

## **The University of New England and *TEXT***

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### ***The Internationalisation of a Manuscript: Finding the Potent Generic***

Not all books can travel...but a greater number  
have this capacity than have actually done so.  
- Rachel Robertson, 1990

While publication on the Internet is often a truly global enterprise involving writers, readers and editors from all over the world, print publishing is still a significantly locale-specific venture. This was brought home to us when we were involved in the final editing of our book, *The Girl's Guide to Work and Life: How to Create the Life You Want* (Brien & Brady 2004).

This paper addresses issues arising from working through the process of turning a manuscript originally written for an Australian readership into one suitable for international sales and distribution - a process which we soon discovered entailed more than looking at spelling or taking out all the slang. While the very idea of this process is often perceived as culturally demeaning, we found it could be turned around to make a positive contribution to the de-colonisation of contemporary Australian writing and publishing.

The first book in this series, *The Girl's Guide to Real Estate: How to Enjoy Investing in Property* (Brady & Brien 2002),

attracted solid sales in Australia and, as a consequence, has been backlisted, but there was little interest in overseas sales or producing a new overseas edition. This was initially disappointing, as we were hoping to attract those export dollars but, in hindsight, the lack of overseas interest in the title should have been obvious to us. The buying and selling of real estate is a locale-specific venture and our book was very Australian in content - for instance, there are different legal/contract conditions and processes in buying real estate in the various Australian states, let alone in various countries. These differences meant that much of the content of the book was specific to Australia. Examples of this were the lists of the Land Titles Offices, Consumer Protection Organisations and Real Estate Institutes in the various Australian States that we included throughout the text.

In short, we wrote that book without any understanding of what it means, in actual terms, to produce a text for the international, as well as a national, marketplace.

## **The International Market**

It is worth reflecting for a moment on what is meant by 'the international market' and what consequences placing a book in that market have for sales and an author's profile - concerns which can be thought of as occurring at the business-end of writing.

There are various ways Australian books can be sold into overseas markets. The most common method is via translation. Translation into a foreign language, for those who have undergone this process, does create certain rights for the author, but does not generate the significant economic gains a UK or USA imprint might offer. Translations involve additional publishing costs and, in most cases, do not open up potentially large markets. To put it bluntly, translation rights might buy the barbecue, but not the beach house.

A far more attractive international option is to tap into the

large [English-reading] UK and USA markets. But few books published in Australia go on to gain an imprint in those markets. In most cases the Australian imprint is distributed to these markets, but the book tends to land offshore like an orphan, with little (or no) publicity support behind it and only rarely with any author promotion attached to its arrival. No wonder our literary agent recently warned us that these overseas sales are 'the cherry on the ice cream, not the dessert itself'. Sales in this case, she reiterated, need to come first and foremost from Australia.

It has been explained to us, for example, that overseas distribution sales might equal the sales from a single Australian state. Having overseas sales from an Australian imprint distributed overseas, therefore, is a bit like having two Queenslands or Victorias if the sales go well, two Tasmanias if they don't! In short, for those of us who are mere mortals (and not literary superstars), significant overseas sales come only with an overseas imprint when that publisher is willing (and able) to publicise the title.

Those Australian authors who sell well overseas have an overseas publisher, selling all but Australian rights. The strategies employed by ex-publisher Sophie Cunningham are interesting here. Via her UK agent, she had her first novel auctioned, being picked up by Doubleday. Then, via her Australian agent, she sold the Australian rights to Text Publishing. Our copies of her novel *Geography* (Text Publishing 2004), having been purchased in Australia, make no mention of the UK version, but a quick search on Amazon.com brings up another totally different looking version of *Geography*. There are, in short, two publishing stories: two agents, two publishers, two editors, two book designers. Of course, the logistics are more complex and the two publishing stories work closely together, but in essence what is at work here is a duality.

