

# **Getting Started:**

## **A Newcomer's Guide to Translation and Interpretation**

A publication of the ATA

**American Translators Association**

*Compiled by Sandra Burns Thomson*

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*American Translators Association*

This Guide is a compilation of articles that have been published in The ATA Chronicle, the Proceedings of the ATA Annual Conferences, or other ATA publications.

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## PREFACE

When I first learned about the American Translators Association, it was a professional organization of 2000 members based in upstate New York. The decade since has seen our membership grow to over 8000. Our budget and our publications have expanded as well. The World Wide Web has changed translation, in some respects, almost beyond recognition.

One thing has remained the same, however—there is still a deep and ongoing need for information about how to get started in the professions of translation and interpretation. In the United States we have very few academic programs and even fewer opportunities to learn on the job. The ATA has prepared this compilation of material from our magazine, the *ATA Chronicle*, the *Proceedings* of our Annual Conference, and other ATA publications as a resource for those new to the field, and those seeking more knowledge about how to advance their career.

It is my hope that this book will be a useful guide to anyone wishing to plunge into the inspiring, maddening, ever-changing and ever-challenging worlds of translation and interpretation. They are marvelous professions practiced by fascinating people. May this volume help you make your way to success.

Ann G. Macfarlane

President, American Translators Association

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **HOW DO I GET STARTED?**

One of the most frequently asked questions by callers to the American Translators Association Headquarters is "How do I get started?" Starting out in a new chosen profession is challenging no matter what the field. This packet is intended to offer guidance to newcomers to the translation profession. You may be a recent graduate of a university program in translation, or a graduate in a technical field with a sound command of a second language. You may have worked for years in business, industry, education, or social sciences, and now wish to use your near-native ability in a second language to apply your skills in a different manner.

The enclosed articles are from several ATA publications. The packet reflects different perspectives and approaches to the many aspects of our profession. Given the modern world's rapidly changing technology, some technical or financial references in the older articles may seem outdated. The articles were chosen for the valuable information on getting started in the translation profession. The basics of training, technological know-how, language abilities, and business skills remain at the core of what a beginning translator needs to build a career.

You will notice that one aspect of being a translator is mentioned frequently—the importance of being actively involved in your professional community. One of the best ways to do so is to become a member of ATA. Member benefits are noted on the enclosed sheet in addition to contact information for the Association. We hope you find your journey in the translation profession as rewarding as the authors of the enclosed articles have, and we extend a cordial welcome to our professional community. We also encourage you to contact us with questions or suggestions.

Sandra Burns Thomson

## AMERICAN TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION

The American Translators Association, founded in 1959, is the largest professional association of translators and interpreters in the U.S. with 8,500 members. ATA's primary goals include fostering and supporting the professional development of translators and interpreters, and promoting the translation and interpretation professions. ATA takes its role seriously, helping translators and interpreters to get started, and offering professional development opportunities. A central purpose of ATA is to formulate and maintain standards of professional ethics, practices, and competence. The ATA Accreditation Program offers testing in 25 language combinations. A task force is currently working with the American Society for Testing and Materials to establish national translation standards. ATA is also a member of the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT), an international federation of translators' associations.

Our annual conference, held in the fall, features over 175 educational sessions; an exhibit area displaying the latest publications, software, and related products and services, as well as several translation agencies; a job exchange area where individuals market their services and employers list vacancies and recruit personnel; and several networking opportunities. ATA has 10 chapters in the U.S., and 13 specialized divisions: Chinese; French; German; Hebrew [being established]; Interpreters; Italian; Japanese; Literary; Nordic; Portuguese; Slavic Languages; Spanish; and Translation Company.

The ATA Website, [www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org), offers in-depth information on translation, interpretation, and the Association. ATA administers the extremely successful online *Translation Services Directories* to help locate translators and interpreters. The *TSDs* are searchable databases featuring the profiles of over 4,000 individuals and 200 companies.

ATA publishes *The ATA Chronicle*, a monthly magazine distributed to the membership. The *Chronicle's* purpose is to educate and inform translators and interpreters, as well as to promote professional development. The *Translators and Interpreters Training Survey* is a list of translation and interpretation programs offered by universities throughout the U.S. ATA also publishes an annual conference proceedings, and the *ATA Series*, an annual monograph. All of these publications are available from ATA Headquarters.

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## **PROFILE OF A COMPETENT TRANSLATOR AND OF AN EFFECTIVE TRANSLATOR TRAINING PROGRAM**

### What Standards Should Professional Translators be Expected to Meet?

1. A highly developed sense of intellectual integrity, responsibility, and ethical conduct, which in practical terms means:
  - a. Not accepting assignments beyond one's language and/or subject-matter competence,
  - b. Continuing the ongoing process of self-education and improvement both in linguistic usage and scientific/technical advances,
  - c. Bringing unsolved problems to the client's attention,
  - d. Keeping confidential unpublished information the translator is commissioned to translate,
  - e. Respecting deadlines mutually agreed to,
  - f. Helping upgrade the performance of the profession as a whole,
  - g. Sharing knowledge with one's colleagues,
  - h. Refraining from unseemly or exaggerated promotional claims, and
  - i. Abstaining from unsolicited criticism of translations by others.
  
2. Language and subject-matter requirements:
  - a. Sound knowledge of source language, equivalent to at least four years of intensive and 10 years of sporadic study,
  - b. Above-average writing ability in the target language, equivalent to that of (self- or otherwise) educated native speakers,
  - c. Reasonable familiarity with the subject matter, equivalent to that which can be acquired by at least one year (preferably two) of formal education or job experience in the particular field,
  - d. Access to recent reference books, equivalent to those found in a fairly up-to-date professional library, and
  - e. Contact with more experienced fellow translators or more knowledgeable linguists and scientists, and the willingness to consult with them on a reciprocal basis.

### What Training is Required to be Able to Attain Such Standards?

1. The following curriculum would seem to be the best way for a college student to prepare for a career in translating.
  - a. Courses that provide an extensive knowledge of, and ability to reason in, the subject matter of the translation: mathematics, pure sciences, social sciences, history, business administration, and economics,
  - b. Courses that provide a sound reading knowledge and grasp of the language(s) from which one will be translating: four years of a major language, two years of a minor language; as many basic language courses as possible; at least two years of Latin (if nothing else, it will do wonders for one's English), and

c. Courses that provide the ability to express oneself in lucid and straightforward English: writing courses, including one in newspaper writing and one in technical writing.

2. Periodic participation in advanced "postgraduate" workshops, notably in specialized subject-matter areas.

Where are the Clientele and Markets for Translators?

1. The U.S. Government and its agencies,
2. U.S. and foreign multinational corporations and their subsidiaries,
3. U.S. importers and exporters
4. Commercial and nonprofit research institutions,
5. Pharmaceutical, chemical, machinery, etc., manufacturers not covered by any of the above categories,
6. Engineering and construction firms with foreign connections,
7. Patent attorneys,
8. The publishing industry,
9. The news media,
10. Municipal governments in bilingual U.S. cities,
11. Graduate schools of U.S. universities,
12. The United Nations and its affiliated agencies, and
13. Foreign diplomatic, commercial, scientific, and other representatives in the United States.

What Specific Fields of Translation Have Special Requisites?

1. Literary requires:

- a. Above-average knowledge of the source language,
- b. Highly developed writing ability in the target language, and
- c. Comprehensive background in the culture, history, and social customs of other countries (notably that of the source language).

Rewards: Intellectual satisfaction, public exposure, reasonable deadlines, byline credit.

Drawbacks: Limited economic opportunities ("feast or famine") because of limited market and generally lower rates than in other fields of translation; lack of retirement benefits (unless working in a salaried position).

2. Scientific/Technical requires:

- a. Moderately extensive scientific/technical knowledge (theoretical and/or practical),
- b. Familiarity with specific terminology and, in the absence thereof, to "know when you don't know,"
- c. A reasonably up-to-date sci-tech library,
- d. Ability to reproduce graphs and figures, and
- e. In most cases, impeccable typing ability and good layout sense.

Rewards: Fairly steady income, with generally higher rates than in the field of literary translation and a broad market, and the opportunity to expand one's subject-matter knowledge.

Drawbacks: Often "impossible" deadlines, the necessity of being a "Jack/Jane of all trades"; fairly high cost of reference books; lack of retirement benefits (unless working in a salaried position).

3. Commercial requires:

Most of the same qualifications as scientific/technical translation, but perhaps to a lesser degree.



# Introduction to Translation

(originally published in *An Introduction to the Professions of Translation and Interpretation*)

## Prefatory Remarks

This Handbook is intended to be useful for beginners and experienced translators alike. No matter how experienced one may be, there is always more to learn, and sometimes it is helpful to be reminded of fundamentals. Beginners can always benefit from the experience of veterans, and, surprising though it may seem, veterans can learn from newcomers as well.

Translation is a dynamic intellectual craft that is developed through experience and maturation. Translation is a profession with elements of both art and science, and with deep historical roots. At its best, translation can be an exquisite form of communication, facilitating a meeting of minds across cultures. At its worst, translation can be nothing more than a slavish substitution of words stripped of meaning, and hindering communication. In the workaday world of most translators, their practice is somewhere between these two extremes.

Over the years I have found that, rather than becoming easier, translation actually becomes more difficult, because as I gain more experience, my own standards and expectations keep rising, as do those of my clients. As I accept the challenge of increasingly complex and sophisticated texts for translation, I find myself continually "raising the bar" and striving for even higher levels of competence as a translator. Translation is a great challenge and a great responsibility. We strive for excellence through the awareness of our strengths and our limitations, and through an appreciation of the needs of our clients.

Translation is a multifaceted business that is constantly changing. Those of us who make our living as translators know that the market is constantly in flux. In that sense, as a business, translation is really no different from any other business. In order to maintain and sustain a translation business, one must have regular clients who supply a steady stream of work. Although translation is part of the service sector of the economy, we really do not have a clear picture of the translation "industry" as a whole because reliable statistics are not available.

The question most frequently asked by beginners is: "How do I get started as a translator?" The answer to that question is somewhat different now than when I got started 20 years ago. At that time, I wrote my draft translations by hand, and typed the final drafts on a typewriter. How things have changed! When I was a novice translator, I had no contact with other translators at all. That has changed also, although I am convinced that most translators are still too isolated from each other.

Although computers and the Internet have changed our lives as translators, the fundamentals of translation remain the same. In this informal and sometimes anecdotal introductory chapter, I intend to outline some of those fundamentals. Other chapters of this Handbook will go into more detail. This Introduction will not discuss spoken language interpretation, though it is a closely related and complementary profession.

## The Process of Translation

Translation is essentially a decision-making process that requires a combination of language ability, subject-specific knowledge, intuition, research skills, and judgment. A proper translation expresses the meaning behind the use of written words in one language in the written word usage of a second language. Although the translator appears to be dealing with words, in actual practice the translator is dealing with units of meaning that may or may not be expressed by the words appearing on paper. The translator must go beyond the "tatemae" (the appearance, or stated word) to the "honne" (the reality, or the true intent) of the document to be translated. Meaning is not contained in words, but is abstracted from words and interpreted within a context. The translator must rely not only on linguistic clues appearing in the document, but also on extra-linguistic knowledge. The translator must be able to understand and appreciate distinctions made in the "source language" of the document to be translated, and to make equivalent distinctions in the "target language" of the translation. This is not an easy task.

In broad outline, the steps in the translation process are as follows:

Text Analysis -- Analyzing the structure of the text and its meaning

Research -- Searching for meaningful "clues" within the text and outside  
of the text

Draft Translations -- Preparing as many drafts as are needed, including  
tentative translations

Accuracy Checking -- Comparing the source and target texts

Editing -- Reviewing the target language text for appropriate style and  
jargon

Formatting -- Putting the final text in printed and/or electronic form

In the real world of translation, translators are constantly faced not only with typographical errors in the source text, but also with intermittent failure (errors) in grammar, rhetoric, and logic (trivial though they may be). A document must be analyzed not only for its linguistic structure, but also for its underlying meaning. Some documents are written under pressure, and sometimes by more than one author, which can result in internal inconsistencies. In addition, highly sophisticated documents often contain ambiguities that are open to interpretation by the reader. The experienced and skilled translator will usually be able to convey this ambiguity in the translation. The decision whether or not to preserve ambiguity challenges the judgment of the translator.

Steps (1) and (2) will often be repeated several times as a translator gains familiarity with the source language text. In some cases, steps (1) and (2) may result in the creation of a glossary for a particular translation.

Thanks to computers, we can easily prepare and revise drafts (Step 3), making corrections as needed. The translator can prepare as many drafts as required to massage the translation so that it is as close a reflection of the original text as possible.

The accuracy checking of step (4) occurs when the translator steps back from the act of translation itself and compares the translation to the original text. It is absolutely essential that this be done. My policy is to print out the translation and do the accuracy checking with hard copy, even if the final translation is to be delivered electronically. It is very easy to miss things on the screen. And I think it is important to "step back" and indeed "step away" from the translation, and then go back to it. Ideally, it is best to set the translation aside for at least a few hours, do something else, then come back to it with a fresh perspective. But we are continually facing deadlines, so this is not always practical. It is often useful to have a translation reviewed by a colleague for accuracy. After that, there is the need to edit the translation as a "target language" document.

Please note that steps (4) and (5) are two very different processes. Accuracy checking means comparing the "source language" document with the "target language" document for accuracy, while editing means evaluating the translation as a "target language" document appropriate in style and jargon for the intended reader. If the translation is for publication, it is best to have this done by a professional editor.

Step (6) is, in many ways, the simplest of the steps, but if done improperly, it can annul all of the work done in steps (1) through (5).

The quality of a translation depends primarily upon:

The quality of the "source language" document;

The degree of subject-specific knowledge acquired by the translator;

The level of "source language" and "target language" proficiency of the translator;

The translator's diligence and attention to detail.

## Approaches to Translation

Although the process of translation is essentially the same in all cases, a variety of approaches are in use, largely determined by the translator's personality and experience. The approach to translation can also depend on the type of document to be translated and its purpose. For example, when translating a patent document, I like to translate the Claims last, even though they appear first in a Japanese patent document.

While most translators keyboard their work, some translators prefer to dictate their translations, and some translators use "machine assisted translation" software in preparing their rough drafts. The reason given is that both of these approaches increase output speed and productivity. There are great advantages to dictating, especially when translating documents that are very familiar and that contain few ambiguities. But if not done properly, dictation can lead to things getting "lost" or misplaced in the translation. Haste makes waste. In any case, the accuracy checking step cannot be overlooked. "Machine assisted translation" can sometimes work for documents that are very consistent and very repetitive. Of course, there are various levels of "machine assistance" that can be provided by computer software, but in most cases, although some of the simpler aspects of translation (those that involve "code switching") can be speeded up, there is really no substitute for the careful and attentive human touch. After all, the original text was prepared by human beings.

Some translators like to prepare a rough "literal" translation first, then go over it later and make it more readable. Others assume that an "editor" will fix up anything that is inaccurate. I consider that a very poor approach, because elaboration of a poorly drafted text

leads to the compounding of errors. It is better to do everything one can to get it right the first time so that whatever changes have to be made later will be minor. Of course, it is sometimes necessary to include tentative translations. The meaning of a particular term, abbreviation, acronym, or eponym may not be obvious until one delves into the text and its extra-linguistic context more deeply. Research is sometimes required to determine the meaning, and consequently, the most accurate translation. The translator must also be familiar with the mode of technical writing in the particular field.

I believe that the subconscious mind plays a very significant role in the process of translation. I have often had the experience of trying to decide the best way to translate a troublesome passage, and having exhausted all available reference and research resources, I let the problem go from my conscious mind, turn it over to my subconscious mind, and focus my conscious mind on something else. Later, it will suddenly occur to me what the best choice is, or how to find out. That is because my subconscious mind was actively at work on the problem all along. It is often useful to step outside the conscious aspect of the translation process, let the subconscious work on it, and then return to the conscious aspect. Unfortunately, we do not always have that luxury because of deadline pressure! However, I have often found that when I have a problem, either professional or personal in nature, I can find the solution by releasing it to my subconscious mind. When faced with a difficult problem, I try to step back from it and ask myself, "What is really important here?" That is, of course, a question of judgment, and human judgment can very often be faulty.

## **Before Getting Started**

I frequently get calls from people who say they are interested in becoming translators, and who are asking how to get started. I always tell them that they must first do some soul-searching. They need to examine carefully and honestly their motives for embarking on translation as an occupation, and to assess as realistically as they can their potential for success in the business. One question I always ask them is, "Have you ever done a translation before?" The answers range from "never have" from wanna-bes, to "quite a lot" from people who have years of experience with in-house translation and now want to break into full-time freelance work.

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I always ask people about their background in language. I am amazed at how many people say they have studied Japanese for one year and now want to become translators. I am afraid that they have been told "o-jozu desu ne" so many times that it has gone to their heads! I have to tell them that much more study is necessary. And they should live in Japan for a while and experience something of the culture. There is always a cultural subcontext, even in scientific and technical documents. I have also received calls from Japanese nationals who have gone no further than studying English in their local schools for six years, and still want to be translators. This surprises me greatly, because I would think they would be suffering from "honyaku-sho" so severely that they would never even think of becoming translators! And on top of that, they almost always think they can translate into English. I tell them that the general rule of thumb in our profession is that the translator translates from the foreign language and into the native language. Of course, there are exceptions, but they truly are exceptions. After all, writing is the most difficult of all language skills, and it is difficult to write well even in one's "native" language, let alone a "foreign" language.

The truth is that knowledge of a foreign language is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, to become a translator. Many additional skills and aptitudes are required. A translator must be able to write well in the target language. The terminology, phraseology, and speech level of the translation must be accurate, up-to-date, and appropriate to the specific context and audience. In order to achieve this, the translator must have an understanding of the subject matter of the text, and the translator must know how to write in the specialized jargon of the field. This does not necessarily mean that the translator has to be an "expert" in the field, but to a significant degree, the translator needs to have acquired knowledge of the field through schooling, work experience, and self-study. Some translations require expertise that the translator cannot possibly possess, and this is particularly true of certain types of interdisciplinary work. In many cases, it is the client who possesses the necessary subject-specific expertise and expertise related to a particular document, and the translator should not feel embarrassed to ask the client for help. Clients would much rather work with an honest translator than with a translator who makes false claims of "expertise" in a field, or an agency that claims to do "all languages and all subjects." Some agencies claim to provide terminology assistance to translators, but in many cases, the questions that arise are not about terminology but about the meaning and background of certain portions of the text. It is a good idea to ask the client for as much background material as possible before beginning a translation.

Obviously, it is not appropriate for the translator to go running to the client with every question that comes up while working on a translation. A translator needs to know how to do research on the terminology and concepts appearing in the source language text. The translator should, of course, have specialized bilingual dictionaries in his or her chosen fields of concentration. Beyond that, the translator must be familiar with other research tools to help unravel knotty questions of meaning that can arise in the course of doing a translation. In addition, all kinds of vexing issues can come up that are not necessarily issues of translation, but must be dealt with: personal names and place names, geographical entities, company names, company-specific terminology, out-of-date terminology, specialized symbols, katakana abbreviations, typographical errors, and so forth. Handwritten documents can present special challenges, especially if the penmanship is poor, and the only copy the client can provide is a third-generation fax!

Although finding the appropriate scientific and technical terminology is certainly difficult, the really hard part about translating is dealing with the everyday language that links and gives context and relevance to the specialized terms. I do not mean to downplay the terminological difficulties encountered in translation. Dictionaries are often filled with errors. Standard terminology is sometimes used in nonstandard and idiosyncratic ways. Nonstandard terminology is sometimes used as if it were standard. New terms are being coined all the time, especially in leading-edge technologies. Scientific fields and technologies that previously were considered separate are now merging to form new fields with concepts requiring new terminology. There is now so much interdisciplinary work being done that no dictionary, even in electronic form, could possibly be large enough or current enough to contain all the terms needed to translate in rapidly developing fields of technology. This forces translators to do terminological research using a variety of sources.

In addition to the daily task of researching factual and technical details involved in any particular translation job, there two very practical things a translator can do to improve translation skill on a long-term basis:

1. Read widely in the source language and in the target language.
2. Study translations done by other translators, and have other translators study your translations, and exchange feedback.

## Perfectionism in an Imperfect World

One of the most interesting psychological attributes of translators is perfectionism. The attribute of perfectionism presents a paradox. The documents we are called on to translate are not necessarily perfect themselves, but we are expected to render them into the target language faithfully and accurately. On the other hand, we know that translators can at times be very sloppy and turn out work that is unacceptable, by any standard. Sometimes this is due to inexperience, sometimes because of unreasonable deadlines, and sometimes it is out of laziness and lack of attention to detail. Of course, this can happen in any Profession, and is certainly not unique to the field of translation. In the final analysis, the most important attitude of any professional is to be willing and able to learn from one's mistakes, and to apply what one has learned so as to further improve the quality of the work.

