

2009 Sight Translation Competitions, Final Report

May 11, 2009

The 2009 Sight Translation Competitions were held on January 15 (High School Latin), January 22 (Junior and Senior University Latin), and January 29 (Junior and Senior University Greek).

Following the most recent practices, I used electronic media for advertising the competitions and delivering the scripts. This proved only moderately successful re: advertising and, due to some problems arising from technical difficulties, the deadline for registration was extended from Dec. 15, 2008 to Jan. 12, 2009.

I would urge the Chairs and/or coordinators of Classics programs to pay close attention to the CCB announcements next fall, as that is the most reliable source for advertising. I do intend to send out a mailing in addition to e-mail announcements, but since the competition is an annual event, if you have not received an announcement by the middle of November, please feel free to contact the competition co-ordinator (Alison.Barclay@smu.ca) for registration forms and information or go to the CAC website, where the posters and forms will be posted as .pdf documents. Also, as noted by John Porter in 2007, the competition does run more smoothly if each institution establishes some regular system for dealing with the competitions, including advertising, corralling students and, most importantly, mailing the translations to the competition coordinator in a timely fashion.

We met with only a few snafus, some technical, two grammatical errors missed in proofing the Jr. Latin passage, and a few events which adversely affected participation (for e.g., the strike at York University and a storm in St. John's), but the main challenge seems to have been finding a time when the majority of the students could get together to write on the date of the competition. The largest groups of participants appear to be those who wrote during their regularly scheduled Latin and/or Greek class, but this is not an option for all institutions and will vary from year to year in accordance with schedules for courses. More troubling was the news that some institutions did not have any eligible students this year, due to cutbacks in courses (ie no second or third year students this year, and so no-one eligible to register). Finally, my good intentions to have the results announced and awards presented by mid-March at the latest were scuttled by a few institutions who did not get their submissions mailed to me as soon as the final competition was completed (Jan. 29). Next year, there will be a firm deadline for receipt of submissions so that we might speed up the process. My adjudicators were raring to go and once they received the passages, the turn around for results was impressive!

2009 Submissions:

High School Latin: 100 (2008: 41; 2007: 114; 2006: 76; 2005: 72; 2004: 54; 2003: 78)

Jr. Greek: 64 (2008: 55; 2007: 43; 2006: 59; 2005: 72; 2004: 71; 2003: 54)

Sr. Greek: 31 (2008: 32; 2007: 23; 2006: 32; 2005: 32; 2004: 28; 2003: 28)

Jr. Latin: 83 (2008: 53; 2007: 80; 2006: 90; 2005: 123; 2004: 113; 2003: 61)

Sr. Latin: 59 (2008: 55; 2007: 64; 2006: 68; 2005: 80; 2004: 69; 2003: 47)

As these figures indicate, submissions were up from last year, or on par, which is encouraging, especially for the High School competition. I mailed out posters to just over 200 high schools but received registrations from only 16, with a total of 158 students registered. There were submissions from 23 universities (out of 37 on my mailing list), with a total registration of 157 for Jr. Greek, 74 for Sr. Greek, 195 for Jr. Latin and 45 for Sr. Latin. There was also one registration from U of T Schools for the Junior Greek competition. As you can see from the numbers of actual papers submitted for adjudication, there is a significant difference between the estimates provided on the registration forms and the number of submissions received. The reasons for this discrepancy varied from students not showing up for the competition due to weather issues, a strike, scheduling conflicts and simply not putting in an appearance to a few instances where the coordinators chose to review the translations and submit only the passages they

felt had a chance. I believe the adjudicators appreciated the vetting of submissions, but I will continue to leave this practice as optional and up to the individuals overseeing the competition.

The results and adjudicators' comments are as follows:

High School Latin Competition

Passage: Vitruvius, *de Architectura, Liber II*: A story about the Dinocrates who wished to impress Alexander the Great

Winners

First prize: Jenny Gu, University of Toronto Schools
Second prize: Amy Lu, University of Toronto Schools
Third prize: Connie Zhao, University of Toronto Schools
Honourable Mention: Benoît Fournier, Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf

Mark Timmins is doing an excellent job at UofT Schools!

Adjudicator's Report:

This year 100 high school students entered the Classical Association of Canada's High School translation competition, among them 77 English-language and 23 French-language submissions. The standard was variable, suggesting differing levels of Latin: some students were very well versed in the more abstruse grammatical intricacies, others made their best attempts at hurdling constructions they probably had not yet encountered. Problem vocabulary included the deponent "polliceor", the comparative "tardiores" (properly translated "rather late" not "later"), "cum" (as a conjunction, not a preposition, which should have been rendered as "although" rather than "when" or "after"). "Cupidus", "regiae" and "exercitus" provided some amusement for a number of English-language students who believed that royal Cupid was taking exercise! However, this translation proved very challenging and the winners did a most admirable job with a difficult assignment.

