MARYBETH TIMMERMANN WINS 2016–2017 ATA SCHOOL OUTREACH CONTEST
Reflecting on a Journey of Discovery

Living on an island in the Pacific Northwest, the nautical theme to these columns comes naturally. And this last one, which I’m writing on a ferry, is no different. When I reflect on my presidency at the helm, I think that it’s safe to say that ATA, the “mothership” as I describe it, is in good shape.

The obvious change has been to the Association’s financial bearings. By bringing the books into the black, we’re now able to lay the foundation for future programs and growth. Structural changes to both ATA’s Annual Conference and The ATA Chronicle played a large part in our recovery, and the Board is mindful to balance the need for financial solvency with the financial pressures of the membership.

Public relations is another area that’s running at full steam. The PR Committee’s Writers Group has been published in over 40 different trade publications to educate not just the general public but the business public—our ultimate customers—about who translators and interpreters are and what we do. We reached out in person to consumers through presentations at trade associations like the Society for Technical Communication, International Association of Business Communicators, American Chemical Society, and others. Through it all, we fielded calls from major media outlets such as NBC and Telemundo and reached the general public directly in their living rooms through our appearances on CNBC and PBS’ Nightly Business Report.

One of the key consumers of translation and interpreting services are government clients. Over the past two years ATA has taken solid steps to strengthen its position with the government through the establishment of a Government Relations Committee that monitors and responds to actions by local, state, and federal authorities. We also created a Government Division to bring government linguists at all levels onboard at ATA. We advocated on behalf of military and immigration interpreters both through the media, such as The New York Times, and to legislators directly. Government outreach reached a high point with Advocacy Day at this year’s Annual Conference, when some 50 ATA members met with legislators on Capitol Hill to voice their concerns.

By bringing the books into the black, we’re now able to lay the foundation for future programs and growth.

Interpreters and interpreting often play a key role in government services, and this sector of the industry and the Association is growing rapidly. ATA has responded by forging closer ties with interpreter groups, such as the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators and the National Interpreting Associations Coalition, which includes health care, legal, and sign language interpreting groups.

ATA also attempted to ensure greater parity between translators and interpreters within ATA by getting interpreter credentials displayed on ATA’s website. Expanding our umbrella to include all the players within the language industry makes us stronger when communicating with the government and the public.

Communication is at the heart of our industry and our Association. Over the past two years we’ve worked hard to improve communication with the general membership. We created ATAtalk, a listerv to discuss ATA policies and activities, published targeted Chronicle articles to explain issues and decisions that the Association faces, as well as expanded communication channels through social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and a new YouTube channel and the ATA

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Looking for Member News and Humor and Translation? These columns and more can now be found in the Chronicle-Online edition: www.atanet.org/chronicle-online!

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FEATURED FACEBOOK POST

American Translators Association
October 6
These moms couldn’t find bilingual children’s books, so they made some
“There was no books at that time that I felt really represented our Latino culture, our elements, our stories and celebrations.”
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TOP TWEETS

Canadian Grocery Chain
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Professional translators aren’t worried about Google’s language-translating headphones:
http://read.bi/2gjS0sg
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FROM THE PRESIDENT  Continued from page 2

Podcast. The “Halfway Report” podcast in July was downloaded 602 times!
In addition to the recently revamped Chronicle, another of ATA’s key communication channels is its website. When I first ran for election for the Board in 2008, I made improving ATA’s website a central part of my platform. Now it seems like the ship has come full circle, no pun intended, as the Board recently decided to create a new committee to explore further improvements and changes to the website. So, this seems like an appropriate time to disembark from the ship.

My time as ATA president has been a wonderful journey of discovery. I’m grateful for the dedicated energy of the Board members as we navigated a myriad of issues over the past two years, as well as the steady energy of the Headquarters staff who kept the ATA mothership moving forward. I want to extend particular thanks to incoming ATA President Corinne McKay, who was a great first mate during this journey. Her balance of enthusiasm and objectivity will serve the Association well as she takes over the helm. Finally, I want to thank all of you for allowing me to steer this dear ship for a while. Bon voyage!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Translation: An Intellectual Pursuit  Jesse Tomlinson

Jesse Tomlinson’s article, “Translation: An Intellectual Pursuit” (September-October), is succinct, thorough, and hits to the core. It sets the bar for the profession.

I’ve observed that a step often omitted in the process of translation is the translator first reading the source text in full to gain a complete understanding of what is being said. Again, this is not a word-by-word reading, but rather a conceptual understanding of the message. Only after that can he or she question words that either don’t fit or don’t add clarity to the message. This confusion, found more often in written English these days, is the first barrier for a translator. And yes, these unclarities are often subtle, which is where the intellect of the translator first comes in: when reviewing the source document.

There is an investment of the mind and the heart. This article highlights the value of such investment to those who need to have their documentation translated into other languages. Not as a sloppy and robotic exercise, but as two intellectual and cultural minds, one in the source and one in the target, creating a bridge to a smooth and polished translated text that appears as if it had been originally written in that language.

It takes heart because it takes caring. Caring to use our intellect and abilities to express well, research, and continually learn. These are all skills that fit in with our profession so well.

As Jesse said, the translator needs to be equally adept in both languages and cultures and to make up for anything lacking with research and learning. And of course, the linguistic team of editors and proofreaders is what brings in additional intellect, research, knowledge, and experience to make an integral result.

The human factor in general has been devaluing over many decades, and this is mirrored in the lack of value for good, human, intellectual translations. It’s unfortunately a sign of the times. Fortunately, there are still clients/organizations who value people, and the high level of communication that these people deserve when reading their source documents in translated form.

