of a *research* project if they are to be eligible for travel funding, CATTW inadvertently created the equivalent of a club that differentiates between teachers at universities and teachers at non-degree-granting institutions. Consequently its annual call for papers began stating that funds would be available only for those who presented the results of research, which was perceived to cater primarily to university teachers. Worse, more recent calls for papers were seen to discriminate betweeen university and community college teachers by stating that those who presented a research paper would each have 25 to 30 minutes speaking time, whereas those presenting papers describing teaching techniques would each have 10 minutes as part of a poster session.

This is sad, because there are far more teachers of technical communication at Canada's community colleges and similar non-degree-granting institutions than there are at the country's universities. And this division will become even wider when high school teachers start teaching technical communication as part of the senior years' curriculum.

Perhaps this difference would not have been so noticeable if the subject of the research papers had offered research results directly related to the *teaching* of technical communication for the particular audience we had identified, results that teachers could apply directly when teaching the undergraduate

engineers, scientists, and technicians the Association had identified as its audience. Unfortunately, many past research papers have dealt with topics that have no practical classroom or work-related application. Indeed, some have dealt with topics that really apply to the teaching of the written language in general, rather than to the *teaching* of technical writing.

The problem is not solely CATTW's. South of the border, Saul Carliner—a respected member of the Society for Technical Communication (STC)—has been stressing that too little research focuses on topics that have a *direct* application to the field of technical writing. In a forthcoming paper that will be published in a fall issue of the STC journal, *Technical Communication*, he writes:

> Research for the sake of research has no value to our profession ... The reason we should conduct research is to answer compelling questions (in the field of technical communication).

> People who perform research...sometimes lose sight of this reason. Driven by the need to gain tenure or a reputation, research is often performed for reasons other than uncovering answers to compelling questions. So we research obvious, easy, and widely-researched topics, such as how to write a better sentence and the effect of white space on readability. That's a sad waste of talent and skill because we do have compelling issues to study in our field.

> The future value of research depends on our ability to, first, address compelling issues, and second, to provide practical, beneficial applications to practitioners[1].

There are numerous projects and topics about technical writing we need to investigate. I am hoping that my missive will spark CATTW members to join me in researching them.

What Is On The Horizon?

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[1]   Carliner, Saul, "One Person's Opinion: A Practitioner's Call for the STC to Establish a Research Agenda", pending publication in *Technical Communication* (the journal of the Society for Technical Communication).

Although the demand for teachers of technical writing in Canada's universities, community colleges, and technical schools continues to grow slowly, it's in other areas that the greatest growth—and challenge—is occurring.

The fastest growth is in our public school systems. Manitoba is developing a technical communication curriculum as an elective for the Senior 4 year (previously grade 12). The program will start on a pilot basis at selected high schools in September, 1994 and will go full steam in September, 1995. A parallel program also is being developed for remote learning delivery. Concurrently, Nova Scotia is developing a curriculum for junior high school grades 6 to 8. (It's significant that both provinces plan to include technical communication as an integral part of the English Language Arts curriculum, from kindergarten right through to senior high school.) And, in Alberta, for the past year a private school has hired a part-time consultant to teach technical writing at the grade 9 level.

Our role in this scenario should be as advisors in the curriculum development process, as teachers on a contract basis, and as developers and presenters of seminars for school system teachers who are about to teach their first year of technical communication. In Manitoba, such seminars are planned for this summer and in the fall.

The second most active growth area is in business and industry. Recent American studies of the "value added" by trained technical communicators have shown that capably written documentation accompanying a product significantly reduces the cost of service calls and, sometimes, product development. A similar study currently being conducted in Canada is expected to reach the same conclusion; it will also derive definitive figures of the value of technical communication taught to an organization's technical staff. Because only larger firms can afford to retain technical writers on staff, there is a growing need for consultants to write documentation for them on short-term contracts, to edit documentation written by technical staff, or to run specialized courses for technical staff who will be writing documentation.

The three other growth areas are more remote, yet still accessible to teachers of technical writing. They comprise teaching:

1. technical communication to professionals in developing countries, and particularly those in the eastern block, so that they can prepare documentation that is comparable to that produced in the west, and to help them write technical proposals

for joint ventures. Recent sites have been Moscow (Russia),
Tallinn (Estonia), and Gotha (Germany),

2. graduate level courses for masters and doctoral graduates in
    sciences. Recent courses taught by Canadians include a one
    week course on Writing Research Papers for Publication (at
    the Mayo Clinic Graduate School), a four day course for
    engineers (at the University of Western Ontario), and a two
    day course for research economists (at a crown corporation in
    Winnipeg).

