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RESOURCES

- Article I: The Translation Profession
- Article II: Life as a Translator
- Article III: Translators and Translation Vendors
- Article IV: The Translation Job
- Article V: Translator's Home Office
- Article VI: Translators and Money

ABOUT ME

- Article VII: Ethics and Professionalism in Translation
- Article VIII: MT and MAT
- Article IX: Asian Languages in Translation
- Article X: Accreditation and Standards in the Translation Industry
- Article XI: Training Translators
- Article XII: Thoughts for the Future
- Article XIII: Professions for Foreign-language Users
- Article XIV: Quick Answers to General Questions
- Afterword from the Author

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K Y˘W˙a Y˘hc ˙H˙ Y˙@˙Ub[i U˷ Y˙FYU˙a žU˙ k YV˙g]hY˙UVci h˙hfUbg˙U˷]cb ˙UbX˙ ˙Ub[i U˷ Y˙VmˉFc[Yf˙˙7\ f]gg

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H˷ Y˙@˷VfU˙m˙W˷bhˈ]bg˙fYj]Ykg˙UbX˙W˷a a Ybhˉ˷fm˙cn ˙h˙YˈfUbg˙U˷]cn ˙]bXˈ gˈfm˙hcX˷hȷU˷Ug˷ k Y˙˙U˷g˙gd˷YW]U˙]ʌnYX˙YZ˙fYbVˈa U˙Yf]U˷U˙UbX˙UVˈ˙Y˙˷Wbcb˙cZ˷ci chˈmˉgˈUVci h˷ ˙hfUbg˙Ucfg˙UbX˙hfUbg˙U˷]cn"D˷UˈgˈȿbchY˷h˷Uh a i W˷cZh˷]g˙a U˙Yf]U˷˙]g˷bchim˷Yh˷ U˙U˙U˷VˈZ˷i hYf˙ˈ[fˈD˷U˷gˈYŸa U U˷˙a Y˷]Zmci ˷U˷bm˙dUfh˙W˙U˷f˙]bhˈfYghg˷h˷Uim˙˙k ci ˙˙X˙_Yhc˙gYYUXXf˷YggYX˙"

H˷ YˈFYgci fWˈg˷gYW˷]cn ˙]g˙]nˈgˈbX˷ch˷ YˈmˈfU UˈfY]U˷]fYˈ hc˷hfUbg˙U˷]cn"H˷]g˷ gˈW˷]cn k]˙˙Yj c˙j YˈUg˙h˷]bˈ Zcfa U˷]cn VˈWˈa YgˈUˈU]U˷V˷ȼbX˙k]˙˙VY_YdhˈU˙ffYbh˷hc˷ ˙Yi ˈa a cghˈ]˷ Yˈbhˈ]dcgg]V˙Y"

:]bU˙˙mˈ]n˷ Y˙5Vci hA Y˙gYW˷]cn ˙]g˷U˷Wdmˈcf˷Fc[Yf˙˙7\ f]gg˷gˈfYgˈa Y˷Zcf˙j]Yk]b[˷cb!]bY˷ cf˷Zcf˙Xck n˙c˷Ud˷]n[˷Ugˈ YˈU˙U˷Vf]YZˈVˈc˷fˈd˙n"

[box]

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ABOUT ME

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H\Y˙@]VfUfmi]g˙WffYbh˙miU˙kcf_˙]b˙dfc[fYgg"˙5jU]˙UV˙Y˙bck˙]g˙U˙W˙`˙YW]cb˙cZ ei cHUh]cbg˙UVci h]hfUbg˙Uh]cb˙Zfca ˙ZUa ci g˙kf]hYfg˙UbX˙h\]b_YfgžUbX˙U˙ g\cfh˙d]YW˙cb˙h\Y˙UfhicfZbY[ch]Uh]cbg˙kf]hhYb˙VmiFc[Yf˙7\f]gg"˙7\YW˙VUW˙ \YfY˙Zfca ˙h]a Y˙hc˙h]a Y˙Zcf˙UXX]h]cbgžcf˙Wbh]UnFc[Yf˙7\f]gg]Zh\YfY˙]g˙ Ubmigi V^YW]b˙dUfh]W˙Uf˙mci ˙kci ˙X˙]_Y˙hc˙gYY˙UXXYX˙\YfYžcf˙]Zmci ˙\UjY˙ Ubmia UhYf]U˙mci ˙ZYY˙kci ˙X˙VY˙cZ]bhYfYgh"

- ˙Ei chYg

- ˙Cb˙BY[ch]Uh]cbg

- ˙Jc]W˙=bdi hFYj]Yk

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ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Library   Quotes   **On Negotiations**   **Voice Input Review**

Ei chYg˙5Vci hHﬀUbg˙Uﬂcb

Arnold, Matthew
The translator of Homer should above all be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author: that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is, in his manner and ideas; and, finally, that he is eminently noble.

Benjamin, Walter
Any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information–hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations.

Borges, Jorge Luis
No problem is as consubstantial to literature and its modest mystery as the one posed by translation. The forgetfulness induced by vanity, the fear of confessing mental processes that may be divined as dangerously commonplace, the endeavor to maintain, central and intact, an incalculable reserve of obscurity: all watch over the various forms of direct writing. Translation, in contrast, seems destined to illustrate aesthetic debate. The model to be imitated is a visible text, not an immeasurable labyrinth of former projects or a submission to the momentary temptation of fluency. Bertrand Russell defines an external object as a circular system radiating possible impressions; the same may be said of a text, given the incalculable possible repercussions of words. Translations are a partial and precious documentation of the changes the text suffers. Are not the many versions of the Iliad–from Chapman to Magnien–merely different perspectives on a mutable fact, a long experimental game of chance played with omissions and emphases? (There is no essential necessity to change language; this intentional game of attention is possible within a single literature.) To assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H–for there can only be drafts. The concept of the "definitive text" corresponds only to religion or exhaustion.

Borrow, George
Translation is at best an echo.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor
In poetry, in which every line, every phrase, may pass the ordeal of deliberation and deliberate choice, it is possible, and barely possible, to attain that ultimatum which I have ventured to propose as the infallible test of a blameless style; namely: its untranslatableness

in words of the same language without injury to the meaning.

Denham, Sir John
Nor ought a genius less than his that writ
Attempt translation.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo
I do not hesitate to read… all good books in translations. What is really best in any book is translatable–any real insight or broad human sentiment.

Frost, Robert
Poetry is what is lost in translation.

Goodman, Paul
To translate, one must have a style of his own, for otherwise the translation will have no rhythm or nuance, which come from the process of artistically thinking through and molding the sentences; they cannot be reconstituted by piecemeal imitation. The problem of translation is to retreat to a simpler tenor of one's own style and creatively adjust this to one's author.

Grose, Francis
Translators: sellers of old mended shoes and boots, between cobblers and shoemakers.

Hamilton, Edith
There are few efforts more conducive to humility than that of the translator trying to communicate an incommunicable beauty. Yet, unless we do try, something unique and never surpassed will cease to exist except in the libraries of a few inquisitive book lovers.

Italian Proverb
Translator, traitor.

Johnson, Samuel
Poetry cannot be translated; and, therefore, it is the poets that preserve the languages; for we would not be at the trouble to learn a language if we could have all that is written in it just as well in a translation. But as the beauties of poetry cannot be preserved in any language except that in which it was originally written, we learn the language.

Kelly, Louis
Western Europe owes its civilization to translators.

Mathews, Harry
Translation is the paradigm, the exemplar of all writing.… It is translation that demonstrates most vividly the yearning for transformation that underlies every act involving speech, that supremely human gift.

Paternak, Boris
As far as modern writing is concerned, it is rarely rewarding to translate it, although it might be easy.… Translation is very much like copying paintings.

Pound, Ezra
A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translations.

Russian Proverb
Translation is like a women: if she is faithful, she is not beautiful; if she is beautiful, she is not faithful.

Sciascia, Leonardo
The best thing on translation was said by Cervantes: translation is the other side of a tapestry.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe
It were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower–and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

St. Jerome
Non versiones sed eversiones
(Not versions but perversions)

Voltaire
It is impossible to translate poetry. Can you translate music?

Les traductions augmentent les fautes d'un ouvrage et en gâtent les beautés.
(Translations increase the faults of a work and spoil its beauties.)

Woe to the makers of literal translations, who by rendering every word weaken the meaning! It is indeed by so doing that we can say the letter kills and the spirit gives life.

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RESOURCES

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Cb˙BY[cH̹U̹cbg

by Roger Chriss
(adapted from the books mentioned at the end)

"Power is based upon perception–if you think you've got it, then you've got it. If you think you don't have it, even if you've got it, then you don't have it." –Herb Cohen

The Problem of Negotiation

There are three crucial elements to any negotiation: information, time, and power. The more of each you have, the better you will be able to negotiate. However, a positive perception of yourself in the negotiating process and your ability to think and act quickly can compensate for any shortcomings in these areas.

Information is vital. You have to understand your client's needs and position. At the beginning of the negotiation, find out what the client needs. Get all the specifics about the job, including what kind of material it is, how long it is, when it needs to be done, how it has to be delivered, and in what form it is to be delivered. Also try to assess how the client feels about the job. Can you offer any advice or suggestions concerning the job? Can you make the job easier for your client? If you can, do so, for this will strengthen your position by giving you more power.

The one piece of information you won't have is what the client is willing to pay. Remember, always talk about money last. Get the information first. There's no point in discussing your rates until you know you want and can do the job. Ask questions about the job. Use the tactic of "I'm sorry, but I don't quite understand…" to get more information. Express interest but not conviction. If you appear desperate, the client may perceive that relative lack of power and seek to exploit it.

Time is very important in translator-client negotiations. Most negotiations will occur on the telephone. Telephone negotiations are faster, more competitive, involve greater risk, offer more possibilities for misunderstandings, and are much easier for the client to say "no" in. To minimize these risks and the resulting problems, listen carefully. Take notes on everything that is said. Offer to look at the material and then call the client back. The advantage in a telephone negotiation is usually with the caller, so calling back may put you in a stronger

position.

A few important points involving time: Don't rush yourself. Always remember that your client has a deadline. Don't make snap decisions. Think slowly, carefully, and thoroughly about what you say and about what the client says. This avoids the errors and misunderstandings that often impede negotiations.

Power is very important in any negotiation. As a translator, you have the power to fulfill your client's needs. The client's power comes from the ability to give you work and the ability to find someone else. Don't worry about that. The client has called you, meaning they are interested in having *you* do the job. The only problem you will incur is justifying your price. First, make an offer. If they accept, you are finished. Get a written agreement and start the job.

If they refuse the initial offer and make a counter offer, you can accept it if you are satisfied. If you believe their counter offer is inadequate, you can use the power of precedent ("But this is what I charge all my clients"), the power of morality ("How can you expect anyone to work for such low rates?"), the power of knowledge ("I know I can do this job right and on time. That's why my rates are worth it"), the power of expertise ("I have an MA from MIIS. This makes me worth what I'm asking"), or the power of attitude ("My rates are my rates."). You then move forward by making another offer or sticking to your original one.

The most important element of negotiations to remember is that you are working toward mutual satisfaction. You and the client both have needs to meet. You have to harmonize or reconcile these needs. Though your experiences and information (e.g.: about the market) may differ, you may be able to find common ground. Try to collaborate in a win-win approach that allows the client and you to stay within your limits but be satisfied at the same time.

When negotiating, never take the results personally. You are negotiating for yourself, but don't let ego get in the way. As Santayana said, "ego is just lunacy on a leash." Always be willing to walk away. If the negotiations fail, galaxies will not explode and civilization will not collapse. A failed negotiation is better than one that leaves you or the client unsatisfied. You know each other's terms and can negotiate for another job in the future, perhaps reaching an agreement then. You want relationships with your client. Negotiations are about building relationships. A client that comes back is the best kind of client. Negotiate well and both you and the client will be satisfied. Then do the job well and you will have repeat client.

The Process of Negotiation

1. Start with the problem. What do you want? What does the client want?

> Try to understand your position and the client's position
> Don't argue over the positions
> Negotiations are about people, not positions

2. Separate the People from the Negotiation

> You want to build a relationship with every client

Put yourself in the client's shoes to understand his interests
Don't deduce their intentions from your fears
Listen actively and acknowledge what is being said
Speak to be understood; speak about yourself, not about them

3. Focus on Interests

Reconcile interests to reach an agreement
Interests define the problem (opposed positions often cover shared interests)
Acknowledge their interests as part of the problem
Be concrete, but flexible; be hard on the problem, soft on the people

4. Insist on Objective Criteria

Use "industry standards" to determine price and delivery methods
Identify your other clients to give yourself power
Identify your credentials to give yourself power
Ask questions: how did the client arrive at the price?

5. Know Your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement)

Your BATNA is your source of power (you can always walk away)
Consider the other side's BATNA

6. Invent a Solution that Benefits You and the Client

Look for mutual gain
Broaden your opinion
Make their decision easy

Tips for Better Negotiations

One: Make a strong beginning
Never begin with a joke, an apology, or an expression of gratitude
Use pregnant pauses to get the client's attention

Two: Stick to the Negotiations
Know what you want to say (use a crib sheet if necessary)
Speak clearly, with no background noise

Three: Use Simple Language
Be conversational
Use the active voice, fast language, and short words

Four: Be Firm
Make your pitch and wait for the client to respond
Move slowly but surely
Don't sound hesitant or uncertain (keep a list of your rates at your desk)

Recommended Reading:

Herb Cohen, *You Can Negotiate Anything–How to Get What You Want,* Lyle Stuart Inc. Secaucus, NJ, 1980

Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In,* Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1981.

James C. Humes, *The Sir Winston Method–The Five Secrets of Speaking the Language of Leadership,* William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

5 Translator's Perspective on Voice Input Software

The two premier products in voice input technology are currently IBM's ViaVoice and DragonSystems' NaturallySpeaking series. The former is available on both the PC and Macintosh platforms, whereas the latter is at present exclusively a PC product, though DragonSystems has announced its intentions to release a Macintosh version of its software sometime in the latter half of 2000.

I have used both NaturallySpeaking and ViaVoice extensively as a means to dictate not only translations themselves, but also business email and correspondence, articles, and even terminology entries. Both packages work well, very well in fact, under most circumstances, though they each have their limits, some unique only to one package, others a function of the state of the technology itself. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the basic elements of this software, the first part of this article describes the general issues involved in voice input. The second part of the article addresses topics particular to using the software when translating, so readers already generally familiar with the technology might want to skip ahead to the section entitled "Translating With Voice Input Software."

System Requirements

Installation and setup of both ViaVoice and Naturally Speaking is straightforward, though time consuming. You'll need considerable space on your hard drive to install either product, especially when you consider user dictionaries or the file necessary for multiple users. In addition, you'll have to attach a microphone head set to both your sound and microphone ports on your computer, meaning that you may lose other audio output, such as from speakers in a laptop or in a monitor, and you may have to rearrange your computer desk to accommodate the length of the headset cord. You also have to consider the noise level where you are going to use the voice input software. A location with lower ambient noise levels and minimal sudden acoustic interruptions is essential for successful voice input.

The most time-consuming part of the installation and set up is the creation of your user file. Both ViaVoice and NaturallySpeaking require you to set up your software by dictating 15 to 20 minutes' worth of a prepared text which the software displays for you on screen, and then processing your dictation for another 15 to 20 minutes. Each user will have to do this, and beyond this you may want to spend more time dictating prepared texts so as to improve voice recognition accuracy.

The most important aspect of your computer system is obviously the speed of your CPU. A faster CPU means faster processing for a voice recognition. Currently you would do well to use a Pentium II or an iMac or better machine unless you want to wait while your computer processes the text your dictating. You also want to have a lot of extra RAM so that the software can operate efficiently. Finally, for PCs, a good sound card is vital. I strongly suggest you check the DragonSystems and or IBM ViaVoice web site to verify that your PC and its sound card are fully compatible with the software. Anything less than full compatibility (in other words, a high-quality sound card) will result in a reduced performance. This means that many laptop computers will not allow for particularly accurate or fast voice input.

Basic Usage Issues

In principle using the software is easy. After you have installed and set up the software, you merely launch the software application, put on the headset, then start dictating text to your computer. What you will notice first is that if you speak to the computer in a perfectly natural, normal voice, dictation accuracy will suffer. Although you can speak reasonably naturally, meaning that you do not have to break up your words the way in 1950's science-fiction robot might have, you have to speak a bit more slowly and distinctly than you would to a friend, making certain to enunciate individual words clearly and accurately, and what's more, to dictate everything you mean to put in the text.

This means that if the text you are going to dictate is 'He said: "How are you?" , and then waited for an answer.' what would you actually have to say is: 'He said <colon> <open quote> How are you <question mark> <close quote> <comma> and then waited for an answer <period>', where the items in braces refer to the words you speak in order to dictate particular forms of punctuation. NaturallySpeaking and ViaVoice use slightly different versions of these commands, so if you become too comfortable with one package, you may find yourself using, for instance, the ViaVoice "dialect" to instruct NaturallySpeaking in what to do, thus getting some unexpected results. Of course in practice few people will have and regularly use both packages, but once you learn one thoroughly, if you choose to switch to the other, expect to make some adjustments.

You will dictate either into the software's dedicated dictation program, which is in effect a basic word processor that works with the dictation software, or into other applications, such as Microsoft Word or WordPerfect. In the case of IBM's ViaVoice on the Macintosh, however, you do not have this option. You dictate into ViaVoice's so-called SpeakPad, then transfer text from there to whatever application you want then text in either by using the built-in commands (which support the following applications: America Online, Outlook Express, Netscape, AppleWorks, and Microsoft Word. Of course creating a macro to cut and paste your dictated text into another application is a trivial task, but not being able to dictate directly into your favorite word processor has some implications, to be discussed in more depth below.

Both packages support basic formatting, such as capitalization, uppercase and lowercase entry, bold, underlined, and italicized text. You can also input acronyms or words by spelling them one letter at a time. And of course you can teach the software words it does not know. You can also create custom macros to enter blocks of text, such as a signature for an email message, or your address and telephone number or a standard paragraph in a business letter.

Macros can also be created to execute various commands, though the two packages have different limits for what commands can be executed, and in the case of ViaVoice, this also differs depending on which platform you are using and what other software you have installed. For instance, on the Macintosh, you can connect ViaVoice commands to external macro editors like QuicKeys.

The one aspect of dictation that is never emphasized enough is the need to have the headset microphone positioned precisely with respect to your mouth. Needless to say this exact location varies with the software, microphone, and the shape of your head, but once you find that sweet spot, you would do well to memorize it so that you can return your microphone to that position. You will probably have to adjust the position of the microphone every so often during a dictation session as the mere act of working your jaw, an inherent aspect of talking, will slowly move the microphone out of the sweet spot, which in turn will reduce dictation accuracy.

Translating With Voice Input Software

The first thing you will notice when trying to translate with voice input software is that it is not quite the same as writing with your hands. It just feels different, as though parts of your brain not used to translate by typing are being brought into service for the act of translating–or for that matter, writing–by dictating. Some people find this irritating, it seems, while others are not as bothered by it. If you have some experience doing sight translation, the act of speaking the translation of a text as you read it, then you should find using voice input software for translation easier. If you have never before done sight translation, you might try it a bit before you jump into voice input software.

The second thing you will notice is that everything that seems easy when typing turns out to be challenging by voice, and vice versa. In other words, entering straight text, such as a long sentence like "We the people of the United States of America, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, and insure domestic tranquility…" is not particularly difficult, at least once you have trained the software and are sufficiently accustomed to speaking in a manner that the software can readily convert to text.

Entering a simple mathematical expression such a $(x^2 - 1) = (x - 1) \cdot (x + 1)$ is actually quite time-consuming. You would have to say <open paren> <italicize on> <begin spell x-ray> <return> <italicize off> 2 <minus sign> 1 <close paren> <asterisk> <open paren> <italicise on> <begin spell x-ray> <return> <italicize off> <plus sign> 1 <close paren>. Then you would check the expression, adding the superscript formatting, then correcting a mistake with "2" if the software produced "two," "to," or "too," or with "1" if the software came up with "won" or "one."

Any formula, equation, mathematical expression, chemical formula, or for that matter sample of computer code will slow you down considerably, assuming that is the voice input software can process the formatting at all. The more technical your work is, the more likely voice input software will not be particularly efficient for you. If you routinely translate chemical or pharmaceutical patents, engineering specifications, software code (including HTML), or any other material with the above kinds of expressions, voice input will likely be at least somewhat tedious to use, particularly when you first get started with it.

The next problem for translators is proper nouns. The dictionaries that come with both NaturallySpeaking and ViaVoice are quite complete for common personal and business names, government entities, and organizations in modern American English, as well as foreign names that occur frequently in our daily lives in the United States. Both software packages can easily handle a phrase like "Juan Gonzales works for Mr. Suzuki at the Honda plant in Merrysville, Ohio." Neither package would do much useful with "Taguchi et al. reviewed data on Minamata disease from records at the Fujigaoka Hospital at Showa University in Kanagawa Prefecture" or "The tugboat Kobayashi Maru collided with an SDF cruiser near Cape Awano." You would have to use the spell feature or add the unrecognized words to get through these sentences, with either process slowing you down significantly.

The third major problem is formatting. Few translators produce raw text these days. Mostly we work in word processors like Microsoft Word, using bold, italics, and underlining when appropriate, centering or flushing text right, setting up margins and tabs, bulletted or numbered lists, and tables. Although NaturallySpeaking and ViaVoice on the PC do give you some control over basic application functions in MS Word, you cannot say to your PC: "Computer, create a table with three columns and eight rows." On the Macintosh platform, ViaVoice offers no application control, though the forthcoming Mac versions of NaturallySpeaking are said to work within common applications and provide some control over basic functions.

In other words, your hands will still have work to do, even if you manage to input every word by voice. You will have to set up tables, add formatting like superscripts, add or correct foreign names that your software does not recognize, and generally adjust things as you go along.

So How Fast Is It Really?

All that said, you might be wondering how fast you can enter text into ViaVoice or NaturallySpeaking. Indeed, speeds of forty to fifty words per minute are not unreasonable once you have trained the software sufficiently and gotten used to speaking to it and working with it. Note that fifty words a minute is a moderate typing speed; plenty of translators can type far faster than that. Besides, the question is not how fast can you type, but how fast can you translate or write.

First, translating and typing, or for that matter writing by hand or with a keyboard, seem to be controlled by largely separate parts of the brain. While I have not seen PETs, MRIs, or CAT scans of a translator working on a translation by typing versus by voice dictation, I suspect that, based on general knowledge and common sense, that the manual dexterity involved in typing does not much involve the language centers of the brain. Dictation, by contrast, does seem likely to involve the language centers of the brain, specifically the speech centers. Also, when you type, you can easily monitor your output by glancing from the source text to the computer screen; when dictating, you have to monitor your output with your ears, then double check the software's recognition with your eyes. In sum, it seems that dictation requires you to perform more tasks at once than dictation does, and that those tasks more directly involve the same parts of the brain. This is all supposition on my part though, based on some personal experience and reading. If any reader knows of specific studies on this subject, I'd appreciate hearing about them.

So the very act of dictating may interfere with translating, at least at first. Obviously one can learn to separate the act of translating from that of speaking: interpreters learn to do it, so you can too, at least in principle. Some people readily take to simultaneous interpreting, that is listening to a speech in the source language over earphones and then speaking the target language version into a microphone, while others claim to experience a subclinical form of schizophrenia while trying to interpret simultaneously and never quite manage to fully acquire the skill. Regardless of the how exactly the brain manages to perform two similar and related tasks at the same time, one thing is certain: practice makes perfect. Do not give up if translating seems difficult, frustrating, or stressful at first. Just keep practicing.

Given the above, the real question is how fast can you translate a text by typing versus how quickly you can translate the same text by voice. After six months of steady use of voice input software I can still produce more quickly by typing. This is because of the formatting requirements of the material I work on, the particular challenges of mathematical and other scientific expressions, foreign names, and obscure technical terminology, and finally the need to edit and proofread the material very closely for recognition errors (more on that subject below). I can however dictate an email message or letter quite quickly now, as well as other general material such as this article, part of which was produced using ViaVoice on my Macintosh.

So depending on how quickly you translate, what kind of material you work on, and how rapidly you adapt to the different mental demands of translation and dictation, you may in very short order be able to dictate most if not all of your work. It is not easy to make this comparison because of the differences in editing and proofreading with a typewritten versus dictated text.

When you type a text, you generally know what you typed. You may even know you made various typographical mistakes, fully expecting to find and eliminate them using a Spellchecker during the final check of the document. When you dictate a text, every word in the text will be a word, though that word may not be the word you expected. Homonyms are the most obvious problem, with word clusters like four/for, their/they're/there, two/too/to, and so forth requiring careful consideration when proofing a document.

The trouble does not end there, however. Voice input is a delicate procedure, and often a slight change in ambient noise, a rasp in your throat, a puff of air as you exhale, or a minor background bang, can affect how a word is recognized, or for that matter add a word to a text. I've seen "here is" become "hers," "here in" become "urine," "year" become "your," "either" become "air their," and so forth. And I've exhaled or coughed or sneezed a few times with rather amusing results on screen. You have to check a dictated text with an eye for these problems before you send it off to a client; the results otherwise might not be pretty.

Comparison of ViaVoice and NaturallySpeaking

I have to compare apples and oranges here, because I have ViaVoice on a Macintosh and NaturallySpeaking on a PC. So I will draw on comments from other users, product reviews from *PC Magazine* and *MacWorld*, and product specifications from IBM's and DragonSystems' web sits, as well as my own experience.

First, a note about my equipment. I am running IBM's ViaVoice Millennium version 1.0.2 on a Macintosh G4/350 MHz with 196 MB of RAM under OS9.0.4, and DragonSystems' NaturallySpeaking Preferred Edition version 4.0 on a Sony Viao Pentium II with 64 MB of RAM under Windows98 SE2. Obviously the Macintosh system is going to provide better performance: the CPU is faster, the system has more RAM, and the sound card in the desktop box is better.

All that said, both packages do work reasonably well under most circumstances, though NaturallySpeaking is a little less accurate than ViaVoice, and this despite having used it for far longer (the sound card in the Viao is the likely culprit here). ViaVoice does process text about 20% faster too, though this is probably owed to the difference in CPU speeds. Both keep up with me sometimes, but fall behind here and there. And it should be noted that I am known among my family and friends as being a slow, deliberate speaker with good diction and pronunciation.

NaturallySpeaking does offer greater functionality, though at a higher price. Magazine and user reviews suggest it is a bit more accurate than ViaVoice in general, and allows for greater control of application functionality and even control of Windows. Under NaturallySpeaking, it is in principle possible to use the basic functions of a PC without ever touching the keyboard, though this would be a painstaking process, at least when selecting links on a web page, opening files, or selecting and moving text. ViaVoice eschews such features, though seems to pick up a bit of speed and keep the cost of the product down in return.

Documentation with each was more than sufficient to get started, and on-line help was quite adequate. I had no problem going to the NaturallySpeaking or ViaVoice web site to get updates, usage tips, and troubleshooting guides. Most useful though is the quick reference card that comes with each software package. Keep this at your desk during the first few weeks or months you use the software so that you can quickly check how to do those little things that you won't readily remember when you first get started.

Unlike ViaVoice, NaturallySpeaking comes in various flavors. The only two worth considering for a translator are the Preferred and Professional versions, the differences between the two being dictionary sizes and the ability to create specialized dictionaries on your own. I find the Preferred edition currently meets my needs, though I may upgrade to the Professional edition when the next version becomes available.

The feature I find most important is the mechanism for correcting words that are recognized incorrectly and for adding words the software does not recognize at all. For corrections, NaturallySpeaking uses a dialog box that seems to appear slowly on my Sony Viao, and for adding new words, NaturallySpeaking uses a separate dialog box. In the Macintosh version of ViaVoice, one floating dialog palette, the Correction window, handles both tasks, allowing you to correct a word to one already in ViaVoice's dictionary, or to add a new word. In other words, while NaturallySpeaking does provide more options and control for correcting text or adding new words, ViaVoice allows you to do both in a more streamlined fashion, with fewer dialog boxes and windows. For me, the latter is preferable. Which you prefer will depend on how you like to work with your software.

On the PC I'd recommend NaturallySpeaking over ViaVoice because of the larger dictionaries and greater functionality. There is nothing wrong with ViaVoice, but at present

NaturallySpeaking offers more of what a translator needs. On the Mac I have to recommend ViaVoice because at present it is the only voice input package available. Once NaturallySpeaking comes out, this recommendation may have to be changed. Also, as new versions of these software packages come out, I'll try to update these recommendations and comparisons.

Tips To Maximize Performance

You will need to keep yourself in good voice in order to use the software for hours on end. I find that keeping a glass of water nearby with a straw in it helps to keep my throat moist. With the headset in place you cannot drink from a glass in the regular way, so the straw avoids moving the microphone out of the sweet spot. It is also important to take frequent breaks; your voice is as liable to repetitive strain as your hands are, and if you are using voice input software because of limits in your hands, then you should already know how vulnerable the human body is to repetitive strain.

Arrange your desk and computer so you can keep your hands comfortable but near the keyboard as you work. You will still need to use the keyboard from time to time, either to deal with unrecognized words or to create formatting that the software cannot muster. It is also from time to time useful to type the translation of a chunk of text you know will give your voice input software considerable difficulty.

Use the software regularly. Practice really does make a difference. And use the correction feature whenever possible so that your software not only learns new words that it will encounter again and again, but also so that the software becomes more acquainted with the nuances that make your voice yours. If the voice input software you choose allows you to import vocabulary lists, do so from on-line sources. This can save you having to over a period of months enter words one by one. The Macintosh version of ViaVoice allows users to do this; take advantage of this feature. Also take advantage of the text analysis feature, which lets you open a file (usually a text file, but NaturallySpeaking also lets you open RTF, Word, Corel, and a few other formats) which the software then analyzes for words it does not recognize. You can rapidly build vocabulary lists this way.

Finally, make backups of the voice files you create and modify. You don't want to lose what will be for you a unique and irreplaceable resource, one that in the long run will make using voice input software that much more efficient and effective.

Conclusion

Voice input is here and it works. Though voice input still has significant limitations for translators, it can be useful not only for everyday business correspondence and writing, and simple translations, but also for more demanding translations once you are used to the software and have added and customized it to meet your needs. At present DragonSystems' NaturallySpeaking has an edge over IBM's ViaVoice on the PC, though ViaVoice has a head-start on the Macintosh insofar as it is currently the only voice input application available. As new versions of these applications become available, translators may find more of their needs met, and fewer reasons to worry about their careers as their wrists hurt well into the evening. I strongly suggest you start using this software if you can so that you start the process of decreasing wear and tear on your hands and become accustomed to a new way of working.

URLs:

For more information on either of these products, visit:

[DragonSystems](#) or [IBM](#)

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HOME

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Resources

Here are some invaluable links for translators, translation, and language in general. Eventually this section will also contain glossaries and other materials from Roger Chriss, so please check back soon.

@]b_g

[Glenn's Guide](). The web site for Glenn's Guide. Includes articles, information, and useful links.

[Radovan Pletka's site]() for a mailing list of translation jobs. You can receive the current list for $30 per year. Email RPletka@aol.com or pletka@dgs.dgsys.com for more information.l

[The Translation Journal]() a publication put out quarterly on the Accurapid web site.

The "[Language International]()" web site, one of the best publications available on the translation and localization industries.

The "[Multlingual Computing]()" wegb site, one of the best magazines on computers and localization available.

[Northern California Translator's Association]() web site.

[American Translators' Association]() web site.

[Karin Ing's web site]() where a privately controlled list of agencies that don't pay translators. Also has useful links to other translation and language oriented sits.

The [Translator's Home Companion](), a site with lots of information and links on the translation profession, including glossary lists sorted by language and subject, product reviews and discussions, and other information.

[Translator Tips](), a useful web site on the subject of the business of translation. Practical advice on marketing, finding and securing clients, etc.

[Webb'sNet](), the web site of Lynn Webb. It includes her M.A. thesis, a cost/benefit analysis of

MT and MAT, as well as links to dictionaries, glossaries and other translation resources from Lynn Webb.

[Eurodicautom](#), the EC on-line dicitonary for many European languages.

[YourDictionary](#), a point of access for lots of Internet dictionaries and glossaries for all major and some many minor languages (such as Sanskrit, Sumerian, and Klingon).

[The Human Languages Page](#). Contains useful information concerning languages and literature, schools and institutions, linguistic resources, products, and services.

[Typing Injury FAQ Home Page](#). Contains useful information on CTS and other RSIs.

[RSI Program](#). Contains lots of information on CTDs (Cumulative Trauma Disorders).

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HOME

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About Roger Chriss

Roger Chriss is a freelance translator working from Japanese, French, and Spanish into English on technical, medical, and computer-related material. He holds a Master's from the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Translation & Interpretation and a Bachelor's from Wesleyan University in East Asian Studies. He passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Exam as well as the U.S. State Department's Escort and Seminar Interpretation Exams.

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In addition to translation, he teaches a course on the business aspects of the translation industry to translation students and an introductory course on the translation and interpretation professions to preparatory students at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He has also written dozens of articles on the translation profession which have appeared in journals around the world and on the Web, including the most recent version of his series of articles, "Translation as a Profession," available in the Articles section of this web site.

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- Click here to download a copy of his current resume in MS Word 98 format.

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- Click here to download a copy of his current resume in text format.

If you have any other questions about his background, experience, or credentials, do not hesitate to contact him by telephone at (831) 649-6342 or by email.

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HOME

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ABOUT ME

Roger Bennett Chriss

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Skills

• Translating technical, scientific and medical material from Japanese, French, and Spanish to English.
• Extensive computer experience, including the following on Macs and PCs:
Word, WordPerfect, FrameMaker, Excel, Photoshop, HTML
• Proficient at crafting documentation, abstracts, and business communication.

Experience

Freelance Translator, Monterey, CA, 1993 to Present
Provided translation, editing, proofreading, abstracting, and technical and commercial writing services. Representative clients and projects are as follows:

- *John Wiley & Sons*, New York, NY: Translated journal articles on electrical engineering, information theory, and computer hardware and software design.
- *Berlitz*, Santa Monica, CA: Translated, edited, and reviewed financial and technical materials, newspaper and magazine articles, clinical drug trials, patents, and multimedia storyboards.
- *Interpreters Unlimited*, San Diego, CA: Translated computer game text strings, screen documentation, and user's manuals.
- *ICT*, Murfeesboro, TN: Translated and formatted operations standards documents for manufacturing equipment; translated user's manuals for manufacturing technology.
- *Sarjam*, Portland, OR: Translated engineering specifications into Excel spreadsheets, created templates for specifications in Excel.
- *Universe Technical Translations*, Houston, TX: Translated design and engineering materials for power conversion integrated circuits.
- *Crimson Language Services*, Brookline, MA: Translated patents, software documentation, and technical materials.
- *Omega International*, Monterey, CA: Translated and edited material on hazardous

chemicals, LPG pumps, dental prosthetics, and airline customer complaint letters.
- *Japan Services, Inc.*, Atlanta, GA: Translated manufacturing specifications, production flowcharts, and employees' manuals for Toto, a manufacturer of toilet bowls.

Education

Masters of Arts, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, CA, May 1993
Major: Japanese Translation. Graduation thesis: translation of book *The Reality of Japanese ODA*. Relevant courses included: Translation of Technical Texts, Translation of Business Texts, Translation of Economic Texts, and Theory of Translation.

Graduate work in Linguistics, University of Wisconsin at Madison, Sept 1990 - May 1991
Studied advanced conversation and composition for Spanish, French, and German.

Bachelors of Arts, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, May 1987
Major: East Asian Studies. Spent junior year at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan.

Resources

Macintosh: G4 with 192 MB RAM, 10.0 GB HD, fax/modem, and DVD-ROM; LaserWriter Select 360 (600 dpi output; Mac & PC), MicroTek X6 scanner. Software includes OS 9, with Microsoft Office 98, FrameMaker 5.0, Photoshop 4.0, Filemaker Pro 5.0, and Japanese language capablities.

Sony Vaio: Pentium II with 64 MB RAM, 6.4 GB HD, fax/modem, and DVD-ROM. Software includes Microsoft Office 2000.

Library: General and technical bilingual and monolingual dictionaries of: anatomy, biology, chemistry, computer science, electronics, immunology, organic chemistry, physiology, physics, programming, and science and engineering.

Related Experience

Adjunct Professor, Monterey Institute of Int'l Studies, Monterey, CA, Jan 1996 - Present
Taught graduate course on the business side of the translation industry to second-year translation and interpretation students.

Freelance Writer, Monterey, CA, Jan 1994 - Present
Fifteen articles about the translation profession which have appeared in Microplume (a publication of ATIM), the New York City Circle of Translator's Journal, and at the Monterey Institute of International Studies' Career Development Office.

Japanese Instructor, Monterey Institute of Int'l Studies, Monterey, CA, Dec 1991 - May 1993
Instructor for English and Japanese for Training for Services Abroad Program. Adjunct faculty for Summer Intensive Language Program in 1992.

ESL Instructor, Wisconsin English as a 2nd Language Institute, Madison, WI, Sep 1990 - Jul 1991
Taught advanced grammar, intermediate composition, and introductory reading classes.

Production Staff, JapanAmerica Interchange, Hartsdale, NY, Summer 1990
DTP, editing, proofreading for international bilingual monthly *Criss-Cross.*

High School English Teacher, Yamate High School, Yokohama, Japan, Oct 1988 - Jul 1989
Taught English to Japanese students: created materials and evaluated students. Taught Japanese language and culture to the school's exchange students.

Honors

• Passed U.S. State Dept. Japanese Escort and Seminar Interpreter Exams
• Passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Exam at the highest level (1-kyu)
• Brown belt in Shorin-ryu Karate, Purple belt in Shotokan Karate, 5th kyu in Aikido
• Eagle Scout with full honors

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ARTICLES

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RESOURCES

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So what's it all about? Who and what is a translator? How does one become a translator? What is going on in the translation profession? This article and the other thirteen will take a close look at these and related questions. This first article is an overview of what is to come in the rest of the series, though by no means an outline or a summation of the remaining thirteen articles. If you are an experienced translator, you might want to browse this article and then get into the meatier discussions of current and forthcoming technologies, sticky financial and legal issues, or nagging ethical problems. If you are new to the profession, or if you are exploring translation as a possible profession, please take the time to read this article so that you are acquainted with certain basics about translators and what they do.

What is a Translator?

A translator converts written material, such as newspaper and magazine articles, books, manuals, or documents from one language into another. This is not to be confused with an interpreter, who converts spoken material, such as speeches, presentations, depositions, and the like, from one language to another. Although there is some vague connection between the abilities involved in translation and interpretation, translators cannot necessarily interpret, nor can interpreters necessarily translate. Moreover, the best translators are not good interpreters and likewise, truly great interpreters are not much for translation. And while many professional training programs require interpreters to develop some skill in translation, professionally trained translators often have no exposure to the skills of interpretation.

To be clear about the languages used by translators, I'll refer to the translator's native language as the A language and the non-native languages as the B or C languages. A B language is one which the translator can speak, read, and write virtually as a native speaker does. A C language is one which the translator can read and understand like a native, but does not necessarily speak or write so well. Obviously we all have an A language, and equally evident, all translators have a B language. Many translators have more than one B language, and some also have C languages. What very few people have is two A languages, and even if you are one of those who do, take care in making the claim, as many people will be skeptical.

I'll also use the following terms. Source text or language will refer to the language which the material first appears in, usually the translator's B language. Target text and language refer to the language that the material is translated into, usually the translator's A language. In

general, translators work from their B or C languages into their A languages, though an individual's skills and the market's needs may alter this principle.

Bilingualism

A good translator is by definition bilingual. The opposite is not necessarily true, however. A born and bred bilingual will still need two things to become a translator: first, the skills and experience necessary for translation; second, knowledge of the field in which he or she will translate. The skills and experience for translation include the ability to write well in the target language, the ability to read and understand the source language material thoroughly, and the ability to work with the latest word-processing and communications hardware and software.