It’s up to each translator to hold the fort and ensure that while software tools are aids, the intellect applied and integrity for the work remains inviolable.

Mary Jo Smith-Obolensky  Glendale, California
Professional Development Your Way

Conferences, online courses, certificates, webinars...the list of professional development opportunities available to translators and interpreters today can feel overwhelming. ATA is here as your trusted source for professional development. We’ve made it a priority to increase our professional development offerings, in terms of both quantity and quality. Here are a few of the exciting new options we have on tap for 2018.

NEW: Regional Certification Training:
We are taking ATA’s popular and effective “Preparing for the Certification Exam” program on the road. Certification training has been a sellout seminar at the past couple of Advanced Seminar and Training Days at ATA Annual Conferences. In addition, the feedback from participants has been positive in that they feel better prepared for the exam. Some participants even remarked that the seminar showed them that they weren’t ready for the exam—they were able to postpone until a later exam date, thus saving time and money. If one of your 2018 goals is to take the certification exam, please mark your calendar for the next exam preparation workshop on Saturday, January 20, 2018. The morning session will be English into Spanish, given by Rudy Heller and Diego Mansilla. The afternoon session will be for all languages into English, given by Andy Klatt and Bruce Popp. All the presenters are long-time graders in the Certification Program. Seating is limited to give participants more focused attention. More information will be published in Newsbriefs and online.

Spanish Language Division Conference: Another local professional development opportunity for the coming year is the Spanish Language Division and the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Florida joining forces to offer “Spring into Action 2018,” March 16–18, 2018, in Miami. The program promises top-level learning experiences as well as great networking opportunities with live events. For more information, please see www.atifonline.org.

Webinars: ATA’s webinars continue to be a popular, cost effective way to bring professional development to you. In 2017, we offered 15 one-hour webinars that brought experts in the field to a wide audience, with attendees from around the world. The topics ranged from translation contracts to tools for interpreters to specialized medical terminology. If you can’t make the live webinar, you can still access the recordings of the sessions at your convenience. ATA’s webinar library now features over 75 titles (some of which are free). As for 2018, plans are for more intermediate and advanced level programming. For more information, please see www.atanet.org/webinars.

ATA58 Annual Conference Session Recordings: Audio recordings from select ATA58 Annual Conference sessions are now available. After not offering the recordings last year, we heard you. They are back. We are offering over 45 one-hour presentations that include handouts and the PowerPoint slides synched to the audio recordings. More information will be published in Newsbriefs and online.

ATA59 Annual Conference: Finally, rounding out the professional development opportunities is the world’s largest event for translators and interpreters, ATA’s Annual Conference. Each year we have over 175 sessions with thought leaders from around the globe sharing their knowledge and experience. Mark your calendar for ATA59 in New Orleans, October 24–27, 2018.

I would like to recognize outgoing President David Rumsey and incoming President Corinne McKay. It has been a pleasure to work with David. His sense of fairness, insights into people, and devotion to ATA and to the translation and interpreting professions were remarkable. I look forward to working with Corinne as she brings her energy and vision. ATA is fortunate to have the services of folks like David and Corinne and the hundreds of other volunteers who make ATA the vibrant organization that it is.
Marybeth Timmermann Wins 2016–2017 ATA School Outreach Contest

Marybeth Timmermann, an ATA-certified French>English translator based in Greenville, Illinois, won a free registration to ATA’s 58th Annual Conference in Washington, DC (October 25–28) through ATA’s School Outreach Contest. Marybeth won the contest for the photo taken during her visit to Greenville High School, where she spoke to juniors and seniors in the advanced Spanish class. In the Midwestern community where she lives, knowing a foreign language is not always valued. “It’s simply not seen as a necessary or very useful skill,” Marybeth says. She wanted to show students that languages offer viable career options and point out how important languages are in today’s professional world all over the globe.

Marybeth’s winning photo was taken after a hands-on activity with students. After an introduction to the concept of translation and the singularities of the English and Spanish languages, she asked students to think of examples of non-literal translations and write them down on index cards. Marybeth says that “many of the students came up with excellent examples.” From the smiling faces in the photo, we can tell that the students were very pleased with their results.

Marybeth was very excited to attend the conference in Washington, DC, her first ATA conference in many years. “We’re thrilled to give this award to Ms. Timmermann to honor her effort in reaching out to students to educate them about promising careers in translation and interpreting,” says ATA President David Rumsey. “Her winning entry is a fitting testament to the lasting success of ATA’s School Outreach Program.”

For more than 12 years, the program has been raising awareness of the role that translators and interpreters play in business, government, and society at large. With several sources predicting major growth in the demand for professional translators and interpreters, this program continues to build awareness of careers in the language industry. As our world becomes more integrated globally, businesses and governments are realizing the importance of using skilled professional translators or interpreters to communicate their message effectively and successfully to global audiences, avoiding potentially costly and embarrassing mistakes.

ATA launched the School Outreach Program in 2004 to educate students about translation and interpreting and to interest them in these rewarding career fields. Through the program, professional linguists speak to students at all levels, highlighting the career benefits of learning another language and the increasing potential for exciting work with foreign-language skills. Using a variety of model presentations and activities available on ATA’s website, presenters outline the requirements for becoming a professional translator or interpreter, emphasizing that these careers demand far more than simply being bilingual.

“By visiting classrooms through the School Outreach Program, translators and interpreters share valuable information not only with the next generation of linguists, but also the next generation of language services clients,” says Meghan McCallum, coordinator of the School Outreach Program. “Our program focuses on educating the public about these exciting career paths and their wide range of applications around the world.”

