Seawater Desalination in Oman

News Update

Exhibition of Used Books Attracts Students

Mind Over Matter

Literature’s Role in Maintaining Cultures

Panorama

Physics Nobel: SQU has Reason to be Proud

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in Oman
Horizon invites contributions from SQU members of staff and faculty. Contributions in the form of articles, news, travelogues, stories of unique and interesting experiences, encounters, etc., are welcome. Contributions may be edited for the sake of clarity and length. Please send your contributions to horizon@squ.edu.om preferably, as MSWord attachments. Authors will be suitably credited.

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Horizon crosses 200 issues! A university newsletter is an effective communication tool for employees, students and the community at large. Since SQU, the premier higher educational institution in the country, is made up of people of different nationalities, and others are usually interested in knowing about its activities, Horizon, the tabloid newsletter brought out by SQU’s Department of Public Relations & Information, has been a hit since it was launched.

This newsletter was typically thought of as an publication for the SQU community and an internal communication device, but is currently functioning as a tool for public relations and goodwill of the institution. We, the people behind Horizon, believe that this newsletter is consistent in appearance, features, and articles, that definitely make the readers accustomed to it and look forward to the publication. We have been following the same format and order of articles ever since the publication was introduced. We have been trying our best to make the newsletter stand out as something desirable to browse. We believe that our readers anticipate reading it.

Horizon would not have brought out its 200th issue successfully without the continuous support it receives from the academics and students. Contribution of articles to Horizon is an act of community service as far as the academics are concerned. In spite of their busy schedules of teaching and research, many academics have voluntarily sent several articles for Horizon. Needless to say, the university administration has been immensely considerate and supportive to our team.

Starting with issue number 196, Horizon is available in portable document format (pdf) on SQU website. Readers can now access Horizon online by simply clicking on the media publications icon given at the bottom of SQU main page. The online version of the publication, in fact, indicates the transformation of this publication from an in house newsletter to an international publication that reaches all over the world, transcending all borders.
Exhibition of Used Books at SQU Attracts Students

The opening ceremony of the seventh annual exhibition and sale of used books, organized by the Text Book Section of the Procurement Department at Sultan Qaboos University, was held under the patronage of Dr. Said bin Ali Yahyaee, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs & Community Service.

This year, 24000 copies of 380 titles of used books were available for SQU students and academics to purchase at deep discounts and special prices. The exhibition featured 8000 (160 titles) Arabic copies and 16000 (220 titles) English copies. Different from the previous years, the used book exhibition continued for 8 days until 18th October including the weekend. The second day of the book exhibition was dedicated only for females.

The Procurement Department collects used books from the text book stores of all the nine colleges and the Language Centre of the University. The visitors, mostly students, were really excited with the titles and the pricing of the books. Original books that were priced RO 20 to RO 50 were sold at the fair for just RO 1. The exhibition is attractive with a good collection of rare medical, engineering, science and business volumes.

Workshop on Innovation and Research

In collaboration with the Research Council of Oman (TRC), the Innovation Affairs Department of the Deanship of Research at SQU recently organized a workshop titled “Innovation and SQU-TRC Collaboration” Two experts from TRC, Ms. Luiza Sarayeddin, Innovation Officer and Dr. Mohammed Al Mughairi, Assistant Secretary General for Innovation, delivered presentations on the importance of incorporating innovation into research activities in Oman. The workshop was attended by the Deans, Deputy Deans for Postgraduate Studies & Research, Directors of SQU Research Centres, and other key people from the research community.

The speakers said that innovation adds value to the research by helping the research organization access the market to sell its inventions and the discoveries resulting from the researches carried out. The experts said that building a culture of innovation along with research would support the idea of “food for thought”. Science can support business creating process in the country. They elaborated on what contributions the university can make in this regard. They underscored the importance of “Transfer Technology Office” within the university and the concept of “National Innovation Ecology” in the backdrop of the current transition of the global economy from a knowledge based one to an innovation based one.

International Recognition for SQU Student

Omar Said Al Abri, a master’s degree student in the Department of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering, won second place in the Student Paper competition organized in connection with the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) 2010 Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition (ATCE) that was held in Florence, Italy from September 20 to 22. The paper that Omar presented at the conference was based on an engineering design project done by final year Mechatronics engineering students at SQU, that could lead to cost reduction, efficiency increase and performance improvement in oil well drilling technology.