Although translators are perfectionists, we know from experience that perfection is unattainable. We are human, after all, and we live in an imperfect world. And though we strive to produce the most perfect product we can, we know that in many cases, perfection in translation is an impossible goal. I firmly believe that the paradox of perfectionism can be resolved only with the realization that we are providing our clients with a service, not simply a product. In the context of our profession, excellence means serving the needs of our clients by making every possible effort to appropriately convey the meaning of the source language text in the target language document. We must recognize our limitations, while at the same time making continual efforts to transcend those limitations and build on our strengths. Ultimately, we can provide appropriate service only when we understand the needs of our clients. Although we may feel that what we want to achieve is perfection, I believe that what we are really striving for is excellence. Excellence is a habit of mind that can be cultivated only through a developmental process involving continual improvement through hard work and self-discipline.

One of the most beautiful aspects of our profession is that there is always more to learn. The intellectual stimulation provided by what we learn about our world and about ourselves through the process of translation can give us a great deal of pleasure, and we can gain considerable satisfaction in knowing that we are making a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge and understanding between different cultures.



September 8, 1997

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# ATA Publishes *Translation and Interpretation Services Survey*

By Shawn Six

The first edition of the American Translators Association's *Translation and Interpretation Services Survey* is out and available. The survey is based on more than 850 responses from people in the translation and interpretation professions. This valuable resource includes compensation data, trend information, education and experience levels, and other profile information on seven common employment classifications found in the translation and interpretation professions.

The survey was compiled, tabulated, and prepared for the American Translators Association by Industry Insights, Inc., a professional research and consulting firm that provides management and marketing services to dealer organizations, franchise operations, and professional trade associations and their members. The company specializes in compensation and benefits studies, industry operating surveys, member needs studies, educational programs, and customized research activities.

The seven employment classifications analyzed in this report include: full-time independent contractors, part-time independent contractors, full-time in-house private sector personnel, part-time in-house private sector personnel, company owners, educators, and government employees. For detailed analysis, responses were broken down by geographic region, education, years of employment, language combinations, ATA membership status, and ATA accreditation status. This comprehensive data allows users to compare their own income to individuals in similar situations.

## Income

Full-time independent contractors earned an average 1998 gross income from translation and interpretation of \$51,848; part-time independent contractors earned \$17,748; full-time in-house private sector personnel earned

\$44,939; part-time in-house private sector personnel earned \$22,284; company owners earned \$130,573 (The Company Owner results were inconsistent. It is apparent that some responses included total gross income of the company, while others included only compensation to the owner himself/herself.). Educators earned \$24,654; and government employees earned \$36,590. Overall, ATA members earned more than non-ATA members and those with ATA accreditation earned more than those without ATA accreditation. Respondents reported receiving 79 percent of their translation and interpretation income from translating and 21 percent from interpretation.

## Trends

More than half of all respondents (60 percent) reported that their 1998 translation and interpretation income increase compared to 1997. The remaining 40 percent was split evenly between those reporting a decrease (20 percent) and those reporting no change (20 percent).

## Education and Experience

Three out of four respondents had achieved either a master's degree (41 percent) or a bachelor's degree (34 percent). One fifth reported having a degree in translation, while 9 percent reported a degree in interpretation. One-third reported having a certificate in translation, while 21 percent reported having a certificate in interpretation. Other credentials reported include court certification (15 percent), passing the State Department exam (9 percent), and passing the UN exam (1 percent).

More than half of all respondents have been in the translation and interpretation professions for over 10 years. Nearly one-fourth had five or fewer years of employment, while another one-fourth had between 6 and 10 years of experience.

## Areas of Specialization

The most common areas of specialization reported were business (63 percent), law (47 percent), industry and technology (43 percent), arts and humanities (37 percent), medicine (33 percent), and computers (32 percent). Non-common areas of specialization included pure sciences (6 percent), natural sciences (14 percent), and entertainment (14 percent).

## Technology

The most commonly used technology tools in the translation and interpretation professions were the computer (97 percent), Internet (87 percent), modem (86 percent), and CD-ROM (70 percent). Voice recognition software/dictation systems (6 percent) and machine assisted/machine translator software (10 percent) were used sparingly by those responding to the survey.

### Miscellaneous

Two-thirds of the respondents were female. Roughly 61 percent of all respondents were born outside the United States. The vast majority (93 percent) were members of the American Translators Association.

### Methodology

The survey questionnaire was mailed to approximately 3,100 ATA members and 3,100 non-members in April, 1999. In total, 861 completed and useable survey forms were returned directly to Industry Insights, Inc. This represents a response rate of 14 percent. Forms received after the final deadline and questionnaires with incomplete information were not included.

Upon receipt, all data were checked both manually and by a specially designed computer editing procedure. Strict confidence of survey responses was maintained throughout the course of the project. Final results were tabulated, and the report was completed in August 1999.

### Other Information

The American Translators Association's 40-page *Translation and Interpretation Services Survey* presents the survey results in

much greater detail than in this summary. The complete report, which is available to ATA members for \$45 and non-members for \$60, includes charts and tables that provide a detailed profile of each of the seven employment classifications mentioned in this article. It is important to remember that the statistics published by ATA are not absolute standards. ATA intends the survey to reveal general tendencies in the industry, not exact amounts.

For more information and to order a copy of ATA's *Translation and Interpretation Services Survey*, see the order form on the bottom of this page or contact ATA Headquarters at (703)683-6100; fax: (703)683-6122; [ata@atanet.org](mailto:ata@atanet.org).

# Letter to a Young Translator

BY Gertrud Graubart Champe

*Champe is the founding director of the Translation Laboratory at the University of Iowa and is a member of the ATA Board of Directors.*

*Note.. The following was written by Dr. Gertrud Graubart Champe to a Russian teenager whose work was sent to ATA by her mother.*

Dear Colleague-to-be:

The text you sent me is of great interest. It is not common for a high school student to translate so well. You have an ear for the language and a passion for your work, and so it is a pleasure to take you seriously and to discuss your dream of becoming a translator with you.

As for your immediate project, you probably realize that a great deal remains to be done before you can submit it to a press. (By the way, you should never send out a translation without including the original. Without it, it is impossible to evaluate your text completely.) I can assure you that the work will be worth it. With some well-planned effort, you will have a good translation. and soon. Here is a sort of master plan. short and long term, which I suggest to you.

Short term goal: publication of the present work

One of the methods translators use to polish their work is to let other people read their translations and comment on them. This may sound a little painful to you, but believe me, it can be very advantageous to come face to face with your audience.

First of all, let's look at the language of your translation. While it is very clear and agreeable for the most part, I suggest you should, maybe with the help of your high school English teacher. approach the creative writing department at the nearest university to see whether one of the students is interested in being your translation partner. This person should not know the source language, or at least not very well. so that you can see whether your translation is really communicating with a person who can't read between the lines. Together, through conversation, you will find the best solutions.

Working with a more experienced writer who can acquaint you in detail with new intricacies of the style and structure of the English language will teach you much more than just giving your work to an editor, and the resulting text will be much livelier. In addition, a student in a writers' workshop will be as interested in publication as you are and will want to help you find a publisher, which is a difficult and time consuming task.

Try to have the project approved for academic credit by your high school teachers. In this way you will be able to devote more of your study time to the project, and you'll be able to get valuable responses from your classmates and teachers.

You are right to think that the text you are working

with needs an introduction. Not many people are aware of the events you are writing about. However, the present introduction needs attention. One of your high school teachers can help you with this as well, either directly or by finding you a mentor. I'll give you a few comments of my own, but I leave it up to you to judge them and perhaps to respond to them by making some changes.

In my opinion, using facts instead of an overabundance of adjectives will allow you to achieve a greater emotional effect on your reader. Don't tell us "touching," "terrifying," or "riveting." Speak calmly and let your readers catch fire from your firm, clear rendering of what is there. When you make strong, definite statements about facts included in your text. I encourage you to show clearly what you base them on. But be sure we know which of the ideas and facts are yours and which are someone else's: documentation is very important. In general. remember that the task of the introduction is to make sure your readers know how your text fits into a broad historical and cultural scheme. In almost all cases. this is more important for us to know than what you, the translator. happen to think about it.

Long term goal: your education as a translator

If you really want to become a translator. you must prepare, prepare, prepare. Let me give you some suggestions based on my own experience as a practitioner and teacher of translation. It's not a complete study plan, but it will give you something to think about as you consider your future.

- Very few people can make a living by translating only literary works. You should prepare yourself to translate other material as well, and always aim for excellence. Besides being good for your soul, this does wonders for your reputation.
- Cultivate your translation ability by knowing both the structure and literary traditions of the languages you are proficient in. Constantly read a great deal in these languages (material should range from literary works to the backs of cereal boxes). Engage in a careful study of the grammar,

*Continued on page 28*

## Letter

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- syntax, semantics, and the politics of language planning in the various countries speaking these languages.
- When you go off to college, please remember that the study of translation at the undergraduate level is not enough, because there is too much ground to cover. Besides, the majority of your classmates will still be learning the second language at a level significantly below yours. So, you will spend as much time on language acquisition as you will solving tough and fascinating translation problems. Start to gather information about translation programs at the masters level now.
  - As a good translator, you should study in the following areas now while you're still in high school, and then later, in college, and in graduate school:

### Linguistics

You must know something not only about general linguistics, but also about semantics, syntax, pragmatics, discourse analysis, history of language, etc., because a good translator is always thinking deep thoughts about how different languages work, and needs an awareness of the concepts and a knowledge of the words to do it with.

### Languages

If you have the energy and ambition to be an outstanding translator, start learning more languages as soon as possible. For overall

knowledge and understanding, and a terrific cross-training effect, learn Latin. If your school does not offer Latin, I can heartily recommend studying it on your own, using *Latin for Reading* (Knudsvig, Seligson, and Craig: University of Michigan Press). This is one of the most intelligent language textbooks I have ever seen. You will enjoy being able to at least read the other languages that you have not studied extensively. Latin gives you a key not only for Romance languages, but even for German, whose grammar is significantly influenced by Latin. Choose one modern European language to learn thoroughly and practice sight reading in others. Learn a language that few people know—for example, a Turkish language of the former U.S.S.R., an oriental language, or Arabic or Hebrew.

### Subject area

Every successful translator has a subject of expertise. This can be politics/economics, biological or physical science, industrial engineering, etc. My own field is medical science. I have also done a lot of translating in machine design and maintenance. You can't imagine how fun it is to learn how to read blueprints or find out how something works from someone who really knows. The advantages of having a field or two are great, and you should start early so you can find your best specialization at your own pace. You might even consider an undergraduate major in a subject field with a double major or a strong minor in language. This doubling of your studies will do two things for you. It will give you added flexibility in planning your studies and your career, and, if you decide

once and for all to be a translator, having a field of expertise will make you fast, accurate, and authoritative far beyond the average.

### Information

Translation is the bringing together of information and language. You must take every opportunity to become good at information retrieval and management. This covers bibliographical reference, both print and electronic, and mastering the growing capabilities of text processing technology and the Internet. Most particularly, being good at information handling requires a mastery of the sub-discipline of linguistics called terminology, which helps you to call things by their right names and store the result of your research in that regard.

### Theory

All the areas I have listed will be more powerful and significant for you if you use the history and theory of translation to guide your understanding of them.

The profile of the American translator is still in a stage of development and growth. This makes it hard to give you clear-cut advice, but it means that the profession can still be shaped by the young. You have a wide horizon and the prospect of different kinds and modes of translation work we don't even predict today. The things that won't change, however, are the qualities that make a really good translator: imagination, curiosity, and the willingness to work however hard it takes to understand the source text and make a target text that others can understand. Good luck!

# First-Timers Find ATA Conference Well Worth Cost

by Ann Sherwin

with contributions from Etsu Nair and Alice Glenn

Reprinted from the Winter 1997 issue of the CATI Quarterly with permission.

**W**orking up the resolve to attend an ATA conference for the first time is perhaps the hard part. But two of our members took the plunge this year and joined the pilgrimage to the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco on November 5-9. In the hope of inspiring many more of you to follow their example next year, when the conference will be in our own back yard, we share with you these "first impressions" submitted by Etsu Nair and Alice Glenn.

From Etsu Nair:

"I got my money's worth and more!" That is my summary of my first ATA conference experience, and I am already looking forward to the next one. After a short trip to Japan, I was ready to absorb everything about the interpretation/translation business, and the conference met my expectations. It gave me an opportunity to network with other people in this business, and it also confirmed that software localization for Japanese is really happening.

I was impressed with how smoothly and professionally everything was run during the conference, despite the record attendance of almost 1700 people. Every session I attended started on time, and the presenters were well prepared. A Chicago-based study group for Japanese<>English translators and interpreters even held a session after dinner that lasted until 11:00 p.m. It was very informative for me. My sharing the hotel room with another ATA member worked out well also. She was an experienced conference participant and had lots of good advice on how to get started in the business.

The only thing that I may not repeat next time was the Table Topics Luncheon. While it was a nice lunch, there was not enough common ground for

an interesting conversation at the table. Overall I was glad that I went to the conference, even though my income from interpretation/translation doesn't quite justify the trip to San Francisco. Since I had decided to leave IBM at the end of the year to become a full-time translator/interpreter/software consultant, this conference came at a good time and confirmed my decision. Thanks, Ann, for encouraging me to go. You were right.

From Alice Glenn:

My take on the ATA's annual conference was that it was well worth the \$185 registration fee. It was my first conference and my first trip to San Francisco. I was not bored. I arrived late Wednesday afternoon and was feeling so tired that I did not want to attend the opening reception. But I did and immediately ran into the director of New York University's translation program (where I studied) and then you. The energy was electric, a buzz of people talking in many different languages. The Hyatt Regency was in a great location and beautiful. All the employees were pleasantly attentive to our needs. On the exhibit floor I spent most of my time at i.b.d., Ltd.'s table and treated myself to some new dictionaries. I also set up an account with UPS.

Many of my questions regarding translation were answered in the sessions. Agencies told exactly what they were looking for on a résumé, and professional translators spoke in "dollars-and-sense" detail about billing and time management. I was surprised to see so many international attendees.

"If you're not networking, you're not working" was one of the overheads in a session I attended. Specialization was an important theme. The conference provided a lovely setting and ample opportunities for networking. You couldn't help it! "Translators are everywhere," my husband commented.

I also took a day to tour the city with my husband, and we visited Muir Woods and saw the giant redwoods for the first time. It was a trip of a lifetime.

From Ann Sherwin:

Despite a controversial issue on the ballot, this year's annual meeting

and election were relatively calm. Two amendments that would have given the vote to associate members were defeated. The first version (no waiting period) had 174 votes for, 284 against. The second (1-year waiting period) had 114 for, 247 against. ATA is now taking a closer look at the matter of making it easier for qualified associate members to attain active status (see box at right).

As the host chapter for the next conference, CATI enjoyed high visibility. The chapter tables were located in a high-traffic area, and we had a central location opposite the escalators. Thanks to Monique Glass and Rob Croese, our table was skirted with a large banner bearing the CATI logo and the next conference site and dates. Many people stopped to ask about Hilton Head. By Friday afternoon our supply of South Carolina tourist brochures was depleted, and Saturday morning we gave out our last embroidered palmetto sticker. We promoted the CATI directory to every visitor at our table with a company name badge and sold **all** 30 copies I had brought along. We also handed out 200 sample issues of the CATI Quarterly.

On Saturday, ten members and friends of CATI left the hotel to have a leisurely lunch at the Palomino Euro Bistro right beside the Golden Gate Bridge. Members who presented sessions at the conference or helped staff our table are acknowledged on page 12..a

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The contributors to this article are free-lancers from North Carolina. Etsu Nair of Apex works with Japanese; Alice Glenn of Durham, with French; and Ann Sherwin of Raleigh, with German.

# Contracting to Provide Translation Services

By James E. Gates and Ana E. Gray

Gates is a trial attorney with Maupin Taylor Ellis & Adams, PA., in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Gray is an attorney from Lima, Peru, and a visiting lecturer at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

(Reprinted from the CATI Quarterly, newsletter of the Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters, Winter 1996, pp. 4-5.)

**N**ot all contracts used to hire independent translators are created equal. Some are short, some are long; some are complex, and some are simple. Nevertheless, when considering a contract to provide translation services, there are a number of points you should always keep in mind. Here are a few of the most important:

Get it in writing. The most basic principle is to make sure that your agreement is in writing. While oral contracts are no less binding than written ones, it is generally much more difficult to prove the existence and terms of an oral contract. If a full-fledged contract cannot be obtained, at least confirm the terms of the agreement in a letter to the client at the time the agreement is reached. Similarly, all changes to the agreement should be confirmed in writing with the client at the time they are made.

Read the entire contract carefully. The good feeling of establishing a relationship with a new client, representations made by the client over the telephone, and the belief that no terms in a form contract can be changed are all factors which can lull you into signing a contract proposed by a client. Do not make the mistake of signing a contract without reading it thoroughly. The contract defines your legal rights, and while it may appear to be a mere formality at the outset, it will be the determining factor in the event of a dispute. It is simply not true that terms in a form contract can never be changed. The client may well accept changes depending upon, among other things, their importance to the client and the urgency of the project at hand. By reading the contract, you may find the terms so onerous that you simply have to say "no." If you do not understand the proposed deal after reading the contract, consider taking it to a lawyer for further explanation. A little money spent up front for that type of legal advice can save you much more money down the line.

Independent contractor status. Contracts used by translation companies and other clients typically contain a provision stating that the translator is not an employee, but an independent contractor. The purpose of these provisions are to eliminate any obligation on the part of the client to pay any employment taxes or benefits to the

translator. Be sure to follow through on the responsibilities such a clause places upon you.

Fee provisions. Make sure all fee provisions are clear. You do not want there to be ambiguity about either your rate of compensation or the amount of work you will do. If possible, review the text for specific projects before agreeing to accept the projects. Ideally, the contract will state that the translator will be paid for any changes in the original assignment. If there is no such provision, consider adding it, or, at the very least, get written confirmation that the client agrees to pay for specific changes submitted to you before you begin working on them. Contracts should, and typically do, set due dates for payment, such as 30 days from submission of the translation. If the contract lacks such a provision, consider adding it. Provisions assessing monthly interest for late payment and any costs of collection, including reasonable attorney's fees, can be used to help ensure timely payment, although it is likely to be difficult to obtain agreement to such provisions.

Quality. Beware of provisions which allow clients to make deductions from your compensation when they determine that the quality of the translation is deficient. A more appropriate approach is to require the translator to correct any mistakes at the translator's own expense.

Noncompetition. Contracts proposed by translation agencies often prohibit the translator from working directly for clients of the agency. You should ensure that the provision applies only to your knowingly soliciting or accepting work from the agency's clients. You may also want to limit it to those clients whose work the agency has subcontracted to you. Another consideration is the duration of the noncompetition provision. The translator will obviously want as short a duration as possible. The provision may specify a period (for example, one, two, or three years) or not address duration at all. Paradoxically, the specification of an unreasonably long period or no period at all could render the entire provision unenforceable. The area of noncompetition clauses is a complicated and ever-changing one. A translator having questions or concerns regarding such a provision should consult a lawyer.

Confidentiality. It is appropriate for the contract to require the translator to treat the original material and the translation as confidential.

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Reports in this column discussing statutes, court decisions, and other legal rulings and principles are intended solely for information purposes and should not be applied to actual legal problems without prior review by your attorney.



## Contracting

*Continued from page 16*

Nevertheless, the requirement should not apply to material which becomes public through no fault of the translator. Nor should the provision apply to terminological data compiled by the translator during the course of the translation, unless the translator is paid for such data. If you wish to retain a copy of the original material and translation for your files, it is best to include a clause in the contract which provides for such retention.

**Choice of the forum selection.** Contracts often contain a provision, called a choice of law clause, specifying which state's law will apply to the contract. There may also be a provision, called a forum selection clause, stating

where any lawsuit regarding the contract must be filed. It will almost always be to your benefit to have the law of your home state apply to the contract. Similarly, if there is a lawsuit, you will almost always be better off if it is brought in your home state. Indeed, if it is you who is bringing the lawsuit, the extra cost and other burdens of suing in another state could be an insurmountable barrier. Recognizing that fact, North Carolina law actually renders unenforceable certain forum selection clauses in North Carolina contracts. Dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and arbitration, offer translators a much cheaper and quicker means of resolving contract disputes than traditional litigation. Translators should consider adding provisions providing

for such alternative dispute resolution in their contracts. Form language and other information regarding these dispute mechanisms can be obtained from groups such as the American Arbitration Association as well as through many lawyers.