To receive this award, participants must belong to ATA or an ATA chapter or an ATA-affiliated organization and must deliver a presentation at a school of their choice. Entrants must also submit photos of themselves presenting in the classroom. To learn more about the ATA’s School Outreach Program, visit www.atanet.org/ata_school.

Birgit Vosseler-Brehmer is an ATA-certified English<>German freelance translator based in Andernach, Germany, specializing in technical and business management translations. She is a member of ATA’s School Outreach team. Contact: bvb@bvb-translations.com.
Reading Beyond the Lines: The Translator’s Quest for Extra-Textual Information

Without summoning extra-linguistic knowledge, translators will remain at the surface of the text, whereas they need to thrust their noses deeper into the multi-layered and subtle allusion or reference.

Technology and the information revolution have opened a vast world of knowledge to all of us. Translators must develop work habits and a methodology that allow them to make the best possible use of search tools and other resources. Looking for extra-textual information is an essential component of translation, albeit one often overlooked or taken for granted. As translators and revisers, we often come across translation mistakes or poor renditions that could have been avoided if the translator had looked for additional information. Translators often deal with highly specialized, unfamiliar, or heavily negotiated documents without being involved in the process that generated them. For this reason, they need to complement their substantive information with further research to deliver a reliable translation.

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS
The most basic assumption in translation—whether translators consciously think about it or not—is that all human discourse contains a message (or intended meaning) and that somehow it is possible for a person with the right tools to grasp that message, to extract it from the container that is the source language, and transfer it into a new container, which is the target language. Whether it is possible to understand the message in all its nuances and complexity (comprehension), whether meaning can be separated from its linguistic envelop (deverbalization) without losing at least part of its integrity, and whether equivalences can be found in the target language to convey the message in a wholesome manner (reformulation) are all questions that can be debated. However, we do engage in the act of translating, which necessarily implies that we believe there is something in a text, some essence of meaning that can be transferred, and that different languages offer ways to transfer meaning, even though imperfectly.

A sentence to be translated is unlikely to contain all the information needed to extract meaning from it for the purpose of translation.

Aside from this basic assumption that we hold to be universal, it is important to underscore the following additional assumptions about the act of translating, based on our experience as Arabic revisers at the United Nations.

1. A document should be approached as a whole. A sentence to be translated is unlikely to contain all the information needed to extract meaning from it for the purpose of translation. This is why it is necessary for the translator to contextualize different segments of the same text to better comprehend the meaning.

2. A document is always part of a storyline. Being aware of the full story is the best way to arrive at a correct understanding of the message. Since this is not always possible from the translator’s standpoint, seeking extra-textual information, as an integral part of the translation process, becomes the translator’s best guide. It sheds light on the evolution of the topic, resolves any
Here is another example of an ambiguous sentence requiring further research to settle its fine nuances: “Approves the investment of the Authority’s Endowment Fund for Marine Scientific Research in the Area with the United Nations Treasury.” This sentence, taken from a draft United Nations decision about budget matters, may seem simple on the surface, but an attempt to translate it shows the need for careful research in order to remove the ambiguity created by “with.” Without summoning extra-linguistic knowledge, translators will remain at the surface of the text, whereas they need to thrust their noses deeper into the multi-layered and subtle allusions or references. By training themselves to be cognitively alert and methodically skeptical, translators will definitely enhance the quality of the output. The greatest risk translators face is to lose their alertness—to grab the first meaning that comes to mind and hold on to it with too much confidence. As William Weaver, best known for his translations of the work of Umberto Eco, Primo Levi, and Italo Calvino, puts it: “The worst mistake a translator can commit is to reassure himself by saying, ‘that’s what it says in the original,’ and renouncing the struggle to do his best.”

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE TRANSLATE?

Basically, we understand the meaning and then reformulate it in the target language. Put that way, translation may sound like a piece of cake. However, the process itself is much more complex. It involves grasping the message—separating meaning from words, getting as close as possible to what the author intended to say, and even the emotions he or she wanted to convey. This is called deverbalization. This means the translator is aware that the complete meaning is not contained in the utterance and additional research is needed. One salient example of unsuccessful deverbalization due to a lack of knowledge and insufficient research is when a translator spelled out the acronym “CBS” as “community-based services,” when in fact it referred to the Central Bank of Sudan. This mistake could have been avoided if the translator had consulted a list of acronyms included in another part of the document.

DOES THE TRANSLATOR NEED TO BE A SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT?

Translators often deal with unfamiliar topics that fall outside of their field of expertise. This has led some people to take the view that only subject matter experts are equipped to translate a given text. We do not share this opinion and believe that a well-trained translator can always educate himself or herself about the topic of the text, including its implicit and explicit elements.

3. Cognitive complements are indispensable to the intelligibility of a text. Translators need to mobilize their general culture and resort to other external sources of knowledge to understand the text, including its implicit and explicit elements.

4. A literal approach can never produce a good translation. Literal translation fails to transfer meaning because it produces awkward and unintelligible forms in the target language. By resorting to extra-linguistic knowledge, translators will feel more at ease with the subject and ideas, which will enable them to reformulate these ideas in a more idiomatic and accessible way. As French author Nicolas Boileau said, “What is well understood is clearly enunciated.” When we don’t understand, we automatically take refuge in the literal approach. Instead of trying to make the picture less blurry, we sink even more into the fog.

ambiguities, and helps us understand patterns, including patterns of word usage.

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COMMON OBSTACLES TO UNDERSTANDING

Despite the variety of documents, topics, and circumstances, it appears that the vast majority of comprehension difficulties in translation fall under one of two categories:

1. **Novelty**: Novelty is when the translator encounters a topic or a concept that is new to them. Novelty can arise from the translator’s lack of familiarity with the topic or from the fact that the concept itself is a new coinage in the source language. For example, when translating a document about information technology, the translator may be faced with a newly coined term such as “material design,” a concept developed by Google around 2014 and introduced in more recent versions of the Android operating system.