Earlier, Omar Al Abri had won first places for the same paper at the national and regional level competitions held in Oman this year. At the international level, Omar won second place by competing against seven students from different countries across the world. The paper he presented was titled “Design of a Cone and Launcher System” and was done under the supervision of Dr. Tasneem Parvez, Associate Professor in the Industrial & Mechanical Engineering Department of the College of Engineering at SQU and Assistant Dean of Postgraduate Studies & Research at the college. Dr. Tasneem Parvez said that the design of an optimal cone and launcher system is expected to make repaid strides in lowering the operation cost and simplifying the expansion operation in Solid Expandable Tubular (SET) rigs used in oil recovery operations.

The students of SQU are actively involved in many expansion related works in its Engineering Research Lab. The task of designing a new cone and launcher systems that could be effectively and efficiently used in down-hole applications, was initiated in 2009 through a graduation project conducted by five students in the mechanical & Industrial Engineering Department.

Commenting on the project, Dr. Tasneem Parvez said that looking from a student’s perspective, it was a challenge to work on a project which has direct relevance to the upcoming technology in oil and gas industry. “At the same time, it is an achievement to complete the design in one year along with their fully study plan. The young engineers and minds in the engineering profession should understand the forefront of the technology and have a desire and understanding to make it better and self dependable for the country. This goal has far reaching consequences and will lead to a new breed of engineering professionals whose aims are far more noble than those of others”.
The Sultanate has been using desalinated water since 1976 when the Al-Ghubrah power and desalination plant using a thermal technology of multi-stage flash (MSF) was first commissioned in Muscat. To meet continuously growing water demand due to population growth and economic development and to reduce the reliance on groundwaters, by 1999 the Al-Ghubrah plant had seven MSF desalination units installed. The first seawater desalination unit installed had a capacity of 22,750 m3/d, and the other six MSF units each have a capacity of 27,000 m3/d. Desalinated water usage in Oman is expected to increase further in the future, due to new industrial and tourism-related developments.

To manage the future water demands in Oman, the Oman Power and Water Procurement (OPWP) company was established in 2005, and one of its responsibilities is to procure the production of desalinated water in conjunction with electricity and to ensure the adequacy of generation of resources for new desalination capacity. OPWP introduced two main systems in Oman, the main interconnected system (MIS) and the Salalah system. The MIS consists of four zones, the Muscat zone interconnects the Governorate of Muscat and the South Batinah, and Dakhliyah regions, the Sohar zone interconnects the North Batinah and Dharah regions and Governorate of Buraimi, the Shangqiya zone interconnects the Shangqiya regions, and the ad-Duqm zone will be connected to the MIS by 2015. The major advantage of the interconnected system is that a surplus of water production in one zone can be exported to cover a capacity shortfall in another zone.

Based on the annual report issued by OPWP in 2008, the projected total demand for the desalinated water in the regions covered by the MIS is expected to increase from 102 million m3 in 2008 to 234 million by 2015, an average annual increase of 13% per year. OPWP has forecasted also that the peak demand for water will reach 723,000 m3/d by 2015, and thus at least 133,000 m3/d of additional water desalination capacity is needed. The peak demand is calculated as the average daily demand during the peak month of the year, and the overall planning philosophy used by OPWP is to match the installed desalination capacity with the peak demand and to rely on storage capacity and groundwater resources to cover contingencies.

The desalinated water in the (interconnected) Muscat zone is supplied mainly by Al-Ghubrah and Barka plants. Due to proximity to demand, availability of land and infrastructure, both Al-Ghubrah and Barka plants sites are the preferred locations for additional power and seawater desalination capacity. The Barka power and desalination plant was the first plant to be built, operated in 2003 and owned by the private sector, AES Barka. The Barka I plant has three MSF desalination units installed, each with a capacity of 30,400 m3/d. The new Barka II power and desalination plant was built adjacent to Barka I plant in 2009 using a membrane technology of reverse osmosis (RO), it is operated and owned by the private sector, SMN Barka Power company. The addition of the Barka II plant with a capacity of 120,000 m3/d will bring the total desalination capacities for the Muscat zone to 393,000 m3/d.