Full overseas publication is important, for this will entail essential marketing support for sales of the title and create contacts that can lead to further publishing opportunities. If a

writer wants to make even part of their living from their writing such strategies are crucial. This strategy is being employed more and more, and interestingly, almost exclusively by younger and newer writers. A reverse strategy to Sophie Cunningham's, but one which worked equally, was recently played out by, or for, the young writer Alasdair Duncan. After being shortlisted in the 2002 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, Emerging Author category, for *Sushi Central*, his novel was published in Australia by UQP, but with his publisher's assistance the USA rights were sold and he has since signed up with an American agent. For Duncan and Cunningham, as for others, their Australian sales and publishing were seen as secondary, or as a step on the ladder, towards larger markets in the UK or USA.

There are other examples of this new wave of Australian authors who initially, and up front, place themselves on the international stage, understanding their Australian publications as a home-town-feel-good experience, but not as the site of their main practice or their primary financial base. These writers expect to make a living from their work and see this living coming not from secondary sources such as author talks, literary grants, teaching and the like, but from their main work as writers, that is, from their sales. Their confidence is refreshing.

### **Internationalisation of a Title**

With our second title, *The Girl's Guide to Work and Life*, a book about the work/life balance, it was only after we were finished writing the book, but still involved in the editing process, that we became aware of the book's potential in international markets. We had not really thought along these lines when drafting the content, and were certainly unaware of the dual method of publishing. We had initially written with only the Australian audience in mind.

More potential was, however, brought up by our publishers who asked us to 'edit the text for the international market'. To

give our publisher credit, we were not given a list of proscriptions to adhere to, but were simply asked to think about this possible market in our next run through the text. As the content of this book - the balance between work and life - seemed far more universal than our work on real estate, at least for a Western audience, we were happy to accommodate the request.

Our initial task was to see what others had made of this request. We started with the publishing industry and found Michael Wilding's article 'Australian Literary and Scholarly Publishing in its International Context' (Wilding 1999) one of the most thorough analyses of the local impact of international conglomerates taking over Australian publishing companies, while Hilary McPhee's *Other People's Words* (McPhee 2001) offered passionate documentation of her own attempts as co-director of McPhee Gribble to attain overseas publication and representation for Australian authors. Neither of these was particularly encouraging so, from there, we looked to discussions of which Australian writing has 'made it' overseas. Here, we found texts stretching backwards in time from a series of articles by Patricia Rolfe in the *Bulletin* (Rolfe 1967, 1968, 1986), Jason Steger in the *Age* (Steger 2002a, 2002b, 2003) and Susan Wyndham in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Wyndham 1999, 2003) to Vance Palmer's 1922 'Fiction for Export' (Palmer 1922) and Bruce Bennett's 1997 'Aust. Lit Exported' (Bennett 1997). These pieces all chart which books and authors have sold overseas, but do not provide any in-depth analysis of what qualities or features of the texts made this possible. Edwina Harvey's 'Why Is the Most Popular Australian SF Not Published in Australia?' (2003) asks an interesting question, but again was of little assistance, as we were already published 'here'. Our task was to try to get 'over there' as well. More than a decade ago Rachel Robertson called for Australian publishers, agents and editors to 'work more imaginatively...to take the initiative and develop new, more professional and more creative ways to promote Australian women writers overseas', but then admitted her article was intended to raise the

problem, rather than solve it (Harvey 2003: 90).

In short, while these and other articles made fascinating reading, none was any real help with our practical problem. For a start, the 'Australian books' referred to in these commentaries are, almost without exception, works of fiction. Secondly, most of the successful authors discussed are (and were already) the luminaries of Australian literature when they broke into overseas markets. Finally, while the older articles fold together into an interesting history, publishing as an industry is changing so rapidly that even articles from five years ago can offer information that is obsolete.

Unenlightened, but undaunted, we turned back to our own text and set about untangling a number of strands, each of which needed creative solutions. It is significant that, in this case, we did this 'internationalising' at the editorial stage of the writing and not as an initial consideration when planning the text. This meant we were not so much *constructing* a text for the international market, but rather *adapting* one. And, in this process, we found we were adapting not just a text but our own attitudes as well.

## **The Adaptive Process**

We initially grabbed at the obvious. We would run through the text looking for Australian spelling, any Australian slang and sayings and other 'Australianisms' including Australian-specific metaphors or similes. As well we would look out for any locale-specific information. We were opting for a version of what is commonly called Transatlantic English - the kind of language found in the *New Yorker*, which purports to travel between the two great English speaking markets of the UK and USA.