   The translator first needs to understand what “material design” means in English before setting out to find an equivalent in the target language. A quick search of the Linguee dictionary app (www.linguee.com), for example, reveals that the majority of occurrences of “material design” deal with actual materials and are translated into French as conception des matériaux. This equivalent is useless in this context because the expression does not refer to the material of which the device is made, but rather a software design concept that makes virtual objects look more real.

   Other interesting examples are “disruptive technology” and “native advertising.” Understanding the definition of the concept and devising an equivalent that covers all its semantic traits is a daunting task. For example, some equivalents suggested in Arabic for “disruptive technology” only retain the disturbance caused by such a technology, whereas it would be more relevant to look for an equivalent focusing more on its groundbreaking nature.

   When faced with novelty, the translator is inevitably required to read beyond the lines to get to the bottom of the new concept through all possible means (e.g., by consulting dictionaries and encyclopedias, search engines, including images and videos when available, asking experts, reading other documents on the same topic, and examining relevant bilingual texts if available).

2. **Ambiguity**: Ambiguity is a situation where the translator encounters a word, phrase, or sentence that can be interpreted in more than one way, especially when the context does not provide enough information to select a correct translation. A frequent case of ambiguity in English texts is that of nominal compounds such as “collaborative procurement agreement.” (Does “collaborative” describe procurement or agreement?)

   Ambiguity can also stem from a poor word choice by the author or speaker. One translator was working on a document where the authors frequently used “nation states” instead of just “states,” implying that they had a specific category of states in mind. However, the context did not support such an interpretation. Fortunately, the translator had the opportunity to communicate with the authors. After several emails back and forth, the authors agreed to simply drop the word “nation” throughout the document.

   A poor grammatical construction or a spelling mistake in the text can also create ambiguity (e.g., when “export specialists” was misspelled as “expert specialists,” or when “lessens the burden” appeared in the text as “lessons the burden”). Seemingly insignificant typing errors like these can cause a lot of unnecessary pain for the translator. This is the reason texts need to

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Being aware of the full story is the best way to arrive at a correct understanding of the message.
be edited carefully, but not all clients are ready to allocate the necessary resources to do this.

Finally, there are cases of deliberate ambiguity, especially in diplomatic discourse. The example of intended ambiguity in the withdrawal clause in United Nations Security Council resolution 242 is notorious.1

Some may argue that all the translator needs to do when faced with ambiguity is simply to carry it over to the target language (i.e., keep the translation ambiguous in the same way). However, it is not always possible to find a word or phrase in the target language that carries the same multiple meanings. Add to this that tolerance for ambiguity may vary depending on the audience or even the culture.

Faced with ambiguity, research is again the best tool in the translator’s hands. Specific tools include relating the text to other texts on the same topic to see if they can shed light on the ambiguity (rel-texting, chron-texting). Previously translated documents (bi-texting) can also give the translator new ideas based on how other translators approached the issue.4

COMMON OBSTACLES TO THE TRANSFER OF MEANING

Having overcome novelties and ambiguities, the translator now has a clear idea of what was said in the source sentence. The ensuing journey is to transfer the meaning to a new cultural and linguistic context and to dress it appropriately so that it can be presented to a new audience. That journey can also be fraught with challenges. Here are two challenges that we have often encountered while translating or revising:

1. Equivalency: Equivalency is about finding an expression in the target language to convey the same idea expressed in the source language. It is one of the most intractable difficulties in translation because some words or expressions may not yet have been coined in the target language, or they may not have a well delimited equivalence. For example, the abovementioned expression “disruptive technology” does not seem to have a definitive equivalent in a number of languages. In Spanish, you may find tecnología desestabilizadora, tecnología perturbadora, tecnología revolucionaria, or any number of variants.

Sometimes even an apparently simple term such as “default position” can be troublesome. In some cases, words seem to be ganging up against the translator. For example, a word like “chair” or “stool” should not cause any translation issues. But if you were translating into a language like Arabic and had to distinguish chairs from stools, you would be hard-pressed to come up with a good solution. In other cases, cultural gaps between languages make it difficult to coin an equivalent expression that will be understood and accepted by users of the target language. For example, finding neutral equivalents for gender orientation concepts in Arabic has been a long process. Even now, neutral terms for gays and lesbians have not been universally adopted.

True and accurate equivalency is a rare gem, which can only be encountered, with a little bit of luck, after a lot of digging. Sometimes the best equivalent is not strictly an equivalent, but a much longer explanation. In some cases, the choice of equivalent is dictated by established usage. This is why using idiomatically appropriate equivalents is an essential element of a good translation.

A special type of equivalency is the problem of back translation when you have names (especially geographical names), quotations, or other references in your source language that are originally from the same target language into which you are translating. For example, “local plant” in a text about the situation in the Palestinian occupied territories was back translated in Arabic after thorough research as “غنديليا” (gundelia), which is an edible plant that the local Palestinian population gathers and sells in the market. In this case, the best scenario would be to find the original reference and copy it as is. For instance, when translating a document into English containing references to the United States Constitution, the translator needs to quote the English text of the Constitution.

How do we go about solving an equivalency problem? The best way is to exhaust all available resources to understand the concept and find the
most appropriate equivalent in the target language. One possible resource is to look at translations into other languages to see how other translators dealt with the problem. As a last resort, you can coin your own equivalent using common sense and your best judgment.