Sohar power and desalination plant was the second plant to be built, operated in 2007 and owned by the private sector, Sohar Power company, to supply drinking water in the (interconnected) Sohar zone due to the economic growth of the Sohar industrial port area. It has four MSF seawater desalination units installed each with a capacity of 37,500 m3/d.

The new RO seawater desalination plant at Sur, which commenced in 2009, also brings an additional desalination capacity of 68,000 m3/d to satisfy the increasing demand of water in the (interconnected) Sharqiya zone. The new Sur plant is located alongside the existing RO plant commissioned in 1993 with a capacity of 12,000 m3/d. Neither of the RO desalination plants at Sur are co-generation plants.

From 2012 onward, the reduction in desalination capacity due to the retirement of two of the seven MSF units at the Al-Ghubrah plant will result in capacity shortfalls of between 91,000 m3/d to 130,000 m3/d from 2013 to 2015 in the MIS. In order to meet the future water demands, OPWP has launched a new scheme to expand/redevelop the Al-Ghubrah plant by splitting the existing plant site into two parts. The existing plant will be called Al-Ghubrah East, and the new independent water and power project Al-Ghubrah West with a total desalination capacity of 136,000 m3/d will be built and operated by a private sector by 2013.

Presently, the Salalah system operates as an isolate system, and local groundwater resources have been used to meet the water demands in Salalah and surrounding areas in the governorate of Dhofar. The projected demand for desalinated water in the regions is 23.4 million m3 in 2009, rising to 26.8 million by 2012, at an average annual growth of 5% due to new industrial developments of the Salalah Free Zone and tourism developments. At this growth rate, the demand may be expected to reach 30.8 million by 2015. OPWP has estimated the peak demand for water will increase from 70,000 m3/d in 2009 to 93,000 m3/d in 2015, and to meet these demands, in 2009, OPWP has also launched a procurement process for a new seawater desalination plant with a capacity of 68,000 m3/d to be built and operated by a private sector by 2011.
Literature’s Role in Maintaining Cultures

Culture, one of the ‘most contentious concepts in academia’ in the second half of the 20th century, remains ‘very much a burning issue at the beginning of the 21st century’ and is believed to be the ideological battleground of the modern world system. Today’s globalized education is accused of erasing weak cultures and blurring and overshadowing stronger ones, and providing what Kramsch’s describes as ‘surface cultures’ that are just portrayed by food, fairs, folklore and statistical facts. Many see that education has become the primary site for the creation and transmission of global ideologies. Globalization accompanied with English are now being connotated with colonialism, with English being described as the language of colonialism and the “neoliberal Empire” that is said to be “redefining national and individual identities worldwide. All of this is predicted to have long term social and cultural effects on societies. It becomes a concern for countries whose native languages and cultures are becoming marginalized in their curriculums. For example, in some parts of the Arab world, where the demographic make-up is predominantly non-Arab, where western education is being imported and English dominates the curriculums—in many cases mandated as the medium of instruction, the existence of their native Arabic culture and its language are threatened.

Globalization has caused rapid changes in education which have caused many in the field to rethink education and learning both within and outside the school systems. One of the factors that many now feel needs to be rethought is how to maintain the native cultures and cultural identities of those who identify with these less dominant cultures. Education plays a crucial role here, since schools are the institutions most responsible for literacy education and socialization in a society. In cases where literacy education is left primarily to the school, and where learning becomes synonymous with the unquestioned acquiring and absorbing not only of skills, but also of the behaviors, values, and principles portrayed in the school curriculum and classroom, what is included or excluded in the curriculum are important factors that need serious considerations. What gets included in the curriculum from language policies to literary text, are not just pedagogical decisions, but have socio-cultural implications that implicitly determine which cultural values are valued and which are given secondary status. It has also been shown that what is not presented in school may not be viewed as important or worth learning by students.