**Completeness.** Contracts usually include provisions, called integration clauses, stating that the contract contains the complete agreement of the parties. These clauses make it more difficult to argue at a later date that key terms were left out, including promises made orally. Particularly if such an integration clause appears in the contract, make sure that all terms of importance to you are set out in the written agreement. Otherwise you may find it impossible to have them added to The deal later on. |

**R**ecently, I received a change of address notification from a fellow translator. In his message he emphasized that, despite moving to a different time zone, he would still be available to his clients from Europe and from the West at the same hours *as* before. (In our office, we will answer the telephone from 7 a.m. Pacific Standard or Daylight Time [fortunately, we are early risers] to accommodate our German clients.)

The widespread use of e-mail and/or FTP sites for transmitting source documents and returning the translated work has reduced distance to a non-issue. Communication via e-mail has made inroads on telephone talk, even though a quick call sometimes seems unavoidable...and is not always welcome (see *Dealing with the Time Difference*, page 30).

Particularly for translators working from German-to-English, translation requests from German agencies or companies seeking native speakers living in their language environment have become commonplace. Many German translators listed in translators' directories on the Web can attest to translation inquiries not only from German-speaking countries or the U.K., but also from places associated with neither English or German. The ever-growing number of Canadian translators joining the ATA is certainly an indication of intense cross-border competition between two friendly neighbors.

Individual translators are increasingly becoming global contractors. Working for clients in other countries can be lucrative, but it also poses a set of new challenges. This article attempts to discuss some of the issues related to the international translation trade from the perspective of a translator working between German and English. It is neither complete, nor will it offer ready-made solutions for all problems. I very much hope that other translators will want to contribute their experience and insight on the topic.

## The Basis for Reimbursement—Word Count, Line Count, or What?

In the U.S., translators are paid per word. The word count is mostly based on the target document, even though there are also agencies that will use a source-language count. In Canada, it is more common to reimburse translators for the word count in the source document.

German, as we all know, makes do with fewer words than English for the same text. This has obvious implications on the grand financial total of a project. While some agencies take this into account by either offering a higher word rate for work from English-to-German (target count) or adding a percentage (source count), others do not.

In Germany, the common practice for billing and paying for translation service is per line, one line consisting of an average of

50 to 55 characters (including spaces). Some clients may be prepared to pay per word if asked for it, but it is not standard. Before agreeing to a line rate, you will have to do your math and compare words and lines in a document. For an approximation, see the next section.

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...Working for clients in other countries can be lucrative, but it also poses a set of new challenges...

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## Estimating Length and Time of a Project

There is this new client from Germany who requires 340 lines from German-to-English for the day after tomorrow. Is this manageable? We all know how many words we can approximately translate in a text of a certain difficulty per day, but not so many of us will know their average translation speed in lines.

If you need to convert lines to words without access to the electronic file, this formula is based on empirical experience:

The number of lines multiplied by 9-10 for an English source text and by 8 for a German text approximates the word count for a document, if your basis is 55 characters per line.

You can check this by opening a document at random, dividing the character count (include spaces) by 55 to obtain the line count (don't use the line count in the Word window), then multiply it by 8 or 9 and compare the result to the word count of the document. In our example here, the client is asking you to translate approximately 2,720 words.

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## The Translator as Global Contractor Continued

For a larger project, your German client may want the translation to be completed in the 39th week. Are you baffled? German calendars usually have a week count, and the week number is quite frequently used as a reference.

But don't pull out your North American calendar and start counting. There is an international standard, DIN EN 28601, which regulates the week count in Germany. If you don't have access to a German calendar, an Australian one will also do (they use the same convention), or simply follow the guidelines established by the German National Metrology Institute: "...the first week of the year is the one that includes the first Thursday." Remember that the German week starts on Monday. Accordingly, the first week of the year 2000 began Monday, January 3. Your Excel program may present you with a U.S. week count, which does not follow the above DIN standard.

### Dealing with the Time Difference

The time difference between your office and your client's is crucial for communication and deadlines. A due date for your German client of Tuesday at 4p.m. means, in effect, that you will need to deliver your document by Tuesday at 7a.m. (realistically, Monday night), if you are on Pacific Standard Time, or Tuesday at 10a.m. if on Eastern Standard Time. Then there are these pesky periods shortly before the end and beginning of our daylight savings time, when the German and North American concepts of when daylight savings starts and ends do not necessarily coincide...

Fortunately, there is the Website of the *Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt*, available in either German or English, which has several pages devoted to time, daylight saving, week count, and so on. The address is <http://www.ptb.de/deutsch/org/4/43/432/dars.htm>.

Do not expect your clients to be aware of the exact time difference between their location and yours. North America, after all, has several time zones. However, they are at least as uncomfortable as you are after waking you up at 5:30 in the morning, or if your file arrived at a different time from when they expected. So do educate them and let them know at what time you will answer the telephone.

### Checking Client Solvency and Payment Practices

When contacted by an agency or company you have never heard of, you will want some information about their solvency and payment practices. It is certainly reasonable to ask about payment periods and practices during the initial contact and negotiations. If the client does not send you a contractual agreement, you may want to consider submitting a standard translator-client contract to them.

I am aware of two mailing lists where subscribers provide information about companies and their payment practices to each other. *Payment Practices*, a strictly monitored list, is based in Montreal, Canada, and maintained by Karin Adamczyk. You can find more information about this list and its subgroups at <http://www.pages.infinitnet/karining>. Another, albeit unmoderated, list is *Zahlungsmoral*, maintained by Dr. Stanislaw Gierlicki, a German-Polish translator. You can find more information about this list at <http://www.st-gierlicki.de/zm.html>.

### Payment in which Currency?

If you work for a client in Germany or elsewhere in Europe, you may be able to negotiate payment in those familiar U.S. dollars, particularly if the client has subsidiaries in America. More likely, though, you will be offered reimbursement in either the currency of the country or in euro (E), the new European currency which has been negotiable since January 1, 1999. However, the euro will not be in circulation in the form of bills and coins before 2002. -

If you want to have a quick glance at today's exchange rate, to calculate your earnings or the taxes you may owe, try <http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic>.

### The Nitty-Gritty of Electronic Money Transfers

Your German client will not want to send you checks. Nor is it advisable, because your bank at home may not be prepared to negotiate them. In Germany and many other European countries, bills are almost exclusively paid for through the transfer of money from one account to the other. This is theoretically not a problem internationally either. In practice, it can be cumbersome and costly for you. When your client's bank does not use the same intermediary as your bank, the charges for you will likely increase and the transfer will take longer. It is worthwhile comparing bank charges for international transfers.

As the European currency is converted into U.S. dollars when it enters the country, you have no control over the exchange rate. Another option, of course, is maintaining an account in the country where your client(s) reside and initiating a transfer into your account in the U.S. whenever it is convenient for you.

#### Liability Issues with International Clientele

Do you have liability insurance? Rest assured that, for the most part, all the work you perform within the country where your insurance is based is covered. As far as work outside this area is concerned, read the fine print of your insurance policy. Your projects for clients in Germany, Switzerland, or elsewhere may or may not be covered. But, after all, it is America that boasts a reputation as the most litigious country in the world...

#### Taxes

Finally, taxes. Earnings from foreign countries are taxable. For more information, talk to your accountant.

URL's change frequently. Please note that all websites listed in this article were checked at the time of its first publication but may not be up to date any more.

# The Bureau-Freelancer Relationship

By Henry Fischbach

A meeting I had convened on March 28, 1959, led to the Charter Meeting of the "Association of Professional Translators" as ATA's immediate predecessor a month later (on May 1, 1959) at New York University. The above principle of all-inclusiveness was enshrined in both. Bylaws were prepared, a Nominating and Election Committee was appointed, and the first elections were held. By July 13, 1962, the fledgling society was officially incorporated as the "American Translators Association" as a membership corporation in New York State.

The aim of most human relationships is to maximize mutual benefits. Relationships among independent translators, translation bureaus, and clients are no exception. Since its very inception back in 1959, ATA's *raison d'être* has been to "advance the standards of translation and to promote the intellectual and material interests of translators..." The best way to implement this tenet, the founders concluded, was for the fledgling Association to be non-restrictive and provide a haven for the *entire* profession, carefully navigating between the Charybdis of a trade union and the Scylla of a trade association. The seas have been stormy and over

the years the wisdom of maintaining an even course has been questioned and, on occasion, even assailed. Historically, translation may have been a solitary (and even lonely) pursuit but today it is ideally a symbiotic achievement.

The advent of instant communications, heightened commercial competition, and, above all, the complexities of specialized knowledge now mandate a concerted rather than solo approach. The independent translator, a designation I find preferable to "freelance" or "freelancer," with its etymologically mercenary connotation, and translation bureau can no longer fully master today's challenges autonomously. Clearly, their mutual cooperation in a more or less intimate association calls for symbiotic teamwork that will maximize shared benefits. The key to such a relationship is an understanding or an appreciation of each partner's special contribution to the excellence of the final product. Joint expertise, resources, and professionalism are the essential ingredients of a successful translation. As in any human relationship, mutual loyalty, respect, and service are the most powerful incentives to a satisfactory business association.

## What translators ideally expect from translation bureaus

*General:*

& greed remuneration

To pay a rate commensurate with the performance specified (for editing, formatting, tables, references, "rush" service, or whether the translation is to be of publication grade).

Prompt payment

To remit payment within 30 days of billing, or as otherwise agreed in writing (regardless of other factors, notably when the bureau itself is paid).

Specific deadlines

To assign a deadline allowing for quality translation yet leaving time for bureau processing in keeping with the client's requirements.

commitments in writing

To state the rate and requirements in writing at the time of the assignment, with commitments to be considered binding

Respect of professional privacy

To refrain from contacting the translator at his/her place of work, and to maintain the privacy of their relationship.

*On Specific Assignments:*

Terminology support

To provide access, if requested on major assignments, to any previous translations, specialized glossaries, dictionaries, or other pertinent reference material available.

Consultation access

To authorize communication with other translators/editors/lexicographers working on a given project or associated with the bureau.

Nature and target of text

To inform the translator of the readership and country for which the translation is intended, or of any client terminology preferences.

Pertinent feedback

To return edited translations on special follow-up projects, so as to enable the translator to be kept constantly informed and knowledgeable in the interests of both parties.

Repeat assignments

To offer work on a continuing basis, especially on the same subject, since this enhances translator performance, maximizes terminological consistency, and expedites delivery.

From the vantage point of half a century as both an independent translator and translation bureau principal, I have attempted to single out and identify the expectations—more accurately, the *desiderata*—of each partner in this synergistic professional relationship. The points made are by no means static, nor is the listing complete; as conditions change, so will the expectations. Since this is not an ideal world and all the *desiderata* may not be met in each case, each partner must actively seek to minimize potential areas of friction if both are to maximize the mutual benefits. The more fully these are met, the more lasting and beneficial the relationship will be. I hope that I reflect the feelings of most of my fellow translators in reaffirming the belief that ATA should continue its policy of inclusiveness and nurturing to foster understanding and respect among all practitioners of translation. Pious as it may sound, ongoing interdependence based on mutual loyalty, esteem, and service is essential, if we are all to thrive.

For years, I have had a chronic allergy to the term "agency" and have fought its indiscriminate use vigorously inside and outside our profession. An agency, according to one major dictionary

definition, is an "organization, company, or bureau that provides some service for another" (i.e., welfare or employment agency, etc.) and, according to another, "a company having a franchise to *represent* another" (i.e., a car-dealer agency, insurance agency, etc.); in either case there is *little, if any, value added* to the final product, which is produced or provided by someone else. The same is true of an "agent," defined as "a person or business authorized to act on another's behalf" (i.e., literary agent or theatrical agent, etc.). Here again, the service performed is also largely confined to acting as a go-between: introducing a prospective employee to an employer, a writer to a publisher, an actor to a producer, etc. Again, there is *no or very little value added* to the final product. The chief function of an agency or agent is therefore, by definition, to act as an intermediary—what some in our profession have called a "translation mill" or "envelope switcher." The term agency is accurate only in the case of a company which provides no added value to the final product (except for a bill and postage). It could be maintained, with some justification, that agents or

*Continued on page 31*

### What translation bureaus ideally expect from translators

#### *In General:*

#### Business fairness

To understand that bureaus incur fixed expenses (for editing, salaries, overhead, customer education, promotion/advertising, reference books, etc.).

#### Word processing and transmission capabilities

To have (or have access to) word processing, FAX, and modem facilities, unless clearly stated that these are not (or not yet) available.

#### Honest representation of competence

To claim only proven language and subject expertise (borderline cases including some general knowledge but no specific expertise should be openly discussed beforehand).

#### Consultation accessibility

To be readily accessible during office hours (and evenings or weekends, by agreement). "Regular" translators to notify the bureau of anticipated absences.

#### Confidentiality and ethical conduct

To refrain from unethical conduct such as contacting the bureau's clients or revealing information contained in the assignments, unless expressly authorized to do so.

#### *On Specific Assignments:*

#### Adherence to specifications

To adhere strictly to the assignment's specifications, as provided in writing, with deviations authorized only after consultation and by mutual agreement.

#### Checking translation submitted

To check translations for completeness and accuracy and to input editor's corrections if extensive (to be included in the fee quoted by agreement).

#### Research and consultation

To undertake all necessary research and indicate any doubtful terms, abbreviations, or passages in the original ("educated guesses" to be clearly labeled).

#### Lack of subject competence

To notify the bureau immediately of any subject matter incompatibility or insufficient terminology resources before proceeding with the translation.

#### Observance of deadlines

To decline deadlines that cannot be met rather than fail to meet those accepted. Never cancel an assignment shortly before the translation is due for delivery.

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## The Bureau-Freelancer Relationship

*Continued from page 17*

agencies in this sense might play a useful role on behalf of independent translators. The designation is inaccurate, however, in the case of a company that adds editing, formatting, verification of specific terminology, client preferences, and assumes contractual liability. The distinguishing feature between translation "agency: on the one hand, and "company" or "bureau." on the other, is whether or not it adds the services mentioned above to the final product. I believe that as professional translators we should clearly make that distinction. After all, language is our chosen tool, and we might as well use it correctly. This is admittedly a long explanation. but in my opinion the distinction is important! ATA

# Is This Still Worth It? An Update

By Jonathan Hine

Mark Adams looked up at his translation class from the pit of the amphitheater. They hated this windowless room. The cramped chairs with folding writing surfaces gave the students nowhere to open dictionaries or lay the source texts next to their translations. He was stuck behind a lectern because the rows of bolted-down chairs prevented his walking among the students or circling the chairs for discussions.

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**... You have to find out how much money you need to earn, and then figure out how much work it takes to earn it. That is called the break-even point...**

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Normally, he might have a backache from not moving around, but today the class was different. These students were usually active and engaged. Now that they were discussing the practical side of setting up a translation business, the interest level was even higher. The first hour and a half had vanished, and it was almost time for a break.

"Now the article by Mr. Hine," he said. The students pulled out their photocopies of the reading assignment, but did not look at them. "What is it about?"

"It's for freelancers," said Anita quickly. With only three students today, there was no need to raise hands. "How to budget. How to calculate prices."

"Does he say you can turn down jobs?"

"He says you can take a job if it fulfills specific needs."

"Yes. That is the key. To be aware of what the job entails. How do you know? Have you had economics or accounting?" Mark paused as the

silence settled on the class. He knew they knew more than they realized.

"Do you know what the break-even point is?" Their faces brightened.

"The break-even point is where you cover costs with no profit," Anita said. Marcia and Jed nodded.

"He gives you four principles in the article. What are they?"

Marcia jumped in this time. "You are in it for the money." I

"We charge for expertise," said Jed.

"That is why we charge more," said Mark, writing their answers on the board. "That is why it is so difficult to put a price on what we do. What about principle #3?"

"Selling time-based units," said Anita.

"What does that mean?"

"The only thing you can measure is your time, so you should be billin<sup>g</sup> for it."

"Yes," Mark said. "That is why we need to keep time sheets. And principle #4?"

"Some advice for freelancers," Marcia offered. "Don't put money from yourself into the business."

It's OK to do it, as long as you document it," said Anita.

"You have to keep track of it," added Jed.

Mark went to the board. He drew a big T, representing a double-entry accounting ledger sheet. For the next few minutes, he explained double-entry accounting in simple terms. The students seemed to understand, but did not react much. Anita and Jed had taken introductory accounting as sophomores. Mark was not sure about Marcia; he found her harder to read than the others. As he finished this part of his lecture, he made a mental note to use a simple checkbook example next time. He moved on to the next point.

"So what are the three parts of a budget, according to Mr. Hine's article?"

"Personal, operating, and growth and capitalization," said Anita without looking at her paper.

Mark looked at the others. "You agree?"

"Yes," said Jed. "Customers do move, and if you want the business to grow you need money."

"Then what?"

"Determine the rate," said Marcia.

"How?"

Jed again, "See how many hours you have."

"Then divide your income requirement by the number of hours available to get the break-even point," said Anita.

"Yes," Mark said.

He then pulled the screen down in front of the blackboard and projected a transparency of Table I. They discussed how a full-time availability of 2,080 hours in a year shrank to 1,255 hours after allowing for sickness, holidays, and overhead. "That is a key number to keep in mind: 1,255. Then if the cus-



tomer wants a piece rate, like cents per word, we convert that by figuring out how long the job will take." Mark gestured to his head to indicate "keep this in mind."

Table 1: Finding the Number of Billable Hours in a Work Year

Conditions	Hours/Year
52 weeks @ 40 hours/week (full-time)	2,080
Less a two-week vacation (80 hours)	2,000
Less eleven holidays (8 hours/day)	1,912
Less allowance for sick time (10 hours/month)	1,792
Less overhead (indirect costs) (e.g., 30%)	1,255

"The goal is to relate your piece rate to your hourly rate. Once we know how long the job will take, we calculate what it should cost and then divide the number of words, pages, or whatever into that. Any questions?" He expected the silence. "OK, let's break until 9:15, then meet in Room 222."

With some cheering over the move to a room with big tables, the students packed their book bags and left.

The article that Mark Adams (a fictitious name) used in his class for translators appeared in this magazine more than two years ago. The material in that article has been published as a small booklet' and included in workshops for translators and interpreters. The basic principles remain the same. You have to find out how much money you need to earn, and then figure out how much work it takes to earn it. That is called the break-even point.

Calculating the break-even point is a crucial first step for any businessperson trying to determine how to price a service. When you know the break-even point, you know how low you can afford to go in negotiating a rate for your work.

The purpose of this article is to cover three aspects of calculating the break-even point that the first article did not cover in depth:

1. Couples and freelancers with multiple sources of income
2. Whether to use target or source text for basing the price
3. Pricing additional services

**Multiple sources of income.** When more than one source of income is involved, freelancers need to pay special attention to their time availability when calculating the break-even point. This would apply, for example, to working couples and whether they are both language mediators or working different jobs. It would apply to someone making a living from different part-time jobs. Of course, it applies to a freelancer who is corn-

binning freelance income with a part-time or full-time job. Consider Table 2, the Business Budget Worksheet, on page 20.

There should be two kinds of entries in the row entitled "Portion coming from other sources."

**Asset income:** money from stocks, bonds, investments, savings accounts, or allowances from relatives, trusts, and so forth. This is income that does not require your working time. For example, you could have purchased the asset(s) with working earnings earlier or it could be an inheritance or a credit union account that is paying dividends. A retirement check would be an example of an asset income.

2. **Salary or wages:** income from a job other than the business for which you are calculating the break-even point. If the source of money requires that you devote time to it, it belongs in this row.

If the entry comes entirely from asset income (see #1 above), then a single person should use 40 hours/week (2,080 hours/year) for the starting point in calculating the amount of time they will be available to work on this business. If two people are completely free to work on the business (say, a husband-wife team or two siblings in business together), then the starting number is 80 hours/week, or 40 times the number of people working.

**Do not include the hours of** someone who is not actively working in whatever it is your business does. If a relative is giving you money regularly to help out, simply enter it in the "other sources" column. The contribution will lessen the amount of money you need to earn. If someone is providing you services (like a book-

## Is This Still Worth It? Continued

keeper), whether it be your spouse or someone else, pay them and budget for the expense (under "fees," for example). The expense represents the impact of their work on your budget.

If the entry comes partially or completely from another job (#2 on page 19), subtract the weekly (or annual) hours from 40 (2,080) to get your starting point. Similarly, you need to subtract a proportionate amount of time from holidays, sick days, and vacation when calculating the time you have for the business.