2) Consistency: To be consistent, translators need to ensure that their translations are coherent throughout the document and that they use words and expressions that allow for a continuum when compared to previous texts on the same topic. Consistency does not come easy. It requires constant vigilance and checking.

An even more challenging level of consistency is consistency throughout a set or series of documents. We are not saying that everything needs to be translated exactly the same way all the time, but if you see a set of related documents as telling a story, you do not want it to be a story where the names of the players keep changing all the time. You do not want a person whose name on her passport is “Layla” to be referred to sometimes as “Laila,” or “Leila,” or even “Lily.” Consistency is particularly important in a multi-translator/reviser context. It is crucial that the final document does not look incongruous. Keeping the same equivalents of recurring items, titles, or subtitles in a document is a good example of consistency.

Consistency is hardest to achieve when dealing with several sources. When translators encounter references (especially direct quotations) from previous documents, they may find that such texts were not translated in a consistent manner. This is an area where modern computer-assisted translation tools can provide valuable help, first by showing the degree of inconsistency in a set of documents, and then by presenting the various options, including terminology, so that translators can make an enlightened choice.

NO SUCH THING AS A PERFECT TRANSLATION
Translation is intrinsically a human activity, and for many a form of art. Therefore, there is no such thing as a perfect translation. We will always make mistakes, either because the author’s intent somehow escaped our grasp despite our best efforts, or because we could not find a clear and simple way to carry the message in a wholesome manner over the linguistic and cultural gap. Mistakes can also be caused by other human factors, such as mental fatigue, distractions of all kinds, or lack of time and inspiration. However, we never give up and continue to translate, notwithstanding all these imperfections.

We believe that translators, by paying attention to the issues above and doing their utmost to address them within the allotted time constraints, will at least be able to avoid a few serious mistakes that can be detrimental to their work and ultimately to their reputations. As judiciously noted by Umberto Eco: “[...] Yet, the translator’s success lies precisely in achieving invisibility.” After all, it is no secret in the world of translation that excellent translations generally go unnoticed while translation mistakes become the talk of the town.

Finally, we do not want to leave the impression that translation is only about toiling in anonymity. It is most of all a source of wonder, pride, joy, and satisfaction for every genuine translator.

NOTES

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Ibrahima Diallo is a senior reviser. He is currently the chief of the Arabic Language Unit at the United Nations Office in Nairobi (UNON) and the text project coordinator for UNON, which is in charge of developing an online translation platform for the United Nations. Previously, he worked as training coordinator for the UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. His working languages are Arabic, English, and French. He also speaks Spanish and several African languages. He has a master’s degree in modern languages with a minor in applied linguistics from the University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Contact: diallo444@hotmail.com.
Scheduling Translation Projects

Once a project involves several people, tasks, languages, components, or even competes with other projects, drawing a complete and accurate schedule is definitely a must.

The challenge of project management lies in the breadth of the subject material involved and the wide variety of translation requests it encompasses. Every project is different, every company (whether an end client or a translation agency) has its own management methods, and every project participant has their own concerns depending on the role they play. However, one area where everyone needs to be on the same page is scheduling.

When sending a translation project for bidding or for immediate production, clients either indicate a delivery date or ask subcontractors to propose one. In both cases, the latter have to schedule their time to make sure they can meet the deadline. The translators (or any other project participants) then need to determine whether they can complete their own tasks within the allocated time frame. Translation project managers also have to work out how to deliver a quality project on time and put together a skilled team. To ensure a successful scheduling process, everyone involved needs to pay attention to the aspects discussed below.

**TRANSLATION METRICS**

After an accurate analysis of files and volumes (e.g., number of words, number of illustrations to localize, number of pages for desktop publishing, etc.), the first planning step is to evaluate the number of working hours or days required for the project. Knowing how many units can be processed per hour or per day for each production task involved in the project is essential for this calculation. For instance, the translation of a technical guide could be based on production metrics of 2,500 source words per day. For marketing jobs, translators might prefer to use estimates of 2,000 source words per day. And for software translation, where translators often lack content (e.g., when translating user interface strings) and possibly use a specific localization program, it might be preferable to reduce those to 1,500 source words per day.

Obviously, translation metrics can be adjusted according to the complexity of the subject, the translator's skills, or even the time needed to look for references. Other factors could affect translators' productivity, and for some specific projects (e.g., the translation of medical software involving new technology and a lot of research), the pace of translation might be limited to 750 source words per day.

The amount of material to be translated could also influence the metrics. In a large project, a translator might start slowly, translating 1,000 words of documentation per day at the beginning, and then reach up to 3,000 at the end. Reversely, for small projects of a few hundred words, translators might never manage their usual production metrics.

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**OTHER TASKS**

Freelance translators sometimes accept large or complex projects that they have to subcontract either to other translators or to specialists in charge of production tasks like revision, desktop publishing, screen shooting, and testing. As for project managers, they nearly always entrust all tasks to others. Consequently, it’s crucial that they know which metrics to apply.
to each task, since units and time frames might differ. For instance, the revision of a technical document might be based on 7,500 source words per day, the layout work in Adobe InDesign might be evaluated at four pages per hour, and the number of screenshots taken per hour might amount to 20, depending on the complexity of the related localized software and the potential use of a specific tool for this task.

Besides the extra metrics to master, team members’ availability could also influence the schedule. End clients might not have considered this point, but sometimes subcontractors cannot guarantee a specific delivery date if their experts are not free.