Culture and its recognition, whether inside or outside the curriculum has many effects on individuals, ranging from social to psychological ones. Research shows that in general, students perform better and are more academically and socially successful when their cultures are recognized and used as a fundamental source of information in the school curriculum. One venue for presenting a culture is through literature/literary texts. And one of the most effective ways of recognizing culture and presenting to students is by including its literature/literary texts in the curriculum. Literature can be used in today’s globalized world to portray students’ cultures which in turn may help preserve, reinforce and even promote these cultures and cultural identities amidst the rampant western influences dominating all spheres of life, especially in education. Literature is a powerful of discourse type. Its ‘language use,’ according to Duranti, has the power of establishing, challenging, and recreating social identities and social relationships. Many believe that literary texts are breeding grounds that can be used for many purposes from teaching language to fostering cultures or cultural understanding to fostering and/or unearthing ideologies.

Literature from students’ culture may have the power to serve many functions. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts not many students are able to deal with the cultural underpinnings of many of the foreign literary texts they are studying. Many aspects of language are culturally determined with cultural specific ideas and these students may not have the ‘contextual’ and ‘pretextual’ prerequisites to deal with and interact with texts that are foreign to them. Providing students with texts from their culture which are relevant to their native languages and cultures are being marginalized in their curriculums. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts see is foreign. Soon they may begin to identify with what they are constantly being presented with and begin to feel alienated to all that is relevant to their native languages and cultures. Students in contexts such as those mentioned above, now need to be exposed to their cultures that are being marginalized and silenced in many curriculums and in society at large. And literature and literary texts from their native cultures, being introduced in the curriculums, is a good place to start from.
Students Complete Summer Course in Australia

Twenty four students from the College of Education at SQU finished their summer program at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Students from various majors such as English, Early Childhood, Mathematics and Science, had the chance to study in one of the leading universities in Australia in June 2010 as part of their summer studies.

The students were engaged in a 5-week intensive English course followed by a 2-week English Teaching Methodology program in the Institute of Continuing and TESOL Education (ICTE-UQ). During the course, students were given brief lectures about the Educational System in Australia and they visited some schools and institutes as well as a kindergarten. Students were not only engaged in studies but also had arranged entertainment trips such as the trips to Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Movie World, Dream World and Brisbane Forest Park. At the end of their stay, students presented an Omani Cultural Show at the university in which they showcased the Omani Culture by performing a mini-play which was attended by students from all over the world.

After they finished their studies, students visited New Zealand where they enjoyed the cold, snowy weather for 4 days. They also stayed in Singapore for 2 days on their way to Australia.

College of Nursing Holds Fire Awareness Session

As part of the orientation program of nursing students, the Health and Safety committee of the College of Nursing organized a fire awareness and training session for all the students. About 123 Nursing students attended the session which was conducted in Arabic.

Keeping with the University’s policy regarding Fire and Safety, the College of Nursing has been regularly conducting Fire Awareness and Training sessions for all its students and faculty. Earlier this year the college conducted an Emergency Evacuation Drill in collaboration with the Technical Affairs Department and the Civil Defense unit of the university.

The College of Nursing is the first college in the university to conduct an annual fire safety and training session for faculty and students. This is the second consecutive year that the college conducted these sessions. The students found the lecture very interesting and useful. This course is of great value especially for nursing students who will be deployed in hospitals as part of their learning, as they will be well prepared to contribute to fire safety in the hospital.

Shortly, the college has planned to have a training session for its faculty. This will be followed by a fire drill, wherein the response and readiness of all the students and staff to a spontaneous fire alarm will be observed. The College of Nursing is currently equipped with Automated External Defibrillator machines in all floors for easy access and use in times of emergency.

SQU Academic Elected as Vice President of AAAE

Dr. Hemantha Jayasuriya, Assistant Professor in the Department of Soil, Water & Agricultural Engineering in the College of Agricultural & Marine Sciences At SQU, has been appointed as the Vice President in charge of Energy, Environment and Emerging Technologies of the Asian Association for Agricultural Engineering (AAAE). The appointment is for two years. AAAE is a professional organization in the Asian region, focusing on strengthening the profession of Agricultural Engineering by promoting information exchange, and improving communications. It strives to formulate, establish, and promote voluntary academic, professional, and technical standards of relevance to the profession of Agricultural Engineering in Asia. The AAAE collaboratively works with American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE) and CIGR and quarterly publishes International Agricultural Engineering Journal and AAAE Newsletter.