For example, if you work 10 hours per week at something else, you would start with 30 hours available per week, or 1,560 hours per year. Now 30 hours is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of 40 or 75 percent, so in Table 1, the vacation time would be 60 hours ( $\frac{3}{4}$  of 80), the holidays would be 66 hours, and the sick time would be 7.5 hours per month. The overhead stays the same because it is already a percentage.

Thus, a freelancer with a 10-hour/week part-time job would have about 941 hours per year to devote to the freelance business.

A two-person team would double these numbers (assuming each had a 10-hour/week job), or you could calculate your individual available time separately and add the answers together. If only one partner had the 10-hour job, their hours would be 941 and 1,255, respectively, so the team would have 2,196 hours available per year for the business.

*Source text or target text.* Since the 1998 article, the transmission of source documents electronically has become commonplace, but the general advice remains the same: count what the freelancer and the client can agree upon. Ideally, the client pays the translator to translate a certain amount of material—the source text. If the source text can be counted accurately, then both

Table 2: Business Budget Worksheet

ITEM	MONTH	YEAR
<b>Personal Budget:</b>		
Rent/house payment	525	\$6,300
Groceries	400	\$4,800
Insurance (life, health, etc.)	250	\$3,000
Clothing	125	\$1,500
Vehicle fuel, repairs	60	\$720
Charitable pledges	90	\$1,080
Eating out	120	\$1,440
Vacation	125	\$1,500
Utilities	250	\$3,000
IRA	188	\$2,256
Other (hobbies, school, etc.)	220	\$2,640
Subtotal: personal budget		\$28,236
Portion coming from other sources	686	\$8,236
"OWNER'S DRAW" REQUIRED		\$ 20,000
<b>Business Operating Budget:</b>		
Advertising	10	\$120
Vehicle (mileage)	120	\$1,440
Fees	15	\$180
Depreciation (179 expense)	350	\$4,200
Office expense	10	\$ 120
Rent	150	\$1,800
Supplies	100	\$1,200
Utilities	110	\$1,320
Dues	40	\$480
Other (postage, books, training, etc.)	75	\$900
Subtotal: business operating		\$11,760
Personal budget		\$20,000
Subtotal		\$31,760
Growth (3%)		\$953
<b>TOTAL REQUIREMENT</b>		<b>\$32,713</b>

parties know exactly what the job will cost up front, and the translator is free to render the target document in the best style possible without considering the target-text word count.

However, if the source document is coming by fax or in the mail and the target document is going to be electronically delivered, then software held in common can only count what is in the target text. The condition of the source document (handwriting, illegible material, tables, sheer bulk, etc.) often makes only a rough estimate of the word count possible. Resetting tables and typing in numbers will take more time than replacing them in an electronic document. More often than not I find myself insisting on a target-text word count when dealing with a paper source text.

Table 3: Section of a Translator's Sales Record

Job #	Date Sent	Rate	Count	Revenue	Hours	\$/hr	Wph	Date Paid	Remarks
TRA-01-99	15/1:2/99	\$0.13	15,568	\$2,023.84	26.30	\$76.95	592	22/3/00	Trailmix
ATX-09-98	31/3/00	\$0.10	135,344	\$13,534.40	235.20	\$57.54	575	15/4/00	TAC-01-84
LSU-07-98	12/4/00	\$0.10	253,889	\$25,388.90	437.74	\$57.99	580	28/7/00	Messen
CTX-01-00	02/2/00	\$0.13	7,895	\$1,026.35	14.50	\$70.78	544	15/3/00	Comtox
TRA-01-00	15/2/00	\$0.13	11,250	\$1,462.50	22.30	\$65.58	504	21/3/00	Trailmix
SUMMARY			534,556	\$58,344.20	1,818	\$32.09	294		

*Pricing additional services.* Once you gain an appreciation of the value of your time, the impact of non-language aspects of your work becomes more visible. Slowing down to read illegible faxes in small font sizes, or retyping tables, or manually replacing decimal points with commas—all these slow down the work and may invalidate the piece rate (cents/word) on which you based the price of the job. Anything you can do to avoid underestimating a job can help. One of the best defenses is having data from your past work.

Freelancers must keep decent records, but they need not be fancy. Table 3 shows a section of a hypothetical translator's sales record. It is based on an Excel spreadsheet. The summary at the bottom includes rows not shown, so the bottom line does not add up.

In each row with a Job #, the Revenue is the product of the Rate and the Count. If the job were for hourly services, then Revenue would be the product of the Rate and Hours. The \$/hr and the Words Per Hour (Wph) are the quotients of the Revenue divided by the Hours and the Count divided by the Hours, respectively. In the summary row, the Count, Revenue, and Hours entries are the sums of the columns above them, but the summary of the \$/hr and Wph are created by dividing the summary Revenue and Count by the summary Hours.

You might quote a total price for a really large job. If you do, then you would enter the Revenue as a number and change the Rate so that it is the quotient of the Revenue divided by the Count.

The Remarks should be able to help you recall what kind of work was involved, especially if something about the job caused you to adjust the piece rate you quoted the customer. Armed with this information, you will be able to quote a rate or price quickly the next time you see a job like it. After a while, you will be able to guess the "price" of a job just by looking at it. What you will be doing is recognizing something you remember pricing on your spreadsheet.

Translation. Also, there are workshops at every ATA Annual Conference and at meetings of large ATA-affiliated chapters, such as the Florida Chapter of ATA, National Capital Area Chapter of ATA, and the New York Circle of Translators. The material in these presentations is continually changing to meet the needs of the attendees. If you have questions about freelancing or organizing your business, please send them to the author at [hine@cstone.net](mailto:hine@cstone.net). We will try to answer them in the pages of this magazine or in the conference presentations.

*(Reprints of the original article as well as the presentations in the Proceedings of the 38th, 39th, and 40th ATA Annual Conferences are available from Headquarters.)*

#### Notes

- Jonathan T. Hine, "Is This Worth It? Economic Decision Making for Freelance Language Specialists," *The ATA Chronicle*, February 1998: 23-30.
- Jonathan T. Hine, *I Am Worth It! How to Set Your Price and Other Tips for Freelancers*, Freelancer's Self-Help Series 2 (Charlottesville VA: Scriptor Services, 1997).

You write "the rest of the story." The scene from Mark Adams' class comes from a real class, called Introduction to

# Setting Up an Independent Translation Business

by Nancy M Snyder

Last year's ATA survey showed that freelance translators are generally not earning high incomes. Of course, many of the survey respondents work freelance in addition to a full-time job. Having a hobby that pays \$5000 a year is great, but if you want to have a full-time career as a freelance translator, \$5000 isn't going to be enough.

There are many myths about being self-employed. I've been self-employed for more than a year now and I've heard a lot of the myths from my friends. My friends think I'm a lucky person. Those of you who are supporting yourselves by full-time freelance translating already know that luck has very little to do with it. Businesses aren't based on luck. They are started with a lot of hard work.

Let's look at some of the myths that exist about self-employment.

*MYTH: You can set your own hours.*

**FACT:** You can set your own hours, but they will probably be twice as long as the hours you have been working for someone else while your business is getting started.

It is a great freedom to plan your schedule to allow for activities that you might not otherwise be able to do because they are during nine to five business hours. You can avoid crowds and go shopping or to the bank or to the circus or anywhere else during the day when nobody else in town is going there. But don't forget—at night, while others are having fun, you're going to be working.

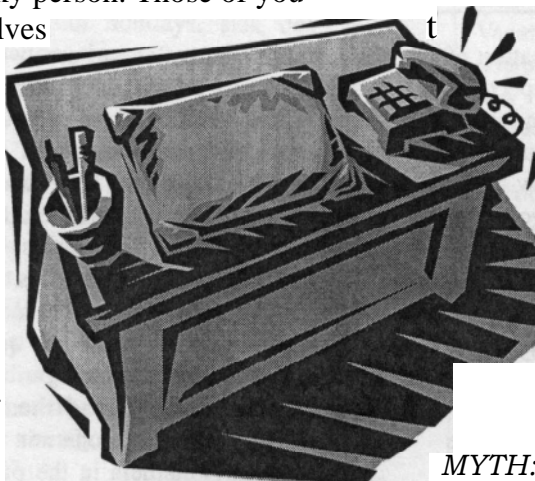
*MYTH: It's great to be your own boss. Nobody pushes you around. You make your own decisions.*

**FACT:** Serving a number of customers may be harder than having a boss. It can mean having a different set of specifications for a number of bosses and keeping them all straight. It can be more

complicated and more stressful than having one boss.

*MYTH: I'd love to be self-employed, but I have a family, so I need the benefits.*

**FACT:** You can be self-employed *and* have company-paid benefits. It takes careful planning and it takes responsibility to pay for your own benefits. Insurance plans available privately may be more expensive than corporate benefits, but investigate insurance programs offered by your local chamber of commerce or other professional organizations you belong to.



*MYTH: I'd like to do more freelancing, but I don't get very many calls.*

**FACT:** If you want to do more freelancing, you don't wait for calls. You call people. You set up a marketing plan. You stick with your marketing plan until you have built up clientele. The responsibility for getting more work lies with you. It's not a matter of chance.

*MYTH: If I had more confidence, I'd do something like that.*

**FACT:** I didn't have confidence. I worried a lot. When I make those marketing calls, my hands would shake. Luckily I could keep my voice from shaking. But I made the calls and got the customers. People who try things even though they are afraid gain confidence when they see their success.

There are two more myths, and these will be the focus of this article. Believing these myths is what holds people back as freelance translators and can keep them from making a good income from translation alone.

*MYTH: If clients would pay more and translators got more respect and were more appreciated and better compensated for what they did, it would be easy for me to make a living. Then I could freelance and make a good living.*

**FACT:** I am making a good living doing freelance translating, and I have not yet begun to do anything

about increasing pay for translators. In this country, the understanding of translation and its difficulties is abysmal. Translators don't get the money that they deserve for the amount of education required.

People in many other professions don't get paid enough for the work they do, either. But until you are in a position to do something about these conditions, you need to put all that aside. It's all very well to think about how the world should be and work for change. But complaining about how things are and wishing they were different can sometimes trap us into doing nothing. In order to accomplish anything, we have to start from where we are now. Who is in a better position to change the current status of translators? Someone who is employed full time somewhere in a demanding job and works freelance evenings and weekends and is so busy and exhausted he doesn't know whether he's coming or going? Or the person who is working full time and exclusively as a translator and is making enough money not to have to worry about paying the rent?

Once you are established in full-time work as a translator, you can be in touch with colleagues and translation consumers continually. That is when you begin to influence the future of the profession. You can band together with other translators and begin client education campaigns. Once you have established your reputation with your clients, you should be able to raise your rates based on their estimation of your value. Will they just drop a person whose work they like and whom they can trust, only to save a penny a word somewhere else?

There are many things we all want: better pay, more respect. They say you can't have it all, but I think it's best to say you can't have it all *today*. The most important thing is to pay the rent.

*MYTH: I don't want to have to deal with corporate politics. I don't want to have to deal with business, I don't like business, I just want to translate.*

**FACT:** If this is how you really feel, self-employment is not for you. In order to support yourself as an independent, self-employed freelance translator, you will *have* to deal with business. In fact, to be a self-employed freelance translator, you have a dual role. You not only have to translate, you have to learn how to set up a business. You have

keep the business running while you are employing yourself as a translator. In other words, you become your own employer and your own employee. Your job as translator is the fun part. For most of us who translate, that's the fun stuff, that's what we want to do. In order to have an opportunity to translate as a self-employed individual, we must learn what it takes to set up and run a business, and we must plan steps to reach that goal. Otherwise, we are going to be one of those freelancers waiting for the phone to ring and earning \$5000 a year.

**T**o run a freelance translation business, you need to know what it takes to run a business. Believe me, it takes a lot. Your best opportunity to learn about running a successful small business is available from the Small Business Administration. The SBA offers an all-day seminar given by SCORE. For \$10.00 you get eight solid hours of knowledge, hints and tips, from people who have spent many years running businesses. These are people who *know* about business. They tell you about taxes that you need to look into. They tell you about insurance that you need to look into. They tell you about legal aspects that you need to look into. They tell you about personality characteristics that you need to consider. They tell you about the cost of running a small business of your own. Not only the cost in dollars, but the emotional cost and strain on the family.

We're talking about a big job. Running a business is an enormous task and I think it's very important to find out whether it's a task you would like to undertake before you start. 80% of small businesses fail within the first year. Two main reasons they fail are undercapitalization and lack of planning.

In order to realistically assess where you are now, you need to have an understanding of how the translation business operates in this country. I was employed as the office manager of a translation agency in the Detroit area for two years. And, believe me, it's a job that I never want again. The pressure is tremendous. You need to understand that translation is a subset of the communications industry. And communications usually means, "I need this job yesterday." Agency people are very much under pressure to get jobs translated as quickly as possible. Agencies are also under

tremendous pressure in being responsible for the translators that they select. Anyone who thinks that an agency manager is a person who just sits and collects money while other people do the work doesn't understand what an agency does. An article by Doris Ganser in the March 1989 *ATA Chronicle* gave a vivid portrayal of a translation agency's tasks. Finding clients, dealing with clients, satisfying clients, is an enormous task, which you will soon find out if you become self-employed.

I am happy to have people doing that task for me in other cities. I don't work for agencies in Detroit because I want to be able to approach local businesses directly. Working for local agencies would exclude many companies from those I am able to contact. But I do work in Boston, I do work in Des Moines, I do work in several cities where agencies are my agents. They are selling my services for me, they are dealing with the customer for me and I'm willing to pay them for that. Of course, it's your choice whether you want to work for agencies or only for direct clients. If you do choose to work for agencies, try to do it with a cheerful heart. If you truly believe that you are being exploited by an agency, by all means don't work for that agency. But there are many agencies out there that will treat you honorably.

Based on my experience both as an agency manager and as a translator, I've boiled the main points down to four key words—ability, credibility, availability, and flexibility. All four of these are factors that have to be considered in the successful freelance career.

The first key, ability, requires that you make a thorough, honest assessment of yourself. First—your professional ability. Are you a skilled translator? Do you like to translate well enough to do it full time? If you have already been employed as a translator, these questions will be easy to answer based on previous experience. But if translation has played only a small role in your career, can you find some other ways to assess your ability? If you are really unsure of your ability, it might be best at first to ask someone to whom you do not intend to apply for work. This will allow you to assess your skills in a non-threatening atmosphere.

Equally important is your assessment of your own personality. If you have done relatively little freelance work, do you think it would bother you to spend so much time in a solitary occupation? Do you have enough self-discipline to turn off the TV? To tell your friends personal phone calls have to be short? To stay home and keep working in spite of loneliness? To be able to get right to work and not stop to tidy up the kitchen? Do you have the daring it will take to let go of the security of the corporate world where your boss plans your week and the personnel director plans your retirement?

Don't forget—daring does not mean unafraid. Every risk we take in life brings with it a certain element of fear. Daring is the ability to master your fear and do what needs to be done in spite of it.

Some people know deep in their hearts that they need supervision and a structured environment to do their best work. It will be best for these people to find themselves employment in a structured situation instead of attempting something that is not right for them.

The second key is credibility. Credibility—that's got to be the most important thing that you can give to your translation customer, whether a direct customer or an agency, to convince him to entrust you with the job. The average person in the United States doesn't even know another language. The customer needs confidence that you know what you are doing. It is very difficult in this country for a customer to get a translation checked. They can't check it themselves, so you must present your prospective customers with credentials that make you credible to them.

You also need to make yourself credible to agencies. Agencies get swamped with résumés. Even to receive an application form from an agency, you have to portray yourself as a credible translator. In business, as in life, first impressions can be critical. In the same way that you would shine your shoes, comb your hair and scrub your fingernails before an important interview, you must keep your résumé, cover letters and applications clean, neat, and free of typeovers, white-out and sloppy handwriting. A sloppy first contact can plant

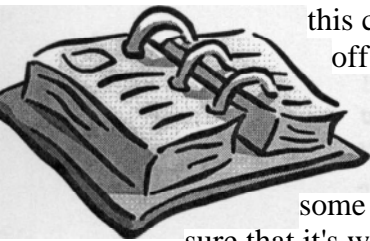
seeds of doubt in the customer's mind—if this person is this sloppy and doesn't even have the job from me yet, what will it come to when he has the job and loosens up a little?

What gives a customer the feeling of confidence? Not a bachelor's degree in German. Teaching a foreign language usually doesn't either. In industrial and business settings, the customer needs to see evidence not only of the knowledge of the language, but knowledge of a particular subject area. Academic or work-related experience in a specific field lends you a great deal of credibility.

One way to check out your credibility is to send letters to agencies describing your credentials and asking for an application. If you get a lot of applications, you begin to gain confidence in your professional credentials. However this doesn't mean you should quit your job and then send out a couple of letters, hoping that you will have a business. You want to set up a step-by-step program.

First, make an assessment of your personal and professional ability. Check out your credibility by contacting agencies and requesting applications. If it seems that you have realistically assessed your skills in relationship to market demands (which you will see from the type of response you get), you can begin to consider investing in some equipment that will make you available.

This brings us to the third key, availability. From time to time I read complaints in *The ATA Chronicle* that some people are just not sure that this computer stuff is paying off. Now, everyone wants us to have fax machines and modems which are quite expensive, and some translators are just not sure that it's worth the expense. You wouldn't hear such comments from translators in Detroit. Detroit is simply not a big translation town. It is essentially a one-industry town—automotive. We do not have a variety of international business. Since fax and modem have become affordable options, it is now possible to work for anyone, anywhere, no matter where you live.



In this business, no matter where I lived, I would still own a fax machine. I know they're expensive, but what it does is to give my customers that important sense of my availability.

Usually the customer, whether an agency or a direct client, needs the translation FAST. When they think of you and your fax machine, there is a little halo around your name. They think to themselves—now, there's a person we can get whenever we need him. That aura of availability makes it worth every penny that I paid for it and spend to maintain it. Clients need to feel that you are available.

I also have an answering machine on my phone. I change the message every time I go out or every time I'm not available. If I'm going to the post office and I'll be back in a couple minutes, I say so. If I'm out at lunch, I say so. If I'm at a meeting or at the library for research and I'm going to be gone for a longer period of time, I say that, too, but I also mention that I call in regularly for messages. I do this because I've worked at an agency. When there's a rush job and they're calling around for somebody, if they get a message that says, "We are not in the office right now. Please leave a message after the tone and we'll return your call as soon as we can," they don't know. You could be gone for an hour, you could be gone for five days.

The client's *belief* in your availability carries more weight than the reality of it. Last year, a week before the conference in Seattle, I sent a fax message to all my major customers to give them advance notice of my absence. It told the day I was leaving and the day my office would reopen. When I got back from Seattle, I sat in my office for two days without a single phone call. And then it dawned on me: in my clients' minds, I was "unavailable." I faxed everyone again to let them know I was back, and within an hour I had 2 new jobs on my desk. Don't forget, you may work for 6 agencies, but each agency may have 16 employees, 60 translators and 600 clients. It is up to you to keep their mind on you.

The fourth key is flexibility. This word is the one that will cause the most controversy.

We all like to do the job that we think is best and have it appreciated by others. We like people to

appr we of our personal style and applaud it. As translators, we are artists, not high-level typists, and we take pride in what we do. But, paradoxically, the translation business is also a service business. The customer may not always be right, but the customer is the one who is paying you. While I believe in client education, I don't believe in getting up on a high horse and telling the client what I will and will not do because I'm an artist. It is important to distinguish between style, which is a personal preference; and accuracy. Of course, we must always stand up for accuracy. If something is definitely incorrect, you must say so and explain why. But if the customer wants things in a certain way because it's a matter of taste, so be it. The only thing; you will do by trying to impose your personal style is cause irritation. And irritation can lead directly to loss of business.

Here's an example. Suppose I am translating information about a bottled drink that is being imported from Germany by a firm in New Jersey. I translate the slogan as "XYZ Cola—the Pop that Refreshes." The next week I get a letter back from my client in New Jersey saying that in the future, I should use the word "soda" instead of "pop." This sounds stupid to me. I'm from Michigan and a soda is a drink made by putting ice cream and flavored syrup in a glass and adding sparkling water. So, do I write back and tell my client in New Jersey that soda is the wrong word and anybody halfway intelligent would realize that pop was the right word to begin with? Of course not. This is an oversimplified example of the flexibility it takes to deal with corporate jargons and personal preferences when you are dealing with a number of customers.