**OVERLAPPING**

Adding people to a project can help reduce the schedule, for example, by distributing the volume of words to be translated among several translators. This might lead to some consistency issues that could be narrowed down thanks to a high level of communication within the translation team, but also by adding a revision step afterwards. Nevertheless, revision should not necessarily start only when all the files have been translated. On the contrary, translators can deliver their files on a continuous basis during the project so revisers can start early in the process and share feedback with them as quickly as possible. The same goes for other tasks, such as desktop publishing, which could be launched once the linguistic aspect of the first files has been finalized. This overlapping reduces the number of days spent on the project, since various people perform several tasks at the same time.

**TARGET LANGUAGES**

Clients don’t always need translations into only one language. For some projects, they sometimes request dozens of target languages, involving translation teams who might be based around the world and are subject to other time zones, holiday periods, and even working days. Forgetting to take this information into consideration might be fatal when scheduling a multilingual project. Sometimes, such as the early release of a product in countries where potential is high, the end client could also ask for some languages to be delivered before others. In this case, the subcontractor has to prepare a number of sub-schedules for the various language groups. Finally, when a single provider or department within a translation agency is responsible for technical tasks, such as desktop publishing, the time needed for the task is obviously multiplied by the number of target languages. If this results in some unreasonable deadlines, the team might be extended with other freelancers, internal teams, or even partner companies.

*Revision should not necessarily start only when all the files have been translated.*

**SEVERAL COMPONENTS**

Some translation projects come with more than one component. For instance, a software localization project might contain software interface files, a user manual, an installation guide, a marketing brochure, and an animation. A variety of tasks and production metrics are associated with those parts and have to be slotted into the overall schedule. Additionally, the link between some components sometimes influences their position in the schedule.

By way of example, starting with just the software translation is preferable, since many key terms and strings displayed in the user interface (UI) also appear in the other components. Sharing the final localized software strings after UI revision with the translators in charge of the documents and animation certainly increases accuracy and consistency. Furthermore, planning the screenshots step for the guides too early in the process could be problematic. The target software needs to be final (ideally after full testing and debugging) before shooting the target screens to be included in the translated documentation.

Finally, the sequence of the components might also be guided by the decision to focus on consistency and limiting the number of participants. Keeping the same translators throughout the process would mean that the translation of each component only...
starts when the previous component is completely translated. If feasible, the same could apply to revision, desktop publishing, quality assurance, and other processes. However, it’s also important to emphasize that under specific circumstances, ideal conditions don’t apply and all components are handled in parallel, probably with many people working on all the tasks.

**MULTIPLE PROJECTS**

Scheduling a single translation project might already be complex, but when several projects have to be launched for a number of clients, the situation becomes even more challenging. Freelance translators having to deal with multiple requests should be extremely cautious and accurately calculate the time they need for each project, taking into account the exact time frame and priority level allocated to each one. Facing the same kind of obligations, project managers also have to meticulously select the right people for each project, making sure not to overload their resources with too many tasks assigned on the same days. Building a multi-project schedule is sometimes a good idea.

**DETERMINING A DELIVERABLE THAT WORKS**

Not all translation projects are complex enough to require a professional schedule, possibly made in MS Excel or by using a special planning tool such as MS Project. Freelancers, and even translation project managers, can often quickly estimate the best delivery date by mentally calculating the number of working days or writing down a few notes on paper. Nevertheless, once a project involves several people, tasks, languages, components, or even competes with other projects, drawing a complete and accurate schedule is definitely a must. Whatever the method used, the key point remains being 100% sure that everything has been taken into consideration to propose or confirm a deadline that will be met by all means without any compromise on quality.

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**Nancy Matis** has been involved in the translation business for almost 20 years, working as a translator, reviser, technical specialist, project manager, and teacher, among other roles. After obtaining degrees in translation and social and economic sciences, she worked for an international language services firm for several years. She currently manages her own company based in Belgium, specializing in localization, translation project management, consulting, and training. She also teaches translation project management at Université Lille 3 (France), KU Leuven (Belgium), Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium), and through webinars. Besides publishing articles on project management and the importance of teaching this subject to future translators, she has also written about terminology management in projects and quality assurance in translation (www.translation-project-management.com). She is the author of *How to Manage Your Translation Projects*. Contact: nancy@nmatis.be.
As defined by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, and still applicable today, sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Sustainable development is based on the interplay of two key concepts: 1) needs (specifically of the world’s poor), and 2) limitations imposed by technology and society on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.

You’re Not Fluent Yet! Speaking the Language of Sustainable Development

Movements focused on sustainable development are rapidly gaining traction at the international level. Here are a few tips for getting up to speed to take advantage of this potential niche market.

The term “sustainability” was first used in the 17th and 18th centuries in relation to “sustainable forest management” and “sustainable yield,” which eventually formed the basis of the environmental movement started by Aldo Leopold in the 1930s and 1940s. Considered by many to be the father of wildlife ecology and the U.S. wilderness system, Leopold was a conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast. Among his best-known ideas is the “land ethic,” which calls for an ethical, caring relationship between people and nature. The themes with which Leopold struggled in his work (i.e., the speed of industrialization and its impact on the natural world) dominated environmental discourse during the 1960s and 1970s.

The first topic addressed by sustainable development that comes to mind is environmental conservation, but there are many interconnecting areas in the field of sustainable development itself, as listed below.

