Q&A with Michelle Keating, Chief, Languages Service, in follow-up to the first meeting of the Bureau of the Sectoral Assembly of the Languages Service (March 2016 – February 2017)

Room E-5116, 12 May 2016, 2-3 p.m.

Ms. Keating thanked the Bureau of the Sectoral Assembly of the Languages Service for inviting her to speak with them and also for their contribution as staff representatives, in helping to improving communication between staff and management.

Strategic Heritage Plan (SHP)

Ms. Keating said the Languages Service would not be moving to the new building, on which construction would begin in 2017, and therefore would not work in an open-floor plan. Staff would be relocated to offices in the old buildings – mostly in the D building – with 2 to 4 P-staff, or 4 to 10 G-staff per office (the latter would be determined in consultation with the respective Chiefs of Section). Chiefs of Section would also share offices. On every floor, there would be a "collaborative space" for use by staff, for instance, by TPU staff proofreading in pairs or by revisers and translators discussing feedback. All offices had windows and natural light, although the windows did not necessarily afford a view of the outdoors.

The offices as currently allocated would be scattered among nine locations in various buildings on campus. She had personally checked out the offices in question, which she cautioned would not provide as pleasant conditions as those currently occupied by LS, notably in terms of views or air flow. She was working with SHP personnel to cluster LS sections closer together. Timing-wise, LS would move only once the new building had been built; staff had been moved out of the old buildings; and the old buildings had been renovated. The current time frame for the LS move was 2020, but that might change.

Ms. Fillion-Wilkinson expressed concern about whether SHP personnel could be trusted to follow through on commitments made, especially as some –for example, ensuring that the quality of LS working conditions would be maintained –clearly had not been honoured.

Ms. Keating said that compromises had had to be made, such as choosing between an open-space layout and modern amenities, and offices and less attractive conditions.

In response to a question about the firmness of the plans, she said that space had been allocated to every unit and the plans had been submitted to the DG. Issues still under discussion included the exact location of the LS sections and units and the number of interns and temporary staff the plans could accommodate. Her next meeting with SHP would take place in the coming week; she stressed that LS had the full support of Corinne Momal-Vanian, Director, Division of Conference Management, in seeking the best conditions possible for its staff. The plans remained confidential and as such could not be circulated to staff; however, members of the LSSA Bureau could request to review them in her office.

Mr. Sarabia Utrilla said that at the first meeting of the LSSA Bureau, members had stressed that while text-processing units should be located near their respective translation sections, it would be

preferable that sections remain scattered among different floors and buildings if better working conditions could thus be secured for staff.

Today dashboard

Ms. Keating said that it had been her idea to introduce the use of the Today dashboard in LS. Chiefs of Section had access to decision-making tools designed by MERS and she believed staff should also have access to their data. Any data was only as reliable as its source, which in this case was gDoc. Therefore, if the data in the Today dashboard was inaccurate, it was either because the data in gDoc was incorrect or because there was a bug in the system; either way, it was important to resolve the inaccuracies. The dashboard was a pilot project, so while staff were not obliged to use it, they were strongly encouraged to do so and to provide feedback. If after a year the dashboard was deemed unhelpful, management would review the strategy to pursue, including whether or not to discontinue use of the dashboard.

It had been agreed with the Chiefs of Section that the Programming Officer, rather than individual staff members, had the primary responsibility for ensuring compliance. One of the main issues being studied using data produced by MERS was conflicting priorities, and how interruptions impacted on the ability of staff to deliver and maintain productivity. Responsibility for output was shared between staff and Chiefs, but the primary share lay with the Chief. In order for LS to operate within the budget allocated to it, staff (both P and G) should not spend more than 10 per cent of their time on "special assignments" (SPA). Chiefs could grant SPA in whatever manner they thought best for their respective Sections, but it should not surpass 10 per cent overall. The Working Group on Translation would soon submit a paper on what types of special assignments were acceptable and should be treated as priority, including, for instance, language classes. Priorities regarding the use of training funds for the upgrading of technical and substantive skills were (1) outreach and sustainability of current resources; (2) group training; (3) individual support for rare languages; and (4) staff exchanges and individual training requests.

LS was moving to a fully electronic workflow. Revisers who did not currently revise on-screen would have to learn. Staff who currently dictated would be given the option either to use voice recognition software or to learn how to type. A pilot project was being considered in RTS whereby iPads would be given to staff to use voice recognition software, which was generally much more advanced on mobile technology; ATS had also expressed interest in participating in such a project. Management did not wish to eliminate posts except by attrition. Proofreading capacity would be maintained in preference to the typing of dictated text, especially given the close scrutiny being given to overtime. Completeness and accuracy remained the responsibility of the translator and the reviser, but it was important to preserve the safety net of proofreading by TPU staff. In general, LS would continue to use all resources to the fullest, but it was crucial to prepare for the future.

The Reference Unit was going through a transformative process involving their move towards content management, thus avoiding the elimination of posts. If posts were cut they would be cut by attrition.

Facilitation of part-time work

Mr. Sarabia Utrilla said that, at the first meeting of the LSSA Bureau, a staff representative had referred to the need to facilitate part-time work; it was that representative's understanding that current budgetary practices made it impossible to hire temporary staff with the resources lost in the case of allowing a staff member to work only at 80 per cent full-time.

Ms. Keating said that the Service sought to support staff wishing to work at 80 per cent full-time. It was not a budgetary issue. However, much like teleworking, such arrangements required approval by the Executive Office and, often, a reorganization of the Section's work by the Chief of the staff concerned.

Productivity

Mr. Sarabia Utrilla recalled that, at the first meeting of the LSSA Bureau, staff representatives had raised concerns about the fact that self-revised translators were expected to produce more than junior translators when they were in fact doing the work of two people. That requirement was seen as a form of punishment instead of a reward for achievement.

Ms. Keating said that as P-4 staff, self-revised translators were expected to produce 5.5 estimated standard pages (ESP) as opposed to 5 ESP based on the fact that they had many years of experience and that they were being paid more than a junior translator. If staff did not want the added responsibility, they need not apply for a P-4 post. She recalled that it had been decided that self-revised P-3s would not be held to such an expectation.

eRef

Ms. Keating, in response to a question put by **Ms. Issaeva**, said that it had been decided in New York that eRef would be discontinued by the end of the current biennium (2016-2017), though the exact timing was not known. Referencing would become a feature of the eLUNa tool. She had asked the managers of the gText project at UNHQ to provide information about the upcoming changes as far in advance as possible. At the moment, the option not to provide reference services for certain documents was also being discussed. Management was eager to proactively support staff as the referencing units moved towards content management, which would involve, inter alia, uploading useful documents to eLUNa and generally anticipating users' needs. The older documents in PDF format would not necessarily be lost as a result of the discontinuation of the eRef tool. If deemed useful, it was possible that they might be scanned and rendered usable using optical character recognition software. Marcel Ngoma-Mouaya, Chief, Reference Unit, would be instrumental in developing a long-term vision and strategy when the time came to shift to content management.