

translorial

Volume XXVI - No. 1 - February 2004

Northern California Translators Association • A chapter of *ata*, American Translators Association

How do you say "I do" in Hebrew?

Or: how we planned our bilingual, often trilingual, wedding ceremony

By Merav Rozenblum

When we started thinking of our wedding ceremony and asked ourselves what, how, where and who we would like to have in it, the issue of language immediately came up. I grew up in Israel, and although both my parents emigrated there from Argentina just a few years before I was born, Hebrew was my first language. I acquired most of the Spanish that I now speak as an adult in school. Francisco, now my husband, grew up in a Spanish-speaking home here in the US and is a perfect bilingual.

So there was no doubt Spanish was to be one of the languages of the ceremony. After all, it is our families' common language, the one we mostly use to communicate with each other, and last but not least, the language in which we met and fell in love. The second language of choice was of course English. The arguments in favor in this case were that the wedding ceremony was to take place in San Francisco, the city that is home for us; many of our local friends do not speak perfect Spanish, some speak no Spanish at all; and English is the language we use for business and politics, at home. We also thought that an English-Spanish ceremony would be a loyal expression of our bilingual lifestyle and the T/I trade which we both practice.

But what about Hebrew, the language which still comprises most of my cultural world, the language in which I will always dream, do math and curse? My Hebrew-speaking friends thought we shouldn't leave out this important part of what I am. I agreed. But a trilingual ceremony would have been a taxing one, and there was no real need to use Hebrew as a language of the ceremony, since all Hebrew speakers who were expected to attend spoke either English or Spanish almost as a native language.

We started with the invitations. We decided to use our own DTP skills and means, and print the invitations, about 200 of them, at home. We are not sure it was the most economical option, but it certainly gave us control, which we, of

NCTA General Meeting

Saturday, February 28, 2004, 1:00 pm
New Meeting Location!

We'll be meeting for the first time at the San Francisco LGBT Community Center, just a block away from our old meeting place at UC Berkeley Extension. Please see the directions below.

San Francisco LGBT Community Center
1800 Market St. (@ Octavia St.)

Room 300

San Francisco

(415) 865-5555

<http://www.sfcenter.org/>

Pre-Meeting Networking: 1 pm

New Member Orientation: 1 pm

Speaker and NCTA Business: 2 pm

Networking: 3:30 pm

Invited Speaker: Paul Walsh, dramaturg and translator of A.C.T.'s *A Doll's House*

NCTA invites you to hear our guest speaker Paul Walsh discuss the challenges in translating Henrik Ibsen's plays from the Norwegian into contemporary U.S. English. His most recent work is *A Doll's House*, translated for San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.), which ran from January 8 through February 8, 2004. Dr. Walsh has worked on nearly two-dozen A.C.T. productions since 1996. Before joining A.C.T., he worked with many theater companies across the United States as dramaturg and translator. Walsh's translation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was performed last season by A.C.T.'s M.F.A. students. Dr. Walsh earned his Ph.D. from the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at the University of Toronto.

Continued on page 5

Contents	How to Say "I do" in Hebrew ...1
	Letter from the President2
	NCTA News3
	Technical Help for Translators .12
	Dictionary Review14
	Database Activity Report16
	Marketplace17

NCTA 2004 CALENDAR	
▶ March 26	Deadline for Submissions to Next <i>Translorial</i>
▶ February 21	Trados Workshop
▶ February 28	General Meeting
▶ March	Trados Workshop
▶ April/May	Trados Workshop
▶ May 8	General Meeting
▶ May/June	Literature Workshop
▶ July	Picnic
▶ August	ATA Certification Exam Workshop
▶ September 18	General Meeting
▶ December 11	General Meeting

Continued on page 8

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Continued from page 1

course, love. We printed out two versions of invitations and the attached instructions-to-the-ceremony-site page: English and Spanish. Interestingly, perhaps because English is our business language, we felt more comfortable drafting the text in English and then translating it into Spanish. Being a right-to-left language, printing out invitations in Hebrew would have strained our technical abilities too much. However, I did add an extra page in Hebrew for our Hebrew speaking invitees, which was a personal letter from me with some useful information about fares and accommodation options, since most recipients would have had to plan a special trip or a vacation in Northern California if they decided to come to our wedding. And so, we matched the language of the invitation to the language we use to communicate with the addressee, and sealed the envelopes.

A few months later, we delved into the details of the ceremony. Not only are we a multi-lingual couple, we are also "atheists of different faiths", as Francisco likes putting it. In our case, we were drawing from both Catholic and Jewish traditions when preparing our own wedding ceremony. Luckily, the differences are not that vast. Having taken care of legalities some months earlier in City Hall, we did not really need anyone to officiate at the ceremony. Rather, we

wanted our friends and family members to take part in the ceremony not merely as witnesses to our union. And, of course, we wanted them to do it in more than just one language. Being consecutive interpreters, we realized that since each text was to be read at least twice, we would have to limit the length of the texts, or else we would bore our guests with too long a ceremony before the awaited reception.

At the beginning of the Catholic wedding ceremony, there's a reading from the Bible. Secular and liberal as we are, we chose one on the female lover's dream sequences from the Song of Songs (3: 1-4), and used Ariel and Chana Bloch's beautiful, new translation of it into English, and the rather canonized De Reina's translation into Spanish. Of

course, this is where Hebrew came in handy: we actually had the privilege of being able to read the text in its original language, and so asked three of our women friends and

relatives to read the passage, each in a different language. Later on in the ceremony, upon exchanging rings, we ourselves read another short passage from Song of Songs (8:6), each in his/her native tongue(s).