3. courses on how to teach technical communication, for teachers
    new to the technical communication field. Recent and upcoming
    courses on which Canadian teachers of technical writing have
    served or will serve as visiting faculty include:

    • the Institute for Technical Communication, at Hinds
       Junior College in Raymond, Mississippi (annually, in
       June, 1992 to 1994), and

    • a seminar for high school teachers, offered by the
       Manitoba Department of Education (in August and
       November, 1994) which will be ongoing.

It's significant that these courses for teachers at junior or community
colleges, or in the high schools, in recent years have replaced the more theo-
retical courses for teachers of technical writing that used to be taught by insti-
tutions such as Rennselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Conclusions

I am seriously concerned that too much of CATTW's research is focused
on topics that have little to do with the *practice* of technical writing and its
teaching. I am also concerned that the Association's members may discover
too late that there are exciting new developments they should be involved in.
Consequently, I appeal to CATTW to refocus its objectives and concentrate
more on assisting its members become more effective teachers of practical
technical writing.

Panel Discussion

Following these brief presentations, panelists agreed amongst themselves

on various issues raised, such as the need for more ESL instruction and the fact that the writing of textbooks has stabilized the field in Canada. Nevertheless, points of difference appeared in discussion. For instance, Jacqueline Bossé-Andrieu remarked that despite the title of our society in French, up to now she has not seen many French scholars concerned with professional writing at our meetings. The survey on which she reported therefore looked into the status of "professional writing" in Canada, which showed that in some areas "technical writing" cannot be separated from translation: outside Quebec and even in the case of some Quebec-based international corporations, writing in French is linked to translation, if not a byproduct of it. This information was of interest to English-speaking CATTW members who tend to focus less on characteristics of the English language than they do on form, genre, and process. Michael Jordan agreed that English-speaking instructors are not doing enough to teach writing, as opposed to process and audience, not showing students how to achieve continuity in writing, not explaining what language is or how writers create it; he claimed that little of this information appears in textbooks. He felt technical writing teachers need to provide clearer instruction about what's going on in language, especially since it is language study itself that differentiates them from literature instructors.

The issue of research engendered most discussion. For his part, Ron Blicq called for more practical research which might address such questions as what constitutes the "value added" to teaching writing in industry? Furthermore, he viewed the role of CATTW members as consultants for teaching in curricula outside the postsecondary system. Lilita Rodman agreed that research should be practical but recognized that audience members at a conference, for example, would not be able to transplant anyone's presentation into their own classroom; rather, the importance of such research lies in stimulating audience members to question what they are doing in the classroom, to give them pause. Janet Giltrow went further to ask what is practical? Suggesting that technical writing is a vulnerable field today, owing to its practice by a managerial class maintaining a white, patriarchal viewpoint, she pointed to inflexibility in the technical writing curriculum as potentially leading to problems in the classroom.

These views aired, the audience then actively participated in challenging or augmenting them. Although various points of view arose, they generally circled the tension between classroom-based reality and social or professional reality; in other words, how technical writing teachers can meet the needs of students, curriculum, practitioners (in the case of the profes-

sions), employers, and society at large, particularly in an era of rapid techno-
logical and social changes. Whereas one discussant saw these concerns as
potentially adding to an already overloaded curriculum in a professional
programme, others felt strongly that integrating them into the classroom was
vital to relevant teaching of writing on the job. They maintained that both
reading broadly and attending conferences allow new ideas to percolate so
that they come out naturally in teaching, rather than being imposed in a rigid
way to a curriculum. Specific suggestions put forward by audience members
for achieving a contextually-based perspective on teaching writing include the
following:

1. encouraging both students and instructors to read broadly to
   avoid an insular perspective in writing-on-the-job;
2. reminding both students and instructors that labour represents
   a reality separate from the dominant management focus in
   writing on the job;
3. adjusting our own attitudes as instructors so that broad
   contextual ideas about writing on the job are naturally brought
   into courses as the need arises, rather than setting them up in a
   rigid curriculum;
4. maintaining teaching as the nexus between practice and empty
   theory, whereby instructors emphasize that writing on the job
   should not merely serve a particular ideology;
5. building on research into teaching, and other subjects such as
   ethics, already conducted in other fields rather than re-inventing
   such work ourselves.

Although these concerns seem to betray a negative view of what has
been going on in technical writing classrooms recently, they implicitly em-
phasize strengths of the field in Canada. Again and again, speakers drew at-
tention to the unique role of CATTW/ACPRTS in analyzing language and
rhetorical issues, a role allowing members to respond to and comment on
changes in society. Indeed, two American speakers contrasted the situation
here with that of the United States, where teaching is less respected and where
a mismatch exists between intellectual training and institutional appointments
in technical writing. In Canada, a strong background in linguistics pervades
CATTW/ACPRTS and its activities, thereby encouraging more research into
issues needing solution. Such strengths were perceived by CATTW/ACPRTS
members as important for exploring other issues in Canadian technical writ-
ing in future, including collaboration among universities, government, and
professional boards.