This brings up an important question: Does a born and bred bilingual makes a better translator than someone who learned the B language later in life? There is no definite answer, but the following issues are important. First, a born and bred bilingual often suffers from not truly knowing any language well enough to translate, with some even suffering from what is known as alingualism, a state in which a person does lacks a full, fluent command of any language. Second, born and bred bilinguals often don't know the culture of the target language well enough to provide top-quality translations, or cannot recognize what aspects of the source language and its culture need to be treated with particular care, as they are in a sense too close to the language. And last, they often lack the analytical linguistic skills to work through a sticky text.

On the other hand, the acquired bilingual may not have the same in-depth knowledge of colloquialisms, slang, and dialect that the born bilingual has. As well, the acquired bilingual will not be able to translate as readily in both directions (from B to A language and A to B language). Finally, born bilinguals often have a greater appreciation of the subtleties and nuances of both their languages than someone who learns their B language later in life can ever hope to have.

The Education of a Translator

Translators come from all backgrounds. Some have Masters degrees in translation from the Monterey Institute of International Studies or Kent State University, some have certificates from Georgetown University or other programs in the United States, others have degrees from schools in Europe (such as the ones in London, Paris, or Geneva) or Asia (such as Simul Academy in Tokyo or Winzao in Taiwan) and many have a degree in a general field such as literature or history. While a specialized degree in translation is useful, it is far from necessary. What counts more than anything else is ability. So where does this ability come from?

Perhaps it is nature, but I suspect that nurture helps immensely. Most translators are very well-read in their languages, and can write well. Some are writers who use translation as a way to write for a living. Others are fascinated by language and use translation as a way to be close to their favorite subject. Still others are experts in certain fields and use their language skills to work in that field.

Almost all professional translators in the United States have at least a college degree. Some even have advanced degrees either in translation or in the field they specialize in (a few even have both). Most translators have university-level language training in their B and C languages. Some started their languages earlier, others later, but very few translators have no language training at all. Of course, language training might mean specialized courses from a variety of schools.

Translators also generally have lived in the countries where their languages are spoken. I know of translators who have spent seven or even ten years in the countries of their B language. Some translators have spent more time in the country of their B language than in the country of their A language. The notable exception to this is Spanish in the United States and English abroad. Because Spanish is used so widely and is as common as English in many parts of the U.S., some translators learn and then work in the language without ever leaving the U.S. As well, translators in other countries often work from English into their native language with just the language training they received in school.

Above all, translators must have a deep interest and dedication to the languages they work with. The only exception to this rule is people who translate very specialized material. I know an individual with a Ph.D. in mathematics who translated a book on topology from French to English. His French skills are dubious, but since few people in the world understand the material, he was suitable. In almost all cases, however, translators have to be committed to honing and polishing their language skills throughout their professional life.

The knowledge of the field the translator is working in is often overlooked by translators and those that hire them. Translators are by definition language professionals, but they also have to cultivate a knowledge of the areas they work in. Few translators claim to be able to translate anything written in their languages, just as few people can claim to be experts in everything. Most translators have to specialize, working with one or a few related categories of material: legal, financial, medical, computers, or electrical engineering, to name a few. Each field has its own vocabulary, syntax, and style; the translator has to work hard to develop the knowledge necessary to deal with such material.

The knowledge also includes two other important factors. First, the translator should have the background knowledge to work in the field. This does not mean that a medical translator should have an M.D. or that a translator of software manuals should be a programmer. But some background, experience, or education (or all three) is essential. This can be obtained through coursework, on-the-job experience, or self-study. No one seems too concerned with exactly how translators develop their subject knowledge, as long as they truly have. And though translators do have degrees in their specialization, most do not.

Second, the translator should have the necessary resources to deal with the material. This means dictionaries, glossaries, and any other resources. Such resources can include web sites devoted to translation or terminology, Usenet discussion groups concerning translation, friends or colleagues who work in the profession, and magazines and journals. And translators have to work tirelessly to maintain if not improve their knowledge of the fields they work in by reading related material. They also have to invest the time and money in maintaining their reference library.

In other words, professional translators are always learning. You don't just put your hand on

a rock and say: "I am a translator." Nor do you simply acquire a language in a few months by living somewhere and then begin translating. Heinrich Schliemann may have learned to read each of his languages in six weeks, but he couldn't write or speak them (nor did he need to). Moreover, at that time, languages had considerably more limited vocabularies than now. And of course, reading and translating are two separate things.

So at what point are you ready to begin translating? Simple. When you feel that your abilities of expression and comprehension in your A and B languages are strong enough that you can do the job properly by the client's deadline. The length of time to cultivate these abilities depends on the person and the language. Native speakers of English have an easier time with the Romance and Germanic languages because their grammars, syntax, and vocabulary are relatively familiar. A language like Chinese or Japanese takes a long time simply because you have to learn to read and understand thousands of characters, as well as deal with grammar, syntax, and structure wholly unrelated to that seen in English.

Finally, you have to be able to prove that you have the skills you claim to have. Experience living, working, and studying in the country of your B language is one form of proof. A degree in your language or in translation is another. Taking a test such as the ones given by the ATA, the State Department, or the United Nations is another. But I'll leave the discussion of accreditation for a separate article.

What is a Translation

A turn-of-the-century Russian translator said: "Translation is like a woman, if she is beautiful, she is not faithful; if she is faithful, she is not beautiful." I hope you will ignore the blatant sexism in the statement and instead see one of the kernels of truth in translation. Translators must strike a balance between fidelity to the source text and readability in the target language. We have all seen material that is so obviously translated as to sound awkward in our native languages, and in some cases as to bear enough hallmarks of the source language as to be readily identifiable as coming from it. The best translation is the one that no one recognizes as a translation. In other words, the document should read as though it were written in the target language originally. This implies, by extension, that the translator's time and effort are transparent, and the translator ends up being invisible. In other words, you do your best work when no one realizes you have done anything.

Achieving this level of translation is challenging, to say the least. Imagine walking a tightrope blindfolded during a wind storm, with people throwing heavy objects at you and shaking the rope. This represents the balancing act. Now add to it the often unreasonable deadline which agencies require of translators by having someone behind you on the rope poking you in the seat of your pants with a pitchfork. Sound frustrating? It can be. But if you enjoy a challenge and know how to deal with your languages, it's not too bad after you've been at if for a while (I suppose the same can be said for tightrope walking).

The trick is to let your clients decide what they want. Since they have to live with the results of your work, let them choose. Patiently explain to them the options they have, how long each might take, and how much each possible version will cost. They'll decide if they want a literal, if unreadable, translation or if they want a Pulitzer Prize-winning text.

If your client can't decide, doesn't know, or won't tell you, then follow the advice of Buddha

and take the middle path. This is easier with some languages and some subject areas than others. Although most people think that technical material is easiest for stylistic considerations, consider this. Academic style varies from nation to nation. In English, we generally present our thesis, then give the evidence, develop the argument, and then reach the conclusion. However, in Japanese, we usually present a vague thesis, give the evidence slowly with lots of discussion, and then reach some tentative statement about the thesis in the form of a conclusion. Other differences exist among other language pairs. Somehow you have to deal with these differences.

Another potential pitfall with technical translation is that often the client cannot let you see or touch the object in question. If you are translating a computer system manual, it's very helpful to see and even work a little with the system. The same holds for a video game, home audio component, or for that matter a scanning electron microscope, which I realize is hardly something you want in your home, but I have translated manuals and technical specifications for such technology. Sometimes seeing the product in question is not possible, the system or software may still be in development, so you are effectively flying blind, trying to land yourself at a destination you've never seen. You might have to create terminology for the system, only to find that the client wants something else. You then have to go back and change everything you did.

The most difficult problem is when you encounter something in one language that doesn't exist in the other. Financial instruments, legal procedures, government and business structures, and so on vary from nation to nation and culture to culture. Although standard glossaries exist for the most commonplace of these, in other words those that you might hear about on Headline News, translators are usually dealing with new or specialized material and information, so you might be stuck having to christen something on your own, or leave it in the A language and put in a translator's note explaining what the term means.

There is a Golden Triangle in any form of business. It is an equilateral triangle (meaning that all three sides are the same size), with the first side being Quality, the second, Time, and the last, Price. If you consider an ideal project to be a balance of all three, and therefore rest in the center of the triangle, you can see what happens when you want to lower costs (imagine your job moving toward the Price side). Quality goes down and Time remains the same. If you want a cheap job done quickly, then Quality really drops. Conversely, if you want a job whose Quality is excellent, then Price and Time both rise. Keep this in mind when you consider your translation speed and what you charge; you will want to be flexible in both areas to give your clients what they want.

What is Translated

Most of the material people want translated is not high culture. I have translated materials ranging from articles in medical journals on deep vein thrombosis to bearer's bonds. The longest translation project I ever did was a 65,000-word book; the shortest, a two-word phrase.

Outsiders to the profession generally see translation as a slow and expensive process which most businesses and organizations would rather avoid. One client told me that translation was, and I quote, "A f*cking pain in the Go**amn #ss." They prefer not to go through the hassle of calling some agency, sending them the material, waiting for a bid, bargaining and

haggling over price, form and date of delivery, and then waiting to see if they get something they can use. Very little of what businesses do is worth translating. So what they do translate has to be important to someone somewhere. And therefore it has to be important to you to do it right, especially if you want to get more work from that client.

What might seem stupid to you could be worth a lot to someone. I've translated lost traveler's checks surveys, interoffice memos, and advertising copy for car care products. None of this is high culture. But someone wanted it, so I did my absolute best. Remember, the only way to survive as a translator is to do a good job. You will be judged primarily if not solely on your work.

This said, materials to be translated come in all sizes and shapes. Often you have to deal with hand-written material. Someone scrawled out some message to someone else and this twenty-five-word chit of paper is now Exhibit A in an international patent infringement lawsuit. You probably won't know that, but it could happen. When I was working in-house as a translator for the City of Kawasaki in Japan, my supervisor plopped a short letter on my desk and I translated it. I later found out that Prime Minister Takeshita took this letter to President Reagan during the Summit meeting in 1988. You never know.

When translating, no problem is too small, no term too minor to be ignored. The people who read your translation don't know the source language. If they did, they wouldn't have hired you. It's easy to see why an article describing a surgical procedure must be done very accurately. It might be harder to see why the comments of a Japanese co-ed on an airline survey would be important, but they could affect future policy of that carrier. You have to take it all seriously if you want your clients to take you seriously.

The Role of the Translator

Translators are language professionals. They are applied linguists, competent writers, diplomats, and educated amateurs. Like linguists, translators have to be capable of discerning subtleties and nuances in their languages, researching terminology and colloquialisms, and handling new developments in their languages. Like writers, translators have to be accustomed to working long hours alone on a subject which interests few people and with a language that few people around them know. Like diplomats, translators have to be sensitive to the cultural and social differences which exist in their languages and be capable of addressing these issues when translating. And like educated amateurs, translators have to know the basics and some of the details about the subjects they deal with.

The above is an idealization of the translator, an image which professional translators aspire to and achieve with varying degrees of success. Not all translators need to overflow with these qualities. They must, however, have them in sufficient measure to be able to translate their material in a manner acceptable to their clients.

Somewhere in the process of translating, the translator will come across all these issues. When I work with technical or medical documents, I have to deal with the intricacies of technical writing in Japanese and English and research new or obscure terms (and sometimes invent my own). I struggle with my English to polish and hone it so that the client sees the material as natural, without the tell-tale signs that it was translated from Japanese. I deal with the differences between Japanese and American culture, especially when I translate computer

manuals. We give instructions and explanations in the U.S. very differently from how people give them in Japan.

Like any professional, translators have to stay on top of their areas of expertise. I devote a lot of my time to browsing through magazines like "PC Magazine", "MacWorld", "Scientific American", "The Journal of the American Medical Association", and the "New England Journal of Medicine" as well as reading numerous books on developments in medicine and computer science.

The fundamental rule when you're not sure of a term or phrase is ask. When you have doubts or questions about a translation, call the client, ask your question, and then get the answer. If you're still not sure, make a note of it in the final translation. Clients are surprisingly tolerant of such notes and often expect them. I've even heard that clients are sometimes suspicious when they don't see these notes. After all, how much can a translator know about new surgical procedures to clear a pulmonary embolism?

In-House versus Freelance

Translators either work for themselves as freelance translators or in-house as employees of, for instance, a translation agency or software localization firm. The former are typically called freelance translators, or freelancers, and the latter in-house translators. If you are just entering the profession, or if you are considering translation as a career, you have to look closely at these two options to decide which is right for you.

As a freelance translator, you are a business owner. You will take care of marketing, invoicing, accounts payable and receivable, taxes, equipment purchases and maintenance, and so forth. Freelance translators may make more per year on average than in-house translators, but their income is far more variable, and they have to cover all their own expenses, including all taxes, retirement funds, medical and other forms of insurance, and business/operating costs.

As an in-house translator, you work for someone else. You go to your office in the morning, sit in your cubicle during the day translating whatever the company needs, attend meetings to discuss large-scale translation projects, terminology, or equipment, go to training sessions to learn to use the new LAN system or MAT software, and then go home in the evening. Like most jobs, you get paid vacation, insurance, half of your Social Security and FICA taxes paid, and a retirement plan of some sort.

Although the remaining articles will discuss the above differences between freelance and in-house translation in detail, and even offer suggestions as to which people might be suited for, I will say here that often questions of personality and work style are irrelevant. The first and most important question is money. Can you afford to be a freelance translator? To start as a freelance translator, you will need a several thousand dollars to get the computer hardware and software you need, to do some marketing, and to wait out the first few months during which time you will likely have little work, and you will be patiently waiting for that first invoice to be paid. So if you are single with few financial responsibilities, some money saved, and don't mind a bit of a risk, the answer to the money question is affirmative: you can have a go at freelance translation. If however you are married with a couple of children, have the usual expenses of a mortgage, medical costs, and so forth, then you should think very

carefully before starting up as a freelance translator.

There is also a strong argument for getting your feet wet in the industry by working for someone else. You can think of it as paid on-the-job training. You will learn more about translating by translating than by doing anything else. And you will also acquire not only all that secondary know-how, such as word processing, negotiating, or filing tax forms, but also lots of practical knowledge of the industry, such as rates, which language pairs or subject areas are in demand, or what technologies are likely to affect translation in the near future. You might even develop relationships that can be turned into clients for a freelance business. So consider starting off as an in-house translator, especially if you are uncomfortable with the financial aspects of working for yourself, or are uncertain as to how you will feel about working at home alone.

A Paradox

The very qualities that seem to make a good translator, those of attention to detail, passion for languages and research, care and craft in writing, also seem to be those that make a poor negotiator or marketing person. How does one overcome this paradox? One, force yourself to market, even when you don't want to. Make a commitment to yourself to send 100 letters to agencies this week; to call your top five clients for a brief chat; to do annual taxes before 1 October, after having filed an extension on 15 April. You are in business, and don't forget it.

You should also remind your clients that you are a business professional. Translators want to be treated as professionals, and therefore, they have to behave as professionals. Take the time to learn about your industry, about your languages, about your subject specializations, and about the technology you use to do the work you do. In any industry, there are always too many people wanting to do the work to be done, and too few people who can actually do the work properly. As a translator, you want to make clear to everyone that you are in the latter category, and not in the former.

Above all, as a translator, you are standing between two people or organizations, one which created the material and the other which wants to read it. You are their solution to this otherwise intractable problem. Remember, it's the information age, and there's lots of information out there in lots of languages. Translators are the ones who bring this precious commodity to the people who want it.

THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Article II. Life as a Translator

Few people have any idea what it is that translators do. Some people argue that translators don't actually do anything because they are not creating anything new. Most people accept that what translators do is work, even if they don't understand how translators do what they do, or for that matter in what kind of environment a translator works.

While I can offer no concrete ideas on the mental gymnastics involved in rendering in the target language ideas expressed in the source language, I can shed some light on how translators do what they do. Having been a freelance translator for seven years now, I have developed certain routines and habits that should be of interest to readers who don't already translate, and might provide some new ideas, or perhaps a chuckle, to those who have been at it a while.

A Day in My Life as a Translator

I start my work day around 7:30 A.M., in part because I live and work in California but have clients on the East Coast that are still grappling with the concept of time zones, and in part because by starting early I am assured an hour of two of considerable quiet during which I can work at full concentration and without distraction.

First, a word about time zones. Freelance translators almost inevitably work for businesses hours ahead or behind them, sometimes even a day ahead if the International Date Line is involved. As such, some businesses may come to expect their freelancer to be on call 24 hours a day, not only able to accept faxes or email, a relatively automatic process, but to confirm on the telephone receipt of such faxes or email, and even to discuss a project, if not actually work on it. This is not a practice I support or recommend; I am willing to work hard for my clients, but I am also protective of my life outside of work and so discourage clients from thinking of me as being on-call at all times. Whether you choose to be available for your clients at all times or to ignore your business phone, fax, and email at certain times is up to you, but I strongly suggest the latter so as to prevent excess stress (will they never leave me alone!?), job dissatisfaction (all I do is work, work, work!), and burn out (I can't take it any more). A career is like a marathon: only by pacing yourself will you be able to retire with grace and poise.

If, by the way, you are awoken by your business phone at six in the morning, you are better

off not answering it. You will not, regardless of how quickly you think you wake up, sound particularly coherent or give intelligent answers to questions. I made this mistake enough times that I now hope to help others avoid it; let your answering machine take the call, then call the client back once you are fully awake and aware, ready to work.

As said above, I like to start my day early so that I can work uninterrupted for a couple of hours. I find translation to require considerable concentration, particularly if I am working on a document with sticky syntax or troublesome terminology, with concepts that are new or unfamiliar to me, or with printing of such poor quality that the job turns into an exercise in archaeological decipherment. Phone calls and faxes can interrupt the flow I get in once I get started on a text, so I all but guarantee myself a couple of hours in which, except for rare cases, I can crank along at a steady, productive pace.

As an aside, organizing and tracking your jobs will make your life much easier. I do this by putting each job into its own folder, specifically a clear plastic folder that allows me to see what the job is and how far along I am in working on it. Any new job gets a folder, even if the job is merely pending and not yet confirmed (meaning that I don't yet have the go-ahead to work on the job). All active jobs are kept in a drawer so that I know where they all are at any given time, and with a glance in that drawer, I can see how much work there is to be done. When a job is finished, I remove the material from the clear plastic folder and place all documents related to the job into a large manila envelope, writing on the front the client's name, a description of the job, and the date the job was finished. That folder is then archived, and roughly three years later I shred and recycle the paper. Of course I also keep electronic copies of all material, archived on Zip discs. Enough of that aside; all I am suggesting here is that you keep your jobs organized so that you don't spend your days trying to figure out what you are supposed to do.

The rest of my day can unfold in one of a few ways, depending on how much work I have and when the work has to be done. I'll tell you about each, one at a time. On days when I have a lot of work, I spend the rest of the day working on the translation until either it is done, or at least far enough along. Whenever I receive an assignment, I check the length of the source text, do a quick calculation, and figure out how many words I have to do every day. I then do a little more than that per day.

As I translate, when I find words or phrases I don't know, I note them on a separate page and then look them up later. Sometimes, my search for these words takes me to one of the libraries nearby or has me on the phone, checking with someone who can either tell me the word, or at least explain the concept to me. I have spent up to four hours on a single day in the library sifting through dictionaries, encyclopedias, almanacs, and maps, looking for the words I need to finish an assignment.

On days when I have only a little work, I still begin the day by translating. Once finished with the day's quota, I work on finding more work. This means sending letters to agencies, calling my clients, and most importantly, looking for new sources of work. I also spend time studying my languages and subject areas, working on articles such as the one you are reading now, updating and improving my web site, and keeping on contact with fellow translators and clients.

If I don't have any work, I work on finding work. Unfortunately, I still have the occasional

day when I don't have any work. Translators generally say that the business is one of "feast or famine." You are either drowning in work, translating from dawn until late at night, trying to meet your impossible deadlines and fretting over carpal tunnel syndrome as you do so, or you are waiting by the phone, praying to the patron saint of translators, St. Jerome, or perhaps the patron saint of lost causes.

You probably noted the paradox here. When translators have lots of work, they have no time to market themselves for the upcoming and inevitable dry spell. When they have no work, it is too late to do the necessary marketing. Which leads to a truism for translators and all other free-lancers: market always!

Income

Income in translation, particularly freelance translation, varies over a considerable range. At the lower end, a freelance translator can have negative income, a result of spending more for business purposes than earning from translation in a given year. The upper end of the range is filled with rumors, from stories of individuals earning over $150,000 per year to claims by duos or small teams of generating in excess of $200,000 per year.

Realistically, few translators ever have negative income, except perhaps during their first year of business. This is most likely to happen if this first business year consists of the last two months of the calendar year, during which considerable funds are spent on computers and other office essentials. Also, few translators ever make over $60,000 per year, and you should be very skeptical of claims of income above $75,000. Of course, there are exceptions, but for the most part translators can expect to make between $35,000 and $45,000 per year. If you hear stories about income levels much higher than that, just smile and bear in mind that most people exaggerate their income, consciously or unconsciously, at least to some extent.

So if you are asked if you make a lot of money as a translator, your answer will probably be no, though that does depend on what you consider a lot of money. And it also depends on what month or year you are in, as translation, like all businesses, is not perfectly stable or predictable.

To be more specific, translators are almost always paid by the word in the United States (between $0.04 and $0.25, though sometimes higher) or by the line or page in other countries. Few translators can do more than about 3,000 words per day, though some do achieve far higher levels of productivity. Regardless, annual income can be calculated with a simple equation:

Annual income = Average Word Rate x Words Translated

If you are charging $0.20 per word and are doing 2,500 words per day, six days a week, 52 weeks per year, you'd earn $156,000. An impressive sum, to be sure, but let's examine what you'd have to do to reach that level of earnings.

First, you'd have to find all your own clients, since no agency is going to pay you $0.20 per word except under extremely extenuating circumstances that could not possibly continue for a year's time. Even direct clients rarely pay that much these days, unless you are providing

desktop publishing and other ancillary services, which themselves can take a lot of time and require expensive software and other technology. And direct clients generally expect a completed translation, one that has been edited, proof-read, and perhaps even prepared for printing. So you either have to do all of that yourself, or you have to pay someone else to do it. Either way, your overall income will fall.

Second, you'd have to be very fast and efficient to maintain that level of productivity over a year's time. There are people who do it. There are even people who claim to do in excess of 7,000 words per day regularly, some of whom simply dictate their translation into a tape recorder, then pay others to transcribe and edit their work. As above though, your income will fall as you pay some of your gross earnings to the people who do this work for you. And as for doing it all yourself, that leads to…

Third, you'd spend a great deal of your time working, probably in excess of ninety hours per week. Remember that for every hour of translation you do, you will likely have five to ten minutes worth of other office work, including marketing, invoicing, accounts receivable and payable, banking, purchasing office supplies and equipment, maintaining and upgrading your computer system, evaluating and acquiring new dictionaries and other language resources, and doing taxes, to name a few possibilities. This is a part of running a business, and you can certainly pay other people to do this work for you, but again, what you pay others comes out of your income.

To reiterate, starting freelance translators can reasonably expect to make $25,000 in their first year, perhaps more, sometimes even considerably more, depending on their language combination and subject specialization. The average in the industry seems to be around $40,000 per year, with some people making in excess of $100,000 per year. But those that do rarely have time for little else but eating and sleeping. There are far easier, faster, and more humane ways to get rich. With the right education, such as in international law or finance, and a few languages, one can go very far and very high in industry, or so I'm told. In other words, translation is not a way to get rich quickly or make the Forbes' 400.

For those of you that dream of translating a great novel or book and living off the royalties, doing so will be extraordinarily difficult. Authors generally get about 10% of the hardback sales and 4% or the paperback sales in royalties and they have to fight very hard to get that. They're not going to yield part of it to some translator unless they absolutely have to. I've translated books and gotten paid the same way I did for everything else: by the word. Many years ago, different relations existed between publishers and translators, but nowadays, the only advantage to translating a book is that you have a lot of work for a long time. Also, royalty payments generally are paid starting six to twelve months after the book hits the bookstores, which will likely be six to twelve months after you finish translating it. That is too long to wait for a substantial amount of income, though this may be offset by an advance from the publisher, should you be able to get one. In sum, translating books can be a fascinating process, but approach it as a business proposition. Do the math if you are offered multiple payment options and make a strategic business and financial decision about the job.

If you're thinking of translating literature, think twice. It takes a long time to translate a work of art, and even more for it to be published. You might get some kind of royalty out of it, but hardly enough to justify the time and effort you'll expend cultivating the necessary relations with the publishers, editors, and of course, the writer (if alive). You really need to love

literature if you want to do this. It can be very rewarding, I say so having done a bit of that work myself, but it is also quite demanding. Enter into such projects slowly and carefully, if at all.

So if you think $35,000 to $45,000 a year is enough to live on, to raise your family, and to prepare for retirement, then you'll be fine financially in translation. Of course, there is the theoretical maximum, and you can increase your income by finding your own clients, or providing other services. And, when you consider that the average individual income in the U.S. in 1998 was roughly $25,000, translation looks all right.

However, this varies from month to month and year to year. Translation is a very fickle industry, subject to the vagaries of politics and economics like few other professions are. In 1988, the demand for Arabic translators was minimal, but thanks to Sadaam Hussein, in 1990, the demand soared. Now, the demand is low again. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, most Eastern European languages saw low demand, but now, the demand is much higher and growing. Japanese was in very high demand until the economic bubble burst. Things haven't been the same for Japanese translators since.

Your income in one year is not a good indication of your income for the next year. In fact, it is no indication at all, unless you are so well established and work in such an esoteric (but still in high demand) field that you can somehow count on work always.

Furthermore, your income from month to month fluctuates. While you will never make so little as to have to choose between feeding yourself or your cat, you may well have little left over after basic expenses in some months. Other months will leave you with enough to take a luxurious vacation, though you should save at least some of that extra income in preparation for the months with less income.

In sum, if you can handle variety and unpredictability in your income, freelance translation is the profession for you. If you want a paycheck every month with the same amount on it, and you want to see that amount go up incrementally over the years, then look for an in-house position or a new profession.

Other Financial Issues

Something that most translators don't realize during their first year in the profession and most would-be translators don't consider is the financial aspects of working for yourself. This is complex, and changes from year to year, so I'll be general here. However, keep all this in mind, and keep track of all this, because it is not only important, but it's the law. And consult with a tax professional for answers to any detailed or unusual questions.

Free-lance translators are self-employed, meaning that they have to file a "Schedule C" at the end of the tax year. They also have to pay quarterly estimated income tax (both federal and state, unless your state does not require payment of state income tax). This can be difficult to do since a translator typically doesn't know what his or her income will be. And they have to pay self-employment tax.

Sound unpleasant? Well, there's more. Free-lance translators also have to pay all their Social

Security tax, all their FICA tax, and any other taxes your state and our federal government invent in the future. Freelancers also have to fund their own retirement plans, though this does have some advantages, including more control over how your retirement funds are invested and higher ceilings for annual investment in retirement funds. And self-employed people need to arrange for their own health coverage and life insurance (if necessary), both of which tend to cost progressively more per year as one ages. And to top it all off, you have to pay Self Employment Tax, though one-half of that amount is deductible from your overall income tax. All in all, free-lancers end up paying a lot more in tax than someone who works for someone else.

However, you can take many more deductions than people who are regular employees can. First and foremost is the well-known "Business Use of Home" deduction. You can also deduct as expenses any and all equipment, tools, and supplies (computer hardware and software, paper, stamps, envelopes, paper clips, erasers, dictionaries, etc.) that you use, as well as a percent of your telephone and utility bills, and a part of your medical insurance costs (this percentage changes every year). Furthermore, you can deduct advertising costs, finance charges for business stuff bought with a credit card, and cost of membership to professional associations and subscriptions to professional journals and magazines.

Does this all balance out somehow? For some people more than others it does. As long as you keep track of everything you do, keep the receipts and records of when and where you do it, and take the time to prepare your taxes accurately and completely, you shouldn't have any problems in this area.

A word of advice, however. Although recent changes to how the IRS performs audits as well as improvements to the IRS's computer systems seem to be leading to more responsible auditing, all self-employed people are still vulnerable, particularly those whose annual income is higher than roughly $75,000 or whose deductions represent a substantial percentage of their annual income. In other words, don't get too cute or clever with the IRS, or at least do so under the expert advice of an accountant.

How to Survive

There are two fundamental rules in the translation profession. Most successful translators seem to follow both, though some successful translators follow neither.

Rule Number One: Work in the country of your B language.

Rule Number Two: Marry a native speaker of your B language.

These rules are not meant to be humorous. Translators typically do make ten to twenty percent more working into a foreign language in the United States as compared to translating into English. And some agencies and employers are more comfortable giving work to a translator whose spouse is a native speaker of the translator's B language. I've had a few agencies choose not to give me work because I was not married to a Japanese woman (Japanese is one of my B languages). Obviously these rules are not meant to suggest that those who break them are doomed to failure, but those who do will have to work harder.

Now then, what to do when there isn't much work coming in? One possibility is rely on your spouse's income (not feasible unless you are married). Another possibility is rely on the money you have in your bank account (assumes you have enough money). A third possibility is do something else part time.

Many translators also do other things on the side. I personally consider myself a consultant who provides language services to anyone who wants them. I have taught English, Japanese, and Spanish over the years. I have done copy editing, proofreading, and written abstracts and text analyses for people. I have worked part-time as a desktop publisher and a database consultant. I do some technical and commercial writing, including short articles for Transparent Language and operating manuals for QXCOM (now a part of Computer Associates). And I teach one class per year at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (the course is called, not surprisingly, "Translation as a Profession").

Never forget that the suite of abilities which translators possess can be applied productively to numerous related fields. Translators are often quite capable copy editors, proofreaders, and desktop publishers. Translators can readily make the transition to writing manuals for computer companies, articles for local papers or magazines, and even short stories or books. Translators can also teach the languages they know or prepare reference or educational materials. Some translators even make the move into interpretation, but be warned: interpretation is a very different animal from translation and requires thorough schooling in the techniques of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation.

Because translation is catch-as-catch-can and can even be seasonal, having a fall-back position is a good idea, particularly as you're getting started in translation. I don't know many translators whose clientele is so reliable that they have a constant and unending flow of work. You have to be ready for those dry spells. If you need money, then go get a part-time job or do something on the side. You can always work for a temporary agency. If you don't need the money, then do one of those things you talk about doing all the time.

How to Succeed

So how do people succeed in this profession? Is there a secret, and if so, what is it? And why, some people might ask, would anyone bother becoming a translator? All good questions; let's examine each in turn.

First: how to succeed. In a nutshell, you succeed by working hard. Sorry, that's really all there is to it. You can sit in your home office, watch your screen saver draw little fish or flying toasters on your computer monitor, and think that you are failing simply because you are an unrecognized and undiscovered genius, you are working in a language with little demand, or you don't have the right background or equipment. However, the truth is much simpler.

If you are not succeeding, you are not working hard enough.

Of course, this assumes that you do have some equipment (translations hewn in stone or written on parchment are not acceptable these days), that you know a good language (little demand nowadays for Hawaiian or Basque), and that you have some ability (though if you

didn't, you wouldn't be reading this article). Maybe you are the next great literary translator, the person who will bring new meaning to the Upanishads or the Iliad. But most translators are not literary geniuses, and they don't have to be. In other words:

If you're not succeeding, you're not working hard enough.

So what do I mean? Simply this: being a free-lance translator involves a lot of business and a little translation. You will have to spend your time marketing yourself, telling clients that you exist and are available to do work, proving to people that you can do what you say you can, and continuing to do this for the duration of your stay in the profession. No matter how long you've been a translator, you'll have to market yourself incessantly. Send your resume hither, dither, and yon. Cold call potential agencies or clients. Walk into local companies (for example: law firms and consulting houses) and see what their needs are. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce or the appropriate embassy or consulate.

Do all this and keep doing it. The people who succeed in translation are the ones who are willing to do all this and more.

Second: what's the secret? I wonder if I should let you in on this, because if I do, then it won't be much of a secret. And I might create more competition for myself by doing so. However, like most secrets, it's not really a secret. And saying it is much easier than doing it. So, without further ado, here it is. The secret of success in translation is: TIMING.

Timing is everything in translation; and I mean this in the broadest sense possible. When you sent your resumes and cover letters to potential clients, when you submit samples of your work to agencies, when you take vacations, when you make new purchases, when you pay taxes, when you get paid, and most importantly, when you submit work.

Let's start with the last first. Submitting work to an agency or client is what you have to do in order to get paid. Clients and agencies want the work on time. That means don't submit anything late, ever! If you think it will be late, then call them ahead of time and make arrangements. Be sure to fix a date and time when you negotiate the terms of delivery. And keep in mind where you are and where the agency or client is. I often have to wake up quite early to deliver something to New York at 9:00 a.m. (I live in California) or submit it in the evening of the prior day.

In sum: NEVER SUBMIT ANYTHING LATE!

Next, when you give and receive money. The government has this rule that self-employed people have to pay taxes quarterly (by April 15, June 15, September 15, and then January 15). When you do your annual income taxes, you figure out what you owe, then subtract what you've already paid and then pay the government the remainder (unless you paid too much, in which case you get some back). Financially, the best strategy is to pay something every quarter so that you avoid the penalties for underpayment at the end of the year and the shock of a large payment on or before April 15. If you have already paid most of what you owe at year's end, you won't have to pay much of an underpayment penalty, if anything at all.

You should also plan your purchases, be they personal or business, around your finances and

payment schedules. Any large business purchase is best made at the end of the year when you are close to getting your deduction for it. Any large personal expenditure is best made when you have a lot of work and a bit in money in the bank. And always keep some extra in the bank, just in case.

As for when to take a vacation, this depends a lot on your personal life. However, it's very easy to get work around Christmas and New Year's because almost no one is around to do it. Also, during August, the supply of translators drops (they all migrate somewhere) and so if you're available, it might be easier to get work. And, you should know the annual cycle for the languages you're working in so that you know when the busy and off seasons are.

Finally, the when of marketing. I have harped on marketing as being the element which separates the successful translators from the failures. Maybe this is harsh, but I do believe it's true. However, although marketing may involve some subtle and ethereal qualities which are difficult to define and explain, one quality which is easy to explain is timing. You have to send resumes to agencies and clients regularly. Time your mailings so that they correspond to the busy season for your language (it's up to you to find out when that is). Also, know when to call them. Wait at least a few days if not a week after sending a resume before calling. Call around mid-morning because that's when people are available but still reasonably relaxed. Call during midweek, for the same reason. And most of all, do all this regularly.

Remember, the secret is timing, and experience is the best way to master it.

Finally, we'll close this article with a brief exploration of why people become translators. I imagine that other translators reading this will find my reasons familiar, though they might differ from your own. I'll also add what I've heard from others, and then you can add your own. If you are thinking of becoming a translator, this might help you make your decision. If you are working with translators, this should help you better understand those mysterious people who work alone to reproduce information.

I translate because I like to write and I like languages. I am a free-lance translator because I like to work for myself. I have translated in-house in Japan and have had teaching jobs on both sides of the Pacific. I've also worked as an hospital orderly, as a desktop publisher, graphic artist, database consultant, truck driver, stock boy, and garbage shoveler (yes, that really is a job). I prefer working for myself and that's certainly one of the reasons I like translation.

Some people are in translation because they like to translate. They enjoy the challenge of taking information in one language and discovering a way to render it into another. They relish the challenge of wading through uncharted linguistic and terminological waters. They thrive under the pressure of harsh deadlines and irregular work schedules. And, they like the income.

Some become translators because they know two or more languages and a subject area and want to do something with this knowledge. Bilingual computer scientists and software engineers find the move into technical translation to be smooth, though not necessarily easy. Many people blindly enter translation, not realizing just what it is like to sit alone at a computer, dictionaries piled around you, working for six to twelve hours on a document which came in the day before and has to go out the following morning.

Is there a right reason to be a translator? I doubt it. Is there a wrong reason? Sure. Knowing two languages is not a good reason to be a translator. It's a start, of course, but there is a lot more. Loving languages is also a start, but I know people who love languages and hate translation; they seem to head into linguistics.

So in closing: if you're a translator, great. If you want to be one, great. If you don't want to be one, great. I like this profession and I know may others who do. With any luck, more of us will be able to know each other better, and the profession itself will be better for it.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

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Translators do not work in a vacuum. Work has to come from somewhere, ultimately from some individual or organization that has material in one language and needs to be able to read it in another language. As discussed in the first two articles, most of this material is business-related, often it is software guides, hardware manuals, engineering specifications, financial reports, legal transcripts, in other words, material that someone needs for some business purpose. Often the material is too large and complex for one translator to handle in a reasonable amount of time, and typically the organization that wants the translation done wants to give the entire translation project to one organization. So we have translation vendors, typically referred to as translation agencies.

What is an Agency?

Translators have all had to deal with agencies at one point or another. Although some of us work exclusively with agencies, others of us have our own clients, and a still others work in-house for a company or organization. Nonetheless, no translator can afford, literally or figuratively, to ignore agencies, and it behooves every translator to know as much about them as possible.

An agency is a service house that provides clients with translations. There are translation agencies in every major city around the world. There are large chains of translation agencies, like Berlitz and Bowne. Other agencies have a headquarters in a major city and then numerous branches in other cities, not necessarily in the same country. And some translation agencies are smaller operations, with only one office sometimes staffed by only one or two people.

Agencies often specialize, providing translation services for only one or a few related languages. Some agencies work exclusively with Japanese, or Spanish, both high volume languages in the United States at present. Others work only with Asian languages, or only with Middle-eastern languages. Also, many agencies specialize in subject areas, providing services for medical translation, software localization, or legal translation.

Always remember that translation agencies are first and foremost businesses. Like all other

forms of business, they live and die by their ability to turn a profit. And their ability to turn a profit rests firmly in their capacity to find good translators and work successfully with them.

In other words, translators are the lifeblood of an agency. A translation agency without translators will go out of business immediately. An agency must have translators and prefers to have good, reliable translators. The opposite, however, is not necessarily true. Many translators work with end-clients directly, providing most of the services that agencies do. Most translators, however, myself included, get at least some of their work from agencies. If you're wondering why translators all just don't strike out on their own, read on.

Why Do We Need Them?

So if a translation agency does nothing more than provide translation services, why do translators need them? Why can't translators simply work for the end-client directly, cut out the middle, and make lots more money? There are three reasons.

First, the size of translation projects. Many translation jobs consist of hundreds or thousands of pages of material, perhaps one or more manuals, technical documentation, or legal materials. The end-client, the one that contracts with the agency to do the translation work, wants the job completed too quickly for a single translator to ever do, such as two weeks for 250,000 words of material, and prepared professionally, perhaps printed in full color with graphics and photos. In other words, no single translator has the capacity to provide this scale of service for projects of this size.

Second, the nature of translation projects. Often a translation job will involve translating material into five languages at once, such as with the preparation of an annual report or the manuals for a new software package. Again, the end-client wants it all returned quickly, so no single translator, even assuming that one translator has the ability to translate into five different languages, a virtual impossibility, can hope to finish the job.

Third, the nature of end-clients. End-clients usually prefer to deal with the same organization on a regular basis. This simplifies their own business operations considerably. What this means is that an individual translator cannot reasonably hope to provide all the different services, including various languages, subject areas, desktop publishing, offset printing, and so forth, that an end-client might need during a given business year. Once again, the demands of many end-clients are far beyond what a single translator can provide.

So there are the translation agencies. They provide two categories of service. One: they put together the number of translators needed to handle the material in question (and many agencies maintain an in-house translation staff for this purpose, particularly for languages with high, steady demand). Two: they manage the project from start to completion, including project estimates and bids, desktop publishing, layout, and typesetting, localization of content (both text and visual material), graphics, and printing. Translators therefore are a small but essential part of this the overall translation process.