But Australia does not get its surf from the Atlantic Ocean. We soon began to lament the frailty of our own culture, seeing the internationalisation of our text as one more (albeit small) nail in the coffin of acceptance of *our* culture overseas.

We began to feel concerned not only about selling-out but - and this was perhaps more important to us as writers - that we were opting for a language and style as bland as in-flight food. Although we had only just begun this new edit, we were fast feeling hostile to the process.

Around this time a Canadian writer, Keith Harrison, visited Australia and, after his visit, sent Tess (as no doubt he did to others) a copy of a piece he had written about his trip, asking for assistance in checking what he called his 'Canadianisms'. There were some interesting and amusing ones such as 'skinless' for *cleanskins* but what caught Tess's eye was the following passage:

Jo and I decide to stroll over to the Queen Victoria Market. We price blundies in a couple of stalls, and end up buying three pairs: Jo's \$75, her brother Rob's and mine were \$95, with the busy vendor reluctantly taking \$10 off the total. (Harrison 2003)

Tess was initially confused with the word 'blundies' until she realised that Harrison was referring to the famous Tasmanian workboots which Australians commonly refer to as *blunnies*, a name coming from the manufacturer's name, Blundstone. Here we have an Australianism being turned into a Canadianism. In itself, it doesn't matter what 'blundies' are, but if a text is full of such references (and the reader is not about to visit Canada or have some other reasons for learning Canadian), then that reader will probably become annoyed or weighted down by such inclusions.

To expand on this, it is worth considering international reviews of Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (McPhee Gribble, 1991), a book which is jam-packed with its own versions of 'blundies' - for it is rich in Australian idiom. The first paragraph has the 'whole restless mob of us...skylarking and chacking'. There are 'scabs', 'blackfellas' and 'reffos' and others who come 'barrelling down' hills and get 'done for; stuffed, cactus'. And that's without Winton's masterful

rendering of Australian voice. Despite this, it was the structure that Joseph Olshan in the *New York Times Book Review* (1992) warned about:

The structure of *Cloudstreet* is not easy for an American reader. Points of view switch by paragraph, and some parts seem deliberately inscrutable. Patience. One must remember that a novel like *Cloudstreet* may strain at first to wow a reader with its maverick originality. It may begin unsteadily, like a dinghy drifting among the huge familiar barges of established literature; but slowly it edges past the danger of collision to make its way into the mainstream realm of elegies for working-class life. [Note 1] (Olshan 1992: 715)

Clark Humphrey (1992), the *Seattle Times* reviewer, on the other hand, found the book accessible for US readers:

a zestful account of working class life over a 20 year span that avoids the blandness often found in the slice-of-life genre... Though there are a few unexplained slang phrases and references to local politicians, there's nothing that will make you lose your way. (Humphrey 1992: K6)

Mark Twain long ago led the way with the use of idiom and, when faced with something as rich and as complex as a novel can be, such idiom, it could be argued, adds to, rather than distracts from, the whole work. But let's face it, we are not Mark Twain and we are not Tim Winton. And, as previously mentioned, we are not working within the genre of fiction.

The first question we thus found ourselves considering was: When producing a non-fiction text, who will indulge us in our Australianisms? Our kind of non-fiction is about clarity and accessibility, self-help books being positioned at the quick, easy-read end of the market. As is often the case, we found our initial question led not to an answer, but to a further series



of questions. Although we were reluctant to cut them, were our Australianisms really a crucial part of our text? Was it simply a case of deleting from and diminishing our text, of translating terms or cutting them, or was there some other approach we might take?

## **Register and Idiom**

Here we found it useful to revisit a common linguistic concept. Register is the term given to the way we all change our language to suit each linguistic occasion in which we engage. The 'telephone voice' is an example we are all familiar with. The concept is, however, deeper than this.

