Interview with Jacqueline Parkison, March 19, 2015

We recently spoke with Jacqueline Parkison, one of Tembua’s virtual project managers, about the other half of her career.

**Tembua**: I realize that you also are a published author, but today I’d like to discuss the work you do for major publishing houses. Can you first tell us the difference between editing and revising, particularly as the latter is used in the translation industry?

**JP**: Glad to be speaking with you! Defining these terms can be challenging.

In the translation industry, “editing” and “revising” are often used interchangeably. Both refer to the work done by a linguist who examines a translator's work in order to fix errors and make improvements in accuracy, consistency, and style. The term “revising” is used particularly to distinguish such linguistic changes from the more content-focused changes made by a subject matter expert editor (SME), who is an expert in their field but not necessarily a linguist. When an SME is involved in a project, the document goes from the translator to the SME, then to the second linguist, who polishes the translation while incorporating the SME's edits. To avoid confusion, this third stage is generally referred to as revision.

Outside the translation industry, the difference between editing and revising lies largely in the relationship between the person and the document. Revision is an overhaul of the work by someone who has control over it – the writer, or someone to whom the writer relinquishes the final say on their document, such as a boss. Editing can be done by the writer or by another person, but the implication is that the edits are for the writer's approval.

**Tembua**: How did you first get involved in editing?

**JP**: Because I’ve always been a reader and a writer, I developed an ear for the language early on. I think my first real project was when, as a teenager, I helped my mother revise her personal statement for graduate school. She had talked to me about her thoughts throughout the application process, so I knew what she wanted to communicate and what they were looking for, and I had enough distance from the statement to be able to see it clearly. The admissions committee loved her statement – and I'll take a little bit of the credit!

**Tembua**: What type of work do you usually edit?

**JP**: The publisher I most often work with handles nonfiction about popular scientific and social-science topics. For author friends and for other clients, I also edit fiction and creative nonfiction, and I edit master’s theses and dissertations for students.

**Tembua**: Because you’re also an author, there must be particular challenges in handling another writer’s work. Can you tell us about some of those challenges?

**JP**: The challenge is always to step back – not to impose my own voice on someone else’s work, but to focus on the author’s goals. Sometimes I grow arrogant when I edit, and I have to remember that if the final product needed to sound like me and reflect my vision, I’d be the one writing it.

**Tembua**: I know you also teach composition at Purdue. I imagine it’s unprofessional to comment on the quality of the work you’re editing. Do you ever pass along tactful suggestions?

**JP**: It depends. When I’m working with publishers, my role comes late enough in the process that recommending dramatic changes would only cause trouble. (Sometimes I have to remind myself of this very sternly.) Actually, that’s true for dissertations as well – it’s a rare client who finishes their work with that much time to spare! With friends’ work, it’s a different story, and I might discuss the initial ideas with them, then make comments on several drafts of the same piece.

**Tembua**: What is the most interesting work you’ve edited?

**JP**: Probably the book that used a barrage of horrifying childbirth stories to advocate for elective C-sections. I thought of that book many times when I was expecting my son.

The work I’ve most enjoyed was a favor for a friend – giving feedback on and cutting 50,000 words from a fantasy novel for young adults. That was so much fun.

**Tembua**: What do you enjoy most about being a professional editor?

**JP**: There’s a deep-down satisfaction to shaping a text into its most effective form. Sometimes, a sentence just snaps into place, and it feels great.

**Tembua**: How would you compare your feelings about creating your own work with editing another’s work?

**JP**: To me, both writing and editing are challenging and satisfying, but they use different muscles. In building terms, writing is like sculpting with clay – you can literally make anything, and it's both exciting and terrifying. You might wind up with something new and wonderful, or with a lump. Editing is like building with Legos. The basic shapes are provided, and you'll at least wind up with something recognizable.

Jacqueline Parkison holds an MFA in fiction writing from the University of Illinois. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in journals including *decomP, Memoir(and), Revolution House, Prick of the Spindle, and Storm Cellar.* She lives in Lafayette, Indiana and teaches are Purdue University.