Agencies, at least good ones, also simplify a translator's life. The agency calls, tells you there is work to be done, you briefly discuss the job with someone you know and trust, then you do the work, submit it along with an invoice, and you get paid. You don't have to deal with

submitting invoices to a huge corporation, a task which can be something of a nuisance, explaining to people with no knowledge of language and translation why your translation doesn't look exactly like the original, telling people with no experience living in other cultures why a particular friendly hand gesture in the United States is lewd in Brazil or meaningless in Taiwan. Most important, you don't have to deal with as much marketing, something the agencies do as a matter of course.

Agencies benefit from having good translators available because they can then provide their clients with quality products in a timely fashion. Agencies definitely want to have good translators, are willing to pay good translators more, and will often be very flexible with you when they want you in particular to do a job. Note the reciprocal relationship here. Not only do translators need agencies to get work, but agencies need translators to get their work done. Agencies need translators as much as translators need agencies because each group provides skills and services the other requires to survive.

Translators do from time to time band together to provide the services that an agency provides in an attempt to circumvent what some translators see as a source of lost income. However, they typically find that this requires a considerable investment in computer hardware, software, and training, not to mention finding reliable printing service bureaus and such. All of this is specialized work, outside the skill set most translators have developed. Color separations, image manipulation, layout, typesetting, and so forth require knowledge and experience. Some groups of translators do cultivate these skills or hire people who have them, but by the time they do all of this and create a successful, functional group, they have in essence become a translation agency.

Now what about those projects that don't require fancy printing, DTP, or color separations? In practice, agencies tend to handle those because they come from the same people who have the big projects. End-clients like simplicity, so they work consistently with the same agency.

However, many translators do develop their own clients and translate such "simpler material" for them. About half my work comes from agencies and half comes from direct clients. It is a good situation because the agencies I work with are responsible and competent and pay me fairly, and my direct clients are the same. Reaching this position requires time and effort, however, as well as no small amount of luck.

Nevertheless, most translators work for agencies at some point in their careers. Some agencies are easier to work for than others. The point of this article is to increase understanding about the relationship which exists between translators and agencies and to provide insight into what translators can do to make that relationship better. If I seem to be putting the onus on translators, I do so only because change comes more readily for individuals than organizations, and translators stand to benefit considerably as individuals from knowing how to work with agencies. I also hope that agencies will reciprocate and treat translators with the respect that their professionalism deserves.

If the above ideas have convinced you that working with translation agencies is worthwhile, then you still have a lot to do. Even if you want to work exclusively with direct clients, the marketing procedure remains very similar. In other words, there is a lot of business to take care of before you will be inundated with translation work.

The Résumé or Brochure

The first thing you have to do is tell the agencies that you exist. You should do this in as many different ways as possible, including sending out mailings of your résumé or a brief business brochure, registering via agencies' web sites as an independent contractor translator, attending various conferences for translators where you might hand out business cards or other material, and so forth. The result is that the agencies will send you work, eventually.

Your résumé or brochure is important. Very important. You will rarely meet the people you work for face to face and you're unlikely to tour the major cities of the U.S. or elsewhere to visit in person every translation agency you can find. Instead, your resume will do all this for you. Therefore, your résumé (or brochure; hereafter I'll just say résumé and ask you to understand that I mean both) had better be perfect.

Not only must your résumé be perfect, it must be distinctive. One project manager I know told me that her translation agency, a smaller organization by current standards, receives about 50 résumés per week, and given all her other responsibilities, she can look at each résumé for about five seconds. So your résumé has to stand out, to cry out that you are *the* translator for this agency, that you are the one worth contacting and working with. How exactly you do this is more than a little difficult to say, but I suggest you consult many different books on résumé writing to look at samples, then find a format and style which appeals to you, next spend a lot of time working your information into that format, and finally put in the effort to check the results, preferably by having a friend (or ideally, a friend who is a project manager) critique your efforts. All that said, there are certain things you have to do with your résumé, and those we will discuss here.

Your résumé must include the following information:

Your full name (the one you want to appear on paychecks)
Your business address (which is probably your home address as well)
Your telephone and fax number(s)
Your email address

All of this information must appear at the very top of the résumé, where it can be seen immediately.

Next, and so important that if you omit it some agencies will stop reading your resume, comes your native and working languages. Don't claim to have more than one native language. I know some agencies which throw away résumés of translators who claim to have two or three native languages. Also, be very careful about claiming to translate into your non-native languages. Some agencies will instantly recycle your résumé if they read something to that effect.

Of course there are individuals who by birth or training have achieved native fluency in more than one language, as there are people who can translate into their second languages. Such people are quite rare, however, and so claiming to be one of them is risky if only because agencies have been fooled enough times to be wary. You are better off claiming less at first and then doing more later for a client than the other way around.

Now, the nitty-gritty; the meat of the resume.

First, detail your experience as a translator, including work you've done in any country, for any organization, under any circumstances. If your background is so extensive that it would fill volumes, then pick the choicest bits and leave out the rest. Also, make sure to list currently active clients, as well as those you've worked for in the past. Specify the work you did for them. Don't just say: I translated for Berlitz. Say: Translated user's manual for Blah-blah software for Berlitz in 1999.

Describe your educational background, highlighting all aspects related to translation, language, or the area you translate in. If you have a Bachelor's in languages or literature, put it in. If you plan to translate engineering material and hold a B.S. in engineering, put it in. If you have unrelated degrees, put them in, but don't emphasize them. If you have absolutely no educational background in language or translation, you might want to get some before you start out as a translator.

If you are just starting out as a translator and have no translation experience, put your education first on your résumé, consider emphasizing those aspects of your academic training which demonstrate your language and translation ability. One way or another you need to convince the agency, or direct client, for that matter, that you can actually translate. Nothing speaks more clearly than experience, but strong education will be viewed as a form of experience.

At this point your résumé may already be looking full, so feel free to extend it to two pages. My résumé covers two pages. The first contains my contact information, my experience, and my educational background. The second describes my office equipment, related experience, and finally awards and accreditations, each of which is discussed below.

Office equipment must be described precisely. Don't merely mention that you have a computer. Every translator has one, some have two or three. Tell them exactly what you have, including the CPU type, the amount of RAM and hard drive space, peripherals and any other gizmos (you can probably omit the description of your Thrustmaster gear or your screen savers). The two required peripherals these days are a printer and fax/modem. Some agencies won't work with translators who don't have laser printers, but most seem to accept printing from high-quality inkjet printers. Do not use a dot-matrix printer or any other arcane devices such as plotters. Be equally precise with your software. Give full names and version numbers for your word processing software. If you have (and know how to use) DTP software, give that. You can even mention databases, spreadsheets, and graphics packages you own. Don't bother mentioning games or educational software. Agencies don't care about your flight simulator collection or your compendium of educational CD- ROM titles.

Next describe any other related experience which will help demonstrate that you can translate and that you know your languages. Specify how long you've spent abroad, how much language training you've had for your non-native languages, and how much education and experience you've had in the fields you translate in. Do not mention menial jobs in college, part-time summer work, or other unrelated professional experience. You do not want to bore people. Most importantly, nothing from before college should be on your résumé. High-school jobs, classes, and such are just not particularly impressive when you are looking for

employment in translation.

Finally, make sure to mention any awards, certifications, accreditation, professional memberships and other qualifications or accomplishments related to your languages you have. If you received a scholarship for one of your languages, mention it. If you passed the ATA exam, the Japanese Language Proficiency Test, the U.S. State Dept. Exams, etc., put it on your résumé.

The Cover Letter

If you choose to create a brochure, you may not need a separate cover letter. For a résumé, however, and even for some brochures, a cover letter is essential. I prefer to use the combination of a letter and résumé, because that gives me more opportunities to tell potential clients about myself. In other words, the cover letter takes care of the information the résumé can't handle. First and foremost, the cover letter should state what kind of work you do and want. Don't just say: I am a translator; say: I am a freelance translator of Japanese and English working in the biomedical and computer fields. Then you should go on to say that you are looking for work as an independent contractor (unless you aren't). Finally, use the cover letter to emphasize whatever experience and qualifications you have that would qualify you as a translator.

The cover letter should be succinct, simple, and elegant. It should not extend to a second page, it must not contain a single typographical, grammatical, or other error of language form or function. You may generate cover letters from a PIM or other business software, but the letter should still retain personal touches, such as signing it by hand. You should also include a contact name, when possible. If not, a simple greeting like "Hello" is sufficient, if not particularly elegant.

In the cover letter you want to mention how long you have been a freelance translator, when you are available (if not available at all times), and what kind of work you handle. Do not mention rates, except in general. You want to be flexible and marketable. Cover letters have a way of being ignored for weeks or even months, and sometimes are stored for years in translation agencies. If two years ago you sent a letter quoting a rate, you might not want to be asked to work at that rate now. And since every job is different, at least at some level, you want room to maneuver in your negotiations.

The Fundamental Problem

Anyone who has worked as a freelance translator realizes that there is no way to tell who is a translator and who isn't. Any idiot can claim to be a translator. Some, it would seem, do. The only obvious limitation is that you have to know at least two languages to be a translator; anything less is rather difficult to accept.

So agencies somehow have to sift through all the résumés they receive and figure out who is a bona fide translator capable of accurately rendering information from one language into another. They have to determine who is up to the job. Because there is no universally accepted system for accrediting translators, at least not at present in the United States, agencies and direct clients are left with two basic methods: look at the person's background

or give a test.

Many agencies are unlikely to accept at face value accreditation or claims of former translation experience. Remember, there is virtually no way for them to corroborate your claims of having been a translator with the Abu Dabi Daily. Unless you have a degree from a well-known school which trains translators, and there are about ten of these around the world, your claims will be questioned. So the other alternative is to take the translation test. And, by the way, having degrees and accreditations does not necessarily exempt you from such testing, as I well know from experience.

Some agencies or direct clients will accept a sample translation from you in lieu of a test. Others, however, will show no interest in sample material you send them. In fact, submitting them before they are asked for is usually a waste of postage. Agencies seem more inclined to trust their own tests than a sample you send. Should you be asked to submit a sample, make sure you have the right to submit the material. Remember that as an independent contractor who works on a work-for-hire basis, you do not own the rights to what you produce.

So here you are, ready, willing, and able to translate, and patiently waiting for the agencies or direct clients you have contacted to give you work. Translation vendors however do not want to be the first organization to give you work; they prefer to have translations handled by experienced people. This leads to an inevitable paradox: how do you get your first translation job if no one wants to work with a translator who has never worked before. Translators are not born having already done years worth of translation work. You have to start somewhere, yet clients will generally not want to take that risk and let you start with them.

Indeed, the snake is eating its tail. Agencies want experienced translators, so how do you get your first experience? Simple: be patient. Even with degrees and accreditation, you are still an unknown to a translation agency or direct client. Even if the agency gives you a sample translation test and you pass, you are still a bit of an unknown. So you have to wait for the opportunity to prove yourself to arise. This comes when for whatever reason the agency needs a translator and you make it to the top of the list.

As for sample translation tests, just do them promptly. Be glad that agencies and other translation vendors are willing to provide tests, because the possible alternatives are worse. They might hire people in-house only; they might insist that you work as an intern at a reduced rate first; or they might demand expensive, time-consuming credentials. Remember, they have the work and the money, so they can make certain demands of translators. It behooves translators to cooperate cheerfully with this process, not because it is so pleasant, but because the translation industry is a meritocracy: if you can do the work, you will have work. So do the tests and then be patient.

Typically an agency or direct client has a stable of freelance translators they call upon when translation work needs to be done. Project managers even have favorite translators, and if you are not already among this stable, you have to wait your turn to get inside. Your turn comes when the agency can't find anyone else to do a translation. I've seen this happen because the regular translator was away on vacation, had retired, took a break to give birth to a child, was injured in an automobile collision, to name a few possibilities. In other words, harsh though this may seem, your turn will come, if only because change and disaster are an inevitable part of life. Your turn may also come when an agency or direct client grows, takes on new

projects, or expands into new areas of business. But even when your big break does come, it will in all likelihood not be particularly large. Instead, vendors tend to start new translators off with small assignments, as a way to test their ability and cultivate a friendly, trusting relationship. In time, and often the time is brief, you will have as much work from a client as the client is in a position to give.

Responses

After you send out your cries for work, you might have to wait a few weeks or even months before the replies come, assuming they come at all. Many agencies, not to mention potential direct clients, will not respond at all unless and until they have a particular need for you. Some sort through all résumés received one a month, or even once a quarter, then send responses to those queries that both impress them and are relevant to what they do. In other words, be patient. No news is not necessarily good news nor bad news.

The replies that do come will not necessary be offers of work, either. Many agencies automatically respond to a resume from a translator by sending a thank-you letter and one or more forms for you to fill out. Fill these out and send them back fast. I know of one agency that uses those forms as a kind of test; if you can't get it back to them within 15 days, they aren't interested anymore. Some agencies even tell you to get it back to them fast. So spend a couple of hours per day dealing with paper work; doing so is a part of business, and if you are self-employed, the responsibility is yours.

The forms that many agencies send will seem redundant. You'll have to fill in your name, address, educational and professional background, and equipment. You'll also have to detail your rates (more on that in a bit), your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly (or at least one of these) output, and other information. If you're not sure about something on these forms, call the agency. This is a great way to get to talk to someone there, develop a closer relationship, and even tell them some of the more intangible things about yourself.

Agencies may also send an independent contractor form. It is a standard legal document that says that you are working independently for them on a work-for-hire basis. Your translations belong to them, not to you. You, however, are liable for any errors, omissions, delays, or other problems which occur in the process of translating something. Read this form carefully and make sure you're not signing away your first born. Some agencies make peculiar demands in these forms. For instance: translators must carry $500,000 in liability insurance; translators must redo all work until it satisfies the client; or, translators are expected to comply with all demands of the agency and client.

These demands can be trying, particularly the one about insurance. The recent spate of difficulties for translators includes the ATA's fouled attempt to suggest rates, the U.S. government's desire to control and underpay translators (remember, the U.S. government is the world's largest employer of translators), and the IRS's desire to crack down on tax evasion schemes among self-employed people. All these difficulties are influencing the content of the independent contractor's agreement, and translators can expect situation to evolve as time goes by.

On the issue of insurance, however, I have consulted several attorneys and employment specialists. The consensus seems to be that translators are poor candidates for law suits and

the insurance itself is very expensive for the coverage offered. Remember that companies sue not so much on principle as to recover damages, real or perceived. Translators are poor by corporate standards, and so are unlikely to become a target for a lawsuit. To put this another way, if you spill boiling coffee in your lap while at the corner store, you probably won't sue, even if the incident was a result of a mistake by an employee at that store. If, however, you spill said coffee at a McDonalds's, at least the defendant in your suit will have pockets deep enough to make the potential recovery significant. As I'm sure you are aware, such things have been known to happen.

Second, the coverage itself, whether its "errors and omissions" insurance or some other form of professional liability coverage, may not do what you want it to do. More fundamentally, however, is the fact that translators are one step in a lengthy process (step four out of ten, in the view of one project manager I know), and so blaming the translator exclusively is legally irresponsible. Moreover, the number of ephemeral and obtuse issues involved in language is so high that odds are the case would never go to trial. In sum, the attorney I asked advised me against such insurance, and I am inclined to agree. I do my work on a "good-faith, best-effort" policy, informing my clients of all problems and issues in the documents I prepare, and discussing with them the future of the document. This seems to have kept threats of lawsuits at bay for seven years now, so I consider this policy and practice to be sufficient. Of course, you should consult with an attorney or other professional to confirm the situation in your locale, and to make certain there is nothing about your situation that justifies insurance.

You may be tempted to contact potential clients by telephone, whether or not you have already sent a résumé or brochure. Doing so can be a great way to make a brief personal introduction, but always be succinct and gentle. Ask if the person you want to talk to has time. If the person says yes, then give a brief, focused description of yourself. Do not attempt to talk up a project manager; they are generally far too busy to engage in chit-chat with a translator they don't know or work with. Also, calling on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays seems preferable, insofar as the work week is neither just starting nor ending. Finally, save the calls for potential clients that you really want to work for. Not only will you keep your phone bill down, but you'll also reduce your stress and frustration levels.

Work

Sooner or later, some agency somewhere will call you and say, "Can you translate this for us?" After you recover from palpitations of excitement, you have to begin the process of negotiating. Don't accept an assignment without first working out the terms of the job.

There are three main points to your negotiations:

When the job is due?
How the job is to be done?
What will you be paid?

Don't start quibbling about word rates before you confirm that you have the time and ability to do the job. If the client wants it by Monday and you're already booked for the weekend, don't launch into a long monologue about your rates. Just apologize for not being available and express your desire to work for them in the future. Remember: money is one of two topics that everyone loves and no one knows how to discuss (sex is the other).

Before you launch into negotiations, make sure you know what the job is. There may be nothing to negotiate. An agency called me and asked me to do a translation of a very detailed legal/financial report about a corporation. I declined, saying that the subject was outside my experience. Don't take jobs which you can't do. And when you can't take a job, do everyone a favor. If you know a translator friend who can do the job, recommend that person to the agency. They will appreciate your effort on their behalf, and I guarantee you'll make your friend happy.

The agency will often have a specific deadline and will simply ask if you can do the work by then. With larger projects, however, they may be a little flexible and might ask when you can get it done. Then you need to know how long the assignment is. Don't be surprised if they don't know. I've done translations from Japanese to English for agencies which have no Japanese speakers on their staff. Get as much information as possible and then do your best to estimate how many words the job will be. As long as you know roughly how many words you can do per day, you'll be able to tell them if you can do the job.

Next, the how. Some translations are only for in-house purposes and thus don't have to be as polished or readable as say, a book or manual. Other projects will be edited and proof-read by the agency after you finish, and so you don't have to sweat every little detail as much. This is often the case when translators are working in a team on a large project. The agency's editors and DTP people will spend a lot of time (one hopes) working on the style, format and terminology of the document before handing it to the end-client. This eases the burden on the translator, but it can also lower the word rate.

Note that "how" also includes how you should submit the translation. The translator is responsible for providing the translation in the format which the agency requests (or at least a format they can readily work with). Moreover, there may be specific instructions concerning how the agency wants the translation done. Such instructions are particularly important when there are a lot of charts and graphs in the original and when the agency will be taking your translation, merging it with the work of others and then desktop-publishing it. Follow the instructions you receive to the letter and don't hesitate to contact the agency if you have questions.

Always ask about the purpose of the translation and the intended audience. Also try to find out if the end-client has a terminology list or glossary it wants you to use. Moreover, get any and all details concerning style and formatting before you start translating. If the source text has charts, tables, or graphs in it, find out what to do with them before you begin to scribble all over their pristine original. And find out if you are supposed to be formatting the translation or simply preparing a text file. Naturally, you can charge a little more for the former.

Next, confirm that you can use and retain a copy of the source document. This seems like common sense, but occasionally you'll find that after you finish a translation job, the agency will ask for the original material back. You may do your translations without ever making a single mark on the source document, but most people do not. So either confirm that you can keep the material, which you should for legal purposes anyway, as well as possible reference or use for later work, or make copies of the material so that you can return the agency's original copy in pristine condition.

Finally comes money. In many cases, the agency will say: We will pay you this much money; take it or leave it (or something to that effect). In others, they will ask you want you would charge. Make sure you know what your rates are ahead of time. Hemming and hawing about money sounds unprofessional; and translators already suffer from enough unprofessionalism that adding to it would be disastrous. Tell the agency how much you want and then let them decide if your rate is acceptable. They might make a counter offer and then you can accept or decline.

There are, in my opinion, three factors when deciding the actual rate for a job. Factor one: your general rates. Factor two: the nature and difficulty of the job. Factor three: the size of the job. General rates vary from language to language and from country to country. There are no universal rates for all languages simply because some languages are harder to translate than others. As well, some languages are in greater demand than others. If you are uncertain of what to charge, you can check the rates surveys available at web sites like Aquarius. Many translators are reluctant to discuss their rates in detail, but the anonymity of the Internet makes such discussions possible. If you are taking on a job with considerable DTP or similar work, check the current rates from the National Writers' Union, which publishes lists in its books and other sources.

Second, the nature of the job. If someone wants me to translate chip specifications that were scrawled out by a drunken engineer on cocktail napkins, I'll charge a lot simply because of the sheer difficulty in working with such material. On the other hand, an everyday business letter nicely printed with little in terms of content or style won't cost my clients much. If a client requests a translation of a medical journal article on a new drug protocol for deep vein thrombosis, I'll charge a lot because of the time and effort (as well as expense) the research to do the job properly will require.

Included in the nature of the job is the nature of your relationship with the client. One translator I know has what she calls the "asshole" factor (apologies for the bluntness of the phrase, but it is quite apt, as you probably already know or will find out soon enough). Although most clients are quite friendly, agreeable, and pleasant to work with, there are always a few that just make everything in a project difficult. A premium on top of your regular rates is a good way to make working for such clients more comfortable; if they refuse to pay that much, then you don't lose much by not working with such clients. Conversely, for clients I really like I routinely do small jobs for free. Occasionally my long-term clients have a business card, short phrase or paragraph from a web site, or other tiny document that needs to be translated quickly. I generate a lot of good-will by doing such jobs for free; and I save myself a lot of effort too, insofar as the paperwork associated with such a job can take a lot longer than the job itself. All that said, you don't want to do this too often or for jobs that are too large, lest you become the "free" translators that is only used when the client wants to avoid spending money.

Last, the size of the job is important. The larger the job, the more I am inclined to accept a slightly lower rate. Security, in other words work for a period of weeks or months, is worth a lot to a freelancer in any industry. If someone gives me 300 pages of software documentation to translate (and yes, this happens), I'll gladly accept a slightly lower rate in return for the roughly two months of secure work the job represents.

There is a counter-argument to the above idea: If you accept a lower rate for a large job, the client may ask you to work at that lower rate for the next normal-sized job. This would result in a downward spiral for your rates. I disagree with this argument simply because I don't let my clients drop rates. If I accept a lower rate, for whatever reason, I make that reason very clear to the client, reminding them that the lower rate is temporary, not reflective of a new rate, and not to be construed as a reason to think I am now cheaper to work with. Despite offering lower rates for very large jobs over the past five year, I am currently charging more in general now than I was five years ago. So I suggest you keep this counter-argument in mind as a motivation to stick to your rates, regardless of what the client tries to do.

In sum, you combine these three factors (or any others you care to include) and come up with a price. Then, the agency accepts or rejects it, or makes a counter offer. Assuming that you reach an agreement, you will get the job. In the next article we will take a close, in-depth look at a translation job.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

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The translation job is what most people who don't translate for a living think translation is all about. Translating is after all what translators do. A translator is also a business person, and so must attend to all the other matters that we are looking into in this article series. For now though, we will look very closely at a canonical translation job, dissecting it for all we can find, and perhaps even coming up with some problems or issues that veteran translators can learn from, or at least nod knowingly with as they read.

The Translation Job

The first thing you have to do when you get a job, be it by fax, overnight mail, or email, is confirm that it was you expected it to be. I've actually received jobs which were supposed to be in Japanese but in fact were in Russian, and I've been sent the wrong material more times than I can remember at this point. Make sure you've got what they said you should have.

Once you are certain of the material, you should make sure that you can translate it. This means not only that you have the requisite knowledge and resources to deal with the material, but also that you can complete it within the allotted time. There is nothing agencies hate more than not getting work when they are supposed to get it (except perhaps losing their clients). Never deliver a translation late! I know I have said this before, but it is the number one complaint of clients, so I say it yet again: Never ever, ever submit anything late. If after looking at the assignment, you think you won't be able to do it within the time frame, call the agency and tell them. They may revise the schedule, or ask you to do only part of the job. But part of a job done properly and on time is infinitely better than all of it done late or incorrectly.

Often the agency won't be able to tell you how long the material is. Remember that just because they send you a job in Chinese doesn't mean that anyone there actually reads the language. If they can't give you an estimate, tell them that you need to see all of the material before you will agree to a time frame. If they don't yet have all of the material, and this can happen when they are awaiting arrival of the rest of a document from their client, then inform them firmly but politely that any estimate you give now will be subject to revision, possibly considerable revision. Agencies realize this, or will accept it once you tell them, and so will be happy to await an accurate estimate from you. Also, do not accept a page count: we all know that desktop publishing obviates the utility of a page count.

Once you have confirmed that you can do the job on time, all you have to do is do the job and then deliver it. We'll get to delivery in a moment, but before that, let's look at some of the more common disasters and crises which can and do occur while translating.

For starters, since we all work on computers, a hard disk crash, CPU failure, printer failure, disk drive failure, virus attack, and even having the computer stolen are facts of life. I know many translators, myself included, who have struggled through disasters such as these. So first and foremost, back up everything you do every day. If worse comes to worse, send them the disk and let them deal with it. The best reason to back up is that your work is your income; you wouldn't keep money in an unsafe place, practice the same level of paranoia with your data.

Even if your computer is stolen or simply picks the day before the assignment is due to croak, you can always rent one on the spot either by going to a place like Kinko's and using theirs or getting one from a local computer store. You can bum one off a friend–I've lent out my laptop many times to desperate friends–or you can go to a school where they know you and use theirs. And you can buy computers through the Web and get them delivered the next day, so there's little excuse for being without a machine for more than about 48 hours.

The other major problems that afflict translators involve the original text. Such difficulties include terminology, the printed quality of the original, idioms and dialect, neologisms, and the quality of the writing in the original.

In theory, terminological problems are to be resolved by looking in a dictionary. But if you work in a very technical field, or if you work with new material, you'll find that you're encountering words and phrases which have not yet been created in your target language. Discussing how to handle this with your client is your best approach. They may give you carte blanche to create your own words and then let their editors repair any linguistic damage you've wrought. Or they may give you a glossary to work from. Regardless of the resolution, dealing with terminology is your responsibility as a translator, and don't shirk it. Proper terminology is very important, often more so to the end-client than good style or punctuation is.

The printed quality of the original is mostly an issue when the source text is in a language such as Chinese or Japanese, but this is always haunting translators because of that boon and bane of their existence: the fax machine. When you receive a hand-written text which was faxed from a photocopy of the fax which the end-client sent the agency, you may start to understand how hieroglyphics experts feel when they work.

Translators are well within their rights to demand (nicely) a clean, crisp, clear, coherent copy of the source text. But even so, clean copy does not guarantee that the handwriting is legible. Then what? Well, do what I do: struggle along as best you can, show it to friends and see if they can help, and try to talk to the person who wrote it. If all of this fails, the agency is usually quite understanding about any illegible portions of the text. Just be sure to tell them about it and ask them how they want you to annotate any illegible areas in your translation.

Idioms and dialect are one of the joys of language but one of the challenges of translation. I find that relying on native speakers is the only way to get at the heart of an idiom or dialect. I

give non-native English speakers explanations about American idioms and dialect (yes, we have dialects, or why would we have D.A.R.E., the Dictionary of American Regional English?), and they in turn help me with idioms and phrases in my B languages, their native languages. Neologisms are also best handled in this manner.

I strongly suggest you keep some sort of glossary of terminology, official translations for proper names of business and government entities, and good translations of idioms, dialect, and neologisms. Whether you do this in a simple word-processing file, a more sophisticated database environment, or a dedicated terminology-management package is up to you, but do something with all that valuable information you collect. If your information is truly precise and organized, consider sharing it with other translators.

Last, the quality of writing in the original. There is an unwritten truism in translation which everyone had best remember now: the translation will never be much better than the original (or in tech-talk: GIGO - garbage in, garbage out). If the original is an incoherent, illogical piece of drivel, so shall the translation be. If the source text is a brilliant piece of scholarship with great literary merit, then the translation should be the same. The point is translators cannot go much above the quality of the original, and people who employ translators should not necessarily blame a bad translation on the translator.

Now, what to do when you are translating and the original is so bad that even the person who wrote it is not sure what it means? Well, my solution is generally to create an equally vague or poor statement in the translation. This may seem unfair or irresponsible, but consider what translators are paid for and what their job is. Translators render information from one language to another. They do not rewrite the original, they do not improve its style or content, they do not insert their own clever ideas or original phrases. They translate!

Of course, if a text is truly beyond comprehension, the only responsible course of action is to contact the client and leave the decision regarding whether or not to translate the material to them. You may lose a job this way, but you will likely win the confidence of a client. The latter is ultimately worth far more than the former, needless to say.

Finally, in terms of translating a text, most agencies do not expect their translators to be literary and linguistic geniuses. Such geniuses would be writing brilliant literary novels or pontificating on the brilliant literary work of other novelists. Agencies do expect (and deserve!) quality work free of errors and omissions and delivered on time. Unfortunately, from what I've heard, some translators are either unwilling or unable to provide such work by the agreed deadline. If you distinguish yourself as a translator who can provide quality work on time, you will get more work.

So I state here in the most emphatic language possible: If you are going to translate something, do it right. Make sure that there are no errors, omissions, spelling or punctuation mistakes, and that you deliver your work on time in the form that the agency requested. If you do this, you will get more work. If you don't, retire now and save yourself and others a lot of grief. That said, the most important thing to remember about contacting agencies for the first time is that everything counts. You have to convince them that you are a competent, responsible, capable professional who will honor agreements and produce quality work.

Delivery

When the project is finished, you have to deliver it. Delivery is sometimes in person. I live so close to two clients that I walk over, put the disk, print-out and invoice in their hands, chat for a few minutes and then return home. Usually, however, I have to send it to them, as you will. How you do this is up to your client, not you.

Terms of delivery should be worked out when you accept the job. The only time this changes is when one, the client asks, or two, when you ask, or three, when the technology involved, for instance a BBS, the Web, or an FTP site, isn't working properly.

Let me tell you a story. I had gotten a very short (200 words) assignment one evening and was asked to deliver it first thing the following morning onto the agency's BBS. I finished the assignment around 8:00 p.m. and tried to put it on their BBS then (I always try that as soon as possible, in case there are problems). But it wasn't a 24 hour BBS, so I waited until the following morning. I tried again but couldn't get through. I called the agency and no one answered, but I did get an answering machine. I was in a hurry because I had an appointment that morning, so I simply read the assignment over the telephone and left it as a 'message' on the answering machine. The agency called me later that day, apologized for being out of the office and leaving the BBS off, and thanked me for the rather unusual delivery, saying that it was better than having nothing. The moral of this story is: be creative and make sure you deliver the job on time.

When sending a file to a client, whether over the Internet or by FTP or direct modem-to-modem delivery, make certain to use the filename the clients asks for or to create a useful file name, such as one that consists of the job number and a short acronym to indicate the language. For instance, you might deliver your French-to-English translation of a job numbered 31415 as a file named "31415fr.doc". As for file extensions, use them. The Internet handles file transfers much more effectively if it knows what it is sending and receiving. An extension gives the Internet, gateways and routers to be specific, just that information. Common extensions are ".doc" for MS Word documents, ".rtf" for RTF (Rich Text Format) documents, and ".txt" for text (that is ASCII) files. Do not compress, encode, or encrypt a file unless a client specifically asks you to. You do not want to make receiving the file difficult. And remember that e-mail attachments cannot at present exceed 2 MB in size, so if you are delivering a truly monstrous job, you may have to break the file into smaller chunks, and then send each chunk attached to its own e-mail message.

Along with the assignment you have to provide the agency with an invoice. Some agencies will specify exactly what they want on the invoice, but most don't. If you create your own invoice, you should always include the following: your full name, address, telephone number, company name (if you have one), fax number, the date of the invoice, the name and full address of the agency, a description of the job, and the details of the amount invoiced. If you are being paid by the word, specify the word rate, how many words there are, and the total. If you are being paid a project fee, specify that. Never round off a word count, and always follow the client's preference for source versus target language counts. Finally, always keep a copy of the invoice for your records.

Job delivery is a great time to distinguish yourself as a translator. You can submit your work a bit early, if possible, and truly impress your clients. Always attempt to be a bit early, if only to allow for problems on the Internet or with your file. And take the time to contact your

project manager when you send the file so that she knows the file is coming. I make a point of thanking, both on the telephone and in the e-mail message which accompanies my translation, the project manager and the agency for the assignment, as well as passing on any pertinent information about the translation. In essence, the easier you make life for your clients, the more likely they will be to choose you for the next translation job they have.

Money

There are, arguably, five rules in business:

1: Keep money for as long as possible

2: Get money as soon as possible.

3: Never break the first two rules.

4: Only the first two rules really matter.

5: There are no other rules.

Unfortunately, translators are on the receiving end of the rules; in other words, you want money from other people, but you aren't giving money to other people, unless you count your rent/mortgage, utilities, car payments, etc. So, you may have to wait some time before an agency actually pays you.

How long is reasonable? you ask. It depends. Many contracts will stipulate exactly how long the agency takes to pay you. Some will say 30 days, others 45 days, some even 60 days. Occasionally, you'll find an agency which takes only a week or so, but that is hardly the norm. According to what I've heard, the average time from invoice to check seems to be about 40 days, give or take a little for weekends, slow mail, and check-writer's cramp (a connective tissue disease which afflicts all but the most noble of business people).

Once in a while, the check will simply not come. This is most frustrating, because there seems to be very little you can do. However, stomping your feet and screaming at the agency representative on the telephone are not likely to be productive.

To clarify this sticky issue of money, I'll draw on my own experience and methods. You might disagree and prefer to send hate mail or exploding packages to agencies which don't pay you, but I've managed to get paid for everything I've ever done and continue to work with the same agencies and organizations. It should also be noted that I've had as much trouble collecting outstanding invoices from direct clients as I've had with agencies, so please do not conclude that only translation agencies play such games. By and large, I am paid on time, and in most other cases, the check merely arrives a few days late.

So how long is long enough to start worrying. From your point of view, perhaps four or five weeks. However, from a business point of view, one month is nothing. Many corporations do not settle bills for 90 days, so the agency might be waiting to get paid long after they pay you. Therefore, my rule of thumb is 60 days, unless the agency specifically states something

different.

As an aside, if an agency says we'll pay you in 10 days, then you are well within your rights to expect payment within 10 days. If you don't get it, follow the suggestions below.

Many agencies will specify quite precisely how long it will take to pay you. Good enough. You can enter that number into a ledger or database, or an invoicing program, if you have one (I do, they're great). Then, forget about that money until the waiting period has passed.

Let's say Joe's Translations contracts with you for a 10,000 word assignment at $0.10 per word and says that they will pay you 45 days after you submit the invoice. You finish the work on August 1 and submit the invoice and then wait until September 14. No money shows up. Now what?

First, don't panic. The galaxy won't explode and civilization won't collapse simply because you weren't paid on time. There are a host of reasons why the check didn't get to you by the 14th. For instance, the U.S. mail service was involved in delivering it. I watched my local post office take three weeks to forward a check from my old address to my new one (I moved three blocks to the south a few years back). Joe's Translations might cut checks on the 45th day and then send them out a day or two later. In other words, don't do anything until three or four days after the due date. You don't want to make a pest of yourself. Not yet.

After the three or four days pass, it's time for action. Compose a nice, polite letter which reminds them of their financial obligation to you and asks when you can expect payment. Enclose a copy of the original invoice and then send it off to Joe's Translations. Keep copies of all written correspondence. They will be useful, should a worse-case scenario develop.

A letter like this will usually do the trick. I've found that nine times out of ten, the agency will call you on the day they receive the letter, apologize profusely and assure you that no harm was meant, your money was not diverted to armed revolutionaries, and that you will get your check soon. And you do, or at least I have. If however you are too eager or anxious to use snail mail, then make a phone call. Ask to talk to your project manager or to the accounting department, then tell the person you speak with that you are wondering about an outstanding invoice. Be calm, patient, and polite; in most cases the delay is a result of nothing more than slow mail, a bureaucratic snafu, or some other minor problem.

If you send a letter, allow three or four days for them to receive the letter and respond. If you have a good relationship with the agency or are not worried about damaging your relationship with Joe's Translations, call, ask them if they received the letter, and then ask them what to expect. Be polite and pleasant, but at the same time, demand concrete information. Sappy statements like, "Yeah, we'll get to it soon" or "Uhuh, it's in our accounting department across the street" don't cut it. If they try to palm off responsibility on the accounting department across the street (and that's really sappy, since most agencies are one-office operations), get the complete address of that department and the name of the person in change. Arm yourself with information.

If after the first letter (or phone call), you still haven't received your check within the specified time, write a similar letter, but emphasize that this is the second letter, you demand

to know what's going on and you'll be calling on such-and-such date at such-and-such time (make sure to give them time to get the letter). You can also do this by fax, but letters are nicer. Then call and politely demand to know what's going on. Make sure you talk to the person in charge of money, not some project manager or secretary. The best person to talk to is the person who writes and signs (sometimes different people) the checks. They will know what's going on; others could be out of the loop.

This will get you paid 99% of the time. Now, for the remaining one percent. If Joe's Translations still ignores you after your second letter and phone call, it's time for the last letter. In this letter, demand (don't ask) in no uncertain terms to know when you'll be paid or why you haven't been. State emphatically that if you do not receive a reply within 10 days (10 is the standard number in business, you might make it a little longer if a vacation or holiday period is coming up) you will do the following:

- Contact the Better Business Bureau in your state and the state where Joe's Translations is
- Contact any and all professional organizations for translators (e.g.: ATA, NCTA, etc.)
- Tell every translator you can possibly find that Joe's Translations does not like to pay its translators (via the Web, of course; use this URL: www.infinit.net/karining/)
- Begin legal action against Joe's Translations.

The Better Business Bureau can be very helpful in dealing with an errant agency like Joe's Translations, as can many professional organizations. Moreover, the mere threat of a boycott might scare Joe's Translations, since agencies need translators as much as translators need agencies. And of course, legal action, though perhaps costly to you, will at least get you some of your money, especially if you can do it through Small Claims Court.

The above paragraph should make clear the need to keep copies of all your correspondence and agreements. Those represent are your evidence. Typically, Joe's Translations would pay you long before you ever contacted the BBB or a lawyer. Unfortunately, in some cases, agencies do go out of business, leaving you in the lurch. It doesn't happen very often, but if an agency enters Chapter 11, you might not get paid, ever.

The moral of this story is keep records, be persistent but patient, and don't give up. Besides, in almost all cases, you'll get paid on time.

But what if you aren't paid the right amount? You are probably assuming that they have not paid you enough. But I've been paid too much and have even received two checks for one job. I'll omit the lecture on business ethics and simply state that I always inform an agency if there is any discrepancy in my payment, be it to my or their advantage. Usually there is a logical explanation. The most common is the word count.

Few if any of us count the number of words in a document ourselves. Instead, we use a word processor to count the words. As you probably have noticed, every word processor on the market comes up with different word counts, with the difference can be as much as 10%. Most agencies will accept your word count, but some will not and will use their word processor (usually the one which gives the lowest count, unfortunately) to do the count and then pay you based on that result. An agency I worked with some years ago continued to

persist in using Word 5.1 (WinWord 3) almost two years after Word 6 (Word 95) was released. When they cut me a check for 10% below what I expected, I called them, suspecting what had happened. Without being accusatory or disrespectful, I asked if they were still using Word 5.1. When told yes, I briefly explained that Word 5.1 had a reputation for giving word counts 10% or so below what any other word processor gave, and that one could draw the conclusion that the agency was using this outdated word processor as a way to cut costs. The agency immediately agreed to split the difference between the Word 5.1 and the Word 95 counts with me, and used Word 95 for all future word counts with me. In other words, be polite and reasonable in such situations, and stick to verifiable facts. If you suspect something fishy is going on, suggest it indirectly, without making any accusations. This has worked well for me in the few cases in which I've been forced into checking such things. It will work well for you, too, though I hope you never need to do anything like this.

How To Win Agencies and Influence Them

Why do some translators seem to have lots of work when others are twiddling their thumbs at the keyboard? Why do agencies choose certain translators over others? And how can you the translator improve your chances with the agencies?

Along with all the suggestions and advice in this and the preceding articles about being a responsible, honest, professional, there are a few other things you can do. Here they are.