Catherine A. Mori, St. George's School

Junior Greek Competition (Margaret H. Thompson Prize)

Passage: Palaephatus, *Unbelievable Tales* 6: The myth of Actaeon rationalized

Winners

Equal First prize (sharing First and Second): Laura Hare, University of Toronto and Joseph Gerbasi, University of Winnipeg
Equal Third prize: Geoff Martin, University of British Columbia and Maayan Adar, University of Toronto
Honourable Mention: Ralph Neill, University of Waterloo

There were ties for first prize and third prize this year. Dr. Cropp did his best to find clear first, second and their place winners, but decided that there were no criteria for breaking the ties. Therefore, the decision was made to award two first prizes (sharing first and second place prize money) and two third prizes.

Adjudicator's report (AB apologizes for the Greek. She still has to acquire Kadmos Unicode):

The passage set was from Palaephatus, *Unbelievable Tales* 6, concerning the myth of Actaeon. Sixty-four translations were submitted from twenty universities (two in French, the rest in English). About half of these were generally on the right lines, while the top five were excellent except for a few blemishes. I was pleased to see so many competitors coping well (in the space of fifty minutes) with a not entirely simple 145-word passage. Vocabulary assistance was fairly generous, and only a few words caused difficulties amongst the better translators: εντοι 'some (people)'; το θειον 'the divine' (note the neuter form); το αληθεε εχει ωδε 'the truth is as follows' (εχει intransitive); επρεφεν literally 'fed' but here better 'kept' or

‘raised’. Few competitors caught the exact nuances of the verbs in ‘It seems to me that Artemis is able to do whatever she might wish [optative], but it is surely not true that a stag came to be out of a man, or a man out of a stag’. In the penultimate sentence the Greek participial structure could well have been converted to (e.g.) ‘as Actaeon neglected his own affairs and instead spent his time hunting . . .’

Martin Cropp
University of Calgary
March 2009

Senior Greek Competition

Passage: Gregory of Nyssa, 451-452M

Winners

First prize: Elias Georgakopoulos, University of Toronto

Second prize: John McCormick, University of Ottawa

Third prize: Aron Bojti, University of Toronto

Honourable Mentions: Aline Desarzens, Université de Montréal and Warren Huard, McGill University

Adjudicator’s report:

A good crop of 31 students from 17 different institutions took part in this year's Senior Greek competition and were presented with the moralizing tale of a miser from the 4th century CE writer Gregory of Nyssa (451–452 M, slightly modified). In choosing this passage, I aimed to provide a sight passage that would be challenging, but comprehensible, to a senior undergraduate with two or more years' experience in Greek. Thus I preferred the (hopefully) more familiar diction of prose to that of poetry; and a more or less self-contained narrative of around 200 words was chosen over a piece of oratory or philosophy. It was also necessary to avoid any author who would reasonably figure on a Canadian undergraduate's reading list, so as to avoid giving any one group of students the advantage of familiarity. On a personal level, the story seemed irresistible to an archaeologist with an interest in numismatics!

The test paper glossed ten words that were either not familiar from my recollection of undergraduate Greek or could not be worked out accurately from their more familiar components.

The single error common to almost every submission occurred in the text's first line, where almost everyone rendered the alpha-contract verb *eraō* as a verb of speaking, not desiring. Several candidates were also rattled by a single, long sentence that catalogues the miser's stingy habits and paranoid fear of losing his gold and concludes with his hiding it in his house's walls. Although the syntax is straightforward, i.e. completely paratactic and devoid of subordinate clauses, its sheer length, almost half the entire passage, clearly proved discouraging for several candidates. If I had a chance to do this over again, I would chop this sentence into a couple of shorter ones.

Despite these hurdles, about 70% of the submissions successfully rendered the gist of the story (the miser trusts no one, hides his fortune in the walls of his house without telling his children of its whereabouts, he dies, and his children look for their inheritance in vain). Generally speaking, Fortune may favour the bold, but in the case of sight translation she smiles instead upon the calmly rational, and five individuals stand out from the rest for both their attention to detail and accuracy:

Robert Weir, University of Windsor

Junior Latin Competition

Passage: Adapted from the Younger Pliny’s Letters, vi, 20

Winners

Equal First: Laura Hare, University of Toronto and Jacob Currie, University of Toronto

Equal Third: David Finer, University of Toronto and Nicholas Arrigo, University of Toronto

Honourable mentions: Maayan Adar, University of Toronto and Fannie Dionne, Université de Montréal

As with the Greek, there were ties for first prize and third prize. Dr. Thomas did her best to find clear first, second and their place winners, but decided that there were no criteria for breaking the ties. The decision was made to apply the same prize distribution as used for the Junior Greek.