My concept of flexibility extends even to pay rates. Even though I do excellent work, my personal philosophy is that I am just starting out and I have to pay the bills. Sometimes it's better to work at a rate that is somewhat less than I'm actually worth, than it is for my business to fold because I'm holding out for more pay. It is also part of my philosophy that as a newcomer, it is much more likely that people will give me a chance if my rates are competitive. Who is willing to pay top dollar for an unknown product? I am continually in a process of marketing myself so that I can replace lower-paying clients with higher-paying clients.

There is a third and final aspect of flexibility. Be flexible enough to set your sights a little lower to keep yourself in business. Create a safety net. If you live in a two-income family, this may not be necessary, but if you're on your own, you might need another source of income to fill in some slow spots until you are established. Don't forget, one of the most common causes of failure in business starts is undercapitalization—not having enough money to keep the business going.

Your safety net could be using any skill you have, but it needs to be part time and not demanding so that you can focus your full attention on your own business. Working full time and running a business is exhausting and not to be recommended for more than a short period of time.

It is important to take a realistic look at the current situation: at your own personal current situation and the current situation of the translation industry in this country. Starting from that realistic point, you need to very carefully plan small steps that will gradually bring you closer to whatever goal it is that you personally desire.

*Nancy Snyder holds a B.A. in German from Michigan State University and a Certificate in Computer Programming. After Volkswagen's Detroit offices, where she was employed as a Terminologist, closed last year, Ms. Snyder started her own translation business. She is ATA-accredited from German into English.*



# HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY MARKET YOURSELF TO TRANSLATION AGENCIES

*George P. Rimalower*  
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(as published in the *Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Translators Association*)

Keywords: Agencies, Bureaus, Translation Agencies

Abstract: Agencies use hundreds of translators; unless you stand out from the crowd, you may be overlooked. Solid translation skills are not all that it takes to be a successful translator. This session explores what can you do to enhance your standing with translation agencies. Translators attending this session will learn how they can become the kind of translators agencies prefer to work with. Discussions will address the best ways to approach a prospective agency and how to "sell" your services. Leading the session will be George P. Rimalower, President of ISI, a large nationwide translation agency based in Valley Village, California.

## 1. FINDING AN AGENCY

Agencies need translators to service their clients and translators need agencies to help them earn a living from their skills and expertise. By following some simple suggestions, the relationship can be a rewarding experience for both parties.

When deciding on which of the over 21,000 translation agencies to work with, don't limit yourself to your geographical location. Translators should sign up with as many agencies as they can regardless of location, especially in this age of computer communication. An excellent source for names of agencies around the country is the ATA Membership Directory. You can also look in your local telephone yellow pages and the yellow pages of large cities around the country. You can find telephone directories for major U.S. cities at your local library. Some agencies post their needs on AOL, CompuServe and the Internet; check forums\_

## 2. SELLING YOUR SERVICES

How can you establish a solid relationship with an agency? First you have to have the ability to translate in a precise, accurate and thorough manner. But you must also inform the agency of your abilities in an appealing manner.

### 2.1 Preparing A Persuasive Resume

In most cases, your resume and cover letter to an agency act as your interview with the agency so they must be persuasive. First impressions count.

- Personalize your correspondence by obtaining the correct name and title of the person to whom you are sending your resume. Personalized correspondence shows you have made the extra effort to present a professional showing of yourself.
- If your resume is thorough, efficiently designed and well written, it will catch the eye of agency personnel who must screen the large numbers of resumes that are mailed to the larger agencies each year.
- Your resume should be easy to read. Lay out your resume by using lists whenever possible and avoid long paragraphs of text. Proofread your work carefully. Errors reflect poorly on your ability to translate.
- List your name, address and telephone number. Immediately thereafter, state your language pairs and the type of computer software and hardware you use. Then state your specialties. These items are what agencies look for first.
- Computers are extremely important to translation agencies. Minimal hardware requirements are a word processor, high quality printer, fax machine and modem. Having an AOL or CompuServe account is also very helpful. E-mail and direct modeming are in common usage. Many agencies prefer to receive documents by e-mail or direct modem transmission—it saves time and reduces the chance of errors by eliminating the need for the agency to retype or scan the material into final form. Clearly state your computer skills and desktop publishing ability.
- Also include your credentials: schooling, technical knowledge, work experience, certifications, hobbies, memberships—all items that indicate and reinforce your areas of expertise and translating proficiency. A hobby in photography, for example, may not seem important to include on a resume to a translating agency, but if that agency needs a translator who is familiar with photographic terminology, it will know who to call.
- Resumes should also state the translator's ability to perform tasks other than translating, including editing or proofreading other translator's work. Also indicate if you are available for rush projects, localization and on-site support. Your willingness to undertake these projects makes you more valuable to an agency.
- Include nonreturnable, neatly assembled samples that show your areas of expertise. If you have desktop publishing ability, for example, make sure the samples reflect these skills as well as your font capabilities.
- As you obtain new equipment or offer new services, send your resume to agencies and alert them to your new services. However, do not keep sending the same resume over and over to the same agencies and contact person. This tactic soon becomes annoying and does more harm than good. If you move or change your telephone number(s), notify the agency in writing.

When should you expect to hear from an agency once it has received your resume? It's hard to say. Our translating agency keeps all resumes on file. It may be two weeks or two years before we call you. Don't be discouraged.

## 2.2 Networking

If you are not a member already, join ATA. It shows you are taking your translation career

seriously. Attend ATA national conferences, such as this one, and any regional ATA functions in your area. While at these conferences, talk with agency representatives and establish a relationship. By establishing a rapport with agency personnel at the conference, your resume will stand a better chance of getting noticed. Ask questions about the agency and how it operates. Find out if the agency is looking for particular language pairs, software or services you can provide that might give you a leg up on others. Always ask for business cards from agency representatives. If you decide to send material on your services to an agency, be sure to reference your meeting at the conference. ISI has met many qualified translators who are now part of our translator pool **at** ATA conventions. Make sure your cover letter contains a reference to your meeting. Meet other translators; they can be good people to guide you.

### 23 Other Skills to **Offer**

Agencies are always looking for translators who have editing skills, proofreading skills and desktop publishing expertise. Translators who are unfamiliar with desktop publishing software (PageMaker, QuarkXPress, etc.) should consider taking courses in these programs.

Localization skills are in demand. This is the process of adjusting the product or service to the country being targeted. For example, dates, times, measurements and colors need to be converted for the target market, taking into account the culture, traditions, taboos, superstitions, etc. of the target country.

Another valuable service is your ability to offer on-site support. This can include product testing, proper implementation, accommodating last minute changes,--etc.

### 3. AGENCY EXPECTATIONS FROM TRANSLATORS

Be realistic about your capabilities. Don't oversell yourself. A top notch translator should be able to translate about 3,000 words per day. If you promise 3,000 words a day but only deliver 1,000, the agency will pass you over the next time a project needs completion. If you continually miss deadlines, the agency will have no trouble finding someone else to take your place.

Many agencies edit the material submitted to them by their translators before they send the completed project to the client. Even so, it is advisable to self-edit or have a second party edit your finished work before sending your work to the agency. Discuss this with the agency.

Once you have taken on a translation assignment, it is up to you to make sure the job is completed on schedule. Unforeseen problems can and do occur. Have backup resources in place in case your computer or other equipment fails.

Whenever an assignment is given, make sure you are always clear before starting the project on deadline, format (Mac, PC, Word, WordPerfect, camera ready artwork, column text, etc.), how the completed material should be sent to the agency (modem, fax, overnight mail), the target audience (Portuguese for Brazil or Portugal, education level, familiarity with subject matter, etc.) and payment. Knowing this kind of information before beginning work can avoid major miscommunication problems later.

# 10 Top Tips for a Top-notch Translation Résumé

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By Eve Lindemuth Bodeux O

As you prepare for the upcoming ATA Annual Conference in Florida, keep these tips for a top-notch résumé in mind.

1. Highlight your source language(s), target language, and native language.
2. List all appropriate contact information: mailing address, phone, fax, e-mail, and Website. Don't lose out on opportunities because one of your contact points doesn't work or is unavailable. Give prospective clients various ways to contact you so they can use their contact method of choice.
3. When sending résumés by e-mail, take steps to ensure that the recipient can open your file. One option is to send a text file, which is the "least common denominator" in the file family and one that can be read by all systems and all software. To save a file as text in many programs, go to the File option on the screen's menu bar, scroll down to Save As, and when it asks what format you would like to save the file as, select Text Only.  
One disadvantage of text files is that they do not support any attributes (bold, italics, etc.). Rich Text Files (RTF) can also be read by many systems and software and allow you to be more creative (using bold, italics, underline, colors, graphics, etc.). To save a file as RTF, go to the File option on the screen's menu bar, scroll down to Save As, and when it asks what format you would like to save the file as, select Rich Text Format.  
Potential clients will often specify in what format they would like to receive résumés. Follow their instructions so that you "get in the door." Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) files allow you to create a résumé with style and formatting. Also, HTML files usually do not take up much memory, making it easy for the recipient to open. However, if you want to use graphics, it makes it a bit more complicated. You must include them in your e-mail and the recipient must save them to a directory. This is best avoided: send a simple HTML text file with no graphics. An added benefit of using text, RTF, or HTML files is that it is highly unlikely that you will transmit viruses through these formats.
4. If you choose to send your résumé as a Word document or other file that may contain viruses, purchase a virus scanner and update it frequently. Nothing is more embarrassing than sending a possible client the newest virus. Having an up-to-date virus scanner also protects your system and allows you to send and receive project files without worries.

5. At the ATA Annual Conference, you will most likely pass out hard copies of your résumé. Be sure to use high quality paper and a high quality printer. Make sure the font is large enough to read comfortably. Make it short—one or two pages maximum. Company representatives and potential clients will have a lot of paper to cart back, so make your presentation compact.

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...Always be truthful about past experience and capabilities. Do not overestimate your target-language capabilities...

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6. Always be truthful about past experience and capabilities. Do not overestimate your target-language capabilities. It is the industry standard to translate into your native language, and if you translate into more than one language, be prepared to justify your claim to agencies or other industry professionals who may be interested in your services.
7. Specify your fields of expertise. Staking out areas of specialization gives you credibility and encourages clients to contact you for your focused knowledge.
8. Be sure to list (and keep updated) your hardware, software, and technical skills. Do you have Trados or other productivity software? Are you an expert at Illustrator? What versions of MS Word or WordPerfect do you have? Let clients know what equipment you have so that possible compatibility issues can be dealt with up front and/or so you can impress them with the latest and

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## 10 Top Tips for a Top-notch Translation Résumé Continued

greatest. Do you know HTML, C++, or have desktop publishing skills? Sharing this knowledge makes you more competitive in today's high-tech workplace, no matter what your fields of expertise.

9. Use appropriate jargon. Don't use terminology that is over your client's head. If your client has never heard of "localization," you may want to briefly explain what it means. If your client doesn't know what Star Transit is, it won't help

you get the job. Adding a clarifier like "translation productivity software" can make all the difference. On the other hand, if your client has 10 years of experience in the translation industry, using insider terms makes it appear that you are "in the know."

10. Check that there are no spelling errors or typos on your résumé. This cannot be emphasized enough. Spell check and then let time elapse between making updates and finalizing your résumé—it gives you a fresh eye to catch mistakes that might slip through. Ask a friend or two to proof it to make sure.

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# Marketing Your Accreditation

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By Julien Marquis

1. De facto recognition of our professionalism within the RCNA territory, or the auto-affirmation of our professionalism

**A** couple of years back Alex Gross told the participants of the ATA conference that the known and visible number of translators in the U.S. was only the tip of the iceberg. He mentioned figures and extrapolations that I do not recall exactly, but I do know for a fact that ATA membership has almost doubled since that conference. The other fact is that ATA conferences have been attracting more and more delegates year after

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...If you are a beginning translator, volunteering your services for specific tasks within our association will enable you to use your achievements as marketing arguments for your professional services...

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year, and corporate sponsors and advertisers are also increasing, as your conference program will attest. Paradoxically, even your legislators are more aware of the intra-linguistic value of translation as a business: in the post-Reaganomics era, or should I say, in the Gingrichian era, government expenses are to be banned, and that is probably why some of your legislators think English should be officially recognized as the sole language in use in the U.S.

Obviously, for all those legislators who speak only one language, the use of another language is an expense because they have to use a translator or an interpreter. Such a negative recognition is, nevertheless, a form of de facto recognition of the value of our professional services. Any publicity is good publicity when you do not have to pay for it. The NAFTA effect on the translation indus-

try has also shed a new light on the translation profession. In any country you need inter-linguistic communication to sell the "image of a product" (Coke), and this is achieved through translation. The best example I can offer you is the Olympics in Atlanta. In the U.S. you did not see the inter-linguistic advertising "on the tube" in Canada. It is in Canadian broadcasting, with its minimum four official TV channels (two in French and two in English), that we have been experiencing the full force of inter-linguistic audio-visual advertisements. Not to mention the International francophone TV5 channel, or Telelatino from Italy! For those with little experience of multilingual translation, this was a most intense lesson in creative translation—whether in French, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish. The Soccer World Cup in the U.S. three years ago produced the same kind of advertising circus, and was a gold mine for public relations firms that produce multilingual communications texts. That is also a de facto recognition of the translation industry as a necessity for selling or distributing anything in the "global economy." An excellent professional service is also helping to promote reco<sup>g</sup>

ber of a professional association is a plus for your customers who have to deal with several languages and who are, most of the time, awkward in their own language. or as a French author used to say, "unilingual illiterates."

## 2. Establishing a network and building professional credibility

Joining a professional association of translators could be your first step toward creating and becoming part of a network, a sort of "Translator's Web," like ATA or any other FIT member association. Do not be a passive member of your association—become proactive. Volunteering your services will increase your visibility. And if you help build the credibility of your association and its accredited members, you will benefit yourself from this newly acquired credibility. If you are a beginning translator, volunteering your services for specific tasks within our association will enable you to use your achievements as marketing arguments for your professional services. Registration in the directory of your association will make you part of a specific network. As a volunteer, you will extend that network because your name will be circulated for other professional reasons; in the end you will get more calls than you **can deal with**.

As a Canadian translator, I should also mention that the "snowball effect" will net you clients and calls. Again, excellent performance of a service is the best marketing and networking argument in your favor; when your own clients will refer you to others. Last year I agreed to do volunteer work on

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## Marketing Your Accreditation

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the translation of a book for charity. The week after completing the volunteer assignment, I received a call asking me to translate another book, a paid translation this time. Best of all, translating the second book introduced me to an author with a style compatible with my own. I called him and ended up translating one of his latest books, this time on my own initiative and that of the editor who accepted my translation.

As a professional translator you should be ready to take on the "globe." How? The magic words these days seem to be "information superhighway" and "World Wide Web." On this subject, I recommend an excellent article on using the Internet—Gabe Bokor's "Translators Online" in the July 1996 issue of the *ATA Chronicle*. I will not enter into the details or extol the merits of one Net access provider over another, but the Internet and the World Wide Web are indeed two means of putting the global marketplace at our doorstep. As power users of modern communication technology, we should be ready to take advantage of easier access not only to all kinds of information, but also to potential customers.

As in any other field of human business activity, there are traps to avoid, such as sending text files to your customers via e-mail or the Internet. If you are not aware of the encoding and decoding capacities of your software, you may end up in difficulties. Some services that provide access to the Internet supply you with software that takes care of such problems. According to Gabe Bokor:

"The Foreign Language Forum (FLEFO) on Compuserve is the largest gathering of translators in cyberspace...The Internet allows us to market our services worldwide and to communicate with our international clients at a negligible cost. It also forces us to compete in the global marketplace, often with colleagues established in low-cost, low-rates countries."

For good marketing and public relations, it is highly advisable that you make sure that the capabilities for encoding and decoding text files offered by your Internet access provider software are compatible with those of your customers. I recommend using Compuserve for the same reason Gabe Bokor mentions in his article:

"Compuserve supports "binary" e-mail, i.e., you can upload (send) any word-processed, graphic, or DTP file, or even an application, as an e-mail message, which can then be downloaded (retrieved or displayed) by the addressee in its original format." It would be unprofessional to claim that you are fully capable of communicating on the "Net" or by e-mail only to discover that your client can't even open the text file sent over the "Net."

It is also critical for your professional image to have a contingency plan so you can make sure your client will receive the disk with your translation by the stipulated deadline (usually by modem or, as a last resort, by courier). Your clients must have complete faith in your credibility and the reliability of your professional service. "Impeccable!" as we say in French.

3. Promote professional services that reflect the ethical principles and sound business practices in use within the profession

Not so long ago we were speaking of the global village, global economy, and global politics. That resulted in the NAFTA economic space, the European Community space, Open sky policies, etc. Amalgamations, regroupments, and buyouts stemmed from that economic

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...As power users of modern communication technology, we should be ready to take advantage of easier access not only to all kinds of information, but also to potential customers...

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trend. Multinationals companies needed to expand to acquire their share of global markets or to carve their niches before others occupied the terrain. These days, the writing on the wall is the information superhighway, cyberspace, cybemaut, e-mail, Internet, the Web and the World Wide Web.

Take a step back to put this into perspective, and what you are looking at is neither more nor less the same kind of jump forward as the one Marconi

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## Marketing Your Accreditation

*Continued from page 17*

enabled us to take not so long ago with his now-forgotten transmission of a wireless radio signal over the Atlantic Ocean. In the case of the global village, the media were the secret weapon or rather the tools, and in the case of cyberspace, the Net, the World Wide Web, and e-mail are your new toys to help you communicate and sell and market your skills.

In French we have a saying, "tout nouveau tout beau" (anything new is better). But if you take a hard look around you will find "a boire et a manger" (anything and everything) in cyberspace. The sect for Zeus announcement (show brochure), the computer paper article about celebrities in cyberspace (show newspaper) or famous cybernauts, hate literature and financial advice and, of course, love and sex in a virtual reality context.

So now you too want to build your own site on the Web. Instead of billboards, newspaper ads, and ads in your professional newsletter, you want to go cyberad and announce your services on the information superhighway. You want a distinctive site; after all, you are part of the communication chain, and are providing intra-linguistic communication between peoples and cultures.

What language are you going to use on your site? The "lingua franca" seems a good bet—English. Good, one less decision to make! Where do you start? Well, let's suppose you have already subscribed to one of the suppliers providing access to the Internet and the Web. Then you will need a site page designed for you by a pro—or you can do it yourself using an off-the-shelf, user-friendly program. This will automatically convert all your commands into HTML (hypertext mark-up language) or Java

codes, the real transmission and coding/decoding languages used in cyberspace.

Now you have to decide what you are going to announce and how. Well, before you do that I recommend a read-through of the code of ethics of your professional association to make sure that you do not advertise services in an unprofessional manner. I also recommend that you not be too flashy or flamboyant about your services; remember, you will still have to deliver! As a small piece of advice, the old saying "let the buyer beware" still applies on the World Wide Web. Try to check the references of potential clients or colleagues before doing business with them. A colleague of mine called me to check on a client in Paris, France, and learned that the company still owed me money from when I moved to Canada 17 years ago.

Your work will not be virtual work only, since your clients will still want you to provide them with cybertexts or cybertranslations. They will expect the jobs you e-mail them not only to be print-ready, but also to be of the same quality as the advertisement on your site page claims! So you see, the language has changed but the name of the game remains the same: be professional and deliver good quality work.

What has also changed is the transmission speed of your work and the distances it can now travel in a matter of seconds or minutes. This is a tool for the professional "truchements" (translators) of the world, to help them help others communicate even faster than before. Remember the deadline "the translation was due yesterday"—on the Web it was due two weeks ago! "Faster, further. ...." strange, but I seem to recognize these words from an event held not so long ago! In any case it applies perfectly to the new deadlines we can expect from our new clients in cyberspace. When sorely pressed by cyberclients deadlines, we will have to face some hard decisions regarding quality standards. "*Ne confonde: pas vitesse et precipitation!*" (Do not confuse speed and panic). Our professionalism will have to be stronger than ever in this new context of the cyber-economy. But once a professional always a professional, right?

So, if you are a recognized professional translator, duly accredited by your professional association, you will have many advantages over the isolated individual who is not part of the human web, that network of professionals who can help him or her out in case of difficulty. In other words, you will be a cybertranslator rooted in the reality of your professional community. So much for the virtual reality of the cyberworld.

I will leave the conclusion of these cybercomments to you and hope you do not turn into cyborgs overnight. I kind of like what I can still touch, see, and speak to—that's the main reason I attend the ATA conferences. After all, I could have sent you this cybergibberish over the World Wide Web. *Mingwetch, .aguse!* (Thank you, that's all!) (Plains Cree). |



# Top 10 Traits of Good Translators

or How to Perform Nearly Perfectly in the Unlikely Event that You are not Already Doing so (in the Eyes of an Agency Coordinator)

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By Patricia L. Bown

## 1. Format your resume so that pertinent points can be easily noticed.

Your native language, language pairs, and years of experience as a translator ought to be immediately visible to any reader flipping through a stack of resumes. List your subject matter specializations or representative types of projects.