Dr. Jayasuriya, a PhD holder from Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand, has 7 years of industrial experience, more than 20 years of experience for teaching and research at graduate and undergraduate levels including curriculum developments at both levels. Before joining SQU, he served for seven years as Assistant Professor in the Agricultural Systems and Engineering Program of AIT. During the past six years, three PhD students and 32 masters students have completed their degrees under the supervision of Dr. Jayasuriya. He has published more than 25 international journal papers and similar number in conference proceedings.

His areas of expertise include agricultural systems analysis, design and development of agricultural and processing equipment, instrumentation and data acquisition systems, power and energy in agriculture, precision agriculture, controlled environment agriculture, soil-tool interactions and, terramechanics. Dr. Jayasuriya holds memberships with many international professional organizations including ASABE, ISTVS and also functions as a reviewer of some international journals: International Agricultural Engineering Journal; Journal of Terramechanics; CIGR – Ejournal; Geoinformatics; Transactions of ASABE; and Applied Engineering in Agriculture.
Physics Nobel: SQU has Reason to be Proud

There is a solid reason for SQU and Oman to be proud of the Nobel Prize glory of the Russian born physicists Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov of the University Manchester, UK! The duo were awarded the Noble Prize for Physics this year for their groundbreaking research experiments with the new nano-scale material called graphene. Dr. Tariq Mohiuddin, an Omani scientist now working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Physics of the College of Science at SQU, was fortunate enough to work as a member of the graphene research team led by the two great scientists. Commenting on his supervisors winning the highest scientific honor, Dr. Tariq said: “Even before winning the Nobel, these professors were famous across the scientific community in the world as graphene scientists with many European and International recognitions to their credit. Their pioneering experiments with graphene produced unprecedented results making it one of the hottest topics of scientific research and ultimately leading to the greatest acclaim in the scientific world”.

Dr. Tariq’s relationship with the two professors has a long history. From 2002 to 2003, Prof. Geim supervised his Masters degree at Manchester, and Prof. Novoselov was a research fellow at Manchester during the time. Having enjoyed the learning experience with the two scientists, Dr. Tariq decided to continue his studies with them. In 2006, he left for Manchester again and this time Prof. Geim supervised his PhD degree whereas Prof. Novoselov functioned as his co-supervisor. Dr. Tariq immediately started working with graphene upon his arrival and carried on experimental work until he was awarded his PhD degree in 2009. His research on graphene included spin based electronics also known as spintronics, electronic transport in graphene, and strain effects in graphene. Based on his research, he co-authored journal and review articles with Prof. Geim and Prof. Novoselov in journals like Science, and American Physical Society Physical Review. According to Dr. Tariq, graphene is very important to the world of science and technology. “The visionary manner in which these scientists proceeded with research and put in years of hard work, makes their prize deserving and timely”, he said.

Graphene is a single layer of carbon atoms which are arranged in a repeated pattern of hexagons. It is 0.4 nanometer thick (i.e. 4/10,000,000,000 meter)! To elaborate further, imagine a table top and you have several carbon atoms arranged in hexagons side by side, so the thickness of a material like this is the same as the thickness of a carbon atom which is about 200,000 times thinner than a human hair. This makes graphene the thinnest known material in the Universe. One may not believe that a material so thin can be visible. But graphene interacts with light in such a way that a concentrating eye can view it through even an optical microscope on a number of surfaces such as selected thicknesses of Silicon oxide on silicon or even glass. Dr. Tariq said that graphene is not exotic just because it is the thinnest material known to man, but experimental results have highlighted characteristics that are just unimaginable for a material of this size. “It is also the strongest material known to man. This means that graphene has huge potential if it is considered for applications of material sciences looking for toughness, durability and the like. There are many such reasons to admire graphene!””, he said.

When asked about his experience in Manchester and with the Noble Prize winners, Dr. Tariq said that when he graduated from SQU, he never imagined that he would be so lucky to pursue the career of a physicist. “It was the will of Allah that I choose Manchester in 2002 for my Masters and meet Prof. Geim and Novoselov”, he said. Having liked the city and the department I had a desire to go back which I did and was lucky to be part of the graphene research team. “Prof. Geim and Novoselov are very hard working individuals, and they expect nothing less from their students. They constantly met their students almost every day which is a luxury that not many PhD students have. We were constantly encouraged to do better and better. I learnt from them every aspect of research such as management of projects, facilities, grants, and even students. I have in fact learnt how to be a good researcher and scientist even at the personal level. It was a great honour to have been associated with the great scientists. The thought that I have made a contribution to graphene research with them makes me feel very proud. And it makes me more honored that, in turn I make SQU, my family and my country proud” Dr. Tariq said.