Our register and our idiom intersect to form our *idiolects* - the various dialects, if you like, that we can all speak. Each of us can articulate a kind of formal Australian that we might use at work, for meetings, job interviews and the like. We have another way of speaking to our loved ones, others for our pets and children, yet another when we are dealing with figures in authority or with telephone sales personnel. Any new situation can lead to a new register and we move in and out of these with ease and, at times, almost alarming speed, according to the situation and our mood. The number of registers and the speed with which we flip between them is only apparent, of course, when these come under conscious consideration - most of the time, they are a little-noticed part of our successful communication with the world.

What would happen, we thought, if the internationalisation of our text could be understood as something akin to such a linguistic phenomenon? We had noticed, for instance, that when Donna went to stay with her in-laws in the US and when Tess spoke with international guests and friends, we both, at first, to ease communication, utilised an almost formal language register, but then, as familiarity took over, slipped our various slang terms and 'isms' in and out of the conversation. It is as if we all begin in some kind of 'common ground' register to facilitate communication but, as familiarity

builds, we slowly glide into other registers and include certain idioms.

What would our text be like, we thought, if we simply adopted this mode? To do this, we utilised the classic 'visualise your reader' method. We visualised our reader as a woman living and working in another country, a woman we had not met but with whom we wanted to share information. We saw this woman as a new friend, one as keen to talk with us as we were to talk to her. Our editing mindset became: *We are Australians. Our task is to make it easy for everyone to understand us, while at the same time keeping our own individual (and Australian) flair.*

## **Solutions**

With this in mind, and feeling a lot better about the process, we addressed each of the 'problems' in our text in turn.

### ***Australian Spelling***

The first concern was, of course, spelling. But as 'international' means the UK and New Zealand as much as the US and Canada, we decided to leave the s/z/u question alone, retaining our Australian 's' in colonialisation and 'u' in colour. These, we agreed with our editor, were relatively insignificant, and much less distracting than whole passages or metaphors. And, we had to keep in mind that our primary audience was local, an audience we did not want to risk alienating by producing an Americanised text.

### ***Australian Slang***

Our second issue was that of Australian slang and sayings. Initially, we thought we would simply delete them, editing these becoming a kind of weeding job. But such deletions resulted in a problem with the tone of the text and a disruption to the feel of the series we are trying to create (which is, while informative, light and breezy). It was not enough, therefore, simply to cut out the slang. We had to replace it with words, content and a tone that ensured the new

passage still carried the lightness or the joke of the original but in a less Australian-specific way. In many cases this meant writing more, rather than cutting, text.

One difficulty here was in identifying what exactly was 'slang'. So many of the words and phrases we eventually picked up as needing 'internationalising' were so intrinsic to our expression that it was, at first, difficult to even recognise them as potential candidates for editing in this way. This process involved us stepping outside of ourselves as authors, and trying to read and comprehend our words as that reader we visualised above would do. If she stumbled over our Australian slang, we either cut it or rewrote it.

This pruning and reconfiguring of slang terms had an unforeseen outcome, opening up our text to Australian readers of non-English speaking backgrounds. This was conceptually important to us, as writers, but was an element of our style we had not previously considered. We realised that we could manipulate the tone of our prose rather than resorting to slang and, in the process, also create a more inclusive text for a wider range of readers.

### ***Australianisms***

It was more difficult to deal with what we have called our 'Australianisms', those endearing local Vegemite-and-Aeroplane-Jelly moments, the richly evocative and satisfying slip-slop-slap summers, the posties, bushfires, STD calls and bush biscuits which we discovered pervaded our text. Here we needed to re-tune our ear and hunt out the words and phrases that would *exclude* our readers. We found, however, that in deleting or rewriting these, the problem of our prose becoming bland was even more pronounced than when dealing with slang.

While it was easy to accept that 'judge' could stand for 'magistrate', and 'lawyer' could include all solicitors and barristers as well, the two terms which, interestingly, were among the most difficult to jettison were 'bushfires' and 'posties'. We extended our passage about bushfires and fire-

fighting to make all our terms self-explanatory, but completely rewrote the section about the postie as nothing else would really work for us in that context.