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...Practical tips about what one agency translator coordinator finds helpful in developing and maintaining smooth working relationships with translators...

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## 2. Have your fax on at all times.

Maybe not literally, although that certainly is appropriate. The point is to be accessible. If you are not immediately available by phone during business hours, then you should be checking your fax, e-mail, and/or voice messages frequently throughout the day. Many times it is not possible to wait even a couple of hours to hear from a translator about availability for a specific job.

## 3. Keep up with the industry.

**Be the expert** on linguistics, resources in content areas, and the tools of the trade (software). Know where **to** look for answers. Let the industry change around you only if that is the result of your business decision to more narrowly define your niche in the market!

## 4. Say "no" when necessary.

**Decline** a project if you are truly reluctant to do it. If you can't handle a project for whatever reason, say so (and give the reason—that helps your client learn more about what you do best). There nearly always **is** another

workable solution for the party trying to talk you into accepting a job.

## 5. Say "yes" to a nuisance job every now and then.

On the other hand (referring back to number 4), go ahead and say "yes" every now and then when your reluctance to accept a project is because it's one of those jobs that's of the unpleasant-but-someone's-got-to-do-it variety. The client to whom you occasionally say "yes" to will not want to totally alienate you by sending you only nuisance jobs.

## 6. Give advance notice of looming disaster.

Disasters nearly always seem to be related to delivery schedules. If you know you will have to miss a due date for any reason, it's better to warn your client sooner rather than later. It's helpful if you can provide a reason for the disaster that will be useful in explaining the delay.

## 7. Miss only one deadline per job.

Sometimes a project seems fated to suffer unavoidable setbacks from the moment it first crosses someone's mind. There probably isn't anything you can do to stop the cycle of madness on such a project. Even so, credibility (your client's and your own) deteriorates rapidly if Plan **B** has to **be followed** by Plan C, or worse. Do everything you can to prevent having to arrange more than one extension.

## 8. Turn in jobs early!

If you happen to complete a project early, go ahead and deliver it. Your client learns more about how quickly you can work (and also knows that you might be available for more work).

## 9. Express your preferences.

Help your client get to know what suits you best by offering information about your preferences—what you enjoy most; what dictionaries you have; how you prefer to receive work, get messages, etc.; if you'd rather volunteer for a root canal than translate a certain subject; if you always or never work on weekends; if you routinely work through the night, so please don't call before noon...anything! You'll have a better chance of getting more of what you want in **a manner you prefer**.

## 10. Teach your client.

If you find yourself mentally listing all the things **you wish** your client knew, go ahead and offer some education. Translator coordinators particularly welcome your expertise on matters that will help them fine-tune their skills in providing accu-

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## Top 10 Traits of Good Translators Continued from p. 14

rate information about language, word count, and content. Also, your clients (often not the end-users of the translation) like to pass along helpful information to their own clients. The people that generate the demand for translations sometimes have no practical knowledge of what transpires between order and delivery. In many cases, it's the translators who can best initiate a flow of useful information to help remedy this situation.

Just one more tip...

### 11. Bring up problems.

A mutually beneficial business relationship requires an ongoing investment of time and energy by both parties. One of the aspects with the most potential for reward in any good relationship is dealing with problems in a professional manner. If you value the business relationship, it's worth bringing up and resolving problems, and your client should do the same with you.

*ata*

# Some Hints to Help Beginners in the Professional Business World

This article appeared in Spanish in "Molinos de Viento" an Argentine publication for translators and interpreters, Website: <http://www.atiba.org.ar>, [atibialatiba.org.ar](mailto:atibialatiba.org.ar)

By *Natascha Ostroumoff*

When the word "professional" is applied to a person or service, it usually means that they have the special skills required to do a quality job in their field. The word also carries with it a series of attributes which extend beyond work-related experience, covering such traits as general demeanor and even one's appearance. As translators, it is especially important that we project a professional attitude.

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...if [the translator] has neglected to present himself or herself in a professional manner, then these qualifications will not make any difference...

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## What Makes a Professional?

For one, wearing clothes that are appropriate to a particular work environment undoubtedly contributes to our professional image. A pair of shorts or tights, a faded T-shirt, and sneakers are most adequate for the beach or for a Saturday afternoon at the club, but are obviously "taboo" for a meeting with fellow translators and something very close to a capital sin when visiting a client or a prospective client. True professionals are expected to wear the right clothes for the right occasion: a well-tailored suit with a matching shirt and tie for men and a suit and skirt or trousers for ladies. A person who is not well-groomed or dressed appropriately will certainly make a very bad impression in business circles. And it may well be that such a person is an excellent translator and knows perfectly well all the terminology in a complicated translation project, but if that person has neglected to present himself or herself in a professional manner, then these qualifications will not make any difference. As the saying goes: the first impression is the one that counts.

## Making Contact

When meeting prospective clients, it is usually necessary to make an appointment (this process might take several phone calls). When we finally get Mr. John Harris on the line, we should introduce ourselves saying: "This is Jane Pritt. I am a professional translator, a member of the American Translators Association, who is calling on behalf of Mr. Thompson (always give the name of the person who referred you). May I visit you to discuss the document that you need translated?" After this introduction, you can go about setting a date and time for a meeting.

You should always arrive five minutes early for an appointment, so as to give yourself enough time to find the correct address and pertinent floor in the building. Being late is rude and does not project a very positive professional image. Upon arrival, greet the receptionist and say: "Good afternoon. I am Jane Pritt. Could you please tell Mr. John Harris I am here for the meeting?" It is at this point that you hand over a business card, which may look something like the sample business card shown in Figure 1.

A good personal first impression is most important, and handing out a business card is a very good start. The new computer software programs currently available (and a little bit of imagination) make it possible to print out business cards in no time. Simply research the tools, envelopes, and labels menu on your Word 6 or 7 or Word Perfect and make use of the Avery business cards.

A meeting with a client or potential client is certainly a test for the professional translator (and I do recommend a personal meeting once in a while, although using the e-mail or messenger services is a very good resource). Practice is essential for everything, and you will feel more confident as you meet with more and more prospective clients. At the end of the meeting do not forget to thank the person who spoke with you for taking the time to see you.

## What To Do When You Get the Job

When you are given the document that needs to be translated, ask for a copy of it (this shows you wish to safeguard the

Figure 1: Sample Business Card

### Jane Pritt

Professional Translator

Member, American Translators Association

Tel: (212) 453-0000

1200 Anystreet

Fax: (212) 454-1000

Anytown, NY 10002

E-mail: [JanePritt@taol.com](mailto:JanePritt@taol.com)

original) and request permission to take it to your office. Try to avoid giving a price quote on the spot, since you will need time to analyze the document and count the words in order to make a proper estimate. When you sit down to look at the *text*, number the pages if they are not already numbered. Carefully analyze all the difficulties that you encounter. Write down any troublesome words and look them up in the dictionary, and then ask the client about the preferred terminology.

Generally, a translator will count the words in two or three lines and make an estimate of the words per line. This total is then multiplied by the number of lines on the page, which gives you the total of words per page, and this number is multiplied by the number of pages in a document. Add approximately 25 percent more words when you translate from English-into-Spanish, and use this figure as the average total number of words. Your quote to the client should include date, an estimated total cost of the translation, cost per word or 100 words, and the expected turnaround time.

A professional translator always meets the deadlines. Perhaps you have to work overnight if necessary, but you should never fail to deliver the translation on time. Failure to do so will surely result in the loss of a client.

Figure 2: Sample Cover Sheet

*Translation From Spanish*

Date Translated: August 26, 1999

Christopher Columbus and the Discovery of the Americas

Translated Especially For (name of company)  
by

Jane Pitt,  
Professional Translator  
1200 Any Street  
Anytown, NY 10002  
Tel: (212) 453-0000  
Fax: (212) 453-1000

E-mail: [JanePritt@aol.com](mailto:JanePritt@aol.com)

Once you have the client's approval to go ahead with the project, sit down in front of your computer and translate. Since you have already analyzed the document, you know the difficulties that may arise and are prepared for them. You should also develop a network of professional consultants or fellow translators whom you can call to ask for help. For example, if you have a rather awkward word related to mar-

itime trade in that piece about Christopher Columbus, do not forget that your friend has an uncle in the merchant marine. Always go to real-life sources for references, because the dictionaries sometimes do not give you the correct terminology (or if you find several definitions in the dictionary, select the correct one with the help of your consultant).

#### Delivering the Document

When you submit a translation it is a good idea to submit it with a cover sheet like the one shown in Figure 2.

This cover sheet is a marketing tool. Just like the business card, the cover sheet is a way to ensure that your clients remember you because it bears your name and contact information.

Whenever possible, follow the format of the original text and copy any tables or figures. Scanners and all sorts of different software tools help us in the task of preparing a professional job. If you do not know how to make charts or drawings, get them done professionally at a copy shop, but do not leave them out (unless the client specifically asked you to do so). When translating into Spanish, we frequently need more space for the captions. This problem may be solved either by increasing the space available or decreasing the font size.

As you can tell from what has already been mentioned, a translator, aside from being an expert in the language and subject **matter** being translated, should have a comprehensive knowledge of computers. You need to know about different software programs, how to convert and open a document that is in a different software format, and how to save documents properly in order not to lose them. It is essential to have a computer consultant handy for those dreadful moments

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### Some Hints to Help Beginners in the Professional Business World Continued from p. 19

when that translation you have just finished simply vanished from the screen!!

When you have finished your translation (which you should have saved on the hard drive as well *as* on a diskette for safety), leave it for a little while (if possible) and then read it aloud in order to improve on the target language as much as possible. Do your own editing, and make all the changes necessary to avoid the problem of having your masterpiece sound like a translation. Then read it against the original in order to check that you have not missed anything, and that you understood everything correctly. Certainly it would be better if you have a colleague look over your translation to check the style and correct the text in order to minimize errors.

In case you cannot find out the meaning of a word or you can't discover what the meaning of a particular acronym is, use a translator's note to explain what you think it may be and write out the translation in Spanish.

The translation project may be delivered to the client by electronic mail or messenger. Ideally, you should deliver a hard copy with a diskette in a folder. Remember to send your invoice with the job, stating payment terms and your bank account number (if you have agreed that payment be sent automatically to your account).

After you have sent out the job (either by messenger or  
ii  
many e-mails get lost and how many messengers leave the urgent job at the reception desk where it lies until the next day!!).

A glossary of terms is always useful in the translation process. Organize a glossary for each client and use it for future translation assignments, adding on new words as you go along.

# Internet Search Strategies for Translators

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By Manon Bergeron and Susan Larsson

*Note: The following is based on the workshop "Stumped? The Answer May Be on the Net...Somewhere," which has been presented by the authors worldwide.*

**T**he Web is an essential part of the translator's daily life, a source of information that allows us to complete tasks that would never before have been possible without access to a major reference library. It may seem chaotic, but the right techniques help us find the information we need. Each new translation topic pre-

keep it uncomplicated. With a few simple symbols and rules, you can master the search engines on the Web.

## Simple Engine Math

Four simple symbols are all you need:

1. +
2. -
3. "
4. \*

- By placing a plus or a minus sign in front of a term or phrase, you can require the term/phrase to be found or excluded from your search.
- To search for a phrase, lock the words together with quotation marks.
- Many engines automatically search for singular and plural forms. but you may use the wildcard symbol (\*) to broaden your search.

Here are some examples:

- a) If you search for +white +house, only hits with both white AND house will be on the page, but they may be anywhere on the page.
- b) If you search for "white house", only hits about a (any) white house will be found.
- c) If you search for +"white house" + "bill clinton", you will get hits (most likely) about the White House in Washington, DC—and the president, of course.
- d) If you search for +"white house" + "bill clinton" -starr, you will narrow the search a bit.
- e) If you search for poli\*, you will have hits for politics, policy, police, political, etc.

Note the Syntax:

Make sure you put the signs immediately before the keywords or phrases in your entry, without any spaces between the sign and the term. You may use any or all of the symbols within the same query, just leave a space between each keyword or phrase.

## 10 Steps for an Efficient Search

- 1) Analyze your question first to determine the type of search and search engine.

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.. Studying the topic in both source and target languages helps the translator develop a working vocabulary used in the field; searching the Web will provide examples of both...

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sents terminological challenges. - We turn to the Web to find terminology that is not available in our dictionaries. Studying the topic in both source and target languages helps the translator develop a working vocabulary used in the field; searching the Web will provide examples of both. Even if the source pages about the subject are not available in translation, by finding similar pages about the subject in the target language, we get the right feel for the language used in the field. In some cases, we can match the terminology up with the information found on the source language page: in others, we have to be satisfied with learning to speak the language of just that topic. In the end, the goal is to find the right term. from the right source, which is used in the right situation.

Searching the Internet can be as simple or as complicated as you wish to make it. Personally, we prefer to

- Do you want to learn more about the topic in the source or target language?
  - Do you want the definition of a specific term?
  - Do you want to find the translation of a specific term?
- 2) *Take the time to formulate your query.*
  - 3) *Choose keywords.*
    - Use several keywords
    - Use a keyword and add another one to restrict it to the appropriate field.
  - 4) *Too many hits?* Try narrowing your search further by adding another word or two to your query to zero in the right field. For example, if you are searching for respirators for hospital use and not for protection while working, change the search to +respirator +hospital.
  - 5) *Narrow your search.* To do this, you can also exclude a specific term from the search by putting a minus sign in front of the word. This is especially useful if your search yields too many hits for an irrelevant Website or topic.
  - 6) *If there are no hits, check spelling or try another search engine.*
  - 7) *Evaluate the quality.* Once you have asked the right questions and found the answers, you must decide if the solutions are acceptable. Check the quality by looking at the information on the page. Is the context similar to that of your text? Who is the author? Look at the language and grammar.
  - 8) *Validate your findings.* Make sure the term works in the target language in the proper context by looking it up again in the search engine. Who uses it? How?
  - 9) *Bookmark any site that looks promising.*
  - 10) *Keep bookmarks in a current project folders. or file into folders by topic.*

#### Useful Tips

- Use lowercase letters to capture all hits (if uppercase is used, only uppercase hits are included).
- Don't scroll: use the browser's Find function (CTRL-F) to locate the search term.
- Try shortening the URL to the next subheading, down to the main address. Valuable information could be hiding just an address away.

- To get more information, follow the links shown on the page you found.
- Skim the search engine results before clicking on links—sometimes the answer is right there.

#### Glossaries

The Web offers a large array of glossaries, and many people ask how to find a glossary on a certain topic. However, even if the topic is correct, it may not contain the term you need. If you find your term in a glossary, you get the definition—but not the term in the target language: a bilingual glossary is needed for this. Follow these steps to find: a) a glossary in a specific field, b) a term in a glossary, c) a bilingual glossary in a specific field, and d) a term in a bilingual glossary.

*To find a glossary in a specific field:*

**+field +glossary**

Use the word for glossary in the same language as the field: glossaire, ordlista, glosario, glossario, glossar, glossarium. This is useful for either target or source terminology. It is also helpful for acquiring an understanding of a subject and the general terminology used. It's not helpful for finding the definition of an exact term.

*To find a term in a glossary:*

**+term +glossary**

Use the word for glossary in the language of the term to find the definition of the term in that language. This is helpful for understanding the specific term, with the added benefit of seeing other terminology in the same field. It is not helpful for finding the term in the other half of the language pair.

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## Internet Search Strategies for Translators Continued

*To find a bilingual glossary in a specific field:*

+field +glossary +source\_language  
+target\_language

Example: To find a finance glossary in French and English, the query would be:

+finance +glossary +English +French  
or  
+finance +glossary +English

- The combination of English, anglais, French, or français is irrelevant—combine at will.
- Use the word for glossary in either language.

*To find a term in a bilingual glossary:*

+term +glossary +source\_language  
+target\_language

Example: To find the word "underwriter" in French and English, the query would be:

+underwriter +glossary +English  
+French  
Or  
+underwriter +glossary +English

- The combination of English, anglais, French, or français is irrelevant—combine at will.
- Use the word for glossary in either language.

Glossaries are not the only source of terminology on the Web. Many pages have been translated; some have even been translated well (joke). You can search for a word in the source language and add the target language to the query, with the goal of finding a page with a link to an identical page in the second language.

Example:

+arsredovisning +English

In the best situation, the search results in a page in Swedish with a link to its equivalent in English—a glossary waiting to happen. If not, the page has the word "English" somewhere in the text.

Another method of letting the Web "translate" for you is to find a word in the source language on a page in the target language with an explanation or translation.

Example:

Search for the following word with the language set to French:

riksdag

This will bring you to a page in French with the proper terminology for the word "riksdag," which is written in parentheses. Remember to verify the source to ensure reliability.

Yet another method of using the search engine to "translate" takes advantage of the truncation feature. If you enter the beginning of a word and end it with \*, Alta Vista will search for all words that start with those letters. This can be used as a lazy translator's tool, since many words have the same roots in different languages, truncate the Swedish word "silanisera" by searching for silani\* in English. Add a word which will keep the results in the right field (in this case, the topic was dental implants and the search was qualified with +implant).

Example:

+silani\* +implant

Search for the term in English, and there is the answer: silanization. Verify the results by searching for the English term to ensure that it is used properly by the right native speakers.

In addition to finding terminology, you can use the search engine to verify that a term is actually used by a certain group. For example, to check whether a word is used in British English, take advantage of the search engine's "fielding function." In Alta Vista, search by "host" as shown in the example below. (Other search engines have similar functions. Check the help pages for explanations.)



Example:

host:uk ombudsperson  
host:uk ombudsman

Run these two searches to find out which is more common in British English; the results:

Ombudsperson-30  
Ombudsman-3,615!!

Sometimes a picture can be worth quite a few of a translator's words. Search engines can help you find a photo that will make things fall into place—or will just allow you to have a good time. Find a picture of a tractor to help you with your work, or why not have a little fun in the example below. You can use the search engine math mentioned earlier (+ - Again. use Alta Vista's fielding function, and this time search by "image":

Example:

image: +"bill gates" +pie  
image: +tractor +"john deere"

Try these techniques. and watch your efficiency soar. While the actual search engines have not been discussed here, the ones we find to be most useful in our work are listed below. Check them out and review their features and help pages.

#### Search Engine Addresses

AltaVista at <http://www.altavista.com> (language features, fielding)

HotBot at <http://www.hotbot.com> (language features)

Northern Light at <http://www.northernlight.com> (folders)

Inference Find at <http://www.infind.com/infind> (metasearch, reduces duplicates)

Dogpile at <http://www.dogpile.com> (metasearch, select search engines)

Google at <http://www.google.com> (unique relevance approach)

Ask Jeeves at <http://www.askjeeves.com> (natural language questions)

#### Useful Addresses

Mabercom at

<http://www.mabercom.com>

Translators' Site du jour at

<http://home.ncia.com/-slarsson/sitejour.html>

Beaucoup (lists of search engines) at

<http://www.beaucoup.com>

## EVOLVING INTERNET STRATEGIES: WORKING THE WEB

Susan C. Rials  
Independent Translator

(as published in the *Proceedings of the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Translators Association*)

**Abstract:** Today's translator has access to a vast array of research possibilities on the World Wide Web. Millions of pages are just a few mouse clicks away. The working translator must develop strategies to find the best information as efficiently as possible (and before succumbing to information overload). This article addresses some approaches that can help optimize the search process. In each step, from the planning phase through the search evaluation phase, there are specific actions that can be taken to improve your searches. Careful planning, creative thinking and the intelligent use of resources can lead you to the answers you need to improve the quality of your translations.

### 1. INTRODUCTION .

This article was prepared from the perspective of a working translator who is not a professional researcher but who uses the web every day to improve the quality of her work. It addresses approaches and strategies that she finds effective in finding what she needs on the web. No miraculous tricks can save the researcher from putting in some hard work, but these pointers may help others focus their research efforts and improve their own search capabilities.

### 2. PLANNING YOUR SEARCH

Before you start any web searching, explore the options available to you. Examine various online sources and test several search tools to see how they work. Read through their help files. Find out what others have to say about them. Run sample searches on two or three different sites to see how they work. Then you can begin to plan your searches for a specific translation. First, think about what you hope to find. Are you looking for general information about a client or a concept? Do you need terminology? Are you looking for glossaries? Do you just want to get a feel for your client's documentation style? This will help you decide where and how to begin. Think about what research would be better done elsewhere. Try to consolidate as many searches into one session as possible. Now you should select keywords for your search.