First, send letters to agencies regularly and remind them that you exist and are active in the industry. Keep them updated about your abilities, equipment, and accreditation. Call them and speak with someone there for a while. If you are close enough to visit in person, do so. Remember, you have to spend money to make money.

Second, get to know other translators and recommend them when you can't take a job. The agency will appreciate it and will think well of you, even though you didn't do the work (of course, this assumes that the person you recommend does a good job; don't recommend bad translators). The other translators will probably reciprocate, though if they don't, you should consider not recommending them any more. Being open and friendly about business is a good policy, to a certain point. But there is no reason for you to be nice to people who aren't nice to you. Just stop dealing with them and find people who will appreciate your openness and friendliness. Ours is a tit-for-tat industry; so let the rules benefit you.

Third, be active and involved in the industry. Keep track of the big trends, such as machine translation systems and the changing laws for independent contractors. Keep up to date with which agencies are doing what and keep in touch with the ones who might need your services.

You may scoff and say that it's not important to be aware of the big issues or send out lots of letters. Nevertheless, I guarantee that it helps. Agencies want to work with serious, committed, responsible professionals and it is up to translators to be professionals. Of course, the opposite is true, too: translators want to work with professional agencies, not the one-person, one-phone fly-by-nighters. So think about it in reverse. If you're a translator, think about how you would run an agency. If you're part of an agency, think about working as a translator. You'll understand soon enough, if you don't already.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Article 5. Tax Horrors From Hell

Home is where your pillow is, and for a freelance translator, it's also where the desk with its attendant office equipment and dictionaries is. But what office equipment is right for a translator? Should you buy that Thinking Machines II system, good for sequencing the genome of a wholly mammoth, but perhaps overkill for a translator? Is MAT software a wise investment? And what can you do to ease the financial burden of all this equipment, not to mention the mammoth, should you go ahead and engineer one?

A Home By Any Other Name

We all think we know what a home office is. So I'll start by saying what it isn't. It is not you working at a laptop sitting on your kitchen table with a few dictionaries piled on the chair next to you. It is not you out on the sundeck, notepad and material surrounding your chaise longue. It is not the dining room table, nor the living room or den doubling as a work space. A home office is a space in your home reserved exclusively for your business.

The primary requirement for a home office is that you are running a business from within it. In other words, if you are an employee of one company working from home, you are not entitled to a Business Use of Home deduction on your income taxes (there may be, however, other deductions for you, such as Unreimbursed Business Expenses; consult a tax professional for details). Your business has to be open and available to all who want it, and you have to conduct at least some of your business from your home office.

To summarize, a home office is a necessity for any free-lance translator. Your home office should be a quiet place, with no distractions other than those necessary for business, such as a phone and fax machine.

Home Office Deductions

You can legitimately take numerous deductions for the business use of your home. Not only a percentage of the rent or mortgage payment based on the size of your office (you work out what percentage of your home is used as an office), but the same percentage can be deducted from all your utility bills, including telephone, gas, electric, and water. Moreover, a business telephone line, or long distance business phone calls made on your personal telephone line, are deductible. Any and all furniture purchased for the office is deductible. Equipment, such

as software and hardware, is deductible (but be careful on this one, the IRS is watching computer hardware and software very closely). And all supplies, including paper, pens & pencils, stamps, envelopes, fax paper, printer toner or ink, paper clips and staples, etc. are deductible too.

The IRS asks only two things when you make these deductions. One: they be legitimate home office needs (no deducting your cat's supper dish or your favorite computer game just because it's in your office); and two: you keep meticulous records, including receipts. The latter is only important if you are audited, but considering how many self- employed people are audited every year, and I personally know many translators who have been audited, keep the receipts. You can deduct the cost of the containers they are in as well as the space they use in your apartment.

So if the IRS lets you deduct a percentage of the space in your apartment as a home office, then the logical thing to do is make your entire apartment or house a home office, right? Wrong. Then, you say, the logical thing to do is make the largest part of your home the office (say the living room or ball room). Not quite. Remember, it is a percentage, and the IRS computers get very suspicious of claims of 100%. Moreover, your home office percentage is checked against your profession (which you fill out in the beginning of the Schedule C) and translators, who maintain no inventory, do not meet clients on site, and require no fancy equipment, are not expected to use 600 square feet for one person. You are welcome to gamble with the ratio, but from what I understand, anything above 30% or about 200 square feet or so, the size of an average room in an apartment or normal house, is likely to get your return flagged for an audit.

Also, although it is extremely unlikely that an IRS auditor will ever visit your home office to verify your claims about it, you may be expected to produce floor plans or other similar documentation of your home office during an audit, as well as proof that you have the equipment, furniture, or other business assets you claim to have. If you are being reasonable about your business assets and your home office, this shouldn't arise. If you are trying to take advantage of the system, you are likely to be audited, and you will also likely fail any attempt to justify extravagance.

And for those of you who are keeping track, the mammoth is not tax-deductible.

Optimum Office

What to put in your home office? This is not meant to be a lesson on interior decorating, a subject which anyone who knows me will state I am uniquely unqualified to discuss. Suffice it to say that you should have a large, comfortable desk, a very comfortable chair, and anything else you use to store resources and equipment. Buying antiques for your home office is not unacceptable, just suspicious. Remember that your business expenses have to seem reasonable, and should not exceed your income unless your income is very low.

The only comment I'll make about furnishings has to do with comfort and the that new-found demon, repetitive stress injury (RSI). Spend a few hundred dollars on a high quality chair for your desk, one which provides good lumbar support and lets you set the height of the chair, the angle of the back of the chair and even the height of the arms. I know more than one translator whose career was ended by tendonitis, CTS (carpal tunnel syndrome), or some

other insidious condition. A good chair and desk won't necessarily prevent such injuries, but they certainly can help.

Ergonomic issues are also important when selecting hardware such as a keyboard, monitor, and mouse or trackball. I'll mention these in the sections on each of these devices, but remember that how the device feels to your hands or eyes is the most important consideration. Always try typing on a keyboard, using a mouse, or looking at a monitor before you buy, or make your purchase from a retailer with an unconditional money-back guarantee.

Computer Hardware

I know very few translators who are not using computers to do their business. It seems that translations hewn in stone or written on papyrus are no longer acceptable. In fact, agencies won't even consider working with you unless you have a reasonably current computer system, including a good printer and fax/modem.

A great deal is written about hardware in magazines such as PC Magazine, PC Computing, MacWorld, and so on. Most newcomers and a lot of more experienced people find this bewildering array of chips, CPUs, printers, etc. dumbfounding, so if you are confused, take comfort in the fact that you are in good company. I'll try to keep this explanation simple, succinct, yet thorough. Because translators' needs are particular and vary depending on what languages they work with, as well as what ancillary services, such as desktop publishing, they offer, I will start by going through the basic components of a good home office system, then go into detail regarding specific hardware and software technologies that you should find useful to make informed decisions about equipment purchases.

The CPU

Until recently, if you wanted a cheap computer, you bought a PC. If you wanted a computer which was easy to use or needed to run Japanese or Chinese (or other languages which used something other than the Roman alphabet), you bought a Mac. Neither of these conditions holds at present, though PCs are still a little cheaper and Macs are still easier to use and better at certain foreign languages. Regardless of which platform you choose, however, certain considerations will hold.

First: what software do you want to use? Which applications will you be running on your computer? Software should determine hardware. Figure out which applications you want to use, and then figure out what the best system to do that is. You'll waste less time and money making computer decisions this way.

Second: what do you think you'll be doing down the road? Put another way: it's better to spend a little more now than have to buy something completely new in six or twelve months. Remember that translators have to maintain their systems and upgrade constantly in order to produce the file formats being used by businesses around the country and to take advantage of any time-saving technologies (if you don't, your competition will; and you can't survive if you are less efficient than your competition).

Keep in mind also the following rules about computer systems: no hard drive is too large, you can never have too much RAM, and your CPU will never be fast enough.

One comment about laptops. Although I appreciate the convenience of having a small, portable system, there are three reasons why laptops might not be the best choice for a translator. One: screen size and quality. Unless you're willing to spend a lot of money, your screen will likely be a bit small and limited in terms of resolution (dots or pixels displayed per inch) and color depth (number of colors displayed onscreen), neither of which may seem important until you start working with applications that involve lots of windows or graphics files. Two: connectivity. A translator needs to be able to print, send and receive faxes and modem transmissions, and use other peripherals (if you need them). Laptops make all of this more difficult, though in many cases it's not much of a problem (Apple PowerBooks are still the best for connectivity; try using a PCMCIA fax/modem card and you'll see what I mean). Three: the keyboard. This is a matter of working style, but I like using the large, 108-key ergonomic keyboard with a big fat trackball. I like the convenience of a numeric keypad and the function keys and have never been very impressed with the trackballs, trackpads, or pointing things in laptops. You may be different. Nevertheless, if you're thinking of getting a laptop, rent or use someone else's for a while and see how you like it before you spend a lot of money.

All this said, it should be noted that I've had a number of laptops over the years. I started with a friend's Macintosh PowerBook 170 in 1993, enjoying that system thoroughly for almost six months. Then I used a PowerBook 2300c for a while, as well as a Compaq PC notebook. I now have a Sony Viao laptop which I'm quite pleased with, as well as a desktop Macintosh system. The two combined provide all the computing power and flexibility I need for my business. Ultimately you may find having two systems useful, or you may be comfortable with only one. To start with though, I recommend a desktop system if only because of greater bang for the buck, and more convenience and flexibility in upgrading the system.

There is never a good or bad time to buy a computer. No matter how hard you try, a faster, more powerful machine will be available within months. I suggest you purchase a solid mid-range machine that has been on the market for a couple of months. This avoids the often initially high price of some machines and the occasional bug that exists in new equipment. Stick to mainstream vendors so that you can be confident that you'll have support for your equipment even a few years into the future, and to make selling the equipment, should you choose to do so, easier when the time comes to upgrade.

Recommendations: Check recent issues of PC Magazine for reviews of Windows-based Intel (or AMD) machines; check recent issues of MacWorld for reviews of MacOS-based systems.

Monitors

The average computer includes an average monitor, which adds up to a below average situation. You will be looking at your monitor all day long, sometimes even well into the evening. Your monitor is where you will see everything you do so having one which matches your working style is important. Monitors come in all shapes and varieties, but there are two elements which ultimately are most important. First, the picture quality, and second, the resolution.

It goes without saying that a monitor which looks good is best. Since you'll be working in front of it all day long, having a monitor with sharp focus, clear convergence, and crisp colors is important. I strongly recommend that you take the time to look at any monitor you're going to buy. Go to a computer store, find a system connected to the monitor you want, and use it. Test it out with the most demanding visual applications, namely games. Games make an excellent way to test a computer's capabilities. Often, games are more processor-intensive and require better graphics capabilities than business applications. So after you use a word processor for a few minutes, play a game. You'll see the whole screen in action, and find out just how fast the computer really is.

Resolution is the other important factor. Although the size of the screen directly affects the amount of information which you can see at once, resolution has the same effect. A 21-inch monitor with a maximum resolution of 1,024 by 868 dots will not show as much information as the same monitor with a maximum resolution of 1200 by 1024. The same holds for 14-, 15-, and 17-inch monitors. Although the monitor itself has a maximum resolution it can display, this resolution can only be achieved if the graphics card in your computer (and virtually all computers these days come with a graphics card) can provide that resolution. In other words, if your 21-inch monitor's maximum resolution is 1200 by 1024 and your computer's graphics card only outputs at a maximum of 1024 by 768, the latter resolution is the maximum for your system. And even if your graphics card can display very high resolutions, you may pay for this in terms of display speed or color depth.

Which brings us to the issue of color depth (the number of colors your monitor can display at once). Currently, most business applications and operating systems use 8-bit color (256 colors on screen at once). However, graphics applications, many games, and some design applications (3D and CAD/CAM) use 24-bit color (16.7 million colors at once). If your work includes these applications, you'll need to have support for the extra colors. Most mainstream computer systems, Mac or PC, come with a graphics card that will be sufficient for basic translation needs. If however you get involved in working on DTP projects, graphics, or other visually-demanding tasks, you may need to add more VRAM (Video RAM) to your graphics card, or even upgrade the card itself.

Finally, there is the question of CRT versus LCD or flat-panel displays. I prefer the latter, if only because they take up far less space on a desk, use less energy, and have no screen glare. Images are generally not quite as bright or sharp on an LCD display, unless you spend a lot of money for a display such as the ones Silicon Graphics produces. Even an inexpensive LCD panel will run almost $1000, whereas a good 15-inch monitor can be had for under $400 in most cases. Pick which you prefer based on your budget and of course what you see. Ultimately how you feel about your monitor's display characteristics is the most important factor in choosing your monitor, so take the time to look at the monitors you are considering carefully.

Recommendations: Sony, NEC, or ViewSonic products, though there are other fine choices. Other good monitors (particularly in the large sizes) come from Mitsubishi, Nanoscan, and Apple (which uses Trinitron tubes).

Mice and Trackballs

The mouse your computer comes with might not be the best mouse you can have. Long ago, I

found that attaching a three-button mouse to my Mac made my life a lot easier, in that I could not only click and drag, but also use the other buttons to save files and close windows. Very convenient, especially for the graphics and layout work I do.

Then I discovered trackballs and found I preferred them to mice. My favorite trackball was a monstrous 3D trackball the size of a softball which rode on a slender but sturdy nub and had a separate strip of ten buttons above it. This was the hookup for a Silicon Graphics VR system I tried out at the TED3 trade show in 1992. It was a great way to work, and after that, current trackballs seem limited. I am however very happy with my Kensington TurboBall.

Even if you like your mouse, odds are that it will die before the rest of the system does. Replace it with a good mouse, one which feels comfortable in your hand, can be moved precisely around the screen, and comes with good software to operate it. The current (spring, 2000) hot mouse is the Microsoft IntelliMouse, an optical mouse that has no moving parts to get clogged with dust or gunk, and with good software for browsing the Web or navigating large documents. Like all optical mice and trackballs (and many mice and trackballs are optical these days), the IntelliMouse still needs to be cleaned from time to time, when the optical pickups themselves become dirty. But cleaning the IntelliMouse, or for that matter a TurboBall like the one I have, is quick and easy. So try out mice and trackballs, see which you prefer for your hands.

Recommendations: Kensington or Logitech products; Microsoft's IntelliMouse.

Printers

A printer is essential for a translator, but a laser printer might not be. Some translators to manage with inkjet printers, though some agencies refuse to work with translators who don't use laser printers. There are three reasons that a laser printer is a good investment.

One: it prints faster than any inkjet and, if it has its own RAM, you can get back to work immediately and not wait for the printer to spit out the entire document. Remember, a laser printer is essentially a dedicated computer which has a CPU and on-board memory so it can take over the entire task of printing once it has the file. With few exceptions, an inkjet has to rely on your computer's CPU to get the job of printing done, so don't expect much from your computer while printing. If you regularly print large documents (I print hundreds of pages per week, sometimes thousands), a laser printer effectively pays for itself in time saved.

Two: print quality is higher, especially if you have a PostScript printer. This can be particularly important if you are formatting documents or doing desktop publishing along with translation. Moreover, if there are graphics involved in your work, a PostScript laser printer which can handle gray scale output is all but essential.

Three: it impresses clients. Having good equipment is one way you can show you are a serious, dedicated professional who is committed to being a translator. Of course, you could lie and say you have one, but most people can readily recognize the difference between laser output and inkjet printing.

Recommendations: most low-end laser printers and the inkjet (color and black and white)

printers from Hewlett Packard and Apple are great. Texas Instruments produces nice laser printers too.

Fax/Modems

You almost certainly will get a fax/modem with your computer. They remain the most important peripheral to have because of the Internet, and are fast becoming so integral to computing that only certain laptops seem to lack them. And fax/modems are the computer peripheral (or component, if you prefer) that will most likely undergo the greatest change in the next few years as DSL, ISDN, and cable modems become available, offering speeds ten to twenty times greater than the 56 kbps we now use.

A computer fax offers the following advantages: you can preset when and where you send your faxes, allowing you to send them when telephone rates are low and send one fax to many people; you can fax a document (translation, terminology list, or invoice) directly from your word processor, without printing; and, the fax quality is higher, making reading hand-written documents or character-based languages much easier (Mind you, this higher quality is not available with all fax/modems: look for one that supports gray-scale faxes. You'll also need a good printer to see the difference in your hard copies).

There are two disadvantages two a computer fax. One (and by far the biggest) is that you can't fax anything that isn't in the computer. If, for instance, an agency sends you by U.S. mail a contract to sign, you won't be able to fax it from your computer unless you first scan the document into your computer (see the section on scanners). The other disadvantage is that your fax won't work unless your computer is on, except of course if you have one of the rather fancy ones which activates your computer when a fax comes in.

A modem is essential to doing business as a free-lance translator. Most major agencies and many smaller ones want translators to send their work via modem, speeding up the delivery process and saving the agency from having to input the translation.

A modem requires communications software in order to make it function. There are numerous packages available, but most are either too clunky or too powerful for the average user's needs. My personal favorites on the Macintosh are Z-term, VersaTerm, and Microphone. I'm not so sure about PC modem software, but there must be something good.

Recommendations: Fax/modem technology itself is quite robust and standardized at this point (and you will get one for free when you buy your computer). Focus on the software. For Mac users, Global Village, which now makes a stand-alone version of its GlobalFax software, is a superior product, though FaxSTF is in my opinion more reliable and flexible at this point in time. For e-mail and web browsing, your choices are basically Internet Explorer or Netscape Communicator, both of which are fine products (and the debate regarding the relative advantages or disadvantages of each will not be addressed here; I use both, and given the various compatibility issues, you will likely use both, too).

CD/DVD Drives

A CD/DVD drive is so essential that it is no longer considered a peripheral. A new desktop

computer without one is almost unimaginable, and laptops eschew them only to reduce size and weight, usually opting to have the drive as a peripheral device.

These drives come in a few different varieties. There are the venerable CD-ROM drives, which only read CD-ROM discs, the newer DVD-ROM drives, which read CDs and DVDs (including movies), CD-RW drives, which read and write CD discs (the writing typically referred to as burning), and DVD-RAM drives, which read and write DVDs.

A typical CD holds roughly 650 MB of data after formatting; a typical DVD roughly 2.6 GB of data per side (or layer). Since most software applications now come on CD (sometimes on more than one), a CD-ROM drive is indispensable. Some multimedia and entertainment titles are available only on DVD discs (including, of course, DVD movies), so a DVD-ROM drive might be useful now, and certainly will be in the future, as more and more material comes out on DVD discs.

Recommendations: You will get a CD-ROM drive with virtually any computer you buy these days, and you will get a DVD-ROM drive with most higher-end systems. If you can afford the DVD-ROM (which reads CD-ROMs, remember), you might as well get it, because DVD-ROM is soon to be the next data storage standard for computers. DVD-RAM drives are still evolving, but by the end of this year will be widely available at moderate prices. In terms of manufacturers, Que, HP, and Sony all garner good reviews, though each has also had problems. Check reviews in current magazines for recommendations among the current crop of drives.

Scanners (and OCR)

A scanner is essentially a copy machine which takes a picture of a piece of paper and then reproduces that picture as a file on your computer. Scanners can be categorized by how they handle color and resolution. Which scanner is best depends on what it will be used for.

I will skip the lengthy and confusing discussion about single versus triple pass color scanning, resolution interpolation, and so on, because most translators don't use scanners to work with art in full color and at high resolution. Instead, translators use scanners to scan text into a computer, thus saving them the time of retyping a document, or to prepare a document for faxing, if they do not have a stand-alone fax machine and rely solely on a computer fax.

Successfully scanning text has more to do with the software than the hardware. Most basic scanners ($100 and up) are more than adequate for scanning text accurately and for scanning art at lower resolutions. OmniPage Pro from Caere remains the industry leader for scanning. I've been using this software for 10 years now and am very pleased with the OCR processing speed, control over custom dictionaries and input language, and accuracy. If you plan to scan a lot of text, you may want to invest in a scanner with a sheet-feeder tray,

Recommendations:

Scanners: Hewlett Packard ScanJet series, Umax, MicroTek, and LaCie products.

OCR software: OmniPage.

When buying a scanner, look for a bundle which includes the OCR software you want. You can save a lot of money by buying such bundles.

Other Peripherals

Other peripherals include so many things that to describe them all would take many articles. The one which I think is useful to translators is a secondary hard drive or a removable drive. Why, you ask, if you have one hard drive, do you need another one? For one major reason and one minor one.

The major reason is as a way to back-up data easily and efficiently. Instead of popping in floppy disks regularly and keeping a large collection of them strewn around your office for your cat to use as toys, you simply copy the latest version of your work to the other drive, and viola, back-up. This is especially useful when your file is over 1.4 MB, the maximum capacity of a floppy.

The minor reason is only important if one of your drives fails. Eventually, this will happen to everyone. The disk will crash, the OS files on it will be corrupted, the disk will be exposed to a virus or worm, and so on. Instead of panicking and worrying about how you'll get your work done, you calmly use the other drive, get everything finished, and then deal with the damaged one.

A removable drive serves the same purpose but has one added advantage: you have virtually unlimited storage at a very low cost per megabyte. After you buy the drive (generally expensive), all you have to do is buy disks for it, and pop them in and out like floppies. This is especially useful for archiving your data, something with you must do, in case you are ever sued by a client (unlikely, but it does happen), audited by the IRS (you can prove you've done what you claim to have done very easily), or are simply asked to redo something six months down the road. For instance, I translated a chip specifications document one December, then translated the revision the following February. Having all of the original translation made doing the revision much easier, and of course, it impresses clients.

Computer Software

Software is much more important than hardware. In fact, what software you're going to use should determine what computer you buy; not the other way around. If you love Windows, then you'll buy a PC. If you're going to do a lot of desktop publishing or multimedia design work, you'll probably buy a Mac. If you're using Japanese of Chinese a lot, you'll get a Mac. If you need to use MAT software, you'll have to have a PC. And there is nothing wrong with having two or more computers.

For as confusing as hardware choices are, software can be worse. Many translators are not taking full advantage of the power and convenience their computers offer, so I'll try to point out what all these kinds of software are good for, and how you might use them to improve your business. "A Computer is not a Typewriter" as the title of a useful book says, and I hope that this will help you get the most out of your investment.

First, a few general rules about buying software. One, don't rely exclusively on the reviews you read in magazines. They are written by underpaid, overworked computer geeks who are given five software applications and asked to figure them out, and then evaluate them and write an article in one week for about $800. Just like a rush translation job, you can't expect high quality, in-depth advice from a source like that.

Use reviews to find out what's out there and how much it costs. Then talk to people who use the software. Try out the software in a store. And when you buy it, do so from a place which has a good exchange policy or money-back guarantee (unless you know you want the package). After a week of using the software, if you don't like it, return it and get something else.

Two: don't buy the biggest, most expensive, most powerful, feature-laden package available. Instead, find some modest package and get started with that. You'll save time, money and frustration. When your ready, you can buy (or for a fraction of the cost, trade up to) the more powerful package. Remember, you'll be buying software regularly over the years, upgrading your existing packages, and constantly learning how to do new and better things.

Three: read the manuals (RTM for short, though some people, in a fit of frustration will say RTFM, or its word equivalent). I spend some of my free time helping people learn how to use computers. The major difference between those that are good with computers and those that are not is that the former group reads the manuals. I'm not saying you should read every page of all the manuals which come with a sophisticated package, but at least read the introductory sections and the other relevant parts, working through any on-line tutorials along the way. Then use the manuals the way you do a dictionary, looking up what you need to know as necessary. Also, you can buy or check out of a library numerous third-party books about all the major software packages available. Those books often provide clearer, more concise explanations and examples of how to use the software.

Operating Systems

All computers come with an operating system, though you might prefer to install a different one yourself. Currently, Windows 2000 and Mac OS 9 are the dominant operating systems on the market, though Windows NT is popular as well, and Linux and other flavors of Unix are making headway on PCs.

Some PC users are still using Windows 95 or 98, and some even prefer Windows NT, claiming that it is a more stable and robust environment (I'm in that group myself). Linux is a sound OS, but lacks mainstream application support, though Corel's WordPerfect suite has now been tweaked to run under Linux. Remember though, you are buying an OS to run the applications you need to produce the material your clients want, so while Linux is tempting for a variety of sound reasons, it may not be a practical choice.

When all is said and done, the operating system is very important, although the less you think about it, the less you notice it, and the less time you have to spend learning how to use it, the better. Like a good translator or interpreter, the best operating system is the one you almost never have to think about.

Before you buy a new computer, think about which operating system you'd prefer. Go to a computer store or a friend's place and use their PC or Mac and see which you like more. I'm not going to say one is better than the other, each has strengths and weaknesses. But given that everything you do on your computer will be related to the operating system, give it some thought.

There are a couple of other factors to consider when choosing an operating system. The most important for translators is language. All of us need to use at least two languages on our computers. Some of us might need more. Depending on which languages you need specifically, you might choose one operating system over another. This issue is particularly relevant for translators working with double-byte languages such as Chinese and Japanese. Under Windows, you either have to purchase the localized version of the operating system (for instance, Windows 98-J) or install the language modules that come with Windows 2000, which includes a full implementation of what is known as Unicode to address language issues. While Unicode works, it does not yet work well, and support from vendors of other major software packages is still in the future in most cases.

Full language support has been available on the Macintosh through WorldScript since the introduction of System 7.1 in the early '90s. As of Mac OS 9, you merely install the language module(s) you need (they are all on the OS 9 disc), and then as long as the software you are using is WorldScript aware, you can use the various fonts and other features you may want. Unfortunately, some applications, such as MS Word, are not particularly WorldScript aware, so you may still need a special foreign-language word processor like Nisus or a localized version of your software, such as PageMaker-J. In general, however, the Mac is a more stable and evolved platform for languages written using a system other than the Roman alphabet.

For Roman alphabet-based languages, you don't have to worry about this issue except when getting spell-checkers and the like. Most good word processing software has a customization feature which lets you set which language you will use, thus setting the parameters for find and replace, search, and sort functions. Similarly, many databases support this feature now. And you can find spell-check files, as well as other foreign-language resources, on the web sites of many software vendors. As for other language-specific issues involving the so-called Asian languages, they are treated in depth in the article on that subject.

Word Processing

This requires a mention only because we all use word processing software to get translations done. The translation industry has shifted from its long-standing commitment to WordPerfect to Microsoft Word (current versions: Word 2000 on the PC and Word 98 on the Macintosh; files from one are fully compatible with the other). Regardless of what you may think of Word, particularly the Office Assistant (an animated agent of dubious value that stems from Microsoft Bob), it is the standard now, and most translation agencies expect translators to have a current version.

Do take the time to learn the more advanced features of your word processor, whether it is MS Word or WordPerfect. Being able to create elegant tables quickly, handle special characters, set up basic layout (including margins, headers and footers, tables of contents, indices, and so forth) is something that will distinguish you from other, less-capable translators and gain you more work in the long run. Also worth knowing are the many

keyboard shortcuts, useful not only for cutting and pasting (I assume you know those), but also for adding formatting like superscripts and subscripts, as well as navigating your document.

Also learn how to customize your word processor's menus and toolbars. Creating buttons or keyboard commands for the tasks you frequently perform can save lots of wear and tear on your hands in the long run, not to mention increase productivity. You can further enhance your word processing environment, particularly in MS Word, by learning how to create macros. You don't need to master VBA (Visual Basic for Applications; the version of Microsoft Visual Basic now built into the core software applications in Microsoft Office); just learn to record and play back macros. There are a number of good third-party books that you can learn all of these things from in short order; trust me, it's worth the investment of an afternoon or two to develop these skills.

There are plenty of other word processors on the market, but they should all be considered as supplementary or complementary to Microsoft Word. I still use WordPerfect, as well as Nisus and even the word processing features in FrameMaker from time to time, but my clients, with rare exception, want translations in Word, and so will yours.

Desktop Publishing

I'll mention this briefly because translators who have their own clients may have to provide desktop publishing services along with translation. DTP is not to be entered into lightly; just because you can use a word processor doesn't mean you'll jump right into PageMaker or Quark. The skills take time to learn and a great deal of experience to master. If, however, you are into DTP or have to provide those services, you'll need a DTP package. There are really only three to consider: PageMaker, QuarkXPress, and FrameMaker (all are available on the Mac and PC).

Do keep in mind that desktop publishing requires more than just the above software. You'll also need more memory in your system as well as a printer capable of handling PostScript output so that you can check the details of your DTP efforts. You may also need more fonts and a larger monitor, depending on the type of work you're doing. DTP has become a great secondary service for translators to offer, particularly those who can type in a language like Korean or Hindi and have the hardware and software to do so.

Accounting & Finance

I've been doing my accounts on my computer, including my taxes, since 1993, and think it's wonderful. It's quick, easy, and painless, as well as much more efficient and powerful than doing it all by hand. Moreover, accounting packages are dirt cheap these days, often included for free when you purchase a computer, and ultimately can save you time and money. If no accounting package meets your needs, you can always create your own in an spreadsheet or database application.

When you run your own business, keeping accurate books is very important, if not to you, then to the IRS. You can use an accounting program not only to keep track of your cash flow, but also income, business expenses, and taxes. You can even import the business records in

the accounting program to tax preparation software, expediting the painful process of doing taxes at the year end.

Recommendations: Quicken, QuickBooks, or Managing Your Money. Quicken is cheaper and easier to use, but Managing Your Money offers true double entry bookkeeping, and other powerful financial features. QuickBooks is a full-fledged small business accounting solution, which is probably overkill for translators, but is still worth considering because it can handle anything that will ever come up in your business. All are excellent in my opinion. TurboTax (called MacinTax on the Macintosh) and TaxCut are both excellent tax preparation programs.

Databases

Most people hear the word database and think of terabytes of data being held on a mainframe or web server and accessed from numerous terminals or clients throughout a company, if not the entire world. But a database is just a collection of data organized with certain unifying principles. Your phone book is a database. A library card catalog is a database. And your client lists should be kept in a database.

Databases are neither expensive nor difficult to use, if you buy the right one. Many include ready-to-use templates which let you build your own databases very quickly. And the so-called PIM (personal information manager) is really just a specialized database with a calendar and other functions built in.

Databases let you store lots of data, such as the names, addresses, and phone numbers of your clients, as well as other information including when you last spoke with them, what work they give, how much they pay you, etc. You can sort your list of clients by name or by when you last contacted them. You can keep track of how much you've made from them over one year, two years, or five years. You can update information. And you can create letters, envelopes, and mailing labels from within the database (a PIM makes this very easy) to prepare mailings to clients.

Why bother with all this? you ask.

Simple. You have to keep track of your clients because they are unlikely to do it for you. It's part of a freelance translator's job to send résumés, cover letters, and other polite reminders to agencies so that they hire you, and not someone else. A database makes all of this easy and straight-forward, though you do have to put the information in there yourself.

Recommendations: if you want a full-fledged easy-to-use database program: on PCs, MS Access (which comes with some versions of MS Office) or FileMaker Pro; on the Mac, FileMaker Pro. There are also many PIMs and other similar products which are simpler, cheaper and less powerful. I used NowContact for years but recently switched to Consultant. Also worth considering, though overkill in my opinion, is Act! from Symantec.

Spreadsheets

I mention these only in passing because a simple accounting program is generally more useful than a full-fledged spreadsheet package, not to mention far cheaper. However,

spreadsheets can be used like a database, and they are also good for invoicing and keeping records which an accounting program may or may not accommodate. They can also handle terminology lists efficiently, and help in project planning and tracking.

Moreover, spreadsheets can be used for keeping track of business transactions such as invoices and accounts payable, as well as anything else involving numbers. I use Excel to keep invoicing records, lists of all my business expenses for a particular year, for my retirement package, and for financial planning. The best way to obtain a spreadsheet application is as a part of an application suite like IBM's Lotus SmartSuite, Microsoft's Office, or Corel's WordPerfect Suite, and often such an application suite will come with your computer.

Also worth mentioning is that some translation projects are done in a spreadsheet, typically Excel. I have translated ISO 9000 compliance forms and similar documents in Excel, creating the layout as well as doing the translation. So you may find a spreadsheet application is as valuable as a word processor.

Recommendations: Lotus or Excel on the PC; Excel on the Mac.

Voice Input

More and more people are developing problems with their hands, wrists, and arms, all lumped into that seemingly innocuous but in reality very painful category called Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), of which Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) is the best known though hardly the most common. The only way to avoid injury in the long run seems to be to type less. Hence, voice input.

Does it work? Yes, within limits. For email, daily business communications, and some translation work, voice input packages like IBM's Via Voice and Dragon System's Naturally Speaking products will work quite well. Assuming, that is, you have sufficient hardware. To wit, Naturally Speaking allows me to input by voice roughly 500 words per hour with an 80% accuracy rate, give or take. It should be noted though that my Sony laptop doesn't have the best sound card (an important consideration for voice input), and isn't particularly fast or overstuffed with RAM. Via Voice, which I use on a fast Mac, works quite well, but also within limits. And both packages have their quirks, as well as some features that look suspiciously like bugs or design limitations.

In sum, voice input is here, it works, and it will reduce your typing load, though hardly eliminate it. Versions that work for other languages are here or on their way, so all of us will be able to work a little longer, a little harder, and with less risk of debilitating injury. I strongly recommend you get either Naturally Speaking or Via Voice.For more details, see my Voice Input Review on this site..

Miscellaneous Applications

In order to keep down the size of this article, I lump all other general software applications into this category. Here I include apps like PowerPoint, which is used for translation from time to time, HTML editors, used when translating web pages, software development tools

like Microsoft VisualStudio, MetroWerks CodeWarrior, or Sun's Java Development Kit (JDK for short), used when working on localization projects from within the software code, and other document preparation tools such as RoboHelp, etc. If you decide to start using any of these tools, be advised that the learning curves, particularly if you are getting involved in object-oriented programming, can be steep. On the other hand, the effort will be rewarded insofar as you will be among the few translators who has and can use such tools.

Reference

Reference material on computers remains a varied software category. Some material, such as the Oxford English Dictionary or Termium, might be worth the price to the right person, while much of it remains more entertaining than useful, especially in light of the development of on-line reference resources.

Most electronic dictionaries on CD-ROM are simply not comprehensive enough for translation, though this is changing. Termium for French remains a valuable and reliable resource, and there are similar CD-ROM reference discs coming out for all major languages. Depending on the type of work you do, on-line reference material such as SAM (Scientific American Medicine; a quarterly publication of the latest medical research) could even prove useful. Most translators seem to find such resources superfluous, however.

The only problem with relying on the Internet for answers to your reference needs is the Internet itself. Finding information on the Web can take considerable time and effort, ISP connections are often slow, Web sites are sometimes unavailable, and responses from discussion groups frequently unforthcoming or confusing. So if you use the Web as a reference resource, give yourself some extra time to find what you need.

Recommendations: None in particular. The list of potentially useful language-oriented CD-ROMs is extensive, and what you might find useful is difficult to say. As for potentially useful Web sites, that list is also long and hard to comment on. All that said, the separate URL List includes many sites that have proved useful to me repeatedly.

MT & MAT Software

Machine translation is a subject very dear to my heart, as I am a technical translator who works on operating systems manuals, hardware documentation, design and specifications manuals, and software manuals. Currently, there is no equivalent to the Babble Fish in the Hitchhiker's trilogy or the universal translator on Star Trek, but MT and MAT software are important enough to bear mentioning in this article.

It is important to understand the difference between MT and MAT. The former does all the work for you (theoretically anyway), taking a source text and rendering it into the target language. You will still have to do a lot of clean-up work and damage control afterwards and even check the parts the program flags for meaning. MAT software helps you to translate by providing one or more of the following services: on-line dictionaries, glossaries, and terminology banks, reference resources, storage of terms and phrases you are constantly using in the translation, version control using earlier editions of the document, etc.

PC Translator: I've never seen the program in action nor have I had a chance to examine sample texts given to it. I assume that it works reasonably well for menial translation tasks which have little in the way of idiom, style, or content.

Power Translator: Versatile in that it has numerous terminological dictionaries and a very clever translation engine (won the 1993 Discover Magazine New Technology Award). It handles general material which is grammatically correct, punctuated properly, and idiomatically neutral quickly, though it doesn't do much with style or nuance. Even at its best, you'd still want an editor or translator to give the translation a "once over" to avoid any meaning errors or differences in nuance as well as to polish the style. At its worst, I'm told the result is best described as word salad.

Logos: A translation system dedicated to handling Japanese and English. I have a demo version which works reasonably well, in that it provides special options to accommodate language issues present in Japanese but absent in English. However, the same caveats that applied to Power Translator apply here, but to a greater extent because of the nature of Japanese writing. It's generally very diffuse and follows a logical structure quite different from English, therefore requiring a lot of creative writing and reorganization on the part of the translator.

Machine Assisted Translation: Déjà-vu and Trados are excellent implementations of old ideas, though if you are clever with your word processor and use the "clipboard" efficiently, you can produce a similar effect for yourself. They become particularly valuable when you are working with a client that has already built up a library of translation memories, or when you are collaborating with other translators on a project being managed in one of these applications. Given that my main language is Japanese, I haven't used either of these packages much, but I see great potential in them, and I hope that their manufacturers find a way to lower the price point to attract more translators. I also hope to see Mac and Linux versions of all their products in the near future.

Games

Games have a number of legitimate and useful purposes for a translator. One, games are a great way to break up the work day, to relax and have fun for a little while in your office. They also give you something to do as you sit at your desk awaiting a fax or phone call that is supposed to arrive in five minutes but could well take over an hour. Unlike a traditional business environment, the freelance translator works alone at home. You can't leave your desk, walk to the lounge or water cooler, and relax with your colleagues. You also can't get on the phone and chat it up with other translators, unless they happen to be taking a break at the same time. So you'll end up taking a lot of your breaks alone. Besides all the traditional forms of relaxation, including eating, watching TV, or doing a brief stretching routine to loosen the neck, shoulders, and arms, you can also play a quick game of this or that as a way to get your mind of the translation you're doing, and have fun using your computer.

Two, games are a great way to test a computer, new or used. Nothing taxes a computer system like the recent release of some flight simulator, 3D shooter, or other visually impressive game (Minesweeper and Solitaire don't count here). You could spend days using MS Word before you detected a problem with your hard disk, sound card, or CD-ROM drive; with a game, it'd take all of ten minutes.

Three, games are a vital part of the translation profession. Roughly one-fifth of my workload per year comes from translating games. To no small degree games have driven the rise in computer capacity during the past decade. And games are in part what has drawn so many households into buying a computer (the Web being the other major factor). So why not be ready to make money? Play some games from time to time so that you are familiar with the language and content of a potentially very lucrative market.

Enough said. No particular recommendations; just get something you like.

Advice for Buying Used Equipment

Bargains abound for used computer equipment. You can find them in newspapers, at universities and colleges, at inventory sales and going- out-of-business sales, and through BBSes. However, be careful because when you buy something used you might inherit the previous owner's problems.

Tips for buying used equipment: Don't buy used hard drives or modems. The new ones are so cheap that it's not worthwhile. Be careful when buying a used printer, unless you know the owner. Depending on how hard a printer has been worked, you might get one with little life left in it.

As for CPUs, there are a few simple things you can do when checking out a used one to avoid getting a lemon. First, make sure you test out the computer by using it the way you plan to. Don't let the seller simply do a demonstration for you. Sit down in front of it and work for fifteen or thirty minutes.

You should run the following tests. Turn on and shut down the computer a few times, making sure that it boots properly. If the computer is a Mac, you should here a crisp middle C when it boots. If you hear any other noise, don't buy the machine. Format a floppy disk or two. Open and save files to the hard disk and a floppy disk, making sure that the save operation is successful. Copy files to and from a floppy disk. Check the keyboard carefully to make sure there are no dead or sticky keys. Check the monitor carefully to make sure the display is crisp and clear and that there are no dead pixels. Test the mouse, making sure that it tracks properly and responds to clicks. And, have the computer make some sounds, be it through a game or a regular program, to make sure that the sound functions are working normally.