An example of the complexity of this revolves around trying to evoke images of the desert. We had used the word Nullarbor to stand for the idea of desert but it, clearly, is a geographically-specific term, rich in associations for Australian readers. In searching for a more generic term, two singular word choices seemed possible, 'desert' or 'Sahara'. Neither would exclude as Nullarbor might, and both would evoke the feeling of vast sandy plains. Sahara, however, clearly also has certain visual associations and those were all pale, while we had been counting on the use of Nullarbor to tie in with, and elaborate, an extended metaphor of 'redness' we were developing. 'The vast, red Nullarbor desert' was, of course, always a possibility, but often we just had to find a different (non-desert) way of expressing dryness or vastness or redness.

This process, which we increasingly thought of as 'searching for the generic', was therefore much more time-consuming than we had originally thought it would be, because the required changes were often being made at the conceptual rather than the verbal level. This meant that our editing work was often akin to translation - instead of changing individual words or phrases, we were re-working the sentence and, at times, whole passages to convey the same meaning. Sometimes another word could be simply added but, more often, the sentence had to be rewritten so that a specific word nestled within an explanatory context

### ***Locale-specific Information***

The final issue we needed to address was what to do with the vast amount of locale-specific information we had included in our text. This was a particular challenge as the books in the *Girl's Guide* series are marketed, after all, as 'information-packed'. They are, like most in their genre, understood by their audience (and our publisher and marketing team) as offering readers a good serve of 'hard' and reliable

information. This information is, moreover, often foregrounded in the text - presented in lists or in appendices, highlighted or boxed, announced with headings or otherwise set off from the rest of the prose.

Our book on balancing work and life, therefore, had to include information such as tertiary study and other educational admission centres, crisis hotlines, professional career advisors, and women's networks and information sources. But these are clearly country-specific and this 'problem' could not be addressed by changing words, the tone of passages or even by more extensive rewriting.

Adding information specifically for American, British and New Zealand women as a series of appendices was briefly considered, but this was unattractive for many reasons. Adding pages increases the cost of the book, and such an arrangement would position the book as firmly Australian with a few nods to possible international purchasers - not at all the result we were working so hard to achieve. This also required deciding on which nationalities to include and exclude (Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, for instance) while we were trying to produce a text suited to the widest possible international audience. The question of regionalism also was raised by our experience with the real estate book. In such an appendix, how could we find room to include the crisis lines for the South as well as the North Islands of New Zealand, not to mention the information on the college admission organisations for each individual State in USA?

This aspect of the process involved us in a deeper interrogation of contemporary publishing practices and assessing the possibilities inherent in new technologies. While an increasing number of print (paper) publications use electronic means for promotion and marketing, co-publication of print and electronic material is still relatively unique. Alongside the increasing number of purely electronic publications, many publishers of print books and serials (both commercial and those from non-profit associations) provide a limited on-line presence to assist the sales and distribution of

printed copies of their works. Typically, a book's on-line site will be a webpage containing a table of contents, a description of the book and an author profile, supported with perhaps some full text reviews and even an extracted chapter. There is always, however, a prominent link allowing interested readers to buy the book.

We already had a promotional on-line site of this broad type in place for the *Girl's Guide* books (developed in 2001 in association with the first title) but decided to take this Internet-based presence a step further. Our solution was to lift *all* the locale/country specific information from our book and publish this on our website instead. We decided to start by including information for Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, UK and Ireland/Eire, as well as, when this was available, relevant global material. For example, under 'Women's Networks and Information' we added a link to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women - Women Watch. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch>. We soon realised that we could create more complete and interesting lists on-line than in the book itself as the space was unlimited. We were able to include in the UK section, for instance, the online networking group, Webgrrls <<http://www.webgrrls.org.uk>> alongside the British Association of Women Entrepreneurs <<http://www.bawe-uk.org>> and such specialised bodies as the University Women of the UK <<http://www.bawe-uk.org>>. In this we were limited only by the time and effort we wished to expend, rather than such logistical publishing considerations as page layout and total printing costs.

This seemed an extension of the innovative practice of using the Internet as a platform to publish extensive (and often expensive) footnotes, images, illustrations, maps and the like, which has been pioneered by some of the more advanced and budget-conscious academic publishing houses.