### 3. SELECTING KEYWORDS

Using the right keywords is one of the most significant ways to improve your search results. The choice of the most suitable terms along with the best combination of those terms, and the syntax you use in each search engine or database, will be a key factor in determining your success. Some pointers are:

- Nouns are usually the best place to start.
- More than one keyword will focus your search better, too many could narrow your options too much.
- Think of the person who created the website that you think will have the answers you need. What keywords would that person be likely to have used? What synonyms might also lead you to good information?
- Are there alternate words used widely to describe the concept you are looking for? For example, if you are looking for information about web sites, you might find information under "web site" as well as "website" or even "home page."
- Should you consider alternate spellings? If you are searching for information about software localization, you might consider searching for both "localization" and "localisation." If you want to cover "localized" as well, you will need to adapt your search syntax.
- Are there multiple meanings for the keyword? If you want information about a table, are you talking about furniture or a chart of numbers? You might also get hits about round table discussions, table tennis or a table of contents. This means you need to add words to focus your search. Searching for both table and furniture will focus the search.
- Are you looking for an exact phrase? Put the phrase within quotation marks. Searching for "coffee table" will give you hits about coffee tables, while searching for the term without the quotation marks could return hits about coffee or about tables in addition to information about coffee tables. Focusing your search means you can minimize time spent wading through useless information.

#### 4. CHOOSING THE RIGHT SEARCH TOOL

##### 4.1 Search Engines and General Directories

There is a distinction between search engines and directories. Typically, search engines are compiled by computer programs (often called spiders, crawlers or bots) that search through specific parts of the web. Directories are usually compiled by humans. Generally, search engines cover much more territory than directories can, and are able to cover more current pages. However, directories can give you more targeted results. AltaVista is one of the most commonly used search engines; Yahoo is the most famous directory. (Ref. 1, Ref. 2)

##### 4.2 Other Databases or Specific Directories

There are many search resources that are targeted to a specific subject matter or geographic location. Most are free, although some charge an access fee. Some search the web for their subject, while others search a special database. Some examples are:

- Eurodicautom (a multilingual database of European Union terminology) (Ref. 3)
- FTU's Termite (a multilingual database of telecommunications terminology) (Ref. 4)
- MedLine (medical subject searches) (Ref. 5)
- FindLaw (legal subject searches) (Ref. 6)
- Orientation.com (geographic searches by county or region) (Ref. 7)

### 4.3 Meta Search Engines

Meta Search Engines „allow you to search multiple sites simultaneously while entering your keywords just once. „Their chief advantage is that .you can get a lot of information from one place; their main drawback is that they are most suitable for simple searches. Since the various sites can require different syntax for their searches, complex searches involving Boolean operators are sometimes better left to individual search tools. The Internet Sleuth and Dogpile are among the leading meta search engines. (Ref. 8, Ref. 9)

### 4.4 Search Tool Comparison

You can read comparisons of various search tools online (see CNET.com's "The Right Engine for the Job") (1) or find the information in books (such as Alfred and Emily Glossbrenner's Search Engines for the World Wide Web or Michael Miller's The Complete Idiot's Guide to Online Search Secrets) (2,3). \_And, of course, you can learn a great deal by reading the help files of each search engine or directory. Some of the most useful criteria to consider are:

- How broad is the coverage?
- How are the results compiled?
- How current are the returns?
- How does the site use Boolean operators, if at all?
- How easy is the interface?
- How specialized is the coverage (geographical, subject, etc.)?
- How easy is it to customize your search (Boolean operators, search for range of dates or on the web only or in web page titles only or in a specific domain only)?
- How well-respected is this source among authorities?

Get to know the ones you use the most. For example, for obscure searches AltaVista will often give you exactly what you want, but not until the second or third page of hits; Yahoo's hits that are most useful are usually not the categories but the actual entries.

## 5. REFINING YOUR SEARCH

If your search resulted in too few hits, first check for typos. Then see whether there are keywords that can be removed (if you have been too specific).

If you got too many hits, you can add keywords or adapt your syntax and try again.

Learn how to use Boolean operators to focus your search. There are excellent articles online about this subject. Two that are especially good are Binghamton University's "Quick Reference for Boolean Operators" (4) and the University at Albany's "Boolean Searching on the Internet" (5).

Some search tools also offer a feature that allows you to focus your search on pages similar to certain hits (sometimes called "more like this") while others offer links to targeted keywords that may be exactly what you are looking for.

Monitor your time. You should always be thinking about how much time you want to invest in any search. If you find yourself getting distracted and surfing off the topic, you might set aside an hour a week for general surfing, and not allow yourself to get distracted when you have a deadline and a particular research task at hand.

## 6. QUALIFYING YOUR SOURCES

As with any research project, part of your task involves deciding how credible the information is. When you go online, some of the same guidelines apply as to any research project, while others specific to the web environment can also be helpful.

Here are some criteria to think about:

- Is the page part of a larger site? What do you know about that site?
- Whose site is it? Is it from a university, corporation, government, international organization, informal group or an individual?
- How recently has it been updated?
- Can you verify other information contained on the site? Is it accurate and well presented?
- What do you know about the author or host?
- What else is on the site?
- How is the information presented? How easy is it to use? How authoritative does it appear to be?
- What do other credible sources think about it? Has it been reviewed by someone whose opinion you trust? Do the leaders in the field have links to the site? Has it been recommended by colleagues?

Further information about qualifying your sources is available online in Hope N. Tillman's article "Evaluating Quality on the Net." (6)

## 7. APPLYING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Once you have completed a search, think about what worked well and what did not. How could you have improved it? Should you have begun the search somewhere else? Should you have phrased the search differently? Did you fail to think of a simple technique that could save time? Did you spend too much time or give up too early? Use this experience the next time you start a search.

Manage the information you acquired. If you found a page that will probably be valuable many times, bookmark it. Control your bookmarks so that they can be as useful to you as possible. It is useless to bookmark every page you visit; if you do this, it will take far too much time to find the one address you need. Create folders and subfolders for the bookmarks you decide to keep. Review your bookmarks regularly and remove those that are no longer useful or valid.

Share the best information with colleagues. If you find a valuable site, e-mail the address to others who you think could use it or post the information on a translator forum or mailing list. If you learn a great new trick, share your knowledge. If others pass along tips to you, check them out and incorporate new ideas into your next search.

## DOING ONGOING RESEARCH

There are many things you can do regularly on the Internet to keep up with your languages, your specializations and translation in general. You can join mailing lists or newsgroups, make regular visits to pertinent sites and periodically surf for specific subjects or just for serendipity (when deadlines are not looming). Follow advances in search technology. The Search Engine Watch (7) and About.com's Web Search (8) are good places to go back to from time to time.

### 9. CONCLUSION

With planning, thought, creativity and experience, translators can do a tremendous amount of research right from their work stations. This will improve the quality of their work and free their time to be spent on other activities, whether that means earning more money or relaxing with friends and family. Either way, it is worth the investment.

### NOTES

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# Localization, Internationalization, Globalization, and Translation

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By Tim Altanero

**B**y now, you've probably run across the terms localization (L10n), internationalization (I18n), and globalization (G11n), and may have wondered what they mean or how to become part of this explosive, lucrative market. All of these terms are generally thought of as belonging exclusively to the high tech industry, particularly software. They are viewed as a relatively recent complication to the global marketing of products and services.

The majority of localization is from English to another language, because the majority of the world's software is produced in the United States. Since taking off in the 1980s and 1990s, localization-related businesses have tended to congregate in Ireland. That country was chosen for its proximity to Europe, favorable tax structure, European Union membership, and English-speaking population. Today, nearly every major high tech firm from Microsoft to Cisco has at least a small office in Ireland, and the country has responded to industry needs by building an educational infrastructure that is yet to be rivaled by the United States.

## Definitions

It is usually easiest to think of localization, internationalization, and globalization in that order, although a truly visionary business would think in reverse. Let's examine why.

Localization is the process of getting a product and its accompanying documentation adapted to a local market. It includes considerations such as translation, adapting currency, measurement, time, and date conventions appropriate to the local market, adjusting software code to function properly, resizing dialog boxes, defining shortcut key conventions, and even deciding the size of the box in which the product will be shipped. In sum, the process consists of all the activities necessary to make the product look and act as if it were native to the locale in which it is intended to be sold.

The localization process can be vastly simplified by internationalizing the initial engineering phase of a project. Software can contain millions of lines of code, making it difficult to find text that requires translation. By isolating translatable text from code in resource files, the integrity of code can be protected, resulting in reduced testing costs. Dialog boxes that resize automatically to accommodate text expansion save countless hours. Preparing glossaries of industry-specific terms prevents multiple translations of the same concept, leading to a tighter, more consistent interface. All of this pre-planning for localization is at the core of the internationalization process.

Finally, there is globalization, which can be easily defined as the condition in which all procedures and processes company-wide are structured in a way that facilitates localization. However, creating this condition is the most difficult of the three

terms we have discussed so far. Especially in our burgeoning "dot.com" economy, the resources often do not exist to hire and maintain a staff of internationally-savvy employees, which is why we continue to see companies following the localization-internationalization-globalization path. While the greatest efficiency may be achieved by adopting a globalization vision at the outset, a country as large as the U.S. tends to lean toward an insular vision, leading to a distinctly monolingual pool of locally available talent.

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## How Do High Tech Companies Handle Localization?

The nature of high tech industry is profoundly variable to the extent that required resources vary over a product release cycle. As such, linguistic and engineering needs ebb and peak, creating a need for flexible temporary workers. It may be called freelance, temp, or consulting, but in all but the largest companies, resources do not permit the retention of expensive specialist staff during the period between product releases.

In general, translation is looked upon as a necessary, yet ancillary, component of the larger localization project. Depending on the company, translation is either outsourced, or consultants are hired. The job of the consultant is to render the source language into the target language while maintaining source code integrity. A consultant's

*Continued on p. 48*



## Localization, Internationalization, Globalization, and Translation Continued

work is normally overseen by an in-house localization manager, or similarly titled individual, who has expertise in two or more languages, in addition to extensive project management experience and some knowledge of computer programming. Often, the localization manager is among only a small handful of permanent staff that deals with international issues related to software production.

If a company decides to hire consultants, these will, ideally, work in-house. Such an arrangement allows for inter-lingual consultation among translators of different languages, and permits the impromptu exchange of ideas and work procedures with engineers and others that will assist in making the project run smoothly. This method of translation, though efficient for the company, is also expensive and requires that additional time be spent recruiting and screening translators, in addition to purchasing publishing or development software tools in each of the target languages. Furthermore, there is the added cost of storing, maintaining, developing, and managing legacy documentation and software from previous releases.

Because of the difficulty of managing projects in-house, many companies opt for a localization vendor. Over the past 10 years, localization vendors have emerged from consolidations, start-ups, and mergers within the industry in response to the torrent of demand for such services from high tech companies. Among the largest of such firms are Lionbridge, Lernout & Hauspie, ILE, Bowne, and SDL. These companies have large in-house staffs specializing in many different areas such as engineering, project management, linguistics, terminology, and translation, just to name a few areas. Some of the services offered by such firms include engineering, testing, quality assurance, translation, project

management, translation memory database development, Website translation, terminology management, and glossary creation, among others.

Localization vendors provide efficiency for a market that requires labor only at limited intervals. By combining projects from many companies at one location, the temporary nature of the work is eliminated, providing stable employment for those with specialized skills.

### Basic Skills and Tools for Localization

In order to enter the localization field as a translator, a broad-based education is the key. In addition to the linguistic qualifications required of any translator, some engineering skills are necessary. The ability to understand computer code is vital. While it may not be necessary to write your own code, it will be essential to be able to work within code that is already written. For example, the ability to distinguish between code, notes, links, and translatable text is necessary to successfully translate a piece of software. A primer course in hyper text mark-up language (html) would be a good start.

Educational opportunities in localization are on the increase, though still rare. The University of Washington in Seattle offers a Certificate in Localization, and Kent State in Ohio and the Monterey Institute in California offer coursework as well. Austin Community College in Texas has a localization curriculum in the works. Overseas institutions, particularly the University of Limerick in Ireland, offer graduate degrees in localization and localization engineering.

In addition to code of various sorts, there are also a number of tools that have become industry standards when working with localization. For publishing, MS Word and Adobe FrameMaker are common tools. For online help development, RoboHelp is common, and if PDFs (portable document format—a common, cross-platform electronic document format) are required, Adobe Acrobat will be necessary as well. These software tools are not difficult to learn, but they are pricey, ranging from \$200 to more than \$1,000. That is a considerable investment for a freelancer, but may be worth it if the pay rate for a given project justifies the expense.

Finally, there are tools specifically for translators that may be worth considering if you have a large volume of translations that tend to be repetitive. This is often the case with localization, where writing is highly structured and contained so as to be clear, concise, and easily readable. Translation memory tools such as Trados, Star's Transit, SDLX, and Deja Vu, among others, assist with terminology management, glossary creation, and translation memory database development. They can greatly increase translation speed by matching similar

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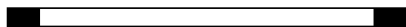
## Localization, Internationalization, Globalization, and Translation Continued from p. 48

strings from legacy work for the translator to edit. For those with an engineering background, localization development environment tools such as ForeignDesk, among others, are popular because they provide a WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) environment. These tools are costly as well, and purchasing them depends largely on the cost/benefit analysis of your project.

### Conclusion

The Internet has provided all computer-literate humanity with easy access to every product sold online. The ease with which foreign markets can be

accessed and with which foreign markets can access the U.S. has led to an enormous boom in the need for quality translations in the context of localization. Localization appears likely to continue its breakneck growth rate, and it is a lucrative field. While the details may seem daunting at first, the industry is undergoing constant and major changes that are likely to bring the costs of tools and training within reach of freelancers. When computers became household appliances, nearly every freelancer learned to use a word processor. It may be only a matter of time before code becomes second nature.



# As Tough as it Gets—But How Tough?

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By Leon McMorrow

(Note: This article is a modified version of a paper published in the Proceedings of the ATA Annual Conference in St. Louis, Missouri on November 3-6, 1999.)

**T**he ability to assess the difficulty of a particular job is one of the "trade secrets" that is developed unconsciously with translation experience. It is very important for accepting/declining jobs, determining readiness for an ATA accreditation examination, negotiating for the best price with a client, and especially for developing self-esteem and gaining a professional reputation.

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...The ability to assess the difficulty of a particular job is one, of the "trade secrets" that is developed unconsciously with translation experience...

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But how does one develop this ability? Is it possible to attach "markers" to translation or interpretation topics that may objectively classify jobs by grade of difficulty?

The field of medical documentation includes some objective markers that give adequate, if not perfect, clues to the difficulty that may be expected when contemplating whether to undertake a particular assignment.

## Professional Implications

"Difficulty" is a concept indicating the absence of ease and comfort in performing a task. It is at least a human perception; we don't know if animals have it. For the person involved in the task, ease and comfort in performance also induce efficiency and personal satisfaction: we do it fast, do it well, and do it with pleasure (at least, in getting it over with—not all tasks are appealing, even though easy).

Translation and interpretation are tasks that are inherently difficult. The uncertain record of machine translation stands as evidence. This inherent difficulty has implications that go beyond the communication itself:

*Time:* The greater the difficulty, the longer the task. If "time is money," then more expense is incurred.

*Skills:* The greater the difficulty, the higher the skill level required to perform the task. The higher the required skill, the more education and experience (i.e., specialization), are required.

The higher the required specialization and the longer the task, the more resources will have to be consumed. This should be reflected in the calculation and pricing of the translation job. Like a spreading wave, the difficulty of the subject matter in translation and interpretation impacts upon the translator's career and the profession.

## Is Specialization Worth the Effort, the Time, the Expense?

Some say that "generalists" and "flat rates" are, and should be, the standard within the profession. This may indeed be valid within fields that present no great range of difficulty for translation, such as history, travel, hospitality, and social sciences. But there are many fields that do not have narrow linguistic limits, such as engineering, chemistry, law, and medicine. Certainly in medicine, with its dozens of sub-fields and "health-related professions," there is a world of difference between the skills required of the lowest ranks and the highest ranks of professional. Appropriately, there are documents written for the least skilled health professionals and also documents destined only for the highly educated. Educational investment, skills, liability risks, and financial rewards vary along a consistent upward line that reflects the difficulty of the tasks encountered and the literature that accompanies them.

Medical professionals are expected to know their limits and not to accept what is beyond them. Otherwise they incur liability. On the other side, clients should pay for the level of service they get, no more and no less. But why should an easy translation be priced like a difficult one, as in flat-rate pricing? I know I hate being charged for the "average" number of hours assigned to my car repair job by some association of car repairers, regardless of how long it took. The problem may be that translators, interpreters, and others do not or cannot decide what is more difficult and less difficult in any particular case. If so, then we should be working to solve the problem of determining difficulty, not avoiding it.

### Sources of Difficulty in Translation

The origin of difficulty in monolingual linguistic communication is multifaceted. Several factors play a role, often simultaneously:

1. Lack of ability of writers or speakers to express themselves well, producing a kind of mumbo-jumbo that has words, often lots of them, but little meaning. Some modern music lyrics fit the bill, while politicians avoiding discussion of a thorny issue frequently rely on meaningless discourse ("First, let me say..." is a sure indicator!). I once got fired from a simultaneous interpretation job because I insisted on waiting until the speaker made a meaningful statement: I would not regurgitate the flow of broken words and phrases used as tiller. This is "incidental" difficulty.

Inability of the reader or listener (through lack of mental capacity, education, or experience) to comprehend the particular type of discourse—one is simply out of one's depth. This, too, is "incidental" difficulty.

3. Factors in the document (for translation) or the discourse (for interpretation) that make it esoteric or rare: it was produced for a *special* group of readers or listeners who already have training or experience in the modes of expression used. Examples are archaic writings (e.g., Early English) and scientific-technical documentation. i.e., documentation proper to a *particular* interest, trade, or profession.

When the additional factor of bilingual or multilingual communication is added, we have a profound mixture of sources of difficulty. No wonder examiners, advertisers, and other people grading the *difficulty* of linguistic products have a problem!

Our intent here is to illustrate a practical solution. First, decide whether the difficulty lies in the people or in the special type of language involved. Compare with peers. The first and second factors listed above may be addressed simply and directly through remedial measures to reach the norm. Then, address the issues involved in the third factor above:

- Are there levels of difficulty within scientific-technical documentation? Of course—the *Introduction to Chemistry* textbook is different from a *Laboratory Procedures* manual.
- Who decides what is difficult in a document—difficult for whom? For a student in the field? A general practitioner? A specialist? We cannot ignore the relativity of the concept of *difficulty* within professional language. Otherwise, tiered examinations would be meaningless—a student and specialist would take the same examination.

- Are the levels of difficulty static? No. With increases in knowledge we expect changes in levels of difficulty of terminology within a field. What is meant by *basic* knowledge and *basic* level of difficulty now differs from what it meant 20 years ago.

Society has already partially answered these questions in a practical way. Science and technology are knowledge-related fields and society stratifies these professions on the basis of acquired knowledge and skills. Professional language matches the different levels of stratification. Let us apply this technique to medicine, a very large profession in most of the world.

### Medical Documentation

The medical translator and interpreter face a field that has already stratified the skills required to perform certain jobs and also the documentation categories that match those skills. The difficulty of the content and language of a particular category of document is linked, in most cases, to the professional skill level of the reader. As a result, two closely related and overlapping guides to documentary difficulty exist: the *professional level of the reader* (For whom was this document intended?) and the *type of document in question* (What type of document is it?). Both are objective measures of difficulty in the sense of being field-determined. They have nothing to do with the education, language skills, or experience of the translator or interpreter.

### For Whom Was This Document Intended?

There are three broad categories of medical occupation: technician, nurse, and physician. Within these categories many auxiliary occupations and subspecialists exist. All these occupations

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have determined a knowledge and skill level appropriate to the tasks at hand and have indicated who is *certified* to perform the tasks. If you know the occupation(s) of the intended readership of a piece of medical documentation, you can, in most cases, accurately determine the level of difficulty of the documentation itself. This is perhaps so obvious to those within medicine that it does not need statement.

Experienced medical translators and interpreters are indeed aware of it when accepting or rejecting a job or when determining the style or register of *translation*—they tease out the implications of the occupation of the readership or audience, if known. A subliminal reprise in the job acceptance ballet is the question: Am I able to translate/interpret for this reader or listener? If I am, how long will the job take and what will be my charge? For those who are not already conscious of it, this should become an internalized routine when discussing a job offer over the phone or by e-mail.