You should also consider getting a diagnostic program and use that to test the computer's functions. The program will figure out what kind of machine it is and then check its performance against industry standards. It will also run numerous other tests on the RAM, the various ROMs as well as PROM and EPROMs, the various BIOSes and other hardware functions. If the machine passes all these tests, then you'll be safe enough buying it. To test Macs, I use a program TechTool Pro (sorry, I don't have any recommendations for PC testing programs).

Don't buy used software unless you know it's what you want and you get all the manuals, registration forms, and other documentation. You should have the person who is selling the software write a letter to the manufacturer informing them of the transfer of ownership, but

some software companies won't recognize this and refuse to support software purchased from a previous owner.

Whenever you buy something used, create an invoice and make sure you and the seller both get signed copies. The invoice should include your name and address, the seller's name and address, the date, a description of the purchase and the price. You may also want to add a clause that states you can return the equipment within a certain number of days should it prove defective.

I've bought and sold plenty of equipment, everything from a TRS- 80 through the current crop of Macs and PCs. It's not hard. If your patient and careful, you can save yourself some money and get a good system.

The Whole Is Greater Than Its Parts

So, you have all this advice about computer hardware, and you're asking yourself, should I bother to take it to heart and use it? My answer is, of course, yes, otherwise I wouldn't have written it. The reason is that a computer system is more than the sum of its parts. It's how you get work done. If the system lets you work fast and efficiently, helps you avoid problems and handle emergencies, and is comfortable, then work becomes easier.

Although a good computer is no guarantee of financial success, it is interesting to note that most of the really successful freelancer (in any field) have good systems and know how to take advantage of them. Naturally, using your system to the fullest has a lot to do with hardware, so I hope you'll take advantage of the ideas offered here. I also recommend that dedicated users check out the following Web sites (among others) regularly for information and tips on getting the most from their systems: For Macs, go to [Macintouch](). It has lots of late-breaking technical and product information, along with links to most of the Mac e-publishing world, including MacWorld, MacCentral, and MacTech. For PCs, go to the [PCGuide](). It has loads of technical and product information for Windows machines, as well as product discussions and reviews, guides for assembling, maintaining and troubleshooting your system, and lots of links. Also worth checking from time to time for information on PCs is [PC Magazine](), which is useful not only for the product reviews, but also for the technical articles and discussions about emerging technologies.

There is, obviously, a lot to learn and to continue learning. Whether you work in-house or freelance, you are sure to come across software and hardware issues you can't resolve. You need to know how to do these things, however; and if you work in localization or some other area of high-tech translation, you also need to learn about the technologies you are working with. To that end, you should be reading computer magazines and manuals, but you will also have to ask engineers or other geeks for help. Do so by all means, but never let a geek get a hold of your keyboard or mouse. The geek will work so quickly that you won't learn anything by watching, unless you have a keystroke capture utility installed. Force this geek to tell you what to do and let you actually do it. You will learn a lot more a lot faster that way, someday perhaps even joining the ranks of geekdom yourself.

I hope your adventures into computing aren't too cumbersome or frustrating. If you discover a wonderful piece of hardware or software, please let me know about it. If you disagree with

what I've said about some hardware, software, or system in this article, do tell. I hope to keep these articles current, and I do so in part through contributions from readers.

This site designed and maintained by Roger Chriss. Last updated on May 15, 2000.
To contact Roger Chriss, click here.

THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

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Life costs money. Despite my efforts, I have yet to find a way to exist without spending money. Translators, like all business professionals, have to be aware of the financial aspects of their livelihood. This I call the translator's balance sheet. No one will ever get rich quick translating material from one language to another, but like any business, the most important thing is to come out ahead, to have the black exceed the red. Previous articles have discussed how to get and do translation jobs; in other words, how to make money to enter into the black side of the balance sheet. This article will show you how to make the black exceed the red by that much more.

The Translator's Balance Sheet: The Black Side

Translators earn most of their income from translation work. Some translators also edit or proofread translations, write abstracts or language analyses, or provide other language-oriented services. Still others teach the languages they know or even translation itself. And doubtlessly some do work wholly unrelated to translation.

The easiest way to earn more money as a freelance translator is to do more work. This means not only more translation, but also other work, which in many cases serves to cover those times when not so much translation work comes in. Such secondary jobs have to be flexible so that you can take the translation assignments when they come, but having a secondary job is not a bad idea, unless you are so well established that translation assignments are spewing from your fax machine at all hours of the day.

Whether translators are paid for their translation work by the word, the page, or the project, the act of translating something from one language to another is how they earn their living. All of this money which is coming in sits on the black side of the balance sheet, and must exceed what is on the red side to represent a profit, and therefore a living. If your translation business is not showing a profit, if your expenses exceed your income, you are in trouble.

Cyril Parkinson observed that expenses rise to meet income. This is perfectly okay. However, translators have to be especially careful because they cannot predict their income the way Jo(e) Paycheck can. One good month does not necessarily lead to another, just as one bad month does not mean another is on the way. Remember, we say that the profession is feast or famine; so enjoy the feast and don't panic over the famine. It is, after all, the way of the

jungle.

There are numerous ways to increase what appears on the back side. The easiest is to do more work. This is a nice idea, but given that there are only 168 hours in a week and 1440 minutes in a day (8765.24 hours in a year, 525940 minutes, give or take for sidereal versus solar years), you can readily see that there is an upper limit to how much work you can do. Assuming you have as much work as you are capable of or willing to do, or something close to that level, the trick is to get as much money as possible for your work.

In other words: Learn to negotiate.

As discussed in the first article, annual income is the product of words translated by word rate. Increasing both is the key to greater financial success in translation. Thus negotiations are a vital aspect of your business relations with translation vendors. A little math makes this clear. For a 10,000 word translation, if you work at ten cents per word, you'll make $1000; at eleven cents per word, you'll make $1100, and so on. In other words, you should think of your word rate as your salary ratio. If the average word rate for your language combination drops by 10%, you'll effectively take a 10% cut in salary. Of course, the opposite is also true.

As an aside, you should have a minimum fee for all jobs. In my experience, no job takes less than two hours to do, when all is said and done. Between the initial phone call and discussion of the job, receiving and checking the material, whether by fax or email, translating the words themselves, delivering the job, then submitting an invoice, noting payment in your records when the check comes, and finally depositing the check (and this list does not even include the inevitable but distant issue of doing taxes), ultimately all jobs consume roughly two hours of time, at least. Such mini-translations include materials such as inter-office memos, official documents such as driver's licenses, passports, family registrations, business cards, snippets from Web sites, and so forth. If you were paid by the word, you'd make only a few dollars for the job and probably not cover the cost of printing and sending the finished job to the agency.

Translation vendors are aware of this problem because they are in the same position. If they take a very small job, they have to consider their fixed costs as well. Regardless of how small or large a job is, certain costs remain the same, and the agency knows this. Therefore, so should you. Sit down and figure out roughly how much it costs you to do a translation. Include the time and money spent on talking to the client, sending faxes or files, and printing the translation or the invoice. I won't do a job for less than $30, and this has caused me little trouble. Also note, as I discussed previously, that sometimes doing these mini-translations for free is a great way to develop good will with a client. But I only do this for clients I really like, and only once in a while.

Rates

You should also know what word rate you are willing to accept for a job. Work this out ahead of time and stick to it. You might even keep a chart on your desk, telling you for example that you will do general material for $0.09/word, technical for $0.10/word and rush jobs for $0.15/word (these are just examples, not recommendations). You might also have a chart worked out for how you adjust your rate based on the size of the job. I regularly accept a slightly lower rate for jobs which exceed two weeks in duration. Make sure your rates are reasonable; there's no point in asking for twice the market average because you'll quickly

find you have no work. There are lots of good translators out there waiting to replace you; so don't give anyone a reason not to use you.

You can find out roughly what other translators are charging for similar work by checking on-line resources such as the rates survey on Aquarius (http://aquarius.net). You can also ask people in local translation societies, and even consult with your more reputable and honest clients. Charging too high a rate has obvious drawbacks, but charging too little, to some people's surprise, is also problematic. Consider this: You know what a reasonable price for a gallon of milk or gasoline, what a music CD or paperback book, or for that matter what a box of cat food. If you found a store that sold a gallon of milk for $0.99, a new music CD from a hot band for $2.59, or a new paperback for $0.49, you might be happy, but you might also be nervous. Why the big discrepancy in prices? How can the store afford to sell these products at prices that are way below wholesale? The same attitude should permeate your pricing. One project manager told me that at her agency, rates that are more than 10% below market norms are seen as dubious or suspicious. So know the going rates for the kind of work you do, figure out an acceptable range for yourself, and then memorize those numbers so that you can negotiate with confidence.

Stick to your rates once you establish them. There are times to change your rates, and I'll discuss that in a moment. But first, let's look at why you should stick to your rates. If you constantly let yourself be talked down, you are effectively cheapening yourself, and by extension, other translators and the profession as a whole. People value what they pay a lot for. And people are willing to pay a fair price for what they value. Part of that sense of value and price comes from the quality and nature of the work. Part of that sense comes from the pride and professionalism of the practitioners. If you show no pride or professionalism, you will lose, and by extension, the entire profession will lose.

I'm not saying that translators should all double or triple their rates. But when translators start accepting lower and lower rates, they create a crisis for themselves. As rates decrease, more and more translators will be forced out of the business simply because they cannot earn a living, and good translators will move on to other fields which value their knowledge, training, and ability more. Some will leave voluntarily because they know they can make a better living elsewhere. Others will leave because they have no choice. Eventually, only those who are translating part-time and are not concerned about pay (if such people exist) will be left.

This brain-drain in translation will be bad for everyone, not just translators. Naturally, the same issue about rates applies to agencies and to end-clients. You get what you pay for is a maxim which is virtually axiomatic in business. Translators have to do their part by insisting that their work has value and is worth so much per word. Agencies have to do their part by insisting that a project will cost so much if it is to be done correctly. And end-clients have to realize that they are dealing with specialists and experts and respect their ability and judgment.

There are, however, some times when you will want or be forced to change your rates. For example, I translate Japanese. If Japan suddenly fell into the ocean, I might have to lower my rates, though more likely I'd be looking for a new job; perhaps as a Japanese historian. On a more realistic level, any time an event causes a sudden change in demand for a language combination, whether that event is a war, political or social turmoil, a natural disaster or

economic crisis, an upsurge in a new industry, or what have you, rates will change. The growth of the computing industry has created opportunities for translators working from English into other major languages that did not exist ten years ago. The strong economy in the United States in the 1990s led to increased demand for many consumer goods manufacturing overseas, and translators benefited accordingly (at least I did; I hope others did as well). So be prepared to change with the times, but don't get too far ahead or behind of the marketplace.

The Red Side

Like any business person, translators have expenses. Expenses come in all shapes and sizes, from the petty annoyances like stamps and telephone bills to the wallet-sucking monsters like new computer systems and new office furniture. The trick is to minimize and optimize your expenses so that you get the most out of a very small red side on your balance sheet. As usual, part of this trick involves timing.

Taxes

We all know we have to pay taxes. Like all self-employed people, translators have to pay quarterly estimated taxes, as well as the traditional annual taxes. Remember that when you work for someone else, you have withholding taxes removed from your paycheck. Because translators are independent contractors, they receive all the money owed to them, and then have to make quarterly payments to the IRS, as well as their state government if that government collects state income taxes.

The trick with quarterly payments is to pay as little as possible without incurring a penalty at the end of the year. If you pay nothing or very little, you may end up owing not only a large tax bill at the end of the year, but a penalty payment as well. There is no easy way to calculate the exact minimum. However, what you can do is use your prior year's tax return, then play with the numbers and see how low you can go before a penalty payment appears. This works only if you are basing your quarterly payments on your previous year's income. And it is only advantageous if you are making more than you did in the previous year, something which is difficult to predict.

If you annualize your income, then you have to be more careful. Annualizing your income means that you figure out how much you earned each quarter, and demonstrate that your quarterly payment is appropriate. For translators who have a lot of work during some parts of the year and far less during others, this is very useful because the quarterly payment reflects the amount of income in that quarter, not some predetermined amount which may be too low or too high.

Fortunately, the penalty the IRS assesses is fairly low, so much so that some translators (and others I know) do not bother with quarterly payments, instead choosing to use that money elsewhere, perhaps in investments, and pay their annual tax balance at the end of the tax year. I don't recommend this strategy until and unless you 1) have a lot of extra money to handle the tax bill without feeling the pinch; 2) understand your taxes thoroughly and know what to expect at the end of the year; and 3) have developed a certain measure of financial discipline in your business and personal life. For most people, making at least a modest quarterly payment is a strategic and wise thing to do. I include myself amongst such people, by the

way, and hope you will adopt this thinking, even if it means not "keeping money as long as you can."

A straight-forward way to get a rough estimate of your annual federal tax burden is to use the Tax Estimator from Intuit at the Quicken web site (www.quicken.com). Although you may not be able to put in exact figures until late in the year, you can at least get some idea of what to expect to pay in taxes for that year.

Deductions

The art of paying taxes seems to be the art of paying as little as possible. Deductions are how you reduce your taxable income. The trick is to reduce your gross annual income as much as possible, without breaking any laws, of course (this section assumes that you are a law-abiding citizen).

After you get done with all the obvious deductions, including dependents, interest payments, other such common tricks, you have to ask yourself how to deduct the maximum for your business efforts.

One obvious trick is how to take the deduction. For instance, let's say you buy a new computer in 2000. First, you should consider doing it as late in the year as possible so that you don't have to wait long to get your money back. Then, you have to decide whether to take a straight deduction or depreciate the computer. Since computers lose so much of their value and utility so fast, you probably should take the straight deduction. Then, when you decide to replace it, donate it to a school, church, or other non-profit organization and take the deduction for the donation. If you sell any business equipment, you have to report it and pay taxes on it. The sale also effects your depreciation schedules. All in all, you save a lot of money doing by taking the straight deduction (at least as the tax codes stand right now). I suggest using the Section 179 deduction, because the paperwork is straight-forward, and the maximum amount ($17,500 as of tax year 1999) is more than enough to cover all conceivable expenses for a translator in a given tax year.

Another obvious trick is getting all the deductions owed to you. The IRS doesn't advertise its deductions. It's up to you to know what they are. So here are most of the deductible items which apply to translators.

Office supplies: This includes all paper, envelopes, pencils, pens, paper clips, staples (and stapler), light bulbs (for lights in the office), printer toner or ink, floppy disks and so on. You may say that this sounds like you are nickel-and-diming the IRS to death, but is there any reason not to, given that the IRS does just this to the American taxpayer? (Actually, to be fair, Congress sets the tax laws, the IRS is just a large collection agency. When we complain about the IRS, we should really be complaining about the Congress. Clever of our elected officials, no?) I suggest buying all your office supplies at once at the end of the year, then take the deduction. Get a receipt when you make your purchase and you're all set.

Utilities: I previously discussed deducting the business-use-of- home. However, one important deduction to remember is the cost of your business phone lines, or your long-distance phone calls if you use your home's only phone line for business. Every business call

can be deducted. Keep a log of the individual phone calls if you use only one phone line in your home, or keep the phone bill receipts for your business line with the rest of your business receipts, then add up the total cost for the year. If you want to be efficient, use a spreadsheet to keep track of individual calls if you use only one phone line, or use an accounting software package to keep track of your phone bills if you have one or more dedicated business lines. And remember, business calls include faxes and modem transmissions.

Advertising: I've harped on the need to market so much that it must be clear that a translator incurs advertising expenses. These expenses are deductible. If you advertise in local papers, the phone book, using a web site, or simply market yourself by sending out mailings, you can deduct these costs. Keep records, including post office receipts.

Shipping: I regularly use Federal Express and the U.S. mail to send material to clients. The costs of shipping are deductible so keep records and take the deduction.

All of the above may sound like a nuisance to keep track of, but if you add it all up, you'll have hundreds of dollars worth of additional deductions which you can use to lower your taxable income.

Investments

Translators should invest their money. Careful investing can yield greater rewards in the short and long run. Because translators are self-employed, there is no 401-K plan or employee IRA plan to take advantage of. Instead, translators can establish their own SEP-IRAs or Keogh accounts and take the appropriate deductions from their taxes, while simultaneously saving for retirement, something we all should be doing because Social Security will at best provide only a small part of one's retirement income. The federal government is currently sending out reports to all employed people in the United States, telling them what their Social Security income will be based on contributions to date. It will likely be an eye-opener for some of you.

Insurance: Medical, Dental, and Life

The cost of medical insurance is a factor of self-employment no one can afford to overlook. Very basic medical coverage can cost hundreds a month for a young, unmarried individual in generally good health. Add in a spouse and children, and medical insurance costs can rapidly a major annual expense. And as people age, insurance costs rise dramatically.

When considering the freelance path, consider these kinds of long-term costs. A translator who is married with children will find the cost of medical and dental coverage a major burden. Moreover, such translators might also want accident or life insurance, to protect their families. This will increase the red side considerably, especially in the face of current skyrocketing premiums. Such translators might do well to find in-house work or other work where the employer picks up part or all of the insurance costs.

Of course, medical insurance costs are a deductible business expense, though the percentage of the deduction varies from year to year. Since I started as a freelance translator, I've seen the percentage as low as 0% and as high as 50%. In other words, don't plan on a precise

deduction every year for your medical insurance costs. Also, medical expenses above a set minimum can be deducted on a Schedule A (Itemized Deductions; used when you think your various personal deductions will exceed the Standard Deduction on your tax return). If you find all of this too complicated to figure out, try using tax preparation software (Intuit's TurboTax, Kiplinger's TaxCut, or what have you), or consult a tax professional.

Credit

Have you ever wondered about your credit rating? Just because you get lots of offers for credit cards in the mail does not mean that you have a great credit rating. And when you try to get credit to do something like purchase a house, you have to remember that those calculations are in part a function of your present and anticipated income. Since translators have a present income which fluctuates and no precise method to estimate their future income, credit does not necessarily come so easily, particularly for major purchases.

Imagine sitting down with a loan officer at a bank and requesting a mortgage to purchase a house. The officer asks you what you do for a living. You say translate. After you explain what that means, the officer asks you for income statements for the previous ten years. You show the officer your annual tax returns, invoice records, and investment records. The officer immediately notes the fluctuations from month to month and year to year and then asks you what you will be making in two or five or ten or twenty years. You answer as best as you can, but the officer will doubtlessly wonder.

Translators are not inherently a poor credit risk; however, their profession may make them seem that way. Therefore, you should be doing everything in your power to demonstrate that you are a great credit risk, so great that people come to you and offer you money all the time. You should always pay all your bills on time. Don't wait for reminders or warnings to come in for rent or utility bills, for student loans or car payments, or for any other money you owe. Don't bounce checks. Don't ride high balances on your credit cards. Don't default on student loans or any other loan. Credit companies keep track of every bill you ever pay and check you write (I know, I worked for TRW for a summer) and evaluate your credit history based not on the one-hundred bills you paid on time, but the one you didn't.

We all have heard the horror stories about people whose lives are ruined by a bad credit report. What we don't hear is how a credit report affects the average person. Because of the ill-defined, nebulous, and precarious nature of the translation profession, translators should strive to have immaculate credit reports, the kind that are carried around on gilt platters.

Tricks to improve your credit rating: Have lots of credit cards and use them at least occasionally, paying every bill on time. Make all loan payments on time or request a forbearance ahead of time. Do not use any of the low income assistance programs such as the ones Pacific Bell or Pacific Gas & Electric have (I live in California, but there are such programs all over the nation. I am totally in favor of them, but they don't help your credit rating). Write lots of checks and make sure they all clear. You get the idea.

Equipment

Translators need office equipment, including a computer with printer and modem, a fax

machine, dictionaries and reference materials, and miscellaneous supplies. There are ways to avoid paying top dollar for these items.

Buy computers through mail order houses or through an academic discount at a university. If you live near a major computer firm, such as Microsoft in Redmond, WA, you can go to their bargain basement where they sell off their old equipment (often very powerful machines) at great prices. You can also consider buying used equipment, just keep in mind the advice offered in the Article: Translator's Home Office.

Buy software and other computer equipment such as floppy disks and toner or ink cartridges through catalog companies or the Internet. Outpost, Egghead, MacZone, MacConnection, PC Zone, PC Connection and MicroWarehouse all offer great prices on everything you'll ever need and will deliver it overnight for free, or sometimes $3 to $6, regardless of how large it is. Make sure to pick a company which is outside your state and thus avoid sales tax on the item.

Dictionaries and reference materials are often quite expensive. Make sure you buy only what you need. Try to find people who use it and see what they think. There are frequently useful discussions and recommendations at sci.lang.translation, or in the various articles at www.accurapid.com/journal. Try to borrow a copy of a reference book you are interested in before you buy it. If you can find one in a used bookstore, a university bookstore for instance, you can save 35% to 50%.

Does It Balance?

This is really two questions: the literal and figurative balance. Literally, if it doesn't balance, you're out of business and have to find something else to do, be it translating in-house for a company, or finding a new profession. Figuratively, you can ask if all the energy and efforts justify the rewards, financial and otherwise, of being a professional freelance translator.

I think freelance translation is worthwhile, both figuratively and literally. If you want to know what I'll think in ten years, ask me then. For now though, I like being a professional freelance translator because of the freedom and control it gives me over my professional life, because I make more money than most of my in-house translator friends, and because I seem to get more interesting work. To me, that's worth the time and effort.

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Whence cometh the true professionals? Are they born or bred? If born, can we develop a brain scan system to detect their ability and then nurture it? If bred, can we identify and then duplicate the ideal conditions to create a translator? More importantly, what do we do now, when we can't answer the above questions? And most importantly, what do we do as freelance translators to become more professional ourselves and enhance the level of professionalism in our industry.

The True Professional

I am going to make a hazy but important distinction here. I believe there are translators and then there are professional translators. The former are people who translate on the side, using their knowledge of a particular field to translation work. For instance, in a previous article, I referred to a mathematician who translated a book on advanced mathematics from French to English. I do not consider him a professional translator.

Professional translators are applied linguists whose ability to work with language, write well, and for free-lancers, to operate a business, represents their source of income. Professional translators are people who are dedicated to their languages and the nations, societies, and cultures which come with them. They are devoted to improving their ability to understand their source language and write in their target language. They recognize that translation is both an art and a skill. As such, they are also committed to deepening their knowledge of the fields they translate in, and to cultivating greater facility for writing about such matters. They also have nurtured a deep respect for business ethics, aware that they are in many instances the communications conduit for a product or service, for information or opinion, and so must consider the consequences of their linguistic decisions. Finally, professional translators know that they can always improve and polish their translation ability.

Professional translators are also distinguished by certain attitudes and approaches to their work. In this article, I want to take a close look at these attitudes and approaches and help clarify what a professional translator is and how we can all become more professional about being a translator.

Unlike the medical or legal professions, there are no precise academic or professional prerequisites to be a translator. This is a boon for those talented individuals who want to get started in the translation industry and a bane for those people trying to identify true professionals. The only requirement a translator must fulfill is knowing two or more languages. Anything less is rather hard to accept.

Virtually all professional translators in the United States have at least a Bachelor's degree, and translation vendors will rarely if ever work with a translator who does not have an undergraduate education. Often these degrees are in language studies, or some related field. However, some translators have degrees in their field of specialization and have academic language training as a college minor. Others have advanced degrees in translation itself. Still others have little if any formal academic language training, instead having learned their languages either in the home or while living abroad.

Translators have to be able to write, so you might assume that translators have formal academic training as writers and professional writing experience. I have found little evidence for this. Few translators I know truly love writing; to most it seems to be merely an essential aspect of translation. However, most professional translators do have a deep interest in writing, be it as a necessary tool or an art form.

Finally, virtually all translators have a well developed knowledge of one or more specialized fields, such as finance, law, including in particular patent and corporate law, computer science, medicine, pharmaceuticals, and so on. This is not to say that translators are experts per se in such fields, but they do have enough knowledge to read, understand, and then translate common material in the field. And very few translators will ever develop such in-depth knowledge in more than a few fields.

Ethics

I have said virtually nothing about professional ethics in the previous articles, except to make suggestions as to how translators might better approach their business endeavors. There are, however, ethical considerations in translation, including decisions on how to charge clients, when to refuse to do a translation job, or how to respond when clients treat you poorly. What follows is a series of general observations that I hope will provide some ideas as to how and why ethical business behavior is advantageous, particularly in the long run.

Translators are often privy to secret information, be that the financial plans of a company, a pharmaceutical patent, or the specifications for a new computer chip. If it hasn't occurred to you that there are people who would pay a lot of money for this information, then you shouldn't take up writing espionage thrillers. If it hasn't occurred to you that you could use financial information to make money, then Ivan Bosky probably isn't your hero or idol. Translators have to keep this kind of information to themselves, regardless of whether or not they are asked to sign a nondisclosure or confidentiality agreement.

Occasionally the desire for secrecy goes so far as to require the translator not to talk about the job at all. I have at least two larger jobs like this per year, and while doing such work I say nothing to anyone about it other than that I currently have work (much as the Chinese greet each other with a phrase that literally translates as "did you eat rice?", freelance translators often greet each other with a question like "have enough work these day?"). This probably

irritates some of my friends and colleagues, who may arrive at the incorrect assumption that I am translating design specifications for a UFO hyperdrive being reverse-engineered at Area 51 in Nevada, but I do feel bound to honor the agreements I enter into.

You may be wondering, so what? It won't matter if I tell me spouse, my friend, my fellow translator, that I am working on documents related to a major international lawsuit that won't become public for the next three months. Please trust me when I tell you it will. The translation industry is very small and tightly knit; it is composed of people who know how to communicate and are used to doing so via the Internet and the Web, and of people who generally like to talk about work if only because they tend to work alone. So anything you say could end up being mentioned in a Usenet group or chat room, at which point it would be public knowledge. And if you can't figure out why leaking the preparation for a major, multi-billion dollar lawsuit regarding illegal trade practices six months before it becomes public would be a problem, then you probably shouldn't be a translator.

In a similar vein, translators have to honor the agreements they make. If you agree to do a job, then you have to do it. You can't just farm out your work and take a percentage without telling your clients that you do this. They have a right to know who is actually doing the work. If they decide to hire you, then they want you, not someone you know, to do the job. Moreover, you have to do the job the way you say you will, which often means doing what the client asks. If the client provides a glossary or style sheet, follow it, regardless of your personal opinion of their word choice or formatting ideas. If they request a particular file format, provide it. If you really think something is wrong with their terminology or format choices, tell them. The client always has the final word on such matters, but at the same time will usually appreciate your observations or suggestions.

In the same vein, translators should not accept assignments they don't have the time or qualifications to do. I regularly turn down work because I am too busy with other jobs or because I don't have the expertise to do the job justice. Remember, the easiest way to lose a client is to do a bad job. Don't.

Efficient Ethics

All right, enough of the lecture. I realize most readers don't want a polemic, so let me see if I can't motivate you through a simple strategy and a few basic facts about the translation industry to be an ethical, professional translator.

There is a well-established idea for the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma in Game Theory called the Tit-for-Tat Strategy. The Prisoner's Dilemma may be familiar, but for those to whom it is new, it goes like this: Two criminals who together committed a crime are brought in by the police for questioning. The police think they both did it, but would have a much easier time if one ratted out the other. So they separate the two criminals and make the following offer to each: If you rat out your partner, we'll get the district attorney to give you only six months. If you stay quiet and your partner rats you out, you get ten years. And though the police say nothing, there is of course the possibility that the criminals could go free (but only if they both keep quiet). Under such circumstances, most criminals will rat out their partner. Now to generalize this idea a bit for the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma. In this version, a group of individuals of any size are all set to interact with each other repeatedly over the same issue. In any given interaction, an individual can cooperate or defect. In other words, you can be nice

to the other members of the group, or you can screw them. It can be shown mathematically, and has been shown many times, that the best strategy in this Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma is Tit-for-Tat, or to be specific: cooperate (be nice) when interacting with another member of the group for the first time, then reciprocate their behavior thereafter. In other words, after you're nice to this other individual, if that individual is nice back, be nice; if that individual defects (screws you), defect back (screw 'em back). This is the best long-term strategy because it is simple and effective.

Why? you ask. The answer is in thinking about the situation overall. Always start off nice. Easy enough to understand that, since goodwill generally begets goodwill, and you know that you will be interacting with these other individuals in the future (no sense in making enemies right away). After the initial encounter, be nice only if the others are nice to you. Again, easy enough to understand because you want to reward good behavior and encourage it to continue, and you want to punish bad behavior and discourage it in the future. The only requirement for this strategy to work is that you keep track of what others are doing to you. Fortunately, the human brain is well-designed for this task, and there is computer software, such as Personal Information Managers (PIMs) to further simplify the task.

So how to apply this to freelance translation? Again, simple. Always start off with a nice, polite, cooperative attitude toward any new client. Don't be automatically suspicious; just be careful. You can find out a lot about a potential new client by asking colleagues and doing web searches. Unless there is sound reason to reject work from the new client, do the work properly (your form of cooperation), then monitor what happens. If you are treated well, paid promptly, and offered more work (the client's form of cooperation), of course you accept it. You cooperated, the client reciprocated, everyone is happy. If the client screws you, screw them back (so to speak) by not accepting any more work and by reporting their behavior to everyone else in the group. Cheats cannot succeed in the long run unless the group in question is infinitely large; since there is a finite number of translators, no client can screw translators forever. Conversely, no translator can translate for very long while screwing clients, because there is a finite number of clients available. Cheats may be able to succeed in the short run, but only if the rest of the group lets them. We can talk to each other about bad client experiences, just as clients talk amongst themselves about bad experiences with particular translators. We can post accurate, precise information regarding bad behavior from clients on web sites dedicated to such matters. In essence, we can help each other keep track of everyone's behavior, encouraging good behavior and punishing bad behavior. A translator will not last any longer without clients than a translation vendor will last without translators.

Recently in the journal *Science* there appeared the latest in a long series of studies on Game Theory and altruistic behavior. Once again researchers clearly showed that those individuals who are known to be open, generous, and honest benefit the most in the long run. The Golden Rule applies here, in other words. Not only will people do unto you as you do to them, or are likely to do to them, but these people are keeping track, as should you.

To sum up, the translation industry is a small, tightly-integrated industry in which people tend to talk a lot. We can use this to our advantage by adopting the Tit-for-Tat strategy in our business efforts and helping each other keep track of who has done what. Good behavior, whether it is a translator doing quality work and delivering it on time or a client offering respectable rates and paying promptly, should be recognized and rewarded. Bad behavior, for instance a translator consistently and without reason delivering work late or an agency

regularly withholding or failing to pay translators, should be acknowledged and punished. If each of us does even a little of this, the industry itself will automatically improve rapidly and dramatically.

All that said, now we'll look at some specific recommendations and suggestions as to how we can all become more professional in our translation endeavors.

Handling Clients

The true professional knows how to conduct business, including the art of negotiation, providing necessary information, and making agreements for each job.

I've discussed the importance of negotiation in previous articles. The only point I want to raise here is that sounding confident and definite when you negotiate is important. You won't impress anyone if you hem and haw when asked questions about price or terms of delivery. Know your rates by heart, know your hardware and software by heart, and know what you can do. Give this information freely and firmly, and then watch and wait. Remember, the heart of negotiation is compromise; if the client doesn't like your terms, they'll make a counter offer. Then it's up to you to accept or make yet another counter offer.

One word of advice about negotiation: dickering and bickering is not the way to cultivate clients. Often a slightly lower rate in the short run leads to more work and higher rates in the future. I have started at slightly lower rates with agencies and then found in short order that they were feeding me large assignments regularly. Conversely, I've turned down rates which I thought were too low and then found that the agency later offered me work at a higher rate. If you provide quality work at a fair price, you will have clients.

Providing information is an essential part of being a professional translator. Clients have to know who you are, where you work, what you can do, and what you charge. When you receive a request for information from a client, be it a new client who has sent you a contractor's employment form or an old client requesting updated information, give it willingly and in detail. Your clients have to know you.

You also have to be accessible. Make sure you are in your office, or at least near your phone, during the workday. Just because no one calls you in the morning doesn't mean you have the afternoon off. You should still be in your office. Sure, you're saying to yourself, that's important, but I can still go out and do things. Yes, you can. But remember that if a client can't reach you they'll send the job to someone else. At the very least, get an answering machine which lets you call in and collect your messages from another phone. I have one and it's helped me considerably, especially when I'm out on business and I want to know what's going on back in my office. Also check your email many times per day. Some clients are now sending out job offers via email and expect prompt responses. In particular, if you participate in any of the Web-based translation exchanges, such as Proz (www.proz.com) or Aquarius (aquarius.net), then you should check your email regularly to see if someone is soliciting your services, or if your bid for a job has been successful.

Making agreements refers to setting the rules for each job. By rules I mean terms which include how the job is to be done, how much you will be paid, and when and how it will be

delivered. Establish all of this before you accept the job. You might even want to get the terms in writing, though I don't bother doing this with clients I know well. Just make sure you know what you are supposed to translate, what file format the client wants, when and how you are to deliver the job, and what you'll be paid for it. Accepting a job without this information is foolish and can lead to numerous problems.

Sometimes an agency will say that they don't really care when you finish a job, what file format you use or how you deliver it. What they mean is that they don't need it fast, they have the hardware and software to handle common file formats, and they aren't concerned with the delivery method. Regardless of their level of interest, you should establish how you are going to do the job, and then do it that way.

After-service

I love this word, whose origin is found in Japanese business culture but exists in one form or another all over the world. The notion that a translation job ends the moment you push the Send File button in your email software, fire off the fax, deposit the papers in an envelope, or complete the upload of the translated file to an FTP site is both unprofessional and irresponsible. Don't leave your home for the beach right after you finish a translation assignment; numerous things can go wrong after you send the job.

What can possibly happen that requires my involvement? you ask. Here's the list: the agency's fax machine doesn't print your transmission clearly enough (this happens often when sending hand-written work, such as an editing job); the BBS or FTP site doesn't receive the modem transmission; the agency can't open or convert your file; the agency opens your file but gets mere gibberish (affectionately known among hackers as baud barf); the agency loses your file; or the agency has questions about what you did.

You have to stick around after you send the job, just in case. I've sent jobs in to agencies on the East Coast on Friday morning and then received calls at 6:00 p.m. my time. If you know you are going out (or away for the weekend), tell the agency beforehand, preferably when you deliver the job. Make sure they know you won't be around after a particular hour and ask them to confirm that the file you sent was received and can be processed. It takes a little more effort but is well worth it; the agency will love you.

Professionals solve problems. This also means that you should try to help your clients with problems. I have helped numerous clients troubleshoot a computer network, BBS, or software incompatibility over the phone while negotiating or discussing a job. Always be useful and helpful; it will make them remember you and think well of you.

Translators must stand by their work. Eventually, a client will call you and tell you that your translation sucks, that their bilingual five-year-old niece could have done a better job, that a colubus monkey has superior spelling skills. Regardless of how offended or angered you are by such claims, take the time to work through the problem with the client. Ask for specific comments, such as where the errors are, what kind they are, and how many there are. If the errors are in fact your responsibility, offer to fix them immediately at no extra charge. If the errors fall into that nebulous area of style or proofreading, offer to participate in the clean-up process but stand by your work if you did what you were told. The most important thing is to service the client. They have the work and the money, so it behooves you to make a positive

impression no matter how negative the situation might be.

Even after the job is finished and the agency confirms receipt of it, keep the file on your hard drive for weeks to come. I usually keep the file on my hard drive until after I am paid for the job, and then I remove , though it is still available on an archival disc. Why? For one, I worked with a translation vendor which lost my translated file some five weeks after I submitted it. They were in a panic and called me, praying that I had kept the file. To their delight, I said I had it and would upload it immediately. Of course, this won't happen five years later, but five years seems to be the current statute of limitations on law suits involving translated materials as well as most other suits in which translated materials could be subpoenaed. So keep everything you translate for at least five years and remember to deduct the cost of the disks and the space used to store them.

As an aside, I recycle printed material after three to five years since completion of a job, but I retain electronic copies of all material I have ever worked on. Data storage is so cheap and efficient that deleting files seems pointless. I may not be able to open some of those files eventually, but with the right tool in the right hands the textual content could be extracted.

Upon finishing a large job such as a book or computer manual (I've done many of both), I usually send the agency a letter along with the finished translation and keep in contact with them as they edit my work and prepare it for publication. I also make clear that I am willing to remain involved in the process, that the agency may call me for clarifications on my work, such as choices about style or terminology, and that I am genuinely interested in the final outcome. It's always good business to be involved in the entire process, not just the small part of it which represents your work.

In sum, you should treat your clients like puppy dogs. They are very curious, very busy, easily distracted, always rushing from one thing to the next, and not necessarily willing or able to understand everything you ask of them or report to them. I don't mean you should not respect your clients, or that you should look down on them. Quite the opposite. Know their limitations and work with them. Don't assume they already know (much like a new owner of a puppy might do), but instead check, double-check, and then check once more. There is an aphorism in Japanese that goes: to question and ask is a moment's shame; to question and not ask is a lifetime of shame. If you fail to ask, the shame will be doubly yours, because not only will you often look and feel silly, but you may well also lose a client.

The Suit Does Not Make the Translator

Translators are among those fortunate few who do not have to dress up for work. I won't go into the details of what I have worn or where exactly I was in my home when talking to clients on the phone, but suffice it to say that those were not conditions under which I would have wanted to be face to face with a business contact. Conversely, translators have to sound professional at all times, regardless of the situation.

In many businesses, a visual impression is the most important. A good suit, a proper haircut, a clean shave (of the legs or face), and the other professional amenities are essential to success. Translators don't have to endure this unless they work in-house or meet with their clients in person. Instead, we have to rely on what we say, how we say it, and how we sound in order to create and maintain business relations. So good spoken English, or any other

language you use professionally, a confident, polished manner, and a strong sense of professionalism in what you say is vital.

You literally cannot afford to have one of those bored, dull voices that telemarketing firms inflict on the average American daily. You can't afford to sneeze and cough throughout your business negotiations, unless desperately ill, in which case you might consider not working. Few people translate well while suffering from the flu and using powerful decongestants. You can't afford the cries of children, the yelping or chirping of pets, or the complaints of roommates in the background. Your home office has to sound like an office. Make sure it is in a quiet part of your home, away from the noise of a kitchen, garage, playroom, or workroom, and can be closed off from the rest of the house by a door. If you live alone, just keep the stereo or TV down, or have a remote with a mute button handy to turn off the volume when the phone rings.

A Nice Neat Package

So a professional translator is something of a package, combining a strong linguistic background with an interest in writing, as well as polished business skills. I realize that I haven't answered the question with which I started this article: whence cometh the true professionals? However, the true professionals themselves may not know where they come from, and I'm not sure it's all that important that they do. All translators have to strive for an ever higher level of professionalism to bring prestige and respect to themselves and the translation profession.

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Will translators be replaced by computers? If so, when? If not, why not? And in between these two extremes resides a world of possibilities that exist under the rubric MAT (Machine Assisted Translation), all of which are impacting on translators right now and will in all probability rise in significance very rapidly over the coming years. Will translators want to work with the new technologies? Will the new technologies work at all? And most important, can someone entering this field now at the start of a career path expect it to remain even remotely recognizable in the coming quarter century?

Perfect Translation

The perfect translation system, be it a human or machine, does not exist. However, the dream of something like the Babblefish from the Hitchhiker's series or the universal translator on Star Trek haunts us and might go something like this.

Your personal computer will have a translation module, maintained from some central database created by the publisher of the system. When email comes in, it will automatically and almost instantly be translated into whatever language you desire (presumably your native tongue). When you send email, it will be translated into whatever language you choose. You will be able to configure it so that when email goes out to Japan, it is translated into Japanese, when it goes to France, it is translated into French, and so on (or you can configure on a person by person basis, giving consideration to the linguistic skills of individuals).