Also from the Catholic tradition, we asked a friend who among other things is a talented writer and speaker to write a "sermon" for us. We introduced him by e-mail to one of our translator friends, who translated the sermon into Spanish. In the ceremony itself, she was reading the Spanish translation after each paragraph that he read of the

English original. This was the longest text in the program, but we must acknowledge our friends' cooperation in respecting the time limitations we imposed on them.

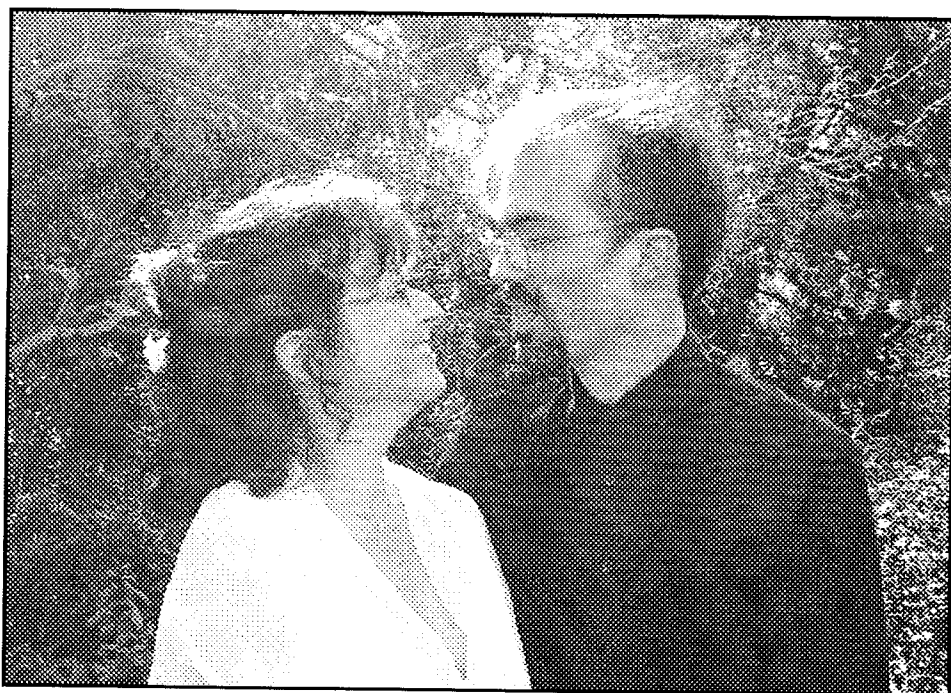
Vows are rather foreign to the Jewish wedding ceremony. Some less traditional couples write them, nevertheless, as a part of their Ketubah, which is a legal certificate signed at the time of the wedding.

Originally, it used to guarantee the economic wellbeing of the wife in times when women were completely dependent on their husbands. Whatever shape they take, these vows are not read in public. We wrote our vows, again in English, and then translated them into Spanish. Since it was Francisco who led the writing of this part of the ceremony, we thought it would be proper for him to read them in their original language, and so I repeated them in Spanish after him.

The most creative part of the ceremony was the Seven Blessings. In the Jewish ceremony they are read by the officiating Rabbi. Only the last two blessings have the bride and groom as their subject. The rest of the blessings have to do with the wider circles of the couple's life. We decided to follow a similar rationale, and asked seven of our relatives and friends to prepare blessings

*Overcoming differences
in religion, culture,
and language—by
being in love*

*A multi-lingual couple
and "atheists of different
faiths" arrange their
wedding ceremony*



NCTA members Merav Rozenblum (English/Spanish<>Hebrew) and Francisco Hulse (English<>Spanish) were married on October 12th, 2003 in San Francisco.

for us, starting with our students, and moving closer to us, to our parents and intimate friends. Again, we had to instruct everybody to be very brief. The non-bilingual among our friends had to forward us a copy of the texts they were going to read, so we could translate them into Spanish. Thus, the groom found himself translating quite a bit in the days prior to his wedding. The next step was to find a Spanish speaker from among the guests who could read the translation along with the person who wrote and offered the blessing. Luckily, in our community of translator friends and among our bilingual families, the task was not particularly hard. All we had to see to was that everybody had their texts (glued to a nice card, for the

sake of uniformity). It was heartwarming to watch some of our friends who had never met before collaborate in our honor.

Some curious things happened. My mother, a native speaker of Spanish, chose to dedicate to us the lyrics of a song in Hebrew, the language and culture she had made her own in the last 38 years or so. I translated the song into English, and Francisco translated my translation into Spanish. Then we read our translations together with my

mother in this tri-lingual blessing, one of the most moving we had. Another blessing was a song offered in Hebrew by our housemate and friend, who does not speak a word of this language. Two other blessings included a song in Hebrew as well, and one included a song in Spanish. In all of them, a translation into the other language(s) was offered before or after the song. So yes, Hebrew was quite present in our ceremony, usually in original poetry and songs.

In only one case did we decide not to use translation. Our Ketubah, which is also an object of art, had a verse from the Song of Songs (6:3), according to our choice, incorporated into its custom-made frame. We liked the reciprocity of this verse, which is usually translated into English as "I am to my beloved and he is mine". However, I felt that this translation was restricting the original Hebrew by conveying only one possible reading of the verse. Other possible readings are "I am there for my lover and he is there for me", "I support my lover and he supports me". Since we couldn't really come up with any better rendering, we decided to use the Hebrew only and so preserve all these additional meanings of this untranslatable, beautiful verse.

Our wedding ceremony lasted a bit under an hour, and turned out to be a memorable event, among other reasons, because of the three languages used, and thanks to 26 out of our 78 guests who actually participated by writing, translating, reading out, singing or playing musical pieces. As to us, we enjoyed our wedding much more than we expected, in spite of the hard work it entailed, and we are now concentrating on living happily ever after.