Adjudicator's report:

The Junior Latin competition attracts a large number of candidates- this year we received eighty-three papers. While, as is usual, there was a tremendous range in success with the translation, the six best papers were only separated from one another by one slight mistake each for the two very best papers, and four rather minor mistakes each for candidates five and six of that group. The selection chosen was an adaptation from one of the Younger Pliny's two famous letters on the eruption of Vesuvius. Some candidates clearly knew the story and that knowledge helped carry along their translations. Even when they were obviously guessing, many students showed that they could make intelligent guesses- a very useful skill in translating. However, I was rather surprised to discover that many Latin students had no knowledge of the Vesuvius story, did not know that Campania was a region in ancient Italy, they paid little attention to the English or French introduction, and had not been taught to "fill in the blanks" intelligently, when they did not know certain Latin words.

Immediately in the second sentence weaker students failed to cope with the ablative "profecto avunculo" and had difficulty putting the different clauses into a coherent whole. The average to the best students all were able to handle the passive infinitives "moveri" and "verti" easily, but only the best coped with the deponent participle "veriti", recognizing that it modified the subject in the main verb "speravimus". Surprisingly only the very best students recognized that the adjective "aequissimo" was in the superlative degree. A few students were clearly running out of time and mishandled the latter sentences, but most gamely made it to the end, able to pick up and keep going after having certain difficulties along the way. A minor typing mistake at the end of the piece caused no trouble to any student.

It would be helpful for future competitions, if the students' instructors allowed them about five extra minutes to recopy their translation on lined paper and insisted that they use ink for that purpose. Some of the papers, especially those containing frequent mistakes, were done faintly in pencil, the writing all ran together and it was consequently very difficult to read.

Geraldine Thomas

Senior Latin Competition (Peter Lawson Smith Prize in Latin Sight Translation)

Passage: Horace, *Epodes* III

Winners

First prize: Maria S. Miller, University of Toronto

Second prize: Alessandro Sisti, University of Toronto

Third prize: Samantha Perera, McGill University

Honourable Mentions: Margherita Devine, McGill University, Daniel Lévy, Université de Montréal and Joseph Stannus, Carleton University

Adjudicator's report:

Vocabulary, vocabulary, vocabulary—together with presumption of content. Of the fifty-nine scripts (from nineteen institutions), only about ten had some idea of what was going on in this short, playful Horatian epode—a mock-epic treatment, replete with heroic elevations, of a nasty stomach ache caused supposedly by ingesting garlic at a dinner with Maecenas. The expectation of content, treatment and tone is furnished by the heading, and translators really should hew to it. There was a tendency, for example,—because it is a passage of formal Latin—to proceed in a heavy, sombre vein quite out of keeping with the description, and of course further and further from sense and point. The information supplying author (Horace), collection (*Epodes*) and medium (poetry) is also useful in colouring expectation and assisting with performance. We are failing as instructors if students, by their second or even third college year, have not been taught (perhaps in translation) what to expect out of the best of Classical literature and authors. That is our responsibility. What students must do is systematically to learn and remember vocabulary. So many scripts

missed large quantities of regular words and usages, destroying all hope of even approximate sense: *olim, si quis* (indefinite), *guttur, fregerit* (tense), *edit, fefellit, miratist* (sense and form), *ignota, ulta* (sense and form), *savio*. Students should also remain cool at the compounding or complicating of a word they might recognize in its base form (with a similar meaning): *alite, insedit, siticulosae, concupiveris, opponat*.

I was delighted with all six of the awardees' versions. They largely escaped these flaws and made the effort to offer translations that were as fun to read as the original. Well done.

Wade Richardson, McGill University

Final comments from the coordinator:

I would like to thank Sophie Beaulé and Joëlle Cauville, my colleagues in the Department of Modern Languages and Classics, for helping me correct and update the French posters, registration forms and certificates, our department secretary, Rachelle Warner, for her assistance with the High School mailing and the Dept. of Modern Languages and Classics for photocopying of posters and paying for Purolator. Thanks go as well to the coordinators of the competition, especially those who brought the errors in the Jr. Latin passage to my attention and those who sent helpful comments. Special thanks go to Guy Chamberland for his invaluable assistance with the passages, not only for providing the French translations for instructions and vocabulary, but also for helping me proof and assess the passages. Martin Cropp and Jim Murray also provided much useful advice. Final thanks go, of course, to our adjudicators for the 2009 competition: Catherine Mori, St. Georges School (HS Latin), Robert Weir, University of Windsor (Sr. Greek), Geraldine Thomas, Saint Mary's University (Jr. Latin), Martin Cropp, University of Calgary (Jr. Greek), Wade Richardson, McGill University (Sr. Latin) and to our president, Jonathan Edmondson, who not only signed all the certificates but ensure their delivery (by hand in some cases) to the winners!

The list of winners will be sent out in the June CCB and posted on the CAC web site (<http://cac-sccc.ca/> and <http://sccc-cac.ca/>), as will a list of this year's passages (with links to pdf versions of the examination papers).

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Barclay
Competition coordinator for 2009-2011.