Similar systems will exist for businesses, but they will be faster and more comprehensive. A book will be scanned into a computer and rendered into another language in a matter of minutes. The computer might even attend to the graphics and desktop publishing tasks, assuming you want it to. The finished translation will need the same amount of editing and proofreading that any piece of writing does, that is to say a lot.

Interpretation will work the same way. Your phone company will provide for virtually nothing a system which lets you talk to anyone in any language. You call Japan and speak to Mr. Tashima. You say what you want in English and he hears it in Japanese. He says what he wants in Japanese and you hear it in English. Court, medical, and conference interpreting will work in basically the same way. People will have small devices like hearing aids which will pick up the incoming language and convert it into your native tongue. These devices will also

use noise cancellation technology to take care of any interfering sounds so that you hear only the interpretation.

A box on your television, or perhaps inside it, will provide instant interpretation or subtitles of foreign films and television broadcasts. You will flip to one of the more than 500 channels you have and see a program which looks interesting, and the system will provide instant interpretation of the dialog.

Furthermore, small devices the size of a pocket calculator will read things for you. You point them at a menu, a street sign, or a newspaper and they scan the page and they translate it and then give you either a printed version on a small screen or read it to you.

Such technology would make communication with anyone anywhere possible. You could travel in remote parts of Tibet and speak and read with the locals. You will walk into a conference and listen to an interpretation of the speaker given by a machine which never tires or loses interest in the task. You can go to a doctor or hotel or restaurant anywhere and communicate everything you need to, be it verbally or in writing.

Can It Be Done?

This is really two questions. One: Is machine translation possible in theory? Two: What will machine translation be like in practice within the next ten to twenty years? The former question seems not to be asked much, if at all, except in certain research laboratories. The latter question seems very much on the minds of translators and others in the translation industry, if only because of the profound financial impact the answer to the question will have.

The first question, whether or not machine translation is possible in principle, might seem impossible to answer. Or perhaps you think that the answer has to be assumed as negative until proven otherwise, in other words, it ain't possible until someone does it. But given that machine translation, unlike breaking the four-minute mile, will involve hundreds or thousands of people working for years or perhaps even decades and spending billions, possibly trillions of dollars in their effort, a little theory seems like a good idea.

The arguments against machine translation being possible seem to run something like this. Language is too subtle and complex for a computer to understand and translate. There are just too many variables to consider in any given sentence. Linguistic communication relies too heavily on context and intonation, on body language and cultural underpinnings, to be handled by a computer. Computers will never be fast enough or powerful enough to deal with the immense requirements of language translation. Computers will have to understand what they read in order to translate, and therefore will have to be sentient themselves, in some fashion similar to what we humans experience as self-awareness. And perhaps the most fundamental argument against machine translation lies in the question of whether or not the human brain is capable of actions and behaviors that cannot be reduced to algorithms.

Fair enough, all good arguments. But the argument for machine translation being possible in theory is sufficiently powerful and compelling to obviate all the above arguments against it. In simple terms, the argument for machine translation goes like this: "If that three-pound

piece of meat in your head can do it, why not a hunk of technology?" In essence, the proof for machine translation being possible in principle is sitting in every translator's head. That three-pound pulpy grayish mass that we call the brain allows a translator to translate. A brain is an organic machine consisting of roughly one-hundred billion cells, neurons and glial cells, each with a multitude of connections to other neurons, communicating chemically with each other through synapses whose activities are modulated by neurotransmitters. Regardless of how little is actually understood about the brain, and regardless of the obvious deficiencies of my description of it above, the brain remains a finite object capable of only a finite number of actions. As such, the brain can be considered a machine, or if you prefer a less mechanistic metaphor, a piece of organic technology, which can in principle be understood and reproduced. And so a computer that translates as well as a human translator is in principle possible.

But So What?

What does the argument above really imply for the future? In other words, just because something is possible in principle doesn't mean we'll be able to do it in practice, at least not in the near term. Or maybe we will.

First I want to dispense with a few preconceptions and protests that are probably percolating in your mind. One, computers are plenty fast nowadays. I don't mean the little box sitting on your desk or lap, which is in and of itself powerful in many ways but equally limited. I mean the chips that are currently on the drawing boards for the next generation of supercomputers. If Moore's Law holds for even fifteen more years (note: Moore's Law refers to the trend of doubling the computational capacity of chips every eighteen months), and as a technical translator who does a lot of work in computer science and electrical engineering I can say with some confidence that the research community believes it will, then we will have a computer chip whose speed and capacity is functionally equivalent to the human brain by 2025 at the latest. Similarly, the cost and performance of various types of memory are expanding far faster than most home users can find uses for, though web servers rapidly eat up even terabytes of data. Finally, the kind of parallel processing that gives supercomputers much of their power is becoming more and more common at the consumer level, so even if Moore's Law places an upper limit on the performance of an individual chip, a group of chips tied together, making full use of terabytes of RAM and other high-speed memory arrays, should easily equal the raw power of the human brain within fifteen years.

Enough of the technical stuff. That's not, you might say, where the problems really lie. They reside instead in the nature of language, in the intricacies and subtleties of written and oral communication, in the nuances of a person's voice or the subtext in a well-written paragraph. Accurate enough, to varying degrees, but rarely relevant to the vast majority of what is being translated in the world these days.

Most of what is translated in our industry is not high literature destined to be awarded Nobel or Pulitzer prizes. Rather the majority of material that translators work on is information, ideas, or beliefs on a particular subject, and most often the material is nothing more than instructions, directions, or explanations, with a minimum of style of literary content. The material is generally bland and dry, for instance software or hardware manuals, engineering specifications, scientific or other technical research material, financial or corporate reports, fiscal analyses, clinical trial reports, patents, and so forth. Accurately rendering the subtle

style of a source text is rarely an issue that translators struggle with, or even discuss much amongst themselves. So if the current human translators don't have to deal with the subtleties and nuances of well-written literary prose, then neither will the machine systems.

As an aside, let us keep in mind that literary translation is an area of endless debate among literary translators; the sheer number of versions of literary classics amply demonstrates this. That machines may not in the foreseeable future tackle such material is not relevant to this discussion; instead it should be remembered that even humans have difficulty ferreting out the intended meaning in a sentence written by a literary master. What's more, that meaning will change with both the reader and the times. Literary theory and literary analysis are dedicated to such issues; the fact that these are fertile fields for endless explorations suggests that people aren't quite sure what to make of fiction like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, to pick a particularly intractable text. I am certain that computers will eventually try their electronic hand at rendering the Mahabarat or the writings of Chuang-zu into English, and I look forward to studying the results.

Back to the topic at hand though. What MT systems will work on represents a fairly particular subset of the world's written output. Not only does written language spare the MT system from having to deal with intonation or body language, but the kind of writing commonly translated in the translation industry at present is generally more carefully structured and reasoned, freer from grammatical and syntactic errors, less liable to contain slang, neologisms, or spur-of-the-moment coinages, and more precise in terminology usage than spoken language, even on the same subject, would be.

Finally, the MT system may not even have to understand what it is translating. I say this for two reasons. First, translators occasionally, and almost exclusively amongst themselves, talk about how little they understand of some of the material they work on. They of course can follow the gist and usually much more, but they also know, at least deep down, that they probably do not have the same in-depth understanding that the specialist or expert who wrote the material has. This can occur with material as simple as a business letter, in which the topic of the letter is understood between both parties but not known to the translator, or material as abstruse as an ethical commentary on organ transplantation and brain death.

Second, and most important, computers are more and more often nowadays performing on par with humans in complex tasks. The canonical example is chess. You are doubtlessly aware that Deep Blue defeated the Russian Chess Master Kasparov in a recent match. Kasparov felt it would never happen, until it did that is. He even commented after the match that at times there seemed to be an intelligence behind Deep Blue's decisions, that the computer became more cautious at one point in one game. Of course he, and all observers, know that no such thing happened. And despite the considerable accomplishment that Deep Blue represents in combining dedicated hardware with expert system-style programming, Deep Blue is neither conscious nor intelligent in the human sense of those words. To put it another way, after the match, Kasparov made many insightful and thoughtful remarks when asked about his experience. In contrast, if anyone bothered to ask Deep Blue a question, I'm certain the remark was silence. And it is more than doubtful that Deep Blue has any particular plans for its prize money, or any desire one way or another to play chess again.

The point is that tasks which require considerable intellectual achievement for humans can be performed using different methods by computers. Whether or not translation is one such task

remains to be seen. In other words, do we need to create a sentient, intelligent computer, then teach it to translate and hope after its training it wants to translate, or can we build a sophisticated expert system, a Blue Linguist if you will, that translates as well as a human does, despite using completely different internal methods? This question will be answered in part in the various R&D labs around the world working on MT. And it will be answered in part by the market.

In other words, if the translation is good enough, translation consumers will not care who or what translated it using which method. So the real question for MT in essence becomes: what is good enough?

Good Enough?

Good enough means acceptable to those who want the translation. Consider this: a company wants all the specifications for an automobile translated from English into French, Spanish, German, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese, and Japanese. The specifications total over 5,000 pages, approximately 1 million words. Assume that a translator can do 5,000 words per day (I realize this is high, but assume it anyway). It will therefore take 200 days of work to produce the translation. A team of ten translators will still take 20 days, plus the time to unify the text after the translators are finished. At $0.25 per word (what the agency might charge the automobile company), the total cost per language would be $250,000. And these numbers are for each language involved. Therefore, if a machine system can translate the information at 20,000 words per hour, we see that the job might be done in a little over two days, plus clean-up time. And the computer plus software will cost considerably less, maybe $3,000 for the computer and $4,000 for the software for each language pair.

But, you say, the translation won't be as good. I agree, at least based on current software and technology. However, let us recall that quality is only one of many factors in a market economy, and the most important factor is embodied that old epigram: time is money. Recall that this statement really means that speed is money. The faster the better. The sooner the product hits the market, the sooner the company recoups its investment. The lower the investment, the better.

So we have a case of the classic cost-benefit ratio. Therefore, the real question is: at what point does the quality of a translation become more important than the cost or time involved? If the machines are 200 times faster, 1000 times cheaper, and produce reasonably accurate and intelligible translations, they will get most of the work. And although they have not reached this state yet, it seems clear, given current technology and progress, that the time is not too far off when they may just well be there, at least for certain categories of translation.

For an excellent study of the cost/benefit ratio of current MT and MAT systems, I strongly recommend Lynn Webb's Master's Thesis on the subject. I hope Lynn will be able to keep her research current as the technologies she evaluated develop.

Machine Interpretation

Some people claim rather strangely that machine translation is possible, but machine interpretation is not. I disagree. Interpretation deals with the spoken language, a

fundamentally simpler form of language than the written language. There are three issues that will tax MI systems: non-verbal communication that accompanies speech, voice processing and synthesis, and the general sloppiness of spoken language.

(Please note that although speech-to-speech MT is a common way to refer to machine-driven interpretation systems, I prefer MI not only because it is a more compact term, but also because it serves to remind us of the important linguistic distinctions between translation and interpretation.)

The first issue will not be as important as many people might think. A speaker at a large conference, for instance, does not rely much on body language to communicate, simply because most viewers are not close enough to benefit from it. In fact, many speakers at conferences are really just reading prepared speeches, changing the issue from machine interpretation to machine translation (of course, the machine has to be aware of deviations from the prepared text, just as a human interpreter does). Witnesses in court are trained by lawyers to avoid body language, so that the jurors will pay attention to the words only. And when body language is important, humans have a great deal of trouble, given how varied and complex each person's use of such non-verbal communication is. So the computers will have the same problems the humans do.

The second challenge is being met as I write this. We've all seen and heard about voice input software such as Dragon Systems' Naturally Speaking or IBM's Via Voice. Both work reasonably well without taxing a mainstream home or business system. It is not difficult to imagine such software becoming virtually 100% accurate (or at least as accurate as a human listener, perhaps more so) within a few more generations of the software. The same holds for speech synthesis. I've been listening to my Macintosh for years now, having it read material I have written to me so that I can edit by listening to a disinterested reader (and trust me, the computer is completely neutral). The available voices are admittedly obviously synthetic and frequently tinny or disturbingly neutral, but they are improving. An acceptable synthesized voice seems likely within a few years. If you want a sample of the improvements in this area, listen to the Web newscaster Ananova (www.ananova.com). This virtual woman reads the day's news headlines in a generally acceptable voice, though at times pronunciation does sound decidedly computer-like.

The third problem, the general sloppiness and imprecision of human speech, will be a challenge only insofar as the computers are not as accurate as people are. When queried about the meaning of an ambiguous or obscure statement, most people will admit that they hadn't thought much about it, but now that they do, they realize they can't be certain as to the intended meaning. How exactly MI systems will address such challenges, perhaps by reproducing the ambiguities, querying the speaker (if possible, and note that when querying is possible, that is what human interpreters do), or simply paraphrasing the statement based on a best-effort guess, remains to be seen. I suspect though that MI systems will in time become sufficiently accurate to be practical.

There is a final problem, one not often discussed when MT, particularly MI, is mentioned. This is the psychological element. Even if we have a lab-tested, government-approved, U.N.-certified MI system, it may still not be adopted for quite some time. People may simply not accept it. I've seen Japanese people struggle with the idea that I can speak the language fluently, and some I knew during my years in Japan never quite accepted it. Given that kind

of attitude, and it is prevalent among many languages and cultures in the world, machine interpretation systems may not be warmly greeted, at least not initially. So their first appearances may be in situations in which we the users will not realize machines are doing the work instead of humans, such as in telephone communications when making airline or hotel reservations or getting technical support for software, or perhaps for international operator assistance. Eventually such systems will be accepted, I think, if only because people ultimately accept anything that makes life easier.

The State of the Art

So, you say, this is all well and good, but none of it is going to happen for a long time. Perhaps not even for centuries. We'll all be long dead, or at least retired, before a computer can do anything useful with language or in translation. Maybe, but a review of where the MT/MAT industry is now seems in order.

The pace of change in computing is enough to give a seasoned funambulist vertigo. The original PCs, including the TRS-80 (with 4K of memory, no hard drive, floppy drive, and no operating system per se), the Commodore 64, the Apple II, etc. were less powerful than the current average Casio BOSS or Sharp Wizard, to say nothing of the current 3M PalmPilots, which effectively represent more computing power than Apollo 11 had at its disposal. The first PCs, the 8086 and then the 286, introduced in the early 1980s were brain-dead machines even back then. For the past eight years, we've seen CPU processing speed double every 18 months as per Moore's Law, hard disk storage space double every two years, and the arrival of peripherals such as CD-ROM drives, DVD drives, scanners, and laser printers which only ten years ago or so were either dreams or ghastly expensive technologies.

The processing power and storage capacity to handle incredibly large and complex tasks is available, or will be soon. This means that the brute-force approach becomes more and more viable as an approach to problems that at present resist elegant computational solutions. Brute force more than anything else let Deep Blue defeat Kasparov, and though chess is hardly as complex as language, it suggests that what seemed for centuries to represent a pinnacle of human intellectual achievement can be performed without an iota of thought as we know it, just virtually inconceivable amounts of raw processing power.

In addition, I think we forget the extent to which human-like computing has already started to enter our lives. We now have voice-driven phone systems in which you state your preferred selection aloud and the system processes it. Admittedly these systems are crude and nowhere remotely near providing real-time online translation, but they indicate that what once seemed to be an insurmountable problem, that of voice recognition and synthesis, is falling to the wayside.

Similarly, optical character recognition, the solution to getting texts into computers, is now extremely fast and accurate. What's more, you can buy a little pen dictionary that has a built-in scanning head at its tip. Run it over a word you need to look up, and the dictionary will then display the definition on a small LCD screen built into the shaft of the pen. Again, very limited compared to the demands of true MT, but suggestive nonetheless.

Current MT products, including PowerTranslator, Transcend, Logos, and others, have a limited capacity to provide useful translations. Although some translators disparage these

products' output as nothing more than word salad, in many cases the results are useable, if inelegant. For informational purposes, however, the results may be satisfactory to some people. Moreover, if the text to be translated is limited in terms of style, usage, and terminology, and is put through a preparatory editing process, then the results may be sufficiently good that with some, or arguably considerable, post-editing, the final translation could be printed and distributed with no fear of rejection.

Regardless of the limited scope of application for current MT software, such technology is slowly improving and will eventually, I think, be capable of providing usable translations for general consumption. Long before that happens though Machine-Assisted Translation (MAT) technology will revolutionize the translation industry.

MAT

Currently MAT is in its early childhood. The most sophisticated systems are still little more than elaborate databases with version control features for preparing and monitoring document translation, terminology and glossary management functions, and some fuzzy logic for finding good matches for text that has not actually been translated yet.

Future systems, as described in recent magazines such as *Language International* and *Multilingual* will offer far more. Not only will they come with vast pools of sample translations mined from the terabytes of such material already available and extensive terminology and glossary listings, but they will also offer intelligent matching of untranslated text that far outperforms today's best "fuzzy" guesses, real-time collaboration between non-local sites via the Internet, constant and automatic updating of sample translations and word lists via bot searches of the Web, and so forth.

The future translator will not sit at a desk with a printed copy of a text to one side of the keyboard and some dictionaries or other resources to the other. In fact many translators already work primarily if not exclusively with electronic source material and use at least some Web-based resources for terminology research. Instead future translators will likely have a live link to their client's web site, working directly in real time with the other translators and project manager involved in the project. They will prepare the source material for "translation" by the MAT system, then monitor the output and work on the parts that the system cannot handle. They will also perform considerable editing, proof-reading, and QA work, along with developing and maintaining glossaries, sample translation databases, and other necessary resources for the MAT system.

This paradigm shift is already underway, with products like Trados' Workbench, IBM's Translation Manager II, Corel Catalyst, and Atril Software's Déjà Vu leading the way. Other products are more focused on localization, while still others, such as Logos, offer a hybrid system that exists somewhere between true MT and MAT, depending, perhaps, on who you ask and what you want to do with it. The point is that this paradigm shift to MAT is not in the hazy future but is happening now. Languages that use the Roman alphabet and routinely use source material in electronic format are the most amenable to use with this software; languages such as Japanese and Chinese are still largely not available in electronic format, and even when they are, the systems do not handle such two-byte languages particularly reliably, at least not yet.

In other words, if you are a Spanish-English or German-English translator, you are probably already using MAT software, or you will be soon enough. If you are a translator working from Japanese to English, you have a couple of years yet before you have to make the move, though doing so earlier would be wise.

There is, however, a problem. Actually, there are a few problems. The first and most obvious is the cost associated with MAT. Not only is the software itself quite expensive for freelance translators to add to their office arsenal, but also it requires more RAM, more hard disc space, and a large monitor to be used efficiently. In addition, a scanner with good OCR software would also be extremely useful. This whole bundle could run as much as $4000, depending on which combination of hardware and software one opts for. Obviously $4000 is a lot for a freelance translator to invest, particularly since many translation vendors prefer to pay translators who use MAT or MT software less than they otherwise would. In fact, some translators who use MAT go as far as not telling their clients about it so as to avoid the issue of reduced rates when using MAT. In sum, there are considerable costs for a freelancer who uses MAT, and how the market will treat such freelancers remains undecided in places.

Second, and perhaps less obvious, is the question of ownership of material. Translators are independent contractors who translate on a work-for-hire basis. They do not own what they produce. If a translator creates a glossary or terminology list in an MAT package while doing a translation for a client, who owns that list? If the translator cannot recycle or reuse such lists, much of the value of MAT will be lost. The same can be said for the organizations that want the translations done, too. Moreover, how would a translation vendor know if I were reusing a terminology list that I created while working for them? And should they care? Such problems are common with Internet and computer technologies. Just consider the issues surrounding MP3 if you are uncertain as to the arguments on both sides. I would like to see a cooperative arrangement exist, one in which translators can continue to build and extend their libraries of terminology and translation samples, and perhaps even, when not legally inappropriate, share material with each other. The same, I believe, should hold for translation vendors. The more good resources we all have, the better our translations will become, and the more quickly we can do them. That is after all the point of MAT.

The third and final problem is translators themselves. Many translators seem resistant to MAT because of the paradigm outlined above. They see translation as a highly intellectual process, one which involves careful analysis of the source text, meticulous research in "quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore", and then creative writing to formulate a target text that balances form and function. MAT takes much of this away, they believe. It is too automated, too computerized, too…, well, you get the idea. I don't consider these translators to be Luddites, resisting to the last a change that is inevitable and beneficial. What I think they are resisting, and I share in their resistance, is a tendency in the translation industry, and in localization in particular, to put speed above everything else. Translators thrive on the challenge of creating a high-quality translation; MAT is perceived by many as a way to crank out in very short times a translation of at best marginal quality. "Good enough so that we don't get sued" is how one localization manager put it to me one day. Whether or not these attitudes are justified or reasonable is a matter of endless debate; but the fact remains that many translators are not rushing to embrace these technologies, use them only grudgingly, and in some cases are leaving the translation profession. I hope that translators will give the technology a chance to mature, to be better understood and appreciated, and to be more widely used in the industry before they reject it. MAT is here to stay; it has its place; it has

the potential to let translators do what they do best. Conversely though, employers of translators, localization firms in particular, should take the time to train translators to these systems, to transition not overnight but a bit more gradually to this new paradigm, and to let translators actually translate. Unhappy translators rapidly become ex-translators, and the supply of good translators is small enough that no one should do anything to reduce it.

Final Thoughts

In 1992 I bet a friend that within 15 years, computer translation systems would take over the industry, leaving very little work for humans, who will maintain and operate the systems and edit their translations. As of this writing (spring, 2000), I am prepared to say that I have lost this bet. My earlier estimations about when and how machine translation would evolve are clearly incorrect, so I concede.

But let's take a look at what has happened in the past five years, the time from when I first wrote about that bet until now. The first desktop supercomputer, the Apple Macintosh G4, has arrived, with Intel's chip line only slightly behind. Voice synthesis is now available as a part of the Mac OS, and though the voices are lackluster, they are usable. Voice-input systems, such as IBM's ViaVoice and Dragon Systems Naturally Speaking series, are now available for a couple of hundred dollars or less and offer accuracy rates approaching 98%. And machine-assisted translation software (MAT) and terminology management software are becoming more prevalent and useful.

Ultimately I believe true MT is inevitable, though how or when it will arise I no longer care to predict. As Neils Bohr said: prediction is difficult, especially about the future.

For me the real question is how will a machine translation system be created. There are two major avenues of research: One, create a conscious computer which can understand and manipulate language essentially as a human would, but do so much more quickly and accurately. This seems extremely difficult for the near term, as there is as yet no good definition of consciousness itself, and what relationship language and consciousness have remains to be clarified. There are also obvious logistical and ethical issues involved, such as what to do if the sentient computer isn't in the mood to translate (can you threaten to pull its plug?), or how to educate such a computer to be a good translator (how to accomplish that with humans is still a subject of some debate).

The other major avenue is to create a system which produces a good translation using different methods from how the human brain does it (however that may be). This is the approach used by all current machine translation systems. Progress thus far is better measured not by how far the systems have come, but by how far they still have to go. Perhaps IBM is working on a successor to Deep Blue. IBM might name it the Blue Linguist and have teams of researchers creating specially-designed language chips, circuit boards, databases, and so forth. And perhaps there will be a contest every year in which the Blue Linguist and five expert human translators all work on the same documents, with a panel of judges trying to identify the Blue Linguist's work from among the group of six translations.

The point is that the results of the MT, or for that matter the MAT, system matter, not the method used to produce them. The translation industry is always ready to adopt any technology or methodology that improves translation quality and speed while reducing costs.

So translators, whether or not they like it, will have to use MAT software. And true MT is coming, and translators should keep track of the progress in this area.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Contents | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | 9 | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **14** | **Afterword**

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The Asian languages, particularly Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, represent a significant part of the translation industry in the United States, especially on the West Coast. Some agencies specialize in only Asian languages or even just one or two of them. Still others make the brunt of their money from these languages. Yet, despite the appeal of their lucrative potential and the need for them in business, many translators and those who work with translators know very little about these languages. This article is intended to fill that gap.

Out of Asia

First, a brief clarification. Although Asia certainly includes India, Nepal, Tibet, Sri Lanka, as well as Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and numerous other fascinating and important nations, this article will address only those languages which fall in the Sino group (Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Burmese, Thai, Laotian, etc.) or the Altaic group (Korean and Japanese; Turkish is omitted for geographical reasons). Apologies to the numerous other languages of the region, but they come from different families and are not relevant to this discussion. For convenience, I'll refer to the above languages as the Asian languages. Please also note that when I refer to European languages, I mean those members of the Romance, Germanic, or Baltic-Slavic families. This excludes Basque, Hungarian, and Finnish, whose origins have nothing to do with PIE (Proto Indo-European).

Modern Asian languages are much older than most modern Indo-European languages. French, Spanish and the other Romance languages all find their origins in Latin. English, German, and the other Germanic languages find their origins in Proto-germanic. Baltic-Slavic is the original form of the current Baltic languages and Slavic tongues which include Russian and others. Note that all the proto-forms of these languages date from roughly 100-200 C.E., or even more recent.

Not so with the Asian languages. We have extant examples of Chinese which date from three thousand years B.C.E. (half a millennium before the Giza pyramids were built). Classical Japanese texts date from the very beginning of the Japanese writing system around 700 C.E. And the language itself is considerably older.

Moreover, while Chinese and its sisters are clearly descended from something generally called Proto-Sinic, Japanese and Korean are Altaic, tracing their roots back to a hypothetical ancestor called Ur-Altaic. In other words, Asian languages stem from a completely different part of the language family tree than do European languages. And, as a note, Japanese has virtually no linguistic connections with Chinese except for the use of Chinese characters and the adoption of some ancient Chinese idioms and adages. Knowing Japanese will help you learn Chinese about as much as knowing English will help you learn Arabic.

I realize that I am ignoring the other fourteen language families in the world, including Dravidian, Amerindian, Bantu, Semitic, and the others. This is not to slight or ignore their importance, but instead to keep the focus of this article on a comparison between Asian and Indo-European languages, the former being too common in the current translation market to be ignored, the latter being represented by three most commonly spoken languages in this hemisphere (English, Spanish, and French), and encompassing the majority of European languages. Similar material involving the differences between Arabic and European languages could and should be written, but I am not the person to do so.

From the Sublime...

Asian languages lack much of the linguistic equipment we take for granted in an Indo-European tongue. For instance, neither Japanese nor Chinese distinguish the singular or plural unless absolutely necessary, they have no verb tenses as we are used to them in say French or Russian, no gender, cases, articles, or declensions as we know them in English, Spanish, or German.

There is no plural form for a noun like 'cat'. You simply say 'cat' (which means one or many); the number of cats, if important, is revealed either through context or the addition of a number with its counter (a part of speech used to identify what is being counted). Similarly, there is no gender (masculine, feminine, or neutral). In Spanish, the word 'cat' is 'gato' and is masculine. No such distinction exists in Japanese, Chinese, or other Asian languages.

Words hardly ever change in Asian languages (they are uninflected, to be technical about it). Unlike German or Russian, where nouns and adjectives constantly change endings depending on what they are doing in a sentence; unlike Spanish or French, which have numerous verb conjugations and three moods (indicative, subjunctive, imperative); unlike most European languages, which have many forms of the word 'the'; Asian languages require no such changes.

Asian languages also lack verb tenses as we think of them in English. At best, Japanese has a perfect and imperfect tense. For instance, we cannot say, "The bridge collapsed tomorrow," in English (if you're wondering why we would need to say this, recall the collapse of a bridge in Seoul, Korea. I heard about this event only one hour after it happened, around 3:00 p.m. in California. Thus, it was already tomorrow in Korea, requiring me to answer the question "When did it happen?" with the statement, "The bridge collapsed tomorrow."). In Japanese, there is no such problem. Because the event is complete, the perfect tense is used and an adverb of time indicating tomorrow is added. Perfectly natural.

Japanese and Korean also have little in the way of rules governing word order, except that the verb always comes at the end of a statement. Chinese (and other Sino languages) requires the

verb in the second position, but little else is regulated. Thus, a literal translation of a banal Japanese phrase can end up sounding like poetry in English.

Moreover, Japanese (along with Korean) can omit virtually everything from a sentence which is not vital. The subject is rarely expressed in a sentence (and unlike Spanish, is not specified by the verb conjugation because there is none). Objects are often dropped. In its conversational form, many Japanese statements consist of nothing more than an adverb or adjective plus a verb (making eavesdropping somewhat more difficult than it is in English).

And, of course, we have the writing systems. Only Vietnamese is currently written using the Roman script, though in a slightly modified form. Chinese uses its characters; Korean, the Hangul script (though Chinese characters are sometimes used); Japanese, the Hiragana and Katakana phonetic scripts plus over 2,000 Chinese characters; and Thai, Khmer, Burmese, and Laotian each use their own phonetic alphabets. In other words, when dealing with an Asian language, at the very least you will have to deal with an entirely unfamiliar alphabet.

All of these characteristics (plus many others) have doubtlessly helped the Asian languages earn their reputation of being ineffable, inscrutable, or just plain mystical. They aren't. They are just different. Very different. So different that you have to climb way up the historical tree of languages to find the connections between Japanese and English, Korean and French, or Chinese and Russian. So different that they all appear on the State Department's list of exotic languages. So different that the time to master one is considerably longer than that for a European language. And so different that an article like this one can only begin to do justice to the subject.

…To the Ridiculous

Not only do these languages differ vastly from English, but the cultural and historical backgrounds do as well. Virtually all European languages can trace at least some of their history through the Roman Empire and back to the ancient Greeks. The Asian languages find much of their cultural heritage in ancient Chinese history and philosophy, but are also influenced by many other sources, including Buddhism.

Certain fundamentals which include how information is presented and described, how an argument is devised and constructed, or how instructions are given differ vastly. For instance, in Japanese an argument is presented roughly as follows: first, the background and general origin of the idea, next the details and information, third, the pivotal point of the argument, and last, a general, and by Aristotelian standards, vague conclusion.

Moreover, there are major differences in rhetorical style. For instance, in Japanese, people are regularly quoted out of context in newspapers. The passive voice is used so frequently that an English teacher's skin would crawl. Triple and even quadruple negatives are often used for emphasis, particularly in speeches. Japanese has a structure best described as the impersonal intransitive passive (which for those of you who study Latin should be familiar). Flowery idioms whose origins lie in ancient Chinese parable pepper modern writing and speech.

In other words: virtually everything is different!

And Thus

Translators of Asian languages (into or out of English) cannot be expected to work in the same way that a translator of Spanish or German does. Neither can they be expected to produce the same results as someone working with English and French can. Nor should they be expected to translate the same volume.

Why? you ask. The answer is simple and has nothing to do with native intelligence. The reasons are as follows: linguistic, socio-cultural, and logistical. Let's look at each individually.

As described above, there are far more differences between Japanese and English than German and English. While no language is so similar to another than a translator can simply plug in words from the target language to replace those in the source language (and if there were, translators would go extinct), the structure of some languages is more readily rendered into other languages.

For instance, when I translate from Japanese into English, I spend a lot of my time converting passive voice sentences without subjects into something acceptable in English. I wrestle with convoluted, lengthy, and often unending Japanese sentences. I struggle to convert Japanese phrases which have two subjects into an English phrase which has only one. I also have to take care of such matters as deciding if a word is going to be singular or plural, adding articles and prepositions, creating subjects and objects so that my English sentences are complete, and working carefully with verbs so that the English verb tense I use matches the intended meaning of the Japanese verb.

Though the specific problems differ, translating to or from any Asian language requires considerably more linguistic manipulation than working to or from a European language. Please understand that I do not mean to suggest that European languages are easier or simpler to work with (though I know Asian-language translators who do believe this), but the linguistic fact is that Asian languages are more different than European languages when compared to English (which of course, is a European language too).

In fact, I often consider translating from Japanese to English as something of an exercise in creative writing. I also translate from French and Spanish into English, so I have experience dealing with those language pairs. The problems are different. Which is more challenging or interesting, I cannot say. However, the linguistic problems involved in going to or from an Asian language and English are more time-consuming.

Socio-cultural issues can become quite important when translating. Anyone who thinks otherwise would probably be happy with the 'magnetic meadows' produced by the first Russian-English machine translation system (the machine's translation of 'magnetic field' in a technical paper). Matters such as how information is presented and described, how directions are given or explained, and how a subject is treated all fall into this category. Because the European languages (and I include English here) have a shared socio-cultural history, these matters differ considerably less in comparison to the Asian languages.

I already pointed out the basic structure of an argument in Japanese. Similarly, such

fundamental concepts as God, a King or Emperor, nationality, race, ethics, law, and history (to name a few) are quite different in Asian societies. Although these issues will never affect a translation at the word-level, they will impact on the overall impression a translation makes. For instance, how do you handle such concepts as race for a society like Japan's or Korea's, which really has only one race, or for one like China's, which predates all of European history? Or what do you do with a phrase like "modern history" in Japanese, which refers to everything after 1603 (for 'kindaishi' in Japanese) or everything after 1868 (for 'gendaishi')? The phrase "modern history" in English tends to refer to everything after WWII. And so it goes.

While this may all seem too abstruse to be relevant, let me give one down-to-earth example. I translated part of a book on brain death in 1994. The author was against considering brain dead people as clinically dead and therefore, against using their organs for transplants. Unfortunately, while his arguments made perfect sense in Japanese, they lost their force and persuasiveness in English because of their structure. Moreover, part of his argument was based on the notion of family responsibility and filial piety, concepts that are quite different in Japan. Although I did my best to integrate brief explanations of the concept of filial piety into the translation and restructure the arguments within the limits of what a translator should do, the resulting English text (which the client was very happy with) certainly represented a case in which a lot was lost in the translation.

Then there are the logistical issues. These represent the nuts-and-bolts of translation and include typing your documents, printing or transmitting your work, looking up words and terms, maintaining glossaries, and managing neologisms.

Most Asian languages (Vietnamese being the notable exception) are written in scripts which differ completely from the Roman or Cyrillic script. Chinese is written exclusively in characters. Japanese is written in a mixture of two phonetic scripts, characters, and occasionally the Roman alphabet. In fact, it would be difficult to create a more confused, chaotic, and inefficient writing system than the one Japanese is stuck with. My professor of Japanese history once said that the worse thing to happen to the Japanese language was the adoption of Chinese characters.

What does this mean?

For one, typing in an Asian language is quite difficult. You simply can't have a keyboard which covers the two or three thousand characters used in Japanese and Chinese. You can't use the Roman keyboard as is to input the complex Hangul script. So, you have to use what's loosely called a 'bridge', a simple chuck of computer code which reads your QWERTY keyboard input phonetically and then presents you with the characters or phonetic symbols which match. For characters this can be agonizingly slow, since one sound in Japanese or Chinese can have as many as one hundred characters associated with it. Even if you have a context-sensitive bridge or one which accepts character compounds, you still have to select from a group of choices presented in a little pop-up window. The net result is that a high-speed professional typist in Japanese does about 30 to 40 words per minute. In comparison, most executive secretaries and professional typists do well over 100 wpm in English.

If you're translating into an Asian language, you have to deal with a major technical issue. Unlike the European languages which have agreed to use ASCII as the standard way of

expressing the Roman alphabet (and recall that Spanish made an official modification a few years ago to accommodate this, and Germany did the same more recently), there is as yet no general agreement about how to deal with the so-called two-byte languages (which include most of the Asian languages, plus some others). If your operating system and software don't support the same two-byte system that your client's does, you will have some problems, to say the least. And although there are file translation programs to help mitigate this difficulty, you sacrifice time, efficiency, and formatting when using them (not to mention content in a few cases).

You have probably been wondering how you look up a Chinese character in a dictionary. It depends. If you know the pronunciation, you might peruse that section of the dictionary and scan for it. This can take considerable time, but it is often faster than looking up the character in a character dictionary. Doing so requires first identifying the radical of the character (the part used to identify it for dictionary purposes), then looking up that radical, next going to the section for that radical which covers characters which have the same number of strokes as the one you are looking for does, and finally, finding your character among the others in that section. As a person who has looked up thousands of words in over eight languages, I can tell you that I'd rather look up something in Spanish or German than in Japanese.

This leads to another problem. While there are reasonably good if not excellent specialized dictionaries for the European languages, there are few if any for the Asian languages. So when Asian language translators take more time to deal with terminological issues, this is part of the reason. And recall that while you can readily type out a word in French or German and post it on CompuServe, you can't do that in an Asian language (Vietnamese excepted) without having the language modules installed and a browser or other client software that supports the language in question. I regularly see (and chuckle) at the valiant efforts of people to use romanization and explanation as a substitute for Japanese writing. It's a small problem, but worthy of consideration.

Finally, neologisms. This can be a nightmare or a blessing. Japanese regularly uses phoneticized English to create new words, and though a native English speaker can derive great amusement from some of the choices, they are relatively easy to identify. Conversely, Chinese invents a word of its own for practically everything introduced into the language. And for lack of good, current reference materials, many Chinese translators have to struggle with this issue and use what they know to be outdated or overly generic terminology simply because they can do no better. This is neither an apology nor a defense, just a statement of fact. Translators of Asian languages live in a world of logistical nightmares compared to their European counterparts. And, the nightmare only gets worse when we consider the technology.

Technically Speaking

If you want to use Japanese or Chinese on your computer, you can't simply get and install the fonts. Fortunately it is no longer particularly difficult or expensive to use these language, or other non-Roman-alphabet languages, on a computer. As of Mac OS 9 and Windows 2000, the necessary operating system modules and language resource for most major languages, including Japanese and Chinese, are contained on the system discs and can be installed at your leisure.

Current versions of Microsoft Office and some other applications already support double-byte languages and so you will not even need to buy localized versions of the software. In other cases, however, you will need to find and purchase the language-specific application, such as for PageMaker and other DTP software. And depending on your needs, you may still need to buy some fonts since the fonts that come included with Mac OS 9 and Windows 2000 are not particularly high quality nor are they commonly used for printing in the world of DTP and professional publications. Since these font packages are extremely expensive (roughly $800 for one Japanese font, for instance), you should confirm with many clients that having them will increase your work flow.

So now you can type in Chinese or Japanese on your computer. But wait. The first thing you'll notice is that a lot of the word processing amenities which we so enjoy in English and European languages don't exist. There is no such thing as a spell checker in Japanese and Chinese (nor is there an equivalent for handling characters). Grammar and style checkers are years in the future (though arguably so for English, too). Sorting a list in a Japanese word processor produces quite interesting but often less than useful results. And simple little matters such as file size suddenly become important (two-byte character languages naturally make for larger word processing files).

Now you want to print your work on your brand new PostScript printer. But you can't. You didn't realize that two-byte languages use their own special derivative of PostScript which has to be installed separately into your printer. If you have scalable fonts (also called TrueType or vector fonts), you will be able to print. But since no one uses those fonts for final output, they are only useful if you are sending your work to an agency. If you are running an agency or preparing final output for a direct client, you'll need to upgrade your printer and then buy PostScript fonts for your Asian language, a not inconsiderable expense.

And last, but not least, it is worth mentioning that using a double-byte language and any software with it, including fonts of course, will eat up a lot of hard drive space and make high demands on RAM. So when your Japanese, Chinese, or Korean translators beg for more RAM or larger hard drives, be sympathetic. They are just trying to get their system up to speed so they can work more efficiently.

And Finally

Having dispelled some myths (and yes, vented some frustrations), there are only two issues left to address. One: Why Asian languages cost more to translate? And, two: What should Asian language translators and those who use their services do to minimize the difficulties arising from the above differences?

Without delving into the market aspects of translation rates, I can only give two reasons for why the Asian languages tend to be more expensive. Firstly, the software and hardware to support Asian languages cost more, the dictionaries and reference materials are far more expensive (a single medical dictionary for Japanese and English can cost over $500), and the time and effort to master an Asian language (this applies to native English speakers of course) is considerably greater than that required to master a European language. Secondly, the amount of time and effort to produce a given volume of Asian language translation is greater than that for the European languages. Is this fair? Yes, because the costs of working with Asian languages are inherently higher and the pay should reflect the time and effort involved

in the work. When the technology and resources become less expensive, the costs will drop.