## **Implications and Benefits**

With the second title in our series, the *Girl's Guide* website [www.girlsguide.biz](http://www.girlsguide.biz) has thus become not only an important marketing tool for the book/s, the series and associated product, but also an actual publishing site for material *not* in the book. Once having decided on this approach a number of other positive implications came into focus.

The information provided on the web can not only be broadened to include any new country required, it can also be deepened for each locale, moving from country to states, regions and even city level. Each section can also be almost infinitely extended with new information, and the whole can be instantly and constantly updated and corrected, providing in essence what was once only achieved in print publication with a new edition. The information included can also provide, through hyperlinks to relevant on-line materials, a vast amount of information for interested readers - much more than was, or could have been, available in the print version.

We also linked web sites about both books, with most pages having links between the two. Getting readers from the printed page of the book to the website, thus not only hopefully provides them with the information they are seeking in relation to *that* book's various topics, but can also lead them across to information about our other book/s and help to increase sales.

The website and the book are, thus, each important parts of the *Girl's Guide* publishing program. While one can be viewed without the other, the two together provide the full impact and information package. This coupling is promoted from both ends - that is, we direct readers to the website from the book, giving the address of the website in several places in the printed text, and also direct Internet surfers to the book via the use of meta data tags.

At all times, we aimed to make the website approachable and accessible for those readers we had visualised as our 'new friends' - women as keen to talk with us as we were to talk to

them. We therefore designed a site without plug-ins which consequentially loaded quickly. We also worked to make the on-line appearance of the site align with the appearance of the book. We used similar fonts, background colours, and images from the cover and throughout the book. Just as carefully, we utilised the same chatty tone in relaying the information. But, while it may appear that the site has a certain homespun feel to it, it has been as carefully contrived as the book. The site and the book are both designed to maximise marketability.

We also, and importantly, encouraged our readers actively to participate in the site, providing space for them to contribute not only to the growing list of useful links (and comment if they are less than useful) but also to include their own stories. Not only does the website encourage this participation, but the book does as well, its concluding chapter focusing on the reader writing their own story and the process by which they can share this with others. The books end with blank space for readers to write into and the following directions:

### **Sharing your story**

If you would like to share your story with other women, go to our website [www.girlsguide.biz](http://www.girlsguide.biz) and follow the prompts. We'd love to hear from you.

Throughout both the book and the site we make it easy for readers to contact us for those usual reader-writer exchanges, or to satisfy their curiosity to 'find out more about the writers'. Interestingly, though, it is *other readers* that our readers want to connect with, for the 'your story' section is one of the most frequently visited areas on the site.

When choosing the language, tone and register for material on the website, we instinctively chose an inclusive, non-Australianised vocabulary. This resulted, in part, from a highly conscious effort to achieve the aim stated above of making the site approachable and accessible. And interestingly, from something we can only hint at in this paper, the resulting text was also, in part, the result of a



'natural' and unconscious word and phrase selection targeted to a wide international audience - natural because, as authors who are experienced with the web, we are used to thinking of the web as a world-wide communication system with a global and globalised readership.

## Conclusion

We found that the modification of our text for a broader international audience, rather than diminishing our book, instead offered us significant opportunities to enrich and extend both its language and content. Looking beyond the book itself for solutions opened up unforeseen opportunities to interact with our readers, and make contact with those who might turn out to be potential consumers of the book and others in the *Girl's Guide* series.

Through this process, we also became more aware of our writing as a product existing in a global marketplace. We took off our parochial mantles and noticed how others around us placed themselves, without apology, on the world stage. We began to appreciate that being Australian was not a badge we had to wear over our hearts, and that to be sold 'over there' we did not have to be superstars, we simply needed to redefine 'over there' as 'here', as part of 'our world'. Most importantly, we began to realise that we were writing within a global community, a community of which we were active members.

## Notes

1) Humphrey completed his review with the observation: 'Landing the U. S. rights to *Cloudstreet* is a major coup for Graywolf Press [Seattle]... Even though the book was nominated for Britain's top fiction award, the Booker Prize, major American publishing houses passed on it. It's their loss.' Return to artifice

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[Return to Contents Page](#)

[Return to Home Page](#)

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## **TEXT**

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