TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE
Bettina Funcke

Recently I found myself wondering about the history of standardized spelling. Did it come about because, after the chaos of the Hundred Years' War, Europe needed order and clarity? Or was it more complex? These reflections arose while leafing through Ludwig Wittgenstein's almost century-old *Wörterbuch für Volksschulen* (translated for this publication as *Word Book*). Whenever we articulate a thought, feeling, or experience in words, we find that language itself has a way of abstracting things. Here we approach the concerns of Wittgenstein himself: how does one express something in a precise manner?

I am neither a professional translator nor a Wittgenstein scholar, but maybe this is why Paul Chan invited me to translate the philosopher's as-yet-untranslated dictionary into English. Maybe Paul trusted my German upbringing and my philosophical education in Karlsruhe. Maybe he appreciated that I have a young daughter who keeps me in touch with the idiosyncrasies of English orthography and the challenge of learning to spell correctly.

It was immediately clear to me that we should make this a bilingual *Word Book*, preserving the German so as to retain the alphabetical order, as well as keeping a sense of Wittgenstein's original purpose. Printing entries in both German and English also makes visible the riches that arise from the gaps between the languages. The structure of German allows for many possible translations, particularly in the case of prepositions and verbs, and for the first months of work my game was weeding out different translations for any given word. The German language often allows for a literal, figurative meaning as well as an abstraction, and the two senses are often deeply connected to each other, as with *der Abzug* (deduction, withdrawal,

and contact print), *die Zerstreuung* (absentmindedness and dispersion), and *das Wesen* (a being and a soul). A word can be both adjective and verb, such as überlegen (superior, and to reflect). One of my favorites is *Sorge* (care, and worry). This double meaning of *Sorge* guided me as I weighed the various word options and their sliding meanings, most often dependent on context or the particular way a word was used.

Having decided on a particular range of translations, it was an equally difficult challenge to determine the order in which to place them. Considering the many discrepancies between German and English I decided to treat the work like a classic Greek or Latin translation, in which differing translations are annotated at the bottom of each page.

In addition to the *Duden*, the authoritative German dictionary, I used websites on Austrian dialect, lists of name analogues (*Wilhelm*/William, *Susanne/*Susan), and three online dictionaries: Langenscheidt, the classic German dual-language dictionary; Leo, initiated by the computer science department of the Technical University of Munich, and Beolingus, maintained by the Chemnitz University of Technology (I was introduced to these tools by my late friend the translator and philologist Warren Niesluchowski; his preference was Beo). The variety of translations the three sources supplied was astonishing, and they all possess different approaches to meaning, grammar, and context. Of the three, Langenscheidt is solidly based in current usage, and is the most user-friendly. The others were founded in academic contexts, which yield more historical word choices. Beo's strength lies in displaying varieties of linguistic context. While it was not my first choice for proper translation, it was often the only source for the many strange words I was dealing with. After all, I was translating a nearly hundred-year-old book made with and for children, full of words that were archaic, or grounded in Austrian dialect, or referring to then-familiar childhood activities. Sometimes these were words I hadn't heard since my own childhood.

While translating, I made groupings to keep track of words. These groupings indicate Wittgenstein's philosophical interests of the time, as much as his schoolchildren's world: engineering and architecture, mathematics, local slang and practices, concrete terms from life (tools, food, the home, health), nature (including animals and plants), farming, school work (language, writing, math, geography, music), religion, professions, and first names.

I want to mention that before any linguistic translation could begin,

the *Word Book* had to go through a more figurative translation between different media and formats. Paul had found a copy of the original *Wörterbuch*, and the first question was how to turn this object into a workable computer file. The book had been printed in the archaic blackletter typeface Fraktur, which Paul explained was too idiosyncratic to run through commercial software that automatically turns printed language into editable text. The calligraphic lines of the typeface are broken into many angles, unlike smoother modern typefaces. His studio scanned the book and mailed me a stapled printout in an envelope, old-style. Long-ago Latin study had left me only somewhat familiar with Fraktur, and the small and relatively faint printout made the letters difficult to decipher. Even under a magnifying glass the *s* looked like an *f*, *tz* read as *ft* or ß, *ck* resembled a *d*, and so on.

Fraktur

Luckily, artist's studios turn out to contain myriad talents. In our case, Nickolas Calabrese, a tattooed Wittgensteinian, artist, and computer specialist put in some weeks of work. Eventually he was able to send me a compressed folder containing 126 PNG files and 126 TXT files. The PNG files were images of each of the *Word Book's* 126 vocabulary columns; the TXT files contained algorithmically translated scans of the columns, from image to text. The next move was to merge the 126 TXT files into a single Word document, which I did, carefully copying and pasting them in alphabetical order. I then corrected mistakes due to the transfer process; these cropped up frequently, perhaps every other word. If a word was scrambled beyond recognition, I was able to compare it to the PNG scan and manually correct it.

Wittgenstein could not have dreamed of such twenty-first-century formatting questions when he dictated word lists to his students in a classroom in the Austrian Alps. He was entirely dependent on what in German is called *Schönschrift*: the students' best, most readable handwriting. The story of exactly how these dictated and handwritten documents were transformed into a typeset volume and published by Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky is a relatively unexplored chapter in Wittgenstein scholarship. As Désirée Weber

writes in her critical introduction to the *Word Book*: "This contextual, inter-subjective understanding of how meaning functions—and indeed Wittgenstein's experience with teaching young students—is at the heart of his later thinking. . . . In this light, the *Wörterbuch* is not just an artifact of Wittgenstein's time as a teacher, but one that gives insight into his thinking about language during the years that he had all but given up doing philosophy as vocation. His new professional obligations as a teacher and his long-standing scholarly interests in how the uses of language are intertwined with our forms of life interwoven in this slim volume."

The right way to spell will always be up for discussion. Over the course of the last century, many of the German spellings themselves have changed, but I didn't correct any of these; in this sense the *Word Book* remains a representation of Wittgenstein's era. My choices of English translation, however, may never fully settle, and this is as it should be: maintaining balance implies not stasis but constant slight movement, back and forth. This brings me back to my reflections on the history of spelling. Prior to the mid-seventeenth century, when dictionaries were introduced, people had simply sounded out words anew every time they wished to write them. Then the English spelling system began to stabilize, during a period of absolutist ideas that Thomas Hobbes articulated in his book *Leviathan*, whose well-known frontispiece depicts a monarch hovering over his land, his own form composed of the many bodies of his people. In this image it is possible to see a dictionary that holds all words, ordered according to the alphabet, the letters of each word assembled in the right order, and it's all in your hands.

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