Asian language translators should be prepared to ask more questions when receiving an assignment than European language translators might. They may need more instructions concerning how much rewriting and fine-tuning of the translation they should do as well as how to deal with terminology and neologisms. People who work with Asian language translators should be prepared to answer such questions and should expect the translator to take a little more time to finish the job than a European language translator might require for something the same size. These people should also be more sensitive to the finished product and realize that some of the awkwardness in the target language might be a result of the content of the original, and not the fault of the translator. Without specific instructions, translators should never do too much rewriting of the original, and thus, some peculiar turns of phrase might appear. The client, or at least an editor or proofreader is in the proper position to attend to such matters (this applies to all languages of course, but the problem occurs more readily with the Asian languages).

So successful translations involving Asian languages can be produced through understanding the linguistic, socio-cultural, and logistical differences, preparing to address and then solve the problems, and realizing what expectations are reasonable. For translators, this means asking a few more questions. For people working with translators, this means being prepared to answer a few more questions and adjust expectations.

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Article 10: Accreditation and Standards in the Translation Industry

The translation industry is slowly climbing a tortured path toward regulation and accreditation in the United States, with the ASTM meeting now to come up with nationally recognized standards for translation, LISA issuing its own ideas about what constitutes good practice in localization, and every translator, translation vendor, translation school, and translation organization adding thoughts and suggestions to this process. But has anyone stopped to ask if this is a good idea, if the industry will really benefit from accreditation or regulation, and who might suffer? That's the point of this article: to take a close look at these two closely-related issues and explore what I think are some overlooked problems.

Accreditation

For years now, accreditation has been regularly discussed, and even hotly debated, among translators, at translation and localization conferences, and even in the federal and state governments. Today there is no form of universally recognized accreditation for translators in the United States, even though we do have such options as ATA accreditation, degrees or certificates from various academic institutions, and qualifying exams from federal and state governments, and from organizations like United Nations.

There is at present slow but steady progress toward government-regulated nationwide accreditation for translators. The ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) Subcommittee F15.48 on Language Translation was officially established in September, 1998, and has been meeting quarterly or more often since that time toward the end of creating guidelines for translation and localization. The ASTM's Guide for User-Oriented Foreign Language Instruction was approved in March, 1995, and a guide being developed by ASTM Subcommittee F15.34 on Language Interpretation is scheduled for voting in the summer of 2000. In addition, LISA (Localization Industry Standards Association) has been meeting and discussing standards for language translation in localization. The ATA a few years ago made its accreditation exams into a two-step process, and has added more languages to its roster as well. In sum, many of the right organizations, with the participation of translators, educators, and a translation vendors, are establishing or expanding efforts at standardization or accreditation.

The goal seems to be twofold: first, a nationally recognized and accepted set of standards for translators and translation; second, an accreditation exam for translators, one that would certify a translator as being capable of translating from one particular language into another. Many translators believe that such an exam would benefit them as well as their industry, increasing among other things pay rates, ease of finding work, and respect as professionals. Many translation vendors belief that such an exam would be useful insofar as it would make finding qualified and capable translators easier.

I believe neither of these things.

First, the exam itself. In theory, an accreditation exam sounds like a brilliant idea. But just as the idea of a benevolent monarch being the best form of government has no place in reality, as amply demonstrated by John Stuart Mill, this exam is a practical impossibility. Let's take a close look at the assumptions underlying this exam, and the inevitable, and I will argue insurmountable, problems that come with them.

The exam will have to exist for every language combination in use in the United States. Even if we assume that these combinations consist of only English and another language, rather than say Japanese to Spanish or Russian to Italian, we are still dealing with a lot of exams, depending on which languages are deemed worthy of testing. At the very least, all United Nations languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, and the two alternatives: German and Japanese) as well as obvious languages like Vietnamese, Korean, Portuguese, Italian, and so forth will have to be tested. Moreover, there will have to be two tests for each language combination, one for each direction, because translators translator from their B language into their A language. So we're already dealing with at least 22 exams.

Since most translators specialize in one or a couple of related fields, the exam will either have to be very general, and therefore not particularly useful insofar as it will not test terminology, subject area knowledge, or the ability to write in an appropriate style, or the exam will have to exist for several fields, such as law, finance, medicine, physical sciences, social sciences, computer science, and so on. For this exam to fulfill its intended purpose as a way of identifying who can really translate what, the exam will likely have to exist for various area specializations. Even if we assume there are only five subject specializations (business, law, finance, medicine, science), the number of exams is now at least 110.

The exam will also have to test skills beyond translation itself, such as the ability to use a word processor like Microsoft Word well, to work with MT or MAT software systems, to manage or create terminology databases, navigate HTML files and manipulate them as necessary, or to perform DTP in an application like QuarkXPress. To what extent are these skills necessary? Should they be evaluated? Is it realistic to accredit a translator who cannot open an HTML file, doesn't know how to create a table in Microsoft Word, or has never used a database application? If these skills are considered a part of a translator's ability to translate, and I suspect they are, at least by some people in the industry, then they should be tested. Doing so will of course augment the difficulties of creating the 110 or more exams needed.

There is also the matter of length. Most translation agencies and vendors prefer to give two or three paragraph tests, just a small way of seeing if a translator can actually translate. No one considers such tests to be comprehensive, and no one would regard passing one of them as anything remotely related to accreditation. By contrast, the graduation exams, called the

Professional Exams, at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, take two full days to complete. Since part of being a professional translator, freelance or in-house, is being able to maintain a certain level of productivity for an entire day, it seems reasonable to have an accreditation exam take at least half a day, during which time a candidate might have to translate one to two-thousand words, depending on the language and subject matter. Again, the 110 or more exams will be that much harder to create the longer they have to be.

The exams will also have to be updated, if not created anew, every year or so not only to reflect changes in language and in the subject specializations, but also to avoid cheating. By cheating I refer not only to people who deliberately obtain a copy of test content before a test so as to improve performance but also to people who merely remember unconsciously the content of a test. These latter people are important because they might inadvertently leak out information about the test, or they might remember the test when they take it again, either because they failed the first time or because they have to take it again in order to maintain their accreditation. So an accreditation exam is not just a matter of creating one exam one time only, but creating more than 100 exams every year.

Who will create these exams? Obviously each exam will have to be created by a group of people based on a consistent set of standards. Some people might be able to participate in the creation of more than one exam, but for each exam I think we can safely assume that at least three people will be needed to come up with a fair and impartial test for translators. That means hundreds of people, at least. And who will grade the exams? Depending on the number of people taking the exams, large teams of graders might be necessary to evaluate the exams in a reasonable period of time. We can't have translators waiting for the results of such an exam for six months or a year. Since a translation exam will by definition have to involve translating and cannot simply be a fill-in-the-blank or a multiple-choice test, grading will be a fairly labor-intensive task. There will also have to be an organization which oversees the creation of the exams, the implementation of testing, an issue to be described at length below, the grading of the exams, and the distribution of grades so that people who claim to have passed can prove they did, and people who need to verify that a translator has passed the exam can do so, too. This organization will have to act in accordance with a set of standards defined by a separate body, such as the ASTM, and will also have to have a means for handling grievances. Inevitably someone will claim that the test was not fair in content or implementation, or was not evaluated justly, and for the exam to be considered useful overall, such grievances have to be heard.

Evaluation of the exams will be especially difficult. It is well accepted that there is no such thing as a perfect translation, that many phrases and idioms can be rendered in two or more ways, and that style is a highly subjective matter. As such, fairness in evaluation will be extremely challenging. The preferences, preconceptions, and experiences of an evaluator will undoubtedly impact at some level, conscious or otherwise, on the grading process, and could potentially affect whether or not a candidate is accredited. Some mechanism to insure fairness in evaluating the exam will be vital so as to assure the people taking the exam that they can expect to pass if they deserve to, and to assure those who use the accreditation as a benchmark for translation ability that it does in fact measure what it claims to. There may even be a need to evaluate the evaluators, but that leads to an infinite regression, which is something best avoided.

Qualifications for taking the exam will be another important issue. Who can take it? Anyone

who signs up? Will there be minimum educational requirements, perhaps stemming from whatever standards for translation and translators are put into practice in this country? If such requirements do exist, who will decide how a degree or certification from another country measures against the American educational system? And how will claims by foreign-born and educated translators be verified? We all know what the CIA and FBI go through to perform background checks on American citizens who have lived abroad and then need to be cleared to work for those organizations. Will a similar system be set in place to verify the foreign education of translators, people who almost by definition have such experience? Or will the word of the person be taken at face value, opening the system to at least the possibility of abuse? Finally, will there be exemptions for the exam? Will a person who holds a M.A. from Kent State or the Monterey Institute, or who has passed the U.N. translation exams, or has a certificate from the translation program at Georgetown University, be exempted?

And what about re-testing? Will translators be required to take the exam again after a certain number of years pass? Will sufficient work experience or continuing education be required to take the test again, or might it replace the need to be re-tested? Translators certainly need to maintain their language skills and keep up with the subjects they work in. But who will decide to what extent either is necessary? Should translators be expected to prove their ability again every so many years, even if all their clients are satisfied with their performance?

Even assuming that a fair and impartial test could be created and evaluated, there is still another category of difficulties. Like so many things in life, the idea is the easy part, and the implementation is where the problems really begin.

Where will these accreditation exams be held? Washington D.C. might seem like a logical choice, though as I live in Monterey, California, I personally would prefer, oh, say, Monterey, though readers living in Boston might not like my preference. If there is only one testing center, at least some translators are going to incur serious costs, both in time and money, to take this exam. The testing center itself may pose serious problems, too, as it will have to accommodate a large number of people and their translation resources; it will probably have to have a computer station of some sort for each person taking the test; and it will have to be set up so that people cannot cheat. I've taken and proctored enough standardized tests in my life to be aware of the difficulties associated with this kind of testing.

There is also the question of what constitutes a fair and reasonable testing environment for such an exam. Having translators write out their exam by hand while using print dictionaries they bring themselves may seem practical, but it is unrealistic. Translators work on computers, they word processes their translations, they use the Web to find terminology, they even work with MAT software. Again, standards might help answer these questions, but the matter of fairness, real and perceived, will linger.

What will these exams cost to take? How much is accreditation worth and who will pay for it? Clearly the cost or creating, evaluating, and implementing this exam will be formidable, and though translators may not be asked to pay but a small portion of this, I suspect that translation vendors will pass on the costs indirectly through reduced rates. And what about the expenses mentioned above for the translator who has to travel across country, perhaps stay in a hotel for a day or two, and then take the exam? Accreditation had better have a significant impact on a translator's income to justify the travel expenses, not to mention lost

work time. And this holds for in-house as well as freelance translators. If I were the president of a translation agency and were satisfied with my translators, why would I bother sending them out for a couple of days or so to take a test? Why not just give them a bonus for a job well done, save money, and make my translators happy?

Next problem: how do we keep track of who has taken the test, who has passed, and who has failed? Will such a list be available to the public on the Internet, or will one have to file a request for such information about a translator? What will happen when some translator forges accreditation, as inevitably someone will? If an individual can forge a medical license and practice medicine without ever having been to medical school, which people have managed to do in the U.S., why not a translator? Will there be consequences? If so, what? If not, then one of the values of accreditation is lost.

All right, enough of the problems associated with an accreditation exam. I hope I have suggested that there are as yet more than a few fundamental hurdles associated with nationwide accreditation, enough so that I believe an accreditation system is a futile exercise that will merely complicate our industry. But there is another side to this, one that we should look at briefly before leaving this topic.

Results

Will anyone care if a translator is accredited? Will that really lead to greater opportunity in terms of word rates for freelance translators or salary for in-house translators? Will accredited translators get more interesting jobs, survive corporate restructuring or streamlining more readily, get better benefits or enjoy more rapid career advancement? Of course this question is impossible to answer with certainty without implementing an accreditation exam, but I think we can make some educated guesses as to what would happen.

The development we can virtually count on will be a gray market for translators. Ultimately in the translation industry what counts is the ability to translate. Translation vendors have never expressed much interest in how or where a translator acquired translation skills, as long as the translator can provide some form of proof of competence. The most widely accepted form nowadays is experience, after that comes some form of formal education, and following that stands an accreditation exam like the ATA's.

There is no reason for a translation vendor not to use an unaccredited translator whose competence is otherwise established. In fact, if the unaccredited translator is willing to work at a slightly reduced rate, or if accredited translators are somehow in a position to demand a premium for their accreditation, then that ultimate business consideration will motivate many translation vendors to choose the unaccredited translator: cost savings. Unless and until accreditation becomes widely recognized and accepted as a sign of superior quality, as for instance ISO-9000 certification is within some industries, many vendors will likely have little preference regarding accreditation, and some may choose unaccredited translators for the cost savings.

There is the related issue of how to monitor translation vendors and their hiring practices. Just as a homeowner can choose to hire a union or non-union plumber with no consequences other than the potential risks in terms of quality of work performed, a vendor would likely not incur any risks beyond those associated with the translation ability of the translator in question,

freelance or in-house. Even if laws were enacted, on a state and federal level, requiring vendors to use accredited translators when and where possible, they could never be enforced, no more than prohibition, union hiring practices, or speed limits can be consistently and thoroughly. So translation vendors can make the choices they prefer, accepting the risks associated with each as they like.

Let us also remember here that there is no effective way for translators to collectively demand higher pay, either in the form of increased salary for in-house translators or higher word rates for freelancers. Translators are barred from unionizing, and the ATA is barred from setting rates for translation, both as a result of decisions made by the Justice Department in the early 1990s. It is unlikely that this state of affairs will change, regardless of the quality accreditation guarantees.

So if there is no more or less money to be had from accreditation, perhaps a freelance translator can expect more work, and an in-house translator can expect faster promotion. In the former case, most freelance translators with a few years experience have as much work as they can handle on average, so more work would be irrelevant. And though word rates might rise for accredited translators, if the vendors are bearing some of the costs associated with accreditation, then word rates could just as easily fall. In the latter case, the differences in pay between a new translator and a senior translator, or for that matter a senior translation manager, are between $10,000 and $20,000 on average, though sometimes considerably less. Thus, if accreditation costs a translator $1,000 in terms of the fee for the exam, travel expenses to take the exam, and other direct and indirect expenses and losses associated with taking the exam, then the promotions have to come quickly enough to justify this. Quantifying this to a precise degree is not possible in this article, but the example above does suggest that accreditation could not have too much value in a corporate environment.

To sum up, there is no particular motivation for translation vendors to prefer accredited translators unilaterally. Given the choice between an accredited translator and a translator with no training, experience, or credentials, most vendors would pay the extra for the former individual. Given the choice between a seasoned translator with formal academic training but no accreditation and a translation newbie with no experience but a newly-minted accreditation, I suspect most vendors would work with the former individual. Combine this reasoning with the practical impossibility of creating and implementing an accreditation exam and the system to back it up, and I am convinced that a nationwide accreditation system run by the government is a bad idea with few if any possible benefits to translators or the translation industry.

Can We Avoid Accreditation? An Alternative

So if you agree with the above argument, or if you are curious to see if I am just criticizing the system, then I am happy to report that I do have a few thoughts as to how we can avoid accreditation while still improving the translation industry for translators and translation vendors, and raising translation quality.

The translation industry at present is a meritocracy. Those who can do the work get more work; those who cannot do the work are given the chance to learn if they so choose, and once they can do the work, they get more work. All others are rapidly dismissed from the profession. In the translation industry, all translators, regardless of background, education, or

accreditation, start at the bottom. You have to prove yourself and your ability to each new client or employer, though this process becomes ever shorter the longer you stay in the profession. You prove your ability by taking vendor translation tests and by doing quality translation work. Degrees, certificates, and accreditation seem mostly to help accelerate the speed with which you get your first translation job and become one of the primary translators for an organization if you are a freelancer, or the ease with which you land your first in-house position and perhaps how quickly you are promoted.

Meritocracies are good, I believe, because not only do they recognize and reward quality work while punishing inferior efforts, but also because they give fair access to all who want to enter, and as a result, force those who are in to keep their skills sharp. Just because I am an established translator with a clientele who seems to appreciate my ability doesn't mean I can slack off. I still have to maintain and improve my language skills, keep up with changes and developments in the subjects I work in, and upgrade or extend my arsenal of business tools. I am competing with both other established translators who can do what I can, and would, I presume, be perfectly willing to step in and take my place with my clients, as well as newcomers who are itching to get a chance to prove themselves, who are hungry to do work, and who will not hesitate to pick up any slack I let out. This is a powerful motivation for me to maintain and improve myself as a translator, and it is a strong motivation for newcomers insofar as they know, or should know, that they will be given a chance soon enough.

Meritocracies do have their limitations. I know some translators who complain that vendors do not treat them with respect, accuse them of low-quality work, and even try to rip them off. I know people who work at translation agencies who complain about the difficulties of sifting the wheat from the chaff among the 50 or more translation résumés or brochures they receive each week, who decry the lack of good translators who submit quality work on time, and who long for some consistency in quality and professionalism from translators.

I agree with all of the above, though I do not think accreditation would do anything to change any of it. An accredited translator may still be unprofessional, an agency may choose to ignore one's accreditation. What's more, agencies will have to verify the claims of accreditation for each and every translator they choose to work with, something that will likely take time and cost money. And translators may still feel as though they have little recourse for dealing with bad vendors.

As for the matter of unprofessional translators or bad translation vendors, I have made suggestions in previous articles as to how to handle specific situations, such as late payment or no payment, when they arise. Translators can cooperate to keep track of information about vendors among themselves so as to avoid bad vendors; agencies can keep good translators by paying them promptly and fairly. Translators can increase repeat customers by doing quality work and submitting it on time; agencies can ask for sample translations and start new translators off with small assignments as a way to sift the wheat from the chaff, as well as perhaps placing more value on education or formal training for translators.

In essence, the current system, such as it is, in the translation industry may not seem to work particularly well, but it is preferable to accreditation, and can be improved in a few simple ways. All of the complaints in the preceding paragraphs really have to do with a lack of understanding and communication regarding expectations. This stems primarily from two areas: One, a lack of understanding regarding what translation is and how it is to be

performed; and two: a lack of well-defined standards for the translation industry in general, and the various kinds of translators and translation vendors in particular.

Standards

The translation industry is in desperate need of some fundamental definitions. The ATA has attempted on a few occasions to issue standards, but for reasons too complex to explore here, has failed to convince translators, translation vendors, or the industry overall to accept their efforts. Other organizations have made various attempts, all without success.

This is changing, however. As mentioned in the opening of this article, the ASTM and LISA are in the process of developing standards for the translation profession. I applaud this effort and hope that the results will finally bring to this industry what it has needed for so long: some simple, clear-cut, straight-forward definitions of what a translator is, what a translator does, how a translator should translate, what constitutes a good translation, what a translation agency is and does, and how translation agencies and translators, or translation employers and translators, should interact with each other, to name a few possibilities.

Translators who want to avoid accreditation, who would prefer that our industry police itself and improve itself from within, should make every effort to become more professional in the translation work, to contribute, whether in writing or otherwise, to increasing understanding about the translation profession and the translation process, and to do quality work in a timely fashion at all times. Translation vendors similarly have responsibilities to fulfill, including making the effort to work with those translators whose abilities justify their respect, offering fair market rates for the work being done, and being willing to bear an equal share of the responsibility for quality translation work, whether through providing technology, training, or information to in-house and freelance translators, or working with organizations like the ASTM and schools like Georgetown University, the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and Kent State University, to develop better training programs for translation professionals.

Many translators already do the above things and then some. Many translation vendors already do the above and then some. Obviously there are enough who do not that the industry as a whole is considering accreditation as a way to resolve existing problems and avoid new ones. I hope I have shown how accreditation will create far more problems than it will solve, and how a reasonable effort from all members of the industry along with standards and definitions from a respectable, independent organization will allow the translation industry to move forward successfully into its future.

THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Article 11: Training Translators

Do translators need to be educated in the art and science of translation? Is it possible to train a translator in an academic setting? Is doing so worthwhile, from the translator's perspective or from that of a potential employer? The current state of affairs in the translation industry in the United States would suggest that academic training is valued but hardly considered essential. On the other hand, a translator with academic training often does find entering the market easier and can command higher salaries or rates, as well as possibly advance in a corporate setting more rapidly. Weighed against the time and money involved in getting academic training, however, the untrained translator may actually do better. So let's take a close look at the nature of training translators, consider what might make for a quality academic training environment, and assess the value of such training.

Academic Training in Principle

The basic approach to academic training for translators seems to remain unchanged from the time of the School of Scribes in ancient Egypt. Student translators are given short texts to translate, then their translations are evaluated by teachers, and finally the translations are discussed in great depth and detail among all the students in the class and the teacher. Variations occur in the length of the assignment, though 500 to 1000 words per week seems to be average, the subject matter in the assignment, including but not necessarily limited to business, financial, legal, medical, computer-related, or political material, and the direction of the translation, with some programs requiring students to translate both into and out of their native language, while others choose to have students translate exclusively into their native language.

Academic training rarely if ever includes any theoretical work, though this could well be a result of the relative lack of material to present to students; a cogent theory of translation remains to be developed. Academic training also tends to limit or exclude entirely matters related to terminology research and development, glossary or term database design and maintenance, or various computer technologies, running the gamut from basic word processing to localization of software source code. Academic training also rarely if ever includes content courses on, for instance, law, medicine, computer science, or other subjects that translators inevitably translate material on but almost have extensive, in-depth, formal academic training in. Last, academic training seems to stay away from the development or writing skills or cultural sensitivity, two areas which translators have to deal with every day

of their working lives.

In essence, translation training then consists of giving students plenty of time to do very short translation assignments, then analyzing those assignments in every last detail, and ultimately discussing the nature of their work, often with an extreme focus on student errors, in great depth. In other words, students get to make mistakes that have no ramifications in their professional careers, and presumably they learn from their mistakes, as well as acquiring familiarity with terminology and various kinds of source material.

This system of education for translators places an extreme emphasis on the teaching faculty, making them responsible for selecting texts that reflect what the translation industry is currently asking translators to work on, evaluating student translations in a manner consistent with what the industry expects a translator to be able to produce, and discussing all student errors and other textual problems so as to guide the student toward developing translation skills that will meet with the industry's demands and expectations.

Faculty must therefore be very proficient translators themselves, as well as capable educators. Needless to say, not everyone can teach, regardless of how well they know their subject matter. Merely possessing a mastery of a subject does not qualify someone to teach it. Teaching is a very difficult task. Imparting knowledge and experience to another person requires not only mastery of the subject matter, but also mastery of the communication of knowledge.

Teaching translation is a very labor-intensive process, since each student's weekly assignments have to be evaluated in great detail and with extreme precision. In addition, course materials should not be recycled; the translation profession change too quickly to allow last year's translation texts to be used more than perhaps a couple of years in a row. Having students work on patents from five years ago may mean they will not learn the currently accepted format for a patent; having students work on a hardware or software manual from even three years ago will deny them much needed current terminology and subject knowledge. The same obviously holds for all subject areas. And by extension, the same will hold for any tests the students take.

Translation faculty must as a result have considerable time and enthusiasm for their subject, as well as intimate familiarity with the current state of affairs in the industry. This does not mean, however, that faculty should be working professionals who just happen to teach a few classes here and there. Students require and deserve full-time attention, meaning that faculty at best should be doing part-time work as freelance translators. As an aside, I do teach one translation course each spring (entitled "The Business of Translation"); one of the reasons I do not teach more than that is my freelance business doesn't allow me to. Covering the demands of my clients and the needs of the students in that one class pretty much absorbs all my working time. To teach more than that would, for me at least, be irresponsible.

Finally, we have the issue of the administration of a translation program. Again, the people involved in running the program should have experience in the translation profession, as well as considerable ability to manage and oversee an academic program. This may seem obvious, but it bears mentioning because the supply of such people is sufficiently small that some programs do not have such people in their administrative ranks. While having any administrator is arguably better than canceling a program, the limitations of someone who

does not know the translation profession in a position of authority in a translation program can lead to misunderstandings about the time, money, and academic resources (e.g.: dictionaries, glossaries, software, etc.) that such a program requires.

Is This The Best We Can Do?

The above approach has been in use for thousands of years, give or take a bit of technology. The Thebes School of Scribes did not have the Internet, word processors, or MAT to contend with, but their methodology was roughly the same. Though I agree that practice is an essential element of training translators, I am convinced that other forms of learning should play an integral role.

First, the volume of translation. Students who spend one or two years translating a thousand words per week are wholly unprepared for the daily demands of professional translation. The average translator produces in the neighborhood of two- to three-thousand words per day, with many doing considerably more. While students should certainly on occasion study one short text very intently as an exercise in learning how to analyze and parse a text, then create the best translation possible, they should also work on translating a normal day's work for a practicing translator.

Students need to acquire the speed and accuracy of a professional. This includes learning to type quickly, knowing how to work efficiently in current software applications and on the Web, and understanding what to do when a text does not yield to translation, whether because the printing is illegible or the writing is unintelligible. Translators who lack these skills will find the market unwelcoming and uncomfortable.

Translation students also need to become very comfortable in the subject field or fields they will work in. Because most translators lack a thorough education in anything other than their languages, part of their education should include subject knowledge. This cannot come directly from the translation texts themselves, as the students simply do not generally translate texts of sufficient length or depth. Developing a thorough understanding of computer science by reading 1,000 words per week on the subject is just not possible. So content coursework, presented in both of the student's languages should be integrated into any translation program.

What's more, professional translators specialize. No translator works in every subject area; it is simply not practical to try to develop that much expertise and linguistic knowledge in that many subjects. Translators generally focus on a few related subject areas, depending on their backgrounds and interests, then cultivate their specialized knowledge and language skills so as to tailor them for translation in those fields. The same should occur in a translation program. After an introductory period of basic translation exercises and development of secondary skills like word processing and terminology management, students should pick a subject area and focus on that. A translation program should therefore offer academic tracks—such as in medicine, law, social science, natural science, finance, computers/localization, the specific breakdown does not matter—then work through both a concerted study of general material on those subjects, in both of the student translator's languages, of course, as well as translation exercises based on what the market is having translators do in those areas. This will not only develop their subject knowledge to a point at which they can confidently approach a text, but will also provide them with the terminology

and knowledge of writing style necessary to create an accurate, readable translation.

Subject fields should be selected based on what the market is demanding from translators. Certain fields, like computers/localization, are strong enough for all major languages that they should exist for all translation students. It may not be practical, however, to have certain translation languages working on certain subjects. For instance, how much medical research or fundamental science is done in Vietnam? Certainly some, but not enough to justify a Vietnamese-English translation student specializing in that area. The task of the translation school is to prepare translation students for the real world, so subject areas should be selected and developed in accordance with the market in the translation industry.

Therefore, having all students in all language combinations work through the same set of exercises in broad categories of experience is not practical or fair to the students. A student with no interest in financial translation who is studying a language combination with minimal demands for such work will not benefit from such efforts as much as she might from doing more in an area that interests her and is in demand. Similarly, the market rarely if ever asks for translators who simply have a smattering of ability and familiarity with a wide range of texts, so graduating students who fit that description is less efficient than graduating students who can handle one subject very well.

Next, technology. Different programs integrate various computer technologies and translation tools into the curriculum, with each language combination often functioning as a separate entity, and therefore each student getting a different level of training with these technologies. All students need to know how to do high-level word processing, basic DTP and HTML work, as well as deal with terminology and glossary databases, and MAT/MT tools. These technologies should be introduced through special classes, of course, but then should be a part of the daily translation curriculum. Students should be expected to create complex word-processing documents for their translations, to do database and terminology projects, to deal with HTML files, and even to open and translate text strings within software code. This will prepare them for the demands of the translation industry. Anything less will simply give them more to learn after they graduate, defeating the purpose of the training they have paid for and worked through.

Finally, theory. I realize there is as yet no well-developed theory of translation, but there is certainly enough theory within linguistics and psychology on the subjects of language, terminology, and such that translation students would benefit from an introduction to this kind of material as a way to ground them in what it is they are doing and give them some broad, general ideas of how to approach a text and translate it well. Too much theory is unnecessary, and each program, depending on its duration, will have to decide how much is sufficient. But no theory at all will leave translation students without a model to use to unify their knowledge and develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for their work.

Special Considerations

There are within teaching translators some particular issues that bear mentioning. First has to do with student background. In other words: what is the proper academic background for a student of translation to have? At the very least, most translation students seem to benefit from having had formal training in their foreign languages, including intensive study of reading and writing. Also, extensive experience writing in their native languages is very

beneficial, whether had through courses such as a college English class or its equivalent or the study of journalism, such experience prepares the future translator to write quickly and effectively in a variety of styles.

The second issue is whether to train translators by having them work into their native and foreign languages, or just into their native language. Since virtually no translator actually translates professionally into any language other than their native language (their A language), formal study by actually translating material into translators' foreign language or languages (their B languages) seems like a less than effective use of time, not only for the students but also for the teachers. Rather than having a translation student struggle to create a good translation in the B language, the student would be better served by developing more insight and understanding into the B languages through reading, terminology acquisition, cultural training, and subject area familiarization. In the same vein, the teachers would have more time to focus on nurturing in their students translation and writing skills that the students will use as professionals, rather than merely correcting and explaining the subtleties of idiom and usage in the students' B language.

Related to this issue is the nature of classroom assignments. Having all the students work on the same assignment often results in the students collaborating to produce their individual translations. Non-native speakers may have their work corrected by native speakers, terminology research becomes a shared endeavor, and background research is done in teams. While this situation is not inherently bad, it does limit how well faculty can judge individual student's ability and progress, not to mention creating problems in grading. So I suggest that at least some translation assignments be similar to real-world assignments: have the students work on a large document, with each student translating a portion of it. This way the students can still share the burdern of terminology and background research but at the same time can meet the challenge of crafting a good translation on their own.

Third is the faculty itself. Excellent faculty is vital in an academic undertaking like training translators. The faculty should be experienced translators themselves, having done work in the subject areas they plan to teach. Since continuity in training is an essential element for the successful education of translators, the faculty should make a long-term commitment to their institution and students, and conversely, the administration should do likewise for its faculty. There are too many stories of programs whose faculty changes in its entirety every year or two; the amount of time and effort involved in such a change-over hinders student learning, wastes limited resources in the translation program, and generally results in a reduction of quality in the program. Solutions to these problems lie in the administration of translation programs, a subject beyond the scope of this article. It is merely my hope that people involved with the administration of these programs will try to see the effects of their actions from the students' perspective.

Finally comes the issue of graduation testing. Many programs require students to pass a battery of graduation exams. This process seems a traditional element in many forms of training, and perhaps is intended to serve as a form of licensure or accreditation for alumni of the translation programs. I feel, however, that such exams are a poor use of time and resources. Rather than devoting weeks to preparing such exams, finding suitable material and testing sites, then implementing the exams, and evaluating the results, the students should instead spend their time in the classroom, undergoing nothing more than the routine testing that comprises a natural part of all formal education. I have already written about the

considerably difficulties associated with creating and carrying out accreditation exams in a separate article and am convinced that the same basic problems plague graduation exams. By the end of a year or two of academic training, faculty should know if the students are or are not ready to enter the profession and then advise the students accordingly. To deny a student a certificate or diploma based solely on his or her performance on one graduation exam seems unfair and counter-productive.

As an aside, some programs require translation students to do some form of project for graduation, perhaps a lengthy translation of material the student is interested in, research on terminology, the preparation of a glossary, or an investigation into an important issue in the profession. Such endeavors, if relevant to the students' overall studies, can enhance the students' understanding and preparation for a career in translation, not to mention adding to the available resources within the translation industry itself. So as long as such projects are integrated into the translation program as a whole and are amply supported by the faculty and administration, precisely defined in the curriculum, and recognized as a significant stage in the students' training, such graduation projects will have value and should continue.

Can We Do It?

The basic problem facing any translation training program is money. Training translators is very labor intensive and offers little in the way of economies of scale. In addition, implementing some or all of the ideas above would only increase costs. And since the translation profession does not offer particularly high income potential, tuition costs must be kept under control. We have, as a result, a not inconsiderable problem, one for which I have a few suggestions.

First and foremost, get the translation and localization industries involved. Many translation vendors and agencies seem to want some form of translation accreditation as a way to verify that a translator can actually translate. Graduation from a credible, viable training program would serve this purpose. So the industry ought to consider putting its money where its mouth is and contributing both in time and effort to the training of translators. This can be done in a number of ways.

One, provide technology. More and more translation vendors, localization firms in particular, want translators with very specific technical skills, such as facility with MT and MAT systems, familiarity with programming languages like Java and C++, skill with software like DTP packages and word-processors. Many of these organizations have such software and the hardware to run it, often they have left-over systems that no longer fill any need. These systems could be donated as an educational grant, contributed as some form of technology transfer, or even sold at very low cost to translation training programs.

Moreover, translation training programs would make outstanding beta test sites for localization and MT/MAT products. A clean beta of the next version of Trados or TM2 could be given a very extensive shake-down in a translation school, where students would both learn about the systems and help improve them. This would not only provide the students with training on the forthcoming systems, but would give the manufacturers of these products a pool of highly capable linguists and translators as testers. In addition, problems with interface design, the handling of terminology, and the integration of terminology, translation memory, version control, and so forth would also be addressed by precisely the people who

will be using the systems. Perhaps there is something about this idea that is not what it seems, but to me this appears to be a classic case of win-win.

Two, provide educational grants or other support, in the form of scholarships, internships, and even work-for-hire (that is, you work for us for 2 years after we pay for your education, or something like that). Internships have so much obvious value, and are a growing part of the relationship between industry and translation training programs that little need be said about them here. Scholarships, a form of corporate charity often discussed but infrequently implemented, represent a logical next step. And work-for-hire, or whatever you want to call it, is a time-honored tradition in many fields, so adding this option for the training of translators seems reasonable.

Second, there are the governments, federal and state, as well as various NGOs and other international organizations. If the United Nations, the WTO, IMF, along with the U.S. State Dept. and intelligence community, as well as various state governments want good translators, they should contribute to the process of creating them. Again, contributions here does not necessarily mean money. It can mean training materials (what better way for a translation training program to get good study material than to get it from the people who hire the graduates?); technology (as with industry, these organizations often have equipment they just don't want or need; it might as well go to good use rather than taking up space in landfills); and even people (why not have full-time translators at these organizations be available, at least occasionally, as advisors, consultants, or guest lecturers?). Again, the idea is to get all parties involved to cooperate for each other's benefit.

There are undoubtedly many other ways to create mutually-beneficial relationships between the programs that train translators and the businesses that employ them. The point here is that both sides stand to benefit from active cooperation with each other, and any idea that plays to so-called enlightened self-interest stands a greater probability of being implemented. So if you are a part of a company that hires or is looking to hire translators, consider contacting one of more of the translation programs in the U.S. and contributing to the training of translators. You will after all get what you pay for. And if you are involved in training translators, I hope you will solicit the active participation of local companies that hire translators.

Thinking About it

Training translators is not an academic endeavor and should not be compared to Ph.D. study in linguistics or literature. Instead, it is professional training, similar perhaps to training computer programmers or accountants. While there are many programs in the United States offering one form or another of such training, and this number is rising, there are enough disgruntled graduates of such programs and confused perspective students that a few words on how to choose the right program seems appropriate.

First, talk to the current students and recent graduates. See what they say about the program. Make certain you are not getting propaganda or the party line by talking to a few people. Read articles about the profession in general (this series might be useful in this regard) so that you can ask intelligent questions and understand the answers you are given. Also talk to potential employers, be they translation agencies and vendors, localization firms, or the government, to find out what kind of training you should have.

Second, talk to the faculty and administration. Do not be shy, coy, or cute. You are interviewing them, and the best way to avoid disappointment and frustration in the future is to ask the bold questions now. Query them about every aspect of the program: admissions requirements, graduation requirements, faculty backgrounds, continuity in the faculty, campus language resources, career placement resources, and statistics on what graduates are doing. Do not accept vague generalizations like "our faculty are very committed." You want specific numbers like "Professor X has taught here for three years after fifteen years in technical translation" and "All of last year's graduates are now employed, with an average starting salary of $36,500." If you don't want to make a mistake, you have to ask these kinds of questions and demand precise, specific, concrete answers.

Third, consider the structure and nature of the program. How long does it take? What kind of degree or certification do you receive at the end? Is that degree or certification respected in the industry? What classes will you take? Does the coursework reflect your interests while giving you the training you need to succeed in the translation industry? Coursework should ideally include some formal training in theory and terminology, practice translating documents into your native language in subject areas that the industry currently hires people to work in, practice using current MT/MAT technology and other software tools common in translation work, and at least one class on the practical side of being a translator, in other words a class that covers business and other professional issues.

Finally, weigh carefully the benefits of the program against the costs. Try to figure out if the program truly advances your career enough to justify the investment of time and money. A translation program prepares you to be a translator, and not a whole lot else. You should therefore be quite comfortable in your decision to enter the translation profession and rather convinced that the training program will accelerate your entry and progress. You can always wait an extra year to start if you are uncertain; you cannot get back your tuition or the time you spent in the program.

Final Remarks

This article is not meant to be a commentary on existing translation programs or any individual at any such program. Instead I hope it provides some insight into the issues surrounding the training of translators, particularly the classroom methodologies in use and what might be implemented in the future, as well as means to make such programs affordable and maximally beneficial to the students.

I hope this article is particularly useful to people involved in training translators and to individuals considering attending a training program. I would welcome comments, corrections, or suggestions from current students and graduates of the existing programs, from faculty and administration at such programs, and from employers who have hired graduates of such programs or have some formal relationship, whether through internships, technology transfers, or financial support, with such programs. Finally, I hope this article will spur interest in creating better training programs for translators and raising the overall level of translation quality in the industry.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

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So what can we all do to improve our industry and make it a more comfortable place for everyone to work in? If the preceding articles have been too vague or long, or if ferreting out such ideas is too cumbersome, I present here a list of ideas that translators, translation vendors, and others involved in the translation industry should consider. I hope that these ideas take root and welcome suggestions from readers for additions or alterations to this list. I also know that I can do little more than present this list. After all, you can lead a cat to water, but you can't make it drink (or do anything else, for that matter).

I Hope That Translators Will...

1. Submit their work on time. This remains the number one complaint of agencies and clients, and they have every right to be upset. Translation is not a "better late than never" profession. Get the work in on time and your clients will love you for it.

2. Create translations which are free from errors and omissions. There shall be no missing words, phrases, paragraphs or pages in translations this year. Terminology will either be correct or noted as uncertain. Words and phrases which are difficult to explain will be noted in a "Translator's Note" at the end of the document. Translators are rendering information from one language to another and know that this process has pitfalls and hurdles. The translator should tell the agency or client about these problems and let them decide what to do.

3. Take the time to educate clients about the issues involving translation, be they linguistic, cultural, social, or philosophical. The client should not be surprised when reading the translated text. The client should be informed, ahead of time, about what to expect and not to expect.

4. Service the client. Clients will be treated with respect and compassion. They shall be informed of all problems and issues involving the translation, by phone or in writing. Translators should express an interest in all parts of the process of translation, not just their own role.

5. Maintain a proper home office, complete with a real computer, current versions of word processing software and other business applications, a fax and modem, and a proper printer

which produces clean, clear, crisp, quality text and graphics. Translators complain about the lack of professional treatment in the industry; it's time they do their part and be professionals themselves.

6. Learn how to use word processing software and the modern conventions in desktop publishing. We all should be putting single spaces between words and sentences, using proper ASCII characters for accents and other symbols, using tabs, tables, columns, and margins correctly, and providing file formats our clients can read.

7. Learn the subtle art of telecommunications and modem transmissions. Agencies and clients complain regularly about translators who can't deliver work properly to their email accounts or FTP sites. Translators have to be able to deliver their work in a timely fashion. Having a good ISP or corporate Internet and giving translators reasonable access will go a long way to minimizing delivery delays.

