

# Please Discuss

## Corinne McKay



### “Hot” Specializations

#### Reader Isabelle Olesen asks:

1. *Whether you are a new translator or an experienced translator who needs a change in focus, what fields are worth looking into or pursuing training?*
2. *What fields have a high volume of work or a lack of translators?*
3. *In what fields are clients willing to pay premium rates?*

#### **Brandon Carney: Chief executive officer of Divergent Language Solutions, LLC**

Regarding specialization, I feel that there are far too many linguists who try to do it all. While I understand no one wants to tell a client “no,” knowing and being honest about your weaknesses is just as valuable as knowing the areas in which you excel.

My immediate answer to Isabelle’s question concerning worthy fields upon which to focus would be health care and law. Both of these verticals have a huge amount of work and present substantial

opportunity for a linguist who can produce a top quality product. The volume of work in these fields will only grow in the coming years while the number of qualified linguists will not track accordingly. It is simple supply and demand. If you are one of the few who produces top-notch work consistently in an environment where you are the exception, clients will beat a path to your doorway with the budget to pay the premium that comes along with it.

One of the challenges that we, as language services providers, face is educating our clients concerning the realities of the translation universe. They want the best, they want it overnight, and they want it cheap. We will often lose a job due to pricing issues only to find that the client received shoddy work and even worse service elsewhere. Although these situations are tough initially, they usually play in our favor over the long-term. After a bad experience, the client recognizes that translation involves more than just hitting a few buttons on a machine. It is a skill and an art form. Working in these two verticals, once the client sees the light, they are willing to pay

a premium for the quality product that they need, as are we.

#### **Grant Hamilton: President and founder of Anglocom**

No doubt there are technical fields where translators can make a great living, but something tells me these are the same fields where machine translation is making the greatest inroads. After all, a machine can learn specialized terminology.

Writing, however, is another matter. No machine can decide which words sound the best, which sentences should be shorter or longer, or which vocabulary choices have the ring of translation to them. They are incapable of taking the abstract thought of a Latin language and expressing it with the concrete friendliness of English.

If you have chosen translation because you love to write and you love language, why not sharpen your writing skills as you hone your bilingualism so that you can do stylistically challenging work?

This is the work that clients value. Their annual reports. Their corporate brochures. Their print, radio, and television ads. They will pay top dollar to get it right. If you can produce compelling copy consistently that preserves and conveys all of the flow and finesse of the source language, people will beat a path to your door. Better yet, you will spend your days doing interesting and often prestigious work.

My advice?

1. Attend specialized workshops for translators and writers.
2. Read voraciously and *attentively* in your target language, and focus on the kinds of texts you would like to translate.

## Information and Contacts

This column is designed to promote discussion of pertinent issues in our industry. Moderator Corinne McKay proposes a topic and asks industry experts to respond. The dialogue will then continue on ATA’s LinkedIn group ([www.atanet.org/linkedin.php](http://www.atanet.org/linkedin.php)). To propose a topic for a future edition of “Please Discuss,” e-mail [corinne@translatewrite.com](mailto:corinne@translatewrite.com).

**Corinne McKay**, an ATA-certified French>English translator specializing in international development and legal translation, currently serves on ATA’s Board of Directors. She is the author of *How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator*. Contact: [corinne@translatewrite.com](mailto:corinne@translatewrite.com).

3. Make sure you have a thorough understanding and are able to address style, grammar, and punctuation issues.
4. Observe closely how other successful translators deal with stylistically difficult work by examining their translations.
5. Have your own work critiqued by people you know and admire.
6. Before turning in completed work, ask yourself: Does this sound like something I could have written myself? (If it does not, maybe you still have some fine-tuning to do.)

Good luck!

**Thais Lips: Vice president of the Colorado Translators Association and an English↔Portuguese translator and interpreter specializing in legal, marketing, and social sciences**

A language in high demand requires very specialized translators.

For instance, around 250 million people speak Portuguese as their native language, which is higher than French, German, or Japanese. Yet, Lusophones often wonder why some people still consider their mother tongue a “minor” language or think that Portuguese is a dialect of Spanish!

In 2013, Brazil alone had a little over 200 million Portuguese speakers. According to the World Bank: “With a gross domestic product of US \$2,223 trillion in 2012, Brazil is the world’s seventh wealthiest economy. It is also the largest country in area and population in Latin America and the Caribbean.”<sup>1</sup> There is international trade expansion in Brazil, and, consequently, increasing translation possibilities.

Brazil has won five World Cup Championships, and will host the World Cup this coming June and July. From the Amazon up north to the Pampas down south, 12 capitals will hold soccer matches. In 2016, Rio de Janeiro will host the Olympics. This all means translation and interpreting jobs galore!

Linguists specializing in Portuguese confirm this growth in workload, as well as an increase in competition. Non-professionals try to take advantage of the momentum by offering translation services at lower rates, but this is where specialized translators stand out in the crowd.

Clients in Brazil demand qualified translators who are highly specialized in various fields, including contracts, marketing, finance, construction, sports, alternative energy, oil and mineral exploration, medical software applications, restaurant and catering menus, and Amazonian indigenous and environmental reports. Knowing the rich culture and subcultures that Brazil, with its continental proportions, has to offer is an extra asset translators can bring to the table. ■

**Notes**

1. “Brazil Overview” (The World Bank), [www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/brazil/overview).

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