Dr. Saif Al Bahri, Dean of the College of Science at SQU said that graphene encompasses various branches of modern science and technology. “In this context, Oman, like other countries can embark on encouraging research in this very prospective field. This will pave the way for multidisciplinary research in the College of Science and SQU taking a leading role”, the Dean said.

Prof. Mujibur Rahman, Head of the Department of Physics at SQU said that the involvement of Dr Tariq with the 2010 Nobel Prize winners is something worth cherishing. “Tariq has been pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge in the exciting field of graphene in association with the Noble Prize winners. I hope Tariq will keep up his research endeavor along the lines that he played a role in bringing his supervisors on the top of the scientific civilization. All of us, particularly our researchers, will certainly get a boost from Tariq through the connection that he already made with the Nobel Laureates”, Prof. Rahman observed.
Horizon: Could you elaborate on your academic and research interests?

Prof. Watson: My main research interests are generative phonology and morphology with particular application to modern dialects of Arabic. I also work on the relationship between modern and ancient language varieties spoken in the south-west of the Arabian Peninsula. Since 2006 I have been working on oral texts and the syntax, phonology and phonetics of Mahriyyot, a dialect of Mehri, one of the Modern South Arabian languages. I currently supervise PhD students working on Arabic phonology and morphology, and on a cognitive grammar approach to the translation of prepositions in Arabic. With regard to my academic background: I graduated with BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies, first class honors University of Exeter 1984. I was awarded Dip. Linguistics by School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London in 1985. I obtained my PhD in Linguistics from SOAS, London in 1989.

Horizon: What is your impression about the Translation Symposium and its organization?

Prof. Watson: I feel that the annual translation symposium organized at SQU is unique because it is organized by undergraduates for undergraduates. In the UK and Europe, these kinds of academic symposiums or workshops are mainly organized by postgraduate students. I am really impressed by the way the symposium has been arranged and the enthusiasm of the Translation Group members in learning new things and in promoting research interest in translation discipline.

Horizon: Could you explain the presentation that you delivered at the annual translation symposium at SQU?

Prof. Watson: My presentation “Teaching and learning Arabic-English translation in undergraduate programs” was aimed at raising research interest in translation students at the undergraduate level. At the University of Salford we have the only BA programme in Arabic/English translation and interpreting aimed at native speakers of Arabic in the UK, and I teach at all levels on this programme. I am interested in teaching undergraduates because it is important to build up a research culture from the very beginning. My presentation at SQU focused on problems Arab students typically encounter when translating Arabic texts into English. These include differences between the languages in terms of tense marking, definiteness and the positioning of adverbs. In addition, repetition at all levels of the language is a feature of Arabic whereas in English it is not. This poses a problem in translating between Arabic and English, and one of the issues I considered in my talk was strategies to deal with repetition in Arabic when translating into English.

Horizon: Nowadays, technical translation is gaining more importance than literary translation. How would you comment on this development?

Prof. Watson: Technical translations, in the broader sense, involve any non-literary translation, i.e., translation of texts dealing with electronics, medicine, law, economics, or natural science. In literary translation, the original writer is very much present during the process. When it comes to technical texts, the author is invisible. When we think about technical texts, we typically consider scientific texts. However, technical is far more encompassing than this, and includes, for example, animal husbandry, sports rules, cooking recipes, Arabic grammar, Latin grammar, etc. In many fields, technical terminology is expanding and changing rapidly. Ideally, a technical text should be translated by a specialist in the specific area in question, who is familiar with the terminology. Obviously, this is not always possible in practice. What is important, however, is that the translator be familiar with the technical concepts involved in the text, so that the translation conveys the right idea to the engineer or technician reading it. Experience plays a significant role in making you a good translator of technical texts. Teachers can help develop skills required to be a good technical translator. By doing continuous and extensive background research and through developing a level of academic interest in the respective area of technical translation, one can excel in technical translation.