8. Go on-line. Translators represent an integral facet of international communication and the emerging global village. They have to be able to talk to each other about what they do and how they do it. Letters are too slow, telephone calls and faxes too expensive. However, on-line, messages and files can be sent and received almost instantly, plus information on virtually any subject imaginable is available for the asking. Take advantage of the on-line universe.

9. Accept assignments for which they have the time and knowledge and turn down all others. Translators should not take jobs if they don't really have the time to do the work properly or if they lack the requisite background knowledge and experience and reference materials. Translators should refer jobs which they cannot accept to other translators whom they know to be competent and responsible professionals.

10. Abandon their individualistic and perhaps ivory-tower tendencies and recognize that they are part of a complex process and that they have thousands of colleagues around the world. Translators should talk to each other about clients, about technology, about terminology, in essence, about their profession. They should not think of other translators as competition, but as colleagues and brethren, as friends and co-workers, people to learn from and teach to, people to give and receive work from, and as people who are in the same situation. Only when translators start to think and act as a professional group with clearly defined goals and standards will the profession itself be accorded the respect and understanding it so requires.

I Hope That Translation Agencies and Vendors Will...

1. Pay translators within a reasonable amount of time. There is no reason why a translator should have to wait sixty or ninety days for payment. There is no reason why a translator should have to write letters and make phone calls in order to receive pay. Agencies should specify in their independent contractor's agreements how long payment will take and then make payment within that time.

2. Maintain a presence on the Web. This includes not only an email account or FTP site that translators can use to send and receive translations, but also a virtual space where translators can go to get information such as style sheets, company policies for translators, and other

pertinent information for translation projects, such as glossaries, translation memories, or sample documents to use for reference.

3. Have people in-house who understand the languages they deal with. I don't want to ask someone at an agency about a text and then be told that they don't know because no one there reads the language it's in. If an agency is going to do high volume work with a language, they should have at least one person who can read, write, and speak that language. The problems this will solve, the time it will save, and the frustration it will eliminate will more than justify the cost of hiring such a person.

4. Use a standardized independent contractor's agreement. Every time I work for a new agency, I have to sign a new agreement, after reading and studying it and then deciding if I think it's fair. We're all dealing with the same problems and issues in the industry; let's use the same agreement.

5. Use a standardized independent contractor's information sheet. Every time I submit material to a new agency, I have to fill out pages of forms. Wouldn't it be nice if there were one form which everyone used, and then you could just keep copies around your office and send it off as necessary? I think it would be great. After all, the agencies are all after the same information, so why not use the same information sheet? And we could even have this form in HTML format, further streamlining the process of gathering and organizing information on translators.

6. Send detailed information to the translator about the job and how it should be done. Make a style sheet which specifies how to handle such matters as charts, graphs, page numbers, fonts, margins, and so on. This will not only make the translator's job easier, but will cut down on the time the agency spends answering the phone and explaining such details to the translator.

7. Provide clean, legible, readable copies of the material to be translated along with all other related material. A fax of a photocopy of a fax is not readable, no matter how good a translator might be at decoding information. Moreover, translators are hired to render information and ideas from one language to another, not to decode bad printing or writing.

8. Hire at least one person who is (or was) a professional translator. Working with an agency which considers the translation industry to be just another business is frustrating. The agency should understand the profession and the people in it. The only sure way to do this is have staff who have been professional translators.

9. Define a schedule and then stick to it. No one appreciates being told that a project will start on a particular day and then finding out it has been delayed by a week or two, or even a month. No one appreciates starting a job and then getting told that the deadline has been moved up and the job must be done in three days instead of four. Translators already work under extreme time constraints; the agencies and clients should at least stick to the original terms for the job.

10. Recognize the valuable and vital service that translators provide. Agencies and clients should not be concerned with what title to use for a translator or how to define their role in linguistic or corporate terms. They should be concerned with providing the in-house

translator with a proper work environment, including computer hardware and software, dictionaries and reference materials, and understanding and cooperation. They should provide the free-lance translator with fair market price for the work, clear instructions concerning the material, and readable copies of all documents.

I Hope That Someone Will...

1. Start an organization which would not only inform and educate the general public about translation, translators, and agencies, but would also provide information about the current state of affairs in the profession, give advice and council to translators, agencies, and consumers of translations, create just and proper policies, guidelines, and standards for the profession, and develop a set of standards and a system for accrediting translators.

2. Create a solid, stable, and functional translation and glossary management software package for Windows, UNIX, and Macintosh systems. The software would keep track of past documents and identify what you've translated before, help build glossaries and terminology lists, actively assist in the translation of material like lists and tables, and exchange data with the same software on other computers, be they on a network or completely separate, as well as with other software on any of the current computer platforms. A Java-based application with support for file translations for standard database formats (dbf, sylk, and so forth) as well as the proprietary formats for Trados, TM2, and Catalyst, among others, would be ideal.

3. Develop a library of current and complete language reference materials. Translators, along with everyone else working with languages rely on the existence of accurate and up-to-date materials to do research and create quality materials. Translators themselves often have to develop their own glossaries and terminology lists. Someone should tap into this vast pool of language resources and create the materials which we all require.

4. Convince the federal government and state governments that while regulation and accreditation of translators might not be a bad idea in theory, the likely result in practice of creating regulations without proper understanding of the professions and input from professionals in all aspects of the industry will be mere chaos and confusion, coupled with a lack of capable and competent translators. Translators should police themselves, avoiding the problems of government-imposed regulation.

5. Perform the academic research necessary to provide a strong theoretical base for the translation profession. Few translators have any idea of what they are doing in terms of linguistics or language. Moreover, few theoreticians (be they linguists, psychologists, or sociologists) can agree on what translation is, how it is done, or what purpose it should serve. Such fundamental definitions would help translators get the professional respect they desire, help agencies and clients understand the process of translation and its value, and help government regulators create reasonable guidelines and standards.

I Hope That Everyone Will...

1. Stop confusing translators and interpreters. Translators deal with the written language. Interpreters deal with the spoken language. A translators cannot necessarily interpret and an interpreter cannot necessarily translate. Moreover, there is no such thing as 'simultaneous

translation' or 'written interpretation'.

2. Stop complaining about translation and translators or using them as scape goats. Translation is a multifaceted process involving many people, not just the translator. Moreover, many of the problems people complain about in a translated text cannot be solved without giving the translator permission to rewrite the material in its entirety. Translation is more than just swapping words or converting a phrase from one language to another. And while I certainly don't want to exonerate all translators for every error ever made, let's consider the big picture before dumping on the translator.

3. See the value and relevance of translation. Translation is about communication. In the modern world, often called the 'global village' or 'international community', communication of information and ideas between different languages and cultures is critical for peace, for the development of economies and technology, and for the growth of nations and regions. Translators are a small, but vital part of this process. They facilitate communication between people who want and often must communicate. Their role in this process must be better understood and more greatly appreciated.

All that said, I hope that these suggestions resonate with other translators and motivate would-be translators to consider carefully who they practice their profession and make what improvements they can.

THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

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If after reading these articles you have decided that translation is not for you, or if after translating professionally for a while or longer you have decided that translation is no longer for you, I'll try to offer a few suggestions, some obvious and simple, others perhaps less obvious and more complicated, for other careers. Learning another language is a wonderful undertaking, and being able to use it for your career is a wonderful outcome of all that effort. But sometimes a professional pursuit must become a hobby, and so my suggestions will include ideas that have little directly to do with foreign language proficiency. At the same time, as someone who loves languages, I'll bear in mind the attitude and commitment translators have made to their languages.

Interpretation

Many translators I know long to interpret; some even became translators as a way to cultivate their language skills ultimately to be able to interpret. Despite the obvious relationship between translation and interpretation, the two are distinct vocations, each with its own skill set and preferred personality.

Interpretation is subdivided into consecutive interpretation and simultaneous interpretation. The former involves listening to a speaker while taking notes on the content of the speech, then when the speaker chooses, to render that speech into the target language. The speaker may speak for a few minutes or upwards of a half hour. Also, consecutive interpreters are usually expected to interpret into and out of their native language.

Simultaneous interpretation by contrast is typically done in a booth. The interpreter listens to the speaker using a set of headphones, then instantly renders the speech into the target language, almost always the interpreter's native language. In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter is rarely more than a few seconds to a minute behind the speaker, and though the quality and accuracy of the interpretation are not nearly as high as they are in consecutive interpretation, the speed and intensity are much higher.

Interpreters are different from translators. They need to be extremely fast with their languages, capable of making snap decisions even when not at all certain about what a

speaker is saying. They must be poised and composed, even when working with angry officials or attorneys, business tycoons, or heads of state, have excellent spoken languages skills, including the ability to listen very accurately under less than ideal ambient noise conditions, and good oral presentation and public speaking skills in all of their languages. Travel is a frequent part of interpretation work, with some assignments, such as escort work with the U.S. State Department, lasting upward of three weeks.

I strongly recommend that anyone interested in interpretation take the time to talk to working interpreters and look carefully at getting some professional training. Both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation require the development of a very precise set of skills, neither of which could easily be obtained on the job.

Project Management

As any freelance translator knows, translation agencies use project managers to coordinate translation projects. And as any freelance translator who has been in the field for a while knows, a good project manager is worth her or his weight in gold.

Project management is a very intense, fast-paced, challenging line of work which is becoming more and more diverse as the years go by. Many localization firms now have project managers who oversee the localization process, coordinate document translation with translation agencies or translators themselves, interface between engineering, sales and marketing staff, and manufacturers to prepare a product for release. Project management definitely requires language sensitivity and good communications skills but not necessarily strong translation skills. You do need to be capable of patience and perseverance, as well as creative problem-solving and multitasking.

If this area interests you, I suggest you talk to some project managers at firms that hire such people (try translation agencies, large software and localization firms, to start with). See if the work appeals to you. Don't worry too much about the technical side of the job; many firms are willing to train otherwise capable candidates in that area. And if you do get into project management, perhaps you'll be in charge of a project I translate for.

Terminologist

Most translators have spent at least a little time doing terminology research, have created a glossary list or two, and may have even build a terminology database in an application like Microsoft Access or used an MAT system like Trados. This is a large part of what a terminologist does every day, but such people also create and verify the definitions that translators and other writers work with.

In other words, to be a good terminologist you either have to be an excellent linguist or educated and experienced in the field you are created terms for. Ideally, you should be both, and terminology positions at places like the United Nations require just that. Many localization firms, however, are happy to get one, and will train you for the other if you are an otherwise suitable candidate.

Should such work appeal to you, contact large translation and localization firms, or

companies that you know are routinely doing a lot of translation work, to see what is available. Also be prepared to use Trados, database systems, and other linguistics tools, as well as having a sound knowledge of your languages and of terminology creation.

Language Teaching

Many translators have already taught one of more languages, perhaps during the process of acquiring their second language. It is a natural thing to do, as translators usually have a well-developed ability to explain their languages and considerable classroom experience studying their B languages.

Teaching as a career requires more than just a commitment to language, however. It requires a commitment to students and to education. Most translators do not have the formal academic training or teaching credentials necessary to turn teaching into a career and would therefore need to go back to school for certification.

If you want to teach at the university level, then you will probably need an advanced degree either in your language or in teaching. If you want to teach and to translate literature, then a doctorate in your language and its literature is an essential first step. Do take the time to talk to the kinds of places you would want to teach at as a way to find out what credentials or training you would need, and to verify that the move into teaching is for you.

Linguistics

There is clearly a connection between translation and linguistics, insofar as translators tend to have strong analytical skills for their languages, and at least some translators have excellent critical thinking skills. The linguistics field is diverse, including such areas as computational linguistics, historical linguistics, phonology, morphology, Indo-European studies, and so forth.

Of course entering this field requires a Ph.D. in linguistics, and given that demand for linguistics, with the possible exception of those specializing in computational linguistics, is low (at least in the United States), one should not enter this field lightly. Also keep in mind that a person with a doctorate in linguistics has limited career options, pretty much university-level academia or nothing. Industry at present only seems interested in linguists with computer science skills, that is to say computational linguistics, though there are some positions for linguists from time to time for tasks such as product naming or branding, or language resource management.

The usual research into good graduate programs, including those at schools like Cornell and MIT, should be done thoroughly. Also, for those who are interested in this field but hesitant due to the lack of faculty positions, consider related fields such as cognitive science, psychology (particularly psycholinguistic research), or even philosophy of language. Research in areas such as machine translation, language acquisition, and natural language processing continues apace, and there should continue to be openings.

Cross-Cultural Training

So much of translation involves cross-cultural issues, and so much of the background and experiences that translators tend to have are directly related to cross-cultural matters, that this field seems natural for translators to move into. Be aware, however, that much of what passes for cross-cultural training has more to do with equipping business executives with the daily know-how to survive in another country.

You will need to know how to handle the minutiae of life for an American abroad: setting up bank accounts, establishing phone and utility service, or registering as a resident alien with a local office. You may also have to teach people who to handle high-level business negotiations, what to do in emergencies, or where to take clients when entertaining becomes a part of business. If you have had all of these experiences yourself and are a good teacher interested in cross-cultural issues, you are ready to enter this field.

The only glitch remaining is that this field is not quite a field, per se. Rather, cross-cultural training is often offered as a part of language training, or at least by the same places that offer language training. You may not even be able to find a full-time position, and that assumes your languages and cultures are in demand. So move slowly if you want to enter this field and take the time to talk to people who are involved in it.

Diplomatic Work

Translators frequently are well-suited for work with the diplomatic arm of their governments. For security reasons you would almost certainly have to work for the government where you were born and raised, and at least with the U.S. Foreign Service, you would to pass the Foreign Service Officer's Exam, a series of interviews, security clearance, and then would as likely as not end up in a nation whose culture and language you are wholly unacquainted with.

If however the challenge of new languages and cultures appeals to you, and you are intrigued by diplomatic and government work in general, this is a possibility well worth exploring. The work, I'm told, is rarely glamorous or vital to national interests or international stability, but it does have its small rewards, plus the occasional large one when you get the chance to meet with important dignitaries or government officials, to work on projects you personally believe in, or to become involved in the decision-making processes that can truly have a positive impact on a region.

Intelligence Work

Translators are also well-suited for work in the intelligence branches of their governments, both military and civilian. In the U.S., the CIA, FBI, NSA, DIA, each branch of the military, and other groups are in constant need of American citizens with excellent foreign language skills, strong written and oral presentation skills, and critical thinking and analytical skills. I know a few translators who have found happy homes in this kind of work, translating and evaluating reports, documents, and so forth in the B languages and preparing analyses based on such material in English.

Some readers may protest that such organizations behave immorally or unethically. While much of what these organizations do does seem to be in that gray area of the law and life,

they don't seem to spend much more time there than most corporations do. And there is the possibility of doing work that virtually anyone would find morally acceptable, such as participating in putting together reports on the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, on the flooding in Mozambique, or on environmental catastrophes in South East Asia or South America. So investigate closely before you dismiss this possibility; it may surprise you as to the rewards that can come in such work.

Technical Writing

Technical writing is the process of preparing documentation, usually computer hardware and software manuals, for mass consumption. Technical writers combine strong writing skills, superior understanding of technology, and good DTP knowledge to produce everything from a word processor's manual, printed or electronic, the help page on a Web site, or for that matter your automobile's owner's guide.

Obviously the skills of technical writing and translation overlap, though in the United States this would, with rare exceptions, only apply to native English speakers. I know quite a few translators who have left translation to work in technical writing, and I myself have done some freelance technical writing work. It pays reasonably well, the work, once you are established, can be quite steady and challenging, and there is, for some people at least, a certain greater sense of freedom in creating a manual than in translating one, as well as more job satisfaction.

If you are interested in this possibility, I suggest you read one of the many good books on the subject, talk to some local technical writers in your area (there is probably a local writers' organization that can help you find them), and sound out some potential clients so you can test the waters. You might even be able to split your working life between technical writing and translation; some clients might even like that combination. Check first, of course, then move ahead as the situation warrants.

Other Forms of Writing

Rather than go through all the other types of professional writing, including copywriting, editing, proof-reading, journalism, and commercial writing, to name some of the categories, let me just say here that if as a translator you are in fact a good writer (and I mean good, as in your clients compliment you on your style, punctuation, word choice, and even prefer you to other translators simply because you "make it sound good"), then there are numerous possibilities for you.

Translation is a form of writing, albeit one that few people realize exists let alone consider to involve writing skills. There is no reason, in principle, that a translator can't become a screenwriter, journalist, or copywriter, as long as the translator gets the right training, if needed, and makes the right professional moves. If any of these areas interest you, start by contacting the National Writers' Union (they know all about all this stuff), and then follow their suggestions to find more information and become more acquainted with these fields.

DTP/Page Layout

Translators frequently develop strong DTP skills as a part of their work. This seems to happen more often to in-house translators as translation vendors try to combine the translation and layout processes into one flow, but nevertheless some freelancers, myself included, do own and use DTP applications and scanners.

DTP is an art and a science. Learning the basics of a DTP application is not much harder than learning a word processor well, but using a DTP application effectively to create stunning layouts, such as are seen in design magazines, requires a lot of practice and a certain artistic flair. Most of the DTP world doesn't require such skill though (witness the layout of the average magazine or computer manual), but nonetheless these publications, along with virtually everything else, involves some form of DTP. As with technical writing, some translators combine translation with DTP work in their freelance business. And some do move into DTP, though not without getting some classroom training or hands-on experience first.

Web Work

This possibility has to be mentioned only because the Web is rapidly touching every aspect of life, and often in more than one language. The ability to work with HTML, JavaScript, and other Web technologies in more than one language is fast becoming valuable in some sectors, particularly in large-scale e-commerce and content-rich media sites. Someone is translating and preparing all that material, and someone is overseeing that process.

Translators with Web translation experience can move into this area with relative ease. I know a few who have done so, and I'm sure many more will. There are even some futurists in the translation profession who believe that virtually all translations will eventually be done through a Web-based real-time model, though that remains to be seen. In any event, if you have the skills, you should be able to find a home in this diverse field.

"International" Work

This category is the catch-all area for everything from international law to international business or finance. Any time a company is involved in business in more than one country, a translator with the right education and experience becomes very valuable. Few translators seem interested in these possibilities though, perhaps because they are so often far removed from translation itself, or even language in general, for that matter.

Also, these areas require the greatest amount of schooling to enter. If you want to go into international law, first you need a law degree. If you want to become involved in international business, you may need an M.B.A. or a Master's in Finance. And so it goes.

Stand-up Comedian

I put this here as a final suggestion in deference to my students. The suggestion has been made each of the past few years when I bring up the topic of what else a person with formal translation training can do for a career. Though I am not certain stand-up comedy constitutes a career, and I wonder how humorous the translation profession would be to outsiders, perhaps I am missing something and someone among the readers of this article will be

inspired by this thought.

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THE LANGUAGE REALM

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RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

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In case you haven't the time or inclination to read through all of the articles, or did and now find yourself stumped as to where you saw some particular idea or suggestion, or perhaps have a specific question that was not addressed in detail in the text of the article series, I have assembled here some common questions and answers, many inspired by students in my course at the Monterey Institute of International Studies on the translation profession, others from correspondence with professional translators and new entrants to our industry. I hope your own questions are answered in this article, but if not, please contact me and I will do my best to provide you with an answer. And if your question turns out to have general applicability, it will appear in a future version of this article.

General Business Questions

Q: How many hours per week do you work? How much vacation can you take?

A: I work roughly 30 hours per week, though that includes not just translation but also all the other business matters I have to attend to, plus study of my languages and the subjects I work in. I take about three weeks of vacation per year, including national holidays. Typically I take a week or so off in the summer and a week around New Year's, plus various days here and there that I use to create long weekends.

Q; How much money can one make as a translator?

A: The minimum is $0.00, or rather less than that, as it is possible to spend more than you earn, and therefore have net loss for a given year. On average, a starting freelance translator should expect to make less than $25,000 in the first year, though some people do manage to make more, and some less. An established freelance translator makes roughly $40,000 to $45,000 per year, from what I've heard, and some do make over $55,000. These averages, derived from a lot of hearsay and anecdotal evidence, are merely guidelines, and will vary considerably depending on your native language, work into foreign languages pays more than work into English does in the United States in general, as well as on your subject specializations. Also, what you earn ultimately depends on your rates and how many words you can translate per day, so learn to negotiate and to translate faster.

Q: What are average market rates at present in the United States?

A: Check [Aquarius](#) for a detailed survey of current rates in the United States for various language combinations. A global average might be something in the neighborhood of $0.11 per word, though this is a rough estimate that includes both into- and out-of-English translation in all subject areas. Obviously, a translator working from English into Japanese doing highly technical work and providing DTP and other ancillary services for direct clients can earn a great deal more per word. On the other end, a translator working from Spanish into English on material for the U.S. government would be paid a lot less.

Q: I hear stories of translators making $125,000 or more per year. What's the deal?

A: First, people tend to lie about two things in life: money and sex. They usually claim to have or get more of it than they really do. That said, I suggest you adjust any claims you hear downward by 10% or so, then consider the difference between gross and net income. For a technical translator working from English to languages like German, Chinese, or Japanese for direct clients, providing editing, proofreading, DTP, and printing services, the gross income for a given year could well exceed $125,000. After expenses though, particularly associated with hiring people to do the editing, proofreading, etc., chances are this person would be making around $80,000. To put this another way, I have only heard one credible claim of a person making over $100,000 per year, and that translator made clear the fact that he did nothing but translate for 365 days straight, in technical areas of defense technology from English to Russian. So yes, in principle, such income is possible, but in practice, you shouldn't expect it.

Q: What can I do if I want to earn more?

A: Translate more words or charge more per word. The former depends on your translation speed and skill, whereas the latter depends on your clients and your business savvy.

Q: I have so much work that I am thinking of starting a translation agency. Any advice?

A: Congratulations. I am thrilled to receive such a question. The only suggestion I can offer you is that I am available to do translation work… but seriously, I suggest you consult with any and all community services for people starting a business, as well as checking with an attorney to make sure you comply with all applicable laws, and so forth. In other words, move steadily and carefully through the process of going from a sole-proprietorship to a corporate entity with employees and contractors.

Preparation for the Field

Q: How do I know when my language skills are good enough to translate?

A: The short answer is: your skills are good enough to translate when you can actually translate. In other words, try to translate something, for instance a copy of a financial report, a software guide, a research article in a scientific publication, a legal brief. If you can work through the material at a rate of a couple thousand words of translated text within one day and without making any significant errors, you are probably ready to translate. Of course you may

need to have a professional check your work to make certain that your success is real.

Q; What can I read to be better informed about the translation industry?

A: There are a few publications that I strongly recommend you refer to regularly. They are print publications like "Language International", "Multiling", and web publications like Accurapid's "Translation Journal". In addition, the ATA Chronicle, as well as publications from regional and chapter organizations like the NCTA are worthwhile from time to time. Beyond these, you should be reading magazines, journals, and books related to the subjects you translate in, as well as keeping abreast of your languages through whatever means are available to you.

Q: Are there any textbooks on translation?

A: The question really is: Are there any textbooks on translation for your language combination and subject areas? The answer thus depends on which languages you know and what subjects you want to translate in. The short answer is no, if only because there are so few textbooks available, and most are of limited value, that you should assume none exist unless you hear otherwise. Posting a message on sci.lang.translation on Usenet should get you an answer particular to your needs.

Q: What about books to learn more about my subject areas?

A: Textbooks are appropriate. Buy recent editions of college- and even graduate-level textbooks for the subjects you plan on translating. If you plan to do financial translation, get books on accounting, managerial finance, tax law, and so forth. Then study the books as though you had to prepare to understand questions and even answer some, if not all, of them, and evaluate the language in the books with an eye toward translation. In other words, find and learn words you do not already know, terminology you are unacquainted with, and particular phrases or idioms unique to that subject area. It will be easier to do this study in your native language of course, though there is considerable value to working through such books in all of your languages.

Q: What about software to study or practice my languages?

A: There are any number of good software packages for studying and learning languages, though most of them will not take you much beyond the level of an advanced college student. A translator needs to be far, far beyond that level, so the software might be a good way to review basics, keep up aural comprehension skills, and maybe study terminology (if the package in question includes a vocabulary module that you can add words to), it will not provide much in the way of practice for professional translation.

Q: How do I find good dictionaries?

A: I wish I knew. Most translators, particularly those working in technical fields, struggle with this problem. Years can pass before new terms in computers, finance, or what have you appear in print, so translators often rely on parallel reading to find good translations for new terms (parallel reading is the processing of reading two versions of one text), sharing their

own term lists via the Web, and checking with clients and experts in the subject fields they work in. Good dictionaries do come along though, and they cause enough of a stir among translators that posting a message on Usenet in sci.lang.translation should provide plenty of ideas.

Business Practice

Q: My clients keep making unreasonable demands. How can I stop them?

A: Tell them to stop. Explain in simple, succinct terms what your limits are, then ask them to respect those limits, if only because you will provide them with higher quality work as a result. If they refuse to honor those requests, consider finding new clients.

Q: I am going to be late with a translation–

A: Stop right there. You should never submit any translation late. If you know you can't finish an assignment on time, tell the client as soon as possible, preferably when you first receive the document. Service your client either by suggesting a new delivery schedule, perhaps with incremental deliveries, or by finding another translator to team up with to finish the assignment on time. Clients that receive work on time are happy clients, and happy clients give you more work.

Q: I don't like deadlines…

A: Then don't be a translator.

Q: My clients keep abandoning me. How can I keep them?

A: Do quality work at a fair price, submitting completed translations on time, and your clients will come back. Anything less and you run the risk of losing clients. Also, be sure that your clients really are abandoning you. Translation is a feast or famine industry; just because you don't hear from a client for a while doesn't mean you've been abandoned. They may just not have any work for you that week or month. Be patient, and have lots of clients.

Q: How many clients should I have?

A: As many as afford you a good living, is the short answer. I suggest you follow the 80-20 rule, that is 80% of your work should come from 20% of your clients. This means you should have a few principle clients, three or four translation agencies and vendors, who keep you busy with a regular supply of work, and then another ten to twenty clients who come to you from time to time with smaller jobs. Also, keep track of your clients; no business relationship lasts forever, and you never know when one of your major clients may suddenly have little need for you. Always be on the lookout for a new major client, in other words, and for signs that a current major client is providing less work.

Q: How can I get rid of a bad client?

A: There are two approaches. One: Charge the client enough that whatever makes them "bad"

becomes worth your time and effort. If they persist in using you, at least you'll feel better about working with them. Two: Tell the client you are too busy to accept work. Once you do this a few times, most clients will stop calling. Between these two strategies, you'll manage to get rid of all undesirable clients. This problem, by the way, doesn't seem to happen very often.

Q: How long should I wait for payment?

A: When you accept a job, you should confirm with the client how long their pay cycle is. Add a few days to whatever you are told to allow for weekends, holidays, slow mail, and check-writer's cramp, and if payment doesn't arrive by that time, then politely inquire about your payment.

Q: What if I do everything you suggested in your articles and still have not been paid?

A: If you have truly done everything, then you have been to court with a lawsuit for breech of contract and somehow managed to lose. Under those conditions, there is nothing I can suggest. If however you have merely been patient and sent some reminder letters or faxes, then you have to increase the pressure by threatening to take legal action, to involve the [Better Business Bureau](#) and local or national translation organizations, and to broadcast to all other translators the specifics of the client's behavior. This threat, which I've used only once in seven years, almost invariably results in prompt, courteous payment. If the threat does not result in payment, then follow through with the threat. You may still not get paid, that is for the courts to decide, but you will make a clear statement to the translation vendor.

Q: My client is deducting 10% from my invoiced amount, claiming I did a bad job. What do I do?

A: Did you do a good job? Did you request specifics about their claims? Did they back up the claim with an independent review? If you really did a bad job, accept the deduction gracefully, offer to make any changes or improvements for free, and hope you didn't just lose a client. If however you feel the client is being unreasonable in their assessment of your work, or worse even, perhaps trying to squeeze you to increase their profit margin, then you must prepare to fight. Demand firmly but politely to see detailed documentation of their claim, preferably reviewed by a third party. If they do not respond immediately, treat the situation like any other invoice in default. Issue the threats and see what happens. By the way, for newcomers to the profession, this happens very, very rarely. For reasons explained in the article on ethics, translation agencies and vendors cannot afford to play these kinds of games.

Q: My client went out of business and I lost $16,000 in invoices. Can I do anything about it?

A: You what!?!? How could you possibly do that?! Never, never leave that much money outstanding. Invoice incrementally for all large projects, demand prompt payment, hold the rest of the project hostage if payment is not forthcoming, and if the client seems to be floundering, bail. Rats abandon sinking ships; no reason to stay around yourself. Okay, all that said, if the client really has gone into Chapter 11, then you have to join the line of creditors, usually a long one, and hope that as the company restructures or is sold off, some money comes your way. In other words, you should simply never get yourself into a situation like this in the first place.

Taxes and Finances

Q: Do I have to pay taxes?

A: Yes. Translators, like all self-employed people, are required to file annual tax returns to the IRS, plus to any state or local agency where they live, if necessary. In addition, the IRS and state tax agencies expect a quarterly tax payment which represents an estimate of what you owe for that quarter. Called Estimated Tax Payments, these payments are due by April 15 for the quarter starting January 1 and ending March 31; by June 15 for the quarter starting April 1 and ending May 31; September 15 for the quarter starting June 1 and ending August 31; and January 15 for the quarter starting September 1 and ending December 31. There is a penalty for underpayment (including no payment) of estimated taxes, though if your estimates are close the penalty is minimal.

Q: Should I use an accountant or professional tax preparer?

A: You should do your taxes on your own at least once in your professional life, preferably using tax preparation software. This will help you understand the taxation process so that you can either plan and prepare your taxes more accurately on your own or work more efficiently with a professional in the future. Eventually your taxes may become sufficiently complicated that a professional is justified. To date I have not used one, though I know plenty of translators who do.

Q: Does the tax software really work?

A: Yes, it does. I have been using tax preparation software since 1993 and spend only about two hours per year doing my federal and state taxes. You of course have to keep accurate, efficient records throughout the year in order to have the tax preparation process go that smoothly, but you should have such records anyway, as a part of your business.

Q: How can I figure out what I owe?

A: Until you have all the numbers for the entire tax year, you can't figure out your tax burden precisely. You can however use the Tax Estimator on the Quicken web site to get a rough estimate of your federal tax burden.

Q: What if a client doesn't send a 1099-MISC form? Say, for instance, they go out of business…

A: Employers that work with independent contractors are required by law to send out a 1099-MISC form by the end of February of the year after the tax year for all amounts in excess of $650.00. Note that the exact time and amount for a 1099-MISC form varies from year to year; consult with IRS forms and reference material for details. In any event, if you don't have a 1099-MISC form from an employer that owes you one, first contact the employer and see if that can get you one. If you can't find the employer, for instance, if the employer has gone out of business, contact the IRS. You will be given a 1099-MISC form to create for yourself, and you will have to supply evidence to justify the amount you place on it. Evidence

includes check stubs and invoicing records. That will suffice for the IRS, which after you submit this mock 1099-MISC form will provide you with a confirmation letter some weeks later.

Q: Do I pay U.S. taxes on money I earn from translation vendors and clients in other countries?

A: Yes, unless there is a tax treaty to the contrary. Consult with a tax advisor or the IRS for details on how to report such income and if there are any special considerations.

Q: Are translators ever audited?

A: Yes they are. I know some who have been audited regularly and others who have been translating as freelancers for over 10 years without a single audit. Prepare your return neatly, accurately, and honestly, and your odds of an audit plummet. Also, an audit is not tantamount to the end of the world. If you have been honest and have all your paperwork, the process is a minor annoyance. If not, then you are in trouble and I can't help you.

Legal Issues

Q: Are translators ever sued?

A: I have heard about translators being threatened to be sued, but I personally know of no instance of a company actually suing a translator. Readers who know otherwise might do me the favor of filling me in on the details. Based on what I have heard from attorneys, employment experts, and translation agencies, suing a translator just isn't worth the time and money.

Q: Should translators have professional liability insurance?

A: This doesn't seem useful at this point. The insurance itself is unlikely to cover you when you need it, and the fact you have coverage could make you more attractive target for a lawsuit. An effective policy to have with clients is that you will provide "good-faith, best effort" translations. Then as long as you do so, you shouldn't need liability insurance.

Q: Should I incorporate?

A: Perhaps. It depends on how you want to function as a business entity. For most freelance translators, incorporating is probably not worth the time and money required. For some though, it may well be. Consult with an attorney, or read through some books on small-business management to get more ideas as to whether or not you should incorporate. I suspect you'll never have to, and I strongly urge you to work in the translation industry for a year or two before you do it, but ultimately it may be justified.

Equipment

Q: What software should I own?

A: A current version of Microsoft Office, including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel, is

absolutely required. You should also have Internet software, including software to handle FTP and point-to-point file transfers, compression and decompression of archived software, and file format conversions. In addition, an HTML editor is quite useful for working on Web translations, and some kind of terminology or glossary management software, perhaps a general database application, or perhaps a dedicated system, is useful. Finally, depending on your languages, MAT software like Trados or Translation Manager 2, among others, is useful if not vital.

Q: What about dictating translations? My wrists and hands hurt…

A: My wrists and hands hurt, too, from time to time. And I do use dictation software, both Dragon Systems' Naturally Speaking and IBM's ViaVoice (parts of these articles were dictated, by the way). I find the software efficient and accurate, up to a point. But owed in part to the complexity of the documents I work on and to some peculiarities in my English pronunciation, borne of knowing other languages, perhaps, using the dictation software is rather slow compared to typing, and often just not practical, due to formatting issues, proper nouns, such Japanese personal names), and mathematical expressions. Perhaps the next generation of the software will be more useful, but until then I suggest you learn various exercises to maintain strength and flexibility in your upper extremities, and avoid hobbies such as bongo-playing, wood carving, or leatherworking. If you are uncertain as to how such software works or what it might be like for a translator, see my Voice Input Review.

Q: My child stuffed a peanut butter sandwich into my floppy disk drive, and now I can't finish my translation…

A: Children and business computers do not mix. I have seen 12-year-olds take down fault-tolerant Cray Supercomputers, and I myself as a small child have managed to crash more than one mini-computer. If at all possible, keep your business system away from younger family members and household pets. If not possible, purchase and use a utility that lets you lock out people and effectively shut down the computer when you are not using it. And, of course, keep backups of all your work so that you lose the absolute minimum possible should anything go wrong.

Q: Should I get MAT software like Trados, Déjà-Vu, or IBM's TM2?

A: That depends on what languages you work with and what kind of material you are translating. In general, if you are working on documents that represent new versions of older material in Romance or Germanic languages, then MAT will probably be essential; your clients may even insist you have one or more MAT packages. By contrast, if you are translating original research from Japanese to English, MAT software will not be at all useful. For more ideas on this subject, see the section on MAT software in Article V: Translator's Home Office.

Accreditation and Professional Organizations

Q: Is the ATA exam worth taking?

A: Perhaps. Many translation vendors view the ATA exam with some skepticism, in part

because the exam is so brief and general as to provide only a minimal assessment of a translator's skills, and in part because the grading of the exam is highly subjective, and therefore some skilled, experienced translators do not pass, while less capable individuals pass. Also, the exam is expensive, requiring you to become an ATA member, then pay a fee to take the first tier or the exam, then another fee to take the second tier, and finally to keep your membership active if you want to claim accreditation. On the other hand, the ATA exam is a recognized credential, one of few available in the United States, and so for a new translator who has no academic training, certification, or any other evidence of translation ability, it is probably worthwhile.

Q: Are there other accreditation exams?

A: Yes. The U.S. State Department has exams for interpreters, which could be used to demonstrate translation ability because of the mistaken idea that those who can interpret can translate. The United Nations also offers exams, though the requirements for taking those exams preclude all but the most experienced translators from applying. There are schools in the country that offer various forms of academic training, with a degree or certification at the end of the process, and so are worth considering for some people.

Q: Is the ATA worth joining?

A: The answer depends on how you want to spend your money. The ATA, one could argue, does not offer much for its membership fees. On the one hand, many translators seem to feel that participating in the local chapter organizations gives them far more of what they need and choose not to join the ATA. There are plenty of translators, however, who enjoy and seem to benefit from their ATA membership. If you plan to take the ATA accreditation exam, you will have to join. If you are new to the profession, you might find better uses for your money, at least until you are more established.

Q: Can a translator succeed without joining any organizations?

A: Yes, absolutely. The ATA and various chapter organizations offer many services of varying degrees of utility, but none of it is indispensable.

Miscellaneous Issues

Q: Should I learn another language?

A: Sure, why not?

Q: Any in particular?

A: You already know how much effort learning a language is, so I suggest you pick one that inspires you. Don't try to predict the long-term translation market. Doing so appears harder than predicting the NASDAQ over the next twelve months or the weather over the next ten years.

Q: What if I disagree with you about something you wrote in this or the other articles?

A: By all means, tell me. If I am mistaken, or if the information can be improved, I'll make all necessary changes as soon as possible. If we have a difference of opinion, then we may have to agree to disagree, though I try to offer differing opinions where possible and appropriate in the articles.

Q: I sequenced the mammoth as you suggested in Article V. Now what? It¹s hungry, not to mention large and smelly.

A: I made no such suggestion, though if you went ahead and tried, then succeeded, my congratulations. And if you did, you are missing your calling by being a translator.

THE LANGUAGE REALM

HOME

ARTICLES

LIBRARY

RESOURCES

ABOUT ME

Contents **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10** **11** **12** **13** **14** **Afterword**

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Nothing comes from nothing, and in that spirit it is appropriate to recognize that these articles and the ideas contained in them benefited immeasurably from contributions from many people. I don't know how many people read the original series, but hundreds have contacted me over the years, offering plenty of suggestions and thoughts for me to consider. I hope this new series reflects the best of what was offered.

Of course all errors and omissions in these articles are my own fault; I have done my best to check and recheck the content of the articles. Please also be aware that these articles are offered on an as-is basis and should not replace professional advice or council where appropriate. In other words, please do not sue me if you take the ideas in these articles and find the results unappealing. Please do contact me if you are unclear as to any of the thoughts in the articles, and please take the time to check anything you are not certain of. Note also that all trademarks in the articles are hereby acknowledged.

I want to thank everyone who read the first series of articles, particularly those who took the time to contact me by mail, email, or telephone with ideas, opinions, and observations about content. I also have to thank the students in my course at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, "The Business of Translation", who challenged me to explain my thoughts on the translation industry and profession more clearly and succinctly, and opened my eyes to new issues and problems through their questions. All of you have added to the content of this new series.

Two people deserve special mention for having been such consistent sources of ideas and information for many years now. They are:

Amy Russell, former VP of the NCTA, Chinese translator and interpreter, whose ideas on the training of translators permeate the article on that subject, and whose freelance and in-house experiences provided valuable information for many articles.

Sachiyo Demizu, Terminologist at J.D. Edwards; her observations on how translators function in a corporate environment, the challenges of terminology and MAT systems, and technical and logistical issues in localization added considerably to many articles.

The following people have contributed each in his or her own way to my understanding of the

translation industry and how different people in different positions see it. They will undoubtedly see some of their ideas in the articles, and they should be recognized for their contributions. So I say thank you to Erin Berzins, Jennifer Cameron-Rulkowski, David Crankshaw, Pam Davis, David Eaddington, Melanie Gao, Nancy Hand, Kristin Brobst Hawson, Steven Hawson, David Holzer, Ryoko Inaba, Amy Kyle Kardel, Steve Lank, Meg Miller, Tré Pennington, Megumi Shibano, Stephanie Terrien, LeeAnn Trusela, Natasha Vinnichenko, and Dylan Westfeldt. There are undoubtedly some people I missed; please understand omission was unintentional.

Finally, I would like to thank you, the current reader, for persisting this far into the end of the article series. I welcome any and all comments and contact from you, and hope to see you out there in the translation profession.

Sincerely,

Roger Chriss
Spring, 2000