

Ex-Miss Hungary's bottom line peaks after court ruling

Six years after being disqualified as Miss Hungary, beauty queen Antonia Balint recovered her crown on July 23, winning a court case against pageant organizers Multimedia. Her case rested on mistranslation of the competition's rules.

Instead of moving on to the Miss World finals in London, Balint and runner-up Timea Raba had seen their prizes reclaimed and titles revoked immediately after the contest, when the Hungarian press resuscitated nude pictures that originally ran in men's magazine Lui and other publications.

The pictures, claimed the organizers, were forbidden by competition' rules.

Ms. Balint disagreed. "There was nothing in the contract I signed which said I'd done anything wrong," she insisted. Balint's lawyer Katalin Kiszely confirmed that the rules had been "mistranslated" in the contract her client signed with Multimedia. "Instead of the clause about not being allowed to pose nude, there was a sentence saying contestants who had done such pictures should not allow other magazines to publish them during the competition," she told *The Independent* (24 July 1997).

The ruling most definitely affected the defendant's bottom line: Balint was awarded damages, plus the price of a Renault Clio initially offered by a private sponsor, plus interest, estimated at \$30,000 (£18,000) altogether.

A documented case of money lost as a result of slipshod translation, naming names, quoting figures, featuring beauty queens and alleged fast living to boot led the Onionskin to track down Laszlo Hegedus, former managing director of Multimedia.

Mr. Hegedus confirmed that his company had turned the competition over to a subcontractor

the year of the dispute. Verb tenses and an apparently misguided effort to tighten up the original English caused the problem, he said.

The original written rules specified that contestants could not allow nude photos of themselves to be taken and published; should this happen, they were to notify pageant organizers and make all possible efforts to put an end to it. The condition was worded in the present and future tenses only. In the flawed translation, prepared by a young lawyer, it was extended to include past photo sessions as well.

According to Mr. Hegedus, finalists were presented with a revised rendering of the rules verbally, at which point three contestants withdrew. Ms. Balint opted to stay the course, winning the title and triggering the dispute once photos resurfaced. Hegedus also noted that the original English rules refer to "immoral conduct", whereas the Hungarian version specified nude photo sessions.

The case came as a reminder that legal translation is one of those fields where translators must not adapt. "Legal texts should be neither strengthened nor weakened," said Mr. Hegedus. "They must be rendered as close to the original as possible."

While acknowledging the importance of verb tenses, Mr. Hegedus, who now heads Polygram Records Hungary, is pleased to be out of the beauty pageant industry, which he describes as "a sweaty business, and not much fun."

Multimedia is appealing the court's decision.

This article first appeared in "The Onionskin", a column in the ITI Bulletin (UK). Onionskin author Chris Durban welcomes feedback and leads at ChrisDurban@compuserve.com (fax: +33/1 43 87 70 45). ■