#### What Type of Document Is It?

In many cases, the translator will not be able to find out the occupation or field of the intended reader, or the intended audience in the case of interpreters. Many of us get work from agencies and some agency personnel do not have this information, either because they never asked for it or for some reason it was not made available. In such cases, the next step is to ask about the title or type of document. Medical documentation falls into two general types (general health care writing for lay people is *not* under review here): "reports" and "special-purpose" documents. The first is intended for insertion into a patient's medical record. The second is intended for sharing information, for education within the multiple branches of the medical profession itself, and for communication with institutions in the outside world (insurance, legal, government, etc.).

It is worth listing the names of these documents since they are almost uniform in presentation and very specific in content. If you can get the name of the medical report or special-purpose document, you will often have a very good idea of what level of, difficulty you are facing.

#### Patient Medical Record

There is a somewhat standard method of creating and maintaining a patient's medical record. This is more closely adhered to in an in-patient setting (hospital or clinic) than a doctor's office, where less people may be using it. The order of the reports that follow also adheres to this method, and is typical of a single episode of illness and care.

1. History and physical examination (H&P)
2. Physician's progress notes
3. Consultants' reports
4. Operative reports
5. Laboratory reports (chemistry: radiology: ECG. EEG, CT. MRI, sonography)
6. Nurses' progress notes
7. Client assessment, review, and evaluation (CARE)
8. Medication list
9. Discharge summary—Orders\*

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(\*In the case of a hospital stay, the discharge summary and orders will be #1 and the physician's history and physical examination will often be called the "admission history and physical examination," and placed at the end of the physician's section of the hospital chart.)

Who are the intended readers of the patient medical record or any of its component reports? Primarily physicians, since they have responsibility for the overall therapy. Nurses have their own section (# 6 above), and so do dietitians, respiratory technicians, physical therapists, pathologists and laboratory technicians (#5), social workers (#7), and pharmacy representatives (#8). Nurse practitioners, physician assistants, medical record administrators, and medical record technicians are also trained to read full patient medical records for clinical or non-clinical reasons. The knowledge or skill attached to individual parts of the patient medical record is closely tied to the title or occupation of the medical person. If you have to translate an entire patient medical record (or interpret it), you will face the whole range of both general and specialist medical terminology. Much of it is repetitive, both within and between episodes of care. That said, there is always room for surprises. Only a skilled translator/interpreter should undertake this task since the consequences of error may be very serious, in addition to bringing disgrace upon the translation profession.

### Special-Purpose Documentation

1. Clinical trial reports (IRBs, CRFs, consent forms, status reports, completion reports)
2. Research articles
3. Case studies
4. Drug prescribing information (a package insert required by the FDA for every marketed drug). For medical devices, instruction manuals or package inserts serve the same purpose; (see #11)
5. New drug applications (NDAs) or related applications to the FDA
6. Consent forms
7. Communicable disease reports to a state or federal agency
8. Medical reports to a third party for grants or reimbursement purposes
9. Depositions for legal use
10. Medical device or drug patents
11. Manuals and package inserts for equipment, devices, quality control, etc.
12. Legislation, regulations, guidelines, standards, and procedures relating to medical products and practice.

The readership of "special-purpose" medical documentation is very large and variable. Once the title of the document is known, however, a clue is generated that may be followed up. It is the best indicator we have at present. There is no occupation-related formula that will cover "special-purpose" documentation such as we had for patient medical records. Not even the physician can be *automatically* included in the intended readership. It is an area that needs much more research, but some issues and practical solutions will be discussed below.

### Discussion

In the case of the patient's medical record, recognition of different levels of difficulty *within* categories of medical documentation may be a problem. One cautionary area needs to be mentioned: the history and physical examination (H&P). All H&Ps are not alike. The range of medical conditions of the patient may cover very common problems like injuries, nasal congestion, or indigestion, as well as rarer metabolic disorders, cancers, neuropathies, or syndromes. These last conditions will fatten the H&P with consultant reports and more specialized laboratory tests. The terminology used will match the range of disorders. Therefore, the H&P is a document type that requires some caution, and it may turn out to be a dream or a nightmare for the translator. Most of the other reports, however, are relatively straightforward: nurses notes will always describe symptoms and responses or reactions. Laboratory reports will normally be "routine" with occasional specialized tests, but even the presence of these may be

expected if the admitting (provisional) or final diagnosis is known.

With regard to "special-purpose" documentation, the picture is not yet clear. The range of difficulty within and between the classes of documents mentioned above depends not only upon the level of medical knowledge used, but also on the level of knowledge of allied medical or completely nonmedical fields. Medical practice interacts closely with the industrial, legal, insurance, commercial, and governmental systems in a modern society. Many of the documents in the "special-purpose" category are *hyphenated medical* in character: medico-legal, medico-engineering, medico-economic, medico-bureaucratic, and so on. They straddle two or more professions. One may be very skilled in handling the medical arm of the document or discourse, but fall down on the nonmedical. These are areas for continuing education of the medical translator/interpreter. It would be an enormous benefit to the profession if systematic courses in "hyphenated medical" terminology and meaning were offered at a national or regional level. The ATA conferences do produce an occasional paper on microbiology, biochemistry, medical engineering, etc.—excellent in themselves, but far from adequate for the continuing education needs of the profession.

The best practical response of the translator/interpreter in this area of "special-purpose" documentation is to develop mental pictures of the difficulties that may encroach from these "marginal" fields and to respond accordingly. When discussing a "special-purpose" document with a client, spend a few minutes teasing out the indicators that will provide a clue to the content. If the subject or topic seems to be more nonmedical than medical, and you are uncomfortable

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about it, you still need as many clues as possible before deciding to reject—perhaps the influence- from other fields is relatively minor. Here are some typical parts of a deal-making conversation:

"You say it is a patent—do you know what the patent is for? A drug? A medical device? What do the drawings look like? Are there a lot of unusual characters—with subscripts, superscripts, etc.? Can you describe them?"

"You say it is a legal document—what is the topic? A lawsuit? A contract? A breach of contract? New legislation?"

"So, it is a package insert (or user instructions/manual/brochure). For what product? Are there pictures, drawings? Do you know what branch of engineering it represents (electrical/mechanical/chemical/software)?"

"So it looks like an article from a medical journal—did you check for an English abstract to find out what is about? (The abstract may be at the end of the article). Did you get a general idea from talking to your client of what it about, or who the readers will be? Is it for publication or internal research only?"

*(Here, the document is a "mystery" to the agency project manager.)* "Do you know Spanish (French. Russian. etc.)? Good. Will you look at the first sentence of the first paragraph on page 3 and the first sentence of the first paragraph on page 5 and read them out to me? Better still, send me a sample. I have a 24-hour fax machine and will send you back an answer within 15 minutes."

With experience (the wider the better), one becomes very good at this *pas a deux*—with an occasional surprise: a document that turns out to be highly deceptive, both in its title and in the first few pages. When requesting a sample, make sure that at least one of the pages comes from a place about 70 percent of the way to the end. Just as in a tumor, the core of a document is the best location for sampling.

#### Conclusion

Classification of jobs by difficulty is a constant task for the interpreter and translator. It is inherent in the practice of the profession and we should not shirk it, both for our own self-esteem and out of respect for the client. In medicine, the best approach to the task for translators is through the intended readership, or for interpreters through the intended audience. Begin to develop a list (a mental one is sufficient) of the types of material you encounter and link them to what you know about the reader, and secondarily to the technical title of the document if it has one. Gradually you will build up a mental library of named documents you can handle and those you still cannot face (we all have them) due to their inherent difficulty as described above. You will become conscious of the time factor involved in your work, and with these two important variables for pricing under your control (skill level and time), you will be able to put a fair price upon your job. You will also impress clients if you can discuss the job in terms they use every day.

# To Go Where No One has Gone Before: A Natural Evolution of the Translator's Role and Mission

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By Marie C. Marrien

**J**ust a few years ago, I was a full-time homemaker and part-time language teacher. At that time, I did not consider myself as anything more than an isolated translator. Since then, communication has changed dramatically, and I have found myself moving in a new direction, adapting my goals and professional vision to reflect the coming of age of a new global community.

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...Because today's technology now makes everyday communication between cultures commonplace, I no longer think of myself as just an isolated translator but as a global ambassador...

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Personally, I believe my professional path evolved quite naturally. As a French native who has resided in the U.S. for several years, and having met all the requirements to be a teacher, it seems quite natural that I would use my language skills as a tool to help facilitate communication between cultures. As a fan of French literature, I love my native language. Books are part of my life, as opposed to TV or the movies. I have a natural curiosity and interest in people, and a desire to strive for understanding. I love to capture the essence of words and now, with all my years of experience, I feel that I am in an advantageous position in terms of utilizing my skills and love of language to transmit meaning in both French and English. Because today's technology now makes everyday communication between cultures commonplace, I no longer think of myself as just an isolated translator, but as a global ambassador offering my services to an ever-increasing market.

## A Natural Evolution

As I watch the world slowly become globalized as more cultures strive to communicate with each other, I realize how much the need for translation is increasing. More and more, we must not only be able to communicate in the other languages, but also have an understanding of the cultural context, of those we deal with in order for our businesses to succeed. Even as we become more savvy as both employees and consumers, our translations must be seamless in our native language or the message will fail—whether it's an advertisement for a multi-billion dollar corporation or a presentation to employees on their new safety program.

My love of language and people is the fundamental drive that helped me take the first step toward becoming a translator. Searching for answers has always been part of the mission of my job, and the new developments in global communication and subsequent need for language specialists has encouraged me to rethink what translation means to me and how our profession has finally come into its own.

## From Teacher to Translator

My move from teaching to translating brought new challenges, but the two professions held many similarities. A key requirement for success in both is the ability to listen and create according to the demands of a particular situation. Basically the objective is the same: to facilitate communication. For me, my education helped to fulfill the requirements I would need as a translator. With a background in literature, I was taught the subtlety of my native language. My background in economics and psychology helped me learn some of the finesse of communication in a corporate world. A talent for language combined with these elements gave me the confidence to make the transition from teacher to professional translator.

As I taught adults, I became more aware of the frustrations caused by time constraints. I also learned more about the other subjects on my students' agendas, and of the importance of creating a link between what they were studying and how this knowledge could be applied to the real-life practice of translation. Many times I ended up sitting down next to them and showing the direct application of our lessons to their own situations. No traditional language program will tell you how to do that.

A good educator teaches not only the basic skills of language, but also the aspects of the culture in which it is spoken. Such an educator will need observation skills, intercultural comprehension, creativity, and the ability to communicate and, of course, the willingness to learn more. The same is required of a translator.

In an attempt to organize my approach to translation, I asked myself three key questions:



1. What is translation?
2. Who are the parties involved?
3. What skills are required?

I tried to approach translation as a tool, one that enables communication between people. I became aware that, as a professional, I was an intermediary between two worlds. The acknowledgment that translation was not an isolated practice, but a necessary tool for successful communication between cultures, appeared quite clearly.

This realization made me want to learn about all the parties involved in the translation process. These individuals include the client, the target audience, the other contributors to the dialogue, and the "maker," or translator himself. It is important to keep in mind that not all the objectives and/or interests of these individuals will be the same.

By thinking about translation from the client's perspective, I was able to identify several needs. Clients give you a product, which often has a desired goal or "mission." They will invest in your service to achieve this goal and, in return, they expect you to produce results as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Several questions appear to be fundamental. What is the job? What is the mission, if any? What are the client's expectations? What are his resources? How much does he want to invest? Frankly, some clients do not want, nor do they need, a cultural specialist. Each job may require different levels of investment from both the client and the translator. I have seen rates for translation organized by quality levels (for example, A, B, C, or D), signifying the level of "perfection" required. This is a realistic approach in light of budgetary and time constraints.

Who is the recipient? Who are the other potential contributors? What skills are required? Not only must translators possess an excellent understanding of the languages involved, but also an ability to write them. There is no doubt that the time of translating with pencil and paper is over. In most instances, we are now forced to be computer literate. Unfortunately, we also know that our profession, composed mainly of freelancers, lacks formal guidelines for education and accreditation. As the demands of the profession continue to grow, we must continue to grow with it.

In light of this approach, many unanswered needs appeared so strongly that I felt compelled to go beyond the traditional ways of thinking about translation.

It seems obvious that a new horizon is opening to our profession. We are moving beyond taking text from clients and spitting it out in another language. Let the software programs attempt to do that (usually with no great success). Even with the best software you cannot replace the human side of communication in any language. Our mission is to go

where translators have not had to go before...taking on the role of consultant/educator, communicator, and global ambassador.

### *From Translator, to Communicator, to Global Ambassador: The New "You" Embracing the Client's Mission*

A new translation project is like embarking on a journey. You learn about and absorb the content itself—the mission behind the words. You must not hesitate to act as a consultant to the client. It is the consultant's role to suggest to the client that the results may be different from their expectations. There are a variety of factors that can effect the outcome, for example, a lack of contextual reference points for an unknown concept in the target language. A project can also fail simply because the approach lacks the cultural elements necessary to reach the targeted audience. As a translator dealing with corporate policies, you may be required to "rewrite" a poorly written or culturally inappropriate document. Therefore, beyond excellent language and writing skills, you must be able to work with the client, explaining how to best approach the project to achieve the desired goal. One of the greatest challenges in freelancing is educating the client while working within the confines of his expectations, all without underselling your services.

One key to success is to anticipate your client's needs. In the ideal relationship, you will get to know the client well enough to look beyond the actual job that is entrusted to you and understand their mindset and strategy. Knowing your client well means being able to anticipate their future needs. As such, it is important to keep informed of business and economic trends that affect your client's industry.

## To Go Where No One has Gone Before Continued

### Customizing Your Work

I strongly believe that it is important to provide not only high quality work, but the service to back it up. Paying attention to each individual, sometimes to several within the same company, has proven to be quite efficient while at the same time enriching my translation skills, my approach, my tools, and my specialties for each client. Being there for each individual who has asked for my services (sometimes even in an emergency crisis) and producing the expected result reinforces the translator/client relationship. This may seem obvious, but most clients have unique needs (for example, specific terminology for their company). Companies moving toward globalization often need to change their mindset (for example, developing corporate terminology that is more universal in scope) to one that takes into consideration any cultural, linguistic, behavioral, and business differences they might encounter while dealing with those from outside their country.

Taking the time to listen and, if necessary, meet clients in person, along with having the discipline and respect for deadlines, shows that you are there to try and help the client fulfill his specific needs.

### Writing Skills: Capturing and Communicating the Essence of the Words

Sometimes translation has its limitations. Creativity is quite limited when it comes to straight translations where the content is quite precise and the terminology does not need any cultural interpretation (for example, medical or technical translations). These types of translations are essentially devoid of intercultural differences.

On the other hand, many business communications, such as human resource messages and general corporate information, need the expertise of

a translator to achieve the desired impact. For instance, in a marketing campaign, you have to take the right approach to motivate your audience. And to get a positive response, the translator must adapt the original message to the perspective of the target culture.

In such cases, being consistent and insuring the consistency of terminology is fundamental. You may want to discuss this aspect of the job with your client and their foreign audience or counterparts. Remember, part of your job is to facilitate communication.

Learn how to take initiative. Become familiar with the nature of the document and be creative, but consult with your client to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. Be clear and confident. If you have all the information in hand and are convinced you are right, then discuss it tactfully and stand up for excellence. Remember that whatever you do, you do not do for yourself, but in the best interest of the client and his target audience.

### Follow-up: Measuring and Improving Performance

Following up on a job is critical in order to improve your overall performance. Even though it is vital that you get feedback on how the translation was received, you also want to find out if it moved your audience and achieved the client's expected objective. Ideally, feedback on the entire project is extremely helpful. By taking this approach, you go a step beyond your initial job and become more of a communicator. It will help you improve your translating skills, and will provide you with cultural insight on your client. Again, the idea is not only how to gain for yourself, but how to be more productive and efficient in order to answer and anticipate your client's needs. This information will help you build stronger bridges of communication between cultures. Sometimes feedback is hard to accept or even agree with, but you will gain in experience in either case.

Today, our job frequently involves more project management. For example, I often deal with graphic designers or agencies that will format the text for the graphic designer and/or a printer. The result is that there tends to be quite a few individuals involved, besides the client, who can have last minute changes. The final version must be proofread to ensure that punctuation is correct or that no text fell off in the design process—a printer or designer who doesn't speak the language won't notice! It's up to you to ensure a final quality product, and you cannot betray your client's trust. This process is critical in order to improve your translation skills while providing you with the cultural dimension you need. It also offers an excellent opportunity to build up strong relationships with your client, and illustrates your team spirit. Your attention to such details will demonstrate your dedication and will show that you respect and take your commitment to the client seriously.

One other way to improve your skills and services is to keep learning. Continued education serves two major purposes. One

focuses on continuous improvement in order to seek excellence. We must continuously review our translating processes, performances, and skills, but we also need to learn how to communicate better and be in tune with the different cultural aspects our job involves. It may be necessary to learn new skills in order to keep ahead of the game and provide a service that is unique.

The second purpose of the learning process focuses on an expanded understanding of our profession that goes beyond its current practice and looks toward its future potential. Keeping informed is vital to our profession. In order to shift from our initial role as translator to the role of a global ambassador, it becomes necessary to understand globalization and to go beyond our cultural, geographic, and personal limits. Information and cultural analysis are key elements to the transformation of our profession. Cultural analysis is an excellent tool to become aware of your own motivations, personal and cultural behaviors, as well as to acknowledge and respect your clients and partners. Such information will help you monitor and review your own progress and evolution in the context of a world always in motion.

#### Is Freelancing a Necessary Evolution?

In light of this approach of our new role as professionals, a simple question rises: Is freelancing a necessary evolution? Can we function as a translator, communicator, and global ambassador within the traditional constructs of our profession?

When I drink my cup of coffee in the morning while surfing the Internet for news or resources sites, I am amazed at the pace at which the world is changing. Within seconds we can grasp vital information and economical and cultural trends. We have become free of the traditional information structure and have reached a higher potential which allows us more choice. It is up to us whether or not to use these new tools. Nonetheless, the assistance these new tools and resources provide have not succeeded in providing a substitute to the human component. The need for human translators is in no current danger.

However, we cannot ignore the trends that are becoming more and more a reality. One of them concerns the question of outsourcing business. It is common nowadays for companies to outsource certain functions instead of investing in full-time employees. It is especially true with specialty professions like ours, and companies are, depending on your skills, willing to pay for your unique service. It certainly presents advantages for all as well as inconveniences. Companies are not committed to you, so the wide choice of freelancers currently available to them certainly motivates you to provide a unique service designed to answer their needs. On your part, as difficult as competition may be, you are free of a structure where your potential as a global ambassador could be lost. And, of course, you lose your dependency on one employer.

Making the final decision is really a question of personal choice and is quite a challenge, both on a personal and business level. For my part, I was ready to embark on the adventure, which has given me the opportunity to explore myself as an individual, my own skills, my performances, and my vision of the world and its outcome without the constraint of a structure. It is a never-ending job. Many times I feel like a lab technician dealing with zillions of components trying to make them interact properly to produce a better product. Because I believe in globalization, my decision, to me, serves a philanthropic purpose. There is much work to be done, and all of us can participate actively to ensure understanding and communication between people.

#### The Rewards

As a freelance translator, the rewards are plenty. There is no denying that the job gives you an incredible and exciting sense of fulfillment as an individual and as a professional. The excitement lies also in making steps for humanity every time you achieve your mission as a global ambassador. There is no small step for humanity.

Materialistically, by embracing this new role, you promote trust and the respect of the people you work for and/or with, but also gain recognition and, most likely, more business. One smart approach to changes in the way we run our business is to provide a fast, efficient, and quality service based on our strengths and our ability to adjust, without losing sight of our ultimate mission—to serve people. Freelancing offers this opportunity to the ones who are up to the adventure. The choice is yours. You, too, may also want to embark on this incredible voyage. Welcome to the next generation!

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To Go Where No One has Gone Before  
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Tips and Hints to Prepare for Your Journey as a Freelancer

*The key of success resides in these few hints and tips:*

- Think global
- Adopt a work ethic and make a commitment
- Think about the client's perspective
- Think about the recipient's perspective
- Be creative
- Be there
- Provide quality, but do not undersell your services
- Take a stand and make a difference
- Review and update your skills and your vision
- Be willing to adjust
- Establish and develop contacts
- Be strategic
- Be hungry for knowledge
- Expand your world
- Think about cultural analysis as an essential tool
- Be aware of traps and pitfalls, such as: short-term vision; resting on past performances; honor; failure to understand a world that is constantly changing; money issues; and letting other elements overpower you

These few ideas do not pretend to give you all the answers to your questions. It is up to you to find what is best for you. Above all, keep in mind the ultimate purpose of our evolving profession and how "free" you want to be.