- **Social movements:**
  - Historic preservation
  - Placemaking (the planning, design, and management of public spaces)
  - Sharing economy

- **Environment:**
  - Sustainable agriculture
  - Renewable energies
  - Green building
  - Energy efficiency

- **International Development:**
  - Social inclusion
  - Poverty reduction
  - Gender equality
  - Disease eradication

- **Circular Economy:**
  - Looking beyond the current “take, make, and dispose” extractive industrial model, the circular economy is restorative and regenerative by design. Relying on system-wide innovation, it aims to redefine products and services to design waste out, while minimizing negative impacts. Such efforts include:
    - Recovering
    - Recycling
    - “Downcycling” (when waste material is converted into something of lesser value)
    - Reusing
    - Repurposing
    - “Upcycling” (reusing waste without destroying it to form something new)
    - Remanufacturing
FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
The good news for translators is that sustainable development is a growing field. For example, it's estimated that there are only about 100 manufacturing companies worldwide who have truly adapted a circular strategy, but that the circular economy could add US$2.6 trillion to the European economy by 2030.³

Cross-cultural communication is essential in achieving the goals the world has set for itself in this area. As a case in point, researchers have argued that language serves as a tool for sustainable development, specifically in regions such as Africa, where local languages must be taken into account.⁵ By communicating in the local language, we switch the focus to the local community as a relevant source of development.⁶ As described by Thomas Bearth (University of Zurich, Switzerland) and Diomandé Fan (University of Kassel, Germany) in 2004, “Economists have traced the failure to achieve objectives to what they call the ‘broken feedback loop’ [...] i.e., a deficit in the flow of communication from the local community back to the sponsors.”⁶ This is just another incentive for translators to step in to help close the loop.

STAYING UP-TO-DATE: TERMINOLOGY RESEARCH
Given that sustainable development is a growing field, there is an abundance of material available to the public that will allow you to gain knowledge about the basic concepts and build your vocabulary. I suggest reading articles in the news, journals, and on websites focused on new initiatives and research. It's also a good idea to follow companies and individuals who promote sustainable development on Twitter or other social media and to participate in the discussion. In addition, I would recommend taking MOOCs (massive open online courses) on related fields and attending relevant webinars and expos with the goal of increasing your knowledge and growing your network.

Conducting searches online to see how other organizations use certain terms and referring to online dictionaries is also an excellent way to increase your knowledge base. In addition to information available in multiple languages on the United Nations' website, many dictionaries and glossaries have been compiled on sustainable development by different governments, as listed in the sidebar below.

AVOIDING NEOLOGISMS
When reading about sustainable development, there are often new expressions and terms that have not yet become commonplace. While it's tempting to sound “cutting-edge,” using neologisms is a matter of walking the line between what constitutes specialist knowledge and what the general public will understand.

Therefore, it’s crucial to remember the importance of good writing. Using plain language is key to communicating ideas clearly, regardless of the field in which you work. Avoid buzzwords and remember the following stylistic tip, as offered by the Canadian government in their 1991 style guide: “Trendy, fashionable expressions […] are used far too often. They can undermine the impact of what you’re trying to say because they are not well understood by the public. The fact that they are trendy will also mean that they will soon date your writing. Avoid them.”⁹⁷

Sources for Terminology in the Field of Sustainable Development

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<tr>
<th>Dictionary/environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dictionnaire environnement (French-English)</td>
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<td>Environmental Thesaurus</td>
<td><a href="http://data.uba.de/umt/de.html">http://data.uba.de/umt/de.html</a> (English, German)</td>
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<td>Environmental Terminology and Discovery Service</td>
<td><a href="http://glossary.eea.europa.eu">http://glossary.eea.europa.eu</a></td>
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<td>Glossary of Environmental Health Terms (U.S.)</td>
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<td>Water Glossaries (multilingual)</td>
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In addition to the links above, a list of helpful resources in multiple languages has been posted on the website of ATAs Science and Technology Division (http://bit.ly/ATA-Sci-Tech-environmental).
Finally, intuition is the most important tool of all. While you must always be prepared to give a well-informed explanation of your word choice to the client (based on frequency of use, grammar and punctuation rules, and reference dictionaries), your personal opinion can be just as persuasive.

CENSORSHIP AND CHANGING BEHAVIOR THROUGH LANGUAGE

As any translator knows, language is at the center of culture and belief systems and contains elements that can shape our lives (e.g., empowering and disempowering women, dispelling fear or perpetuating stigmas, passing down knowledge of traditional medicinal plants, or seeing that knowledge, and those plants, die off). When it comes to achieving change, it’s important to keep in mind that banning words is far less effective than making a persuasive case for better words. In general, it’s better to use language we perceive to be neutral and clear.

For example, a Change.org campaign was run in 2014 to “Stop Using the Term ‘Child Prostitute’” in an effort to avoid censorship and make society more compassionate. Over 150,000 supporters petitioned the Associated Press and argued that the terms child prostitute, juvenile prostitute, and child sex worker “suggest criminality when none exists.” It was recommended that these terms be replaced with the expression “survivors and victims of rape,” in the belief that, “Children who are bought and sold will continue to be treated as criminals, instead of as victims and survivors of child rape.”

We must therefore remember the power of positive language and consider translation as an opportunity to change the way we view the world. Your clients are most likely unaware of the subtleties of the English language, and it will please them even more if you can explain that you chose to express an idea using words and phrases that are intended to promote change. It may be as simple as referring to unemployed homeless individuals as “homeless individuals estranged from the job market” to remove the negative connotation association with the word “unemployed.” Many times, the source text will already convey these nuances, and so it may be an issue of simply conserving them in your translation.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The cultural nuances of language are essential in making different sustainability movements compatible in another country. As language specialists, we know that some words carry more weight than others in certain languages, which can make conveying their power in another language difficult. The same movement in one country may also focus on different...
aspects in another country. For example, the concept of écocitoyenneté in French has no equivalent in English. Reflecting the French value of being a good national citizen, this would most likely translate to “environmentally conscious world citizens” in English. Keeping these cultural differences and values in mind is important to have a greater impact on the target audience.

TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED
My first piece of advice is to follow your passion, since doing so will make you much more interested and engaged in your work. Developing a mission statement, identifying your target clientele, and fine-tuning your elevator pitch will make your efforts much more focused and help you find your own market niche. You should also ensure that your website, online profiles, and marketing materials clearly reflect your mission statement, as it will attract the type of people with whom you want to work.

To find and attract clients, initiate contact with potential clients by engaging on Twitter and LinkedIn and by attending industry events. My philosophy on networking, although energy-intensive, is that gaining one client through in-person networking or directed marketing efforts serves as a gateway to other clients, as word-of-mouth is the most effective (and effortless) way to get more clients.

If you don’t have prior experience, I suggest volunteering your services in the field of sustainable development, where a large number of clients are nonprofits that rely heavily on volunteers. This is an excellent way to build your vocabulary, become knowledgeable about basic concepts, and build your portfolio.

Finally, having an online portfolio and résumé that describe the projects you’ve worked on and how they helped clients advance their sustainable development goals shows potential clients that you’re forward-thinking and focused on their objectives. Listing your “ideal” projects or types of clients in your portfolio will help you attract more of the same in the future. It may help to come up with a list of issues that you’re passionate about, in addition to the key words associated with them, in order to better define what you’re looking for. Most of all, it’s important to remember that, in this field, expressing your values and goals can only help you.

BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU’RE DOING
The more you can show your clients that you understand and believe in the ideology of sustainable development, the more convinced they will be that you can provide them with quality translation services tailored to their needs and objectives. If you have this mindset and understand the sustainable development paradigm that takes an all-encompassing view of the world, you’ll come across to clients as a partner and someone who has the same goals in mind. As in any field, it’s important to focus on understanding the purpose of the translation, instead of simply trying to convince your client you can produce a “good” translation. You want to show them that your work is effective.

Notes

Cross-cultural communication is essential in achieving the goals the world has set for itself regarding sustainable development.

Natalie Pavey is a French-English translator specializing in sustainable development, marketing, and business communication. She has a master’s degree in French language and culture. Prior to becoming a translator, she spent two years participating in development projects in West Africa as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer and worked in Katmai National Park in Alaska as a park ranger/interpreter. In addition to ATA, she is a certified member of the Corporation of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick and the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (Canada). Contact: n.pavey@nptranslations.com.
worked with an interpreter before. When doctors aren’t sure how to work with an interpreter, they probably won’t ask, and they’ll be grateful that you brought it up.  

**Waiting with the patient:** It’s time to stop scaring interpreters about being alone with the patient and to start talking about why they don’t want to be alone with the patient. Basically, you don’t want to be there when the patient is telling you about his or her condition and there’s nobody to interpret it to. You don’t want to compromise your neutrality and confuse role boundaries. If the patient wants to talk about the weather while sitting in the waiting room, the world will keep spinning. If she asks you about her condition, politely suggest that she ask the doctor the same question and that you would be happy to interpret it for her.

**It’s time to stop scaring interpreters about being alone with the patient and to start talking about why they don’t want to be alone with the patient.**

**Sight translation for intake paperwork:** There are different ways to do this. One option is to read to the patient what’s on the form and show them where to write. If the patient doesn’t know how to write, you can sight translate the form and write down the patient’s answers. (Sometimes they’ll come right out and tell you they can’t write, sometimes they’ll just ask you to do the writing, and sometimes the family member will fill it out, in the same way I would fill out paperwork for a sick family member.) If patients have questions while you’re filling out the form, make sure to encourage them to ask the doctor.

**Consecutive for the interview:** The nurse will ask the patient initial intake questions: What medicines do you take? How much do you weigh? Where is your pain, and when did it start? What does it feel like, and how bad is it on a scale of one to ten? I use the consecutive mode for the questions as well as for the patient’s answers.

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**From Beginning to End: The Interpreted Medical Visit**

Some pointers on etiquette and best practice when interpreting in a medical setting.

For the first time in months, I took an assignment for a medical interpreting job. While my language skills are just fine for this setting, I was reminded of how difficult this work really is and how flexible we have to be. The experience also made me remember how nervous I was when I was new, mostly because I had no idea what to expect.

The points addressed here don’t have anything to do with terminology. Terminology and asking for clarification is a different matter. What follows is a basic rundown of what you can expect in an interpreted encounter in the outpatient world.

**Professional introduction with front desk, patient and family, and clinical staff:** During the initial introductions, I want to make sure that everyone knows I’m the interpreter—not a family member or friend who came with the patient, and not a bilingual staff member getting pulled from her regular duties to interpret. I make it a point to introduce myself not only to the patient, but also to anyone who is with the patient (including children). This helps build rapport quickly and can ease any tension that might be there when you’ve got bilingual family members and you’re afraid they’re going to give you a hard time, which, by the way, almost never happens. The patient’s bilingual family members are not there to harass the interpreter—they just want their sister, mom, dad, etc., to be okay. When I introduce myself to the doctor, I ask if he or she has ever
Simultaneous for the patient: When the patient is describing her pain in more detail, I move to a simultaneous interpreting, maintaining eye contact with the patient to keep her talking while I interpret. (I know that in training we learn this is a no-no, but it can be used to support good communication.) This way the doctor can hear her at the same time she’s motioning to different body parts. Another nice way to use simultaneous is when the patient is going on with a story about what happened. While note-taking for memory and consecutive is great to allow the speaker more time to talk, when you use simultaneous the doctor can have a chance to intervene and redirect the patient, just as he or she would be able to do with an English-speaking patient.

Positioning during an in-office exam or procedure: During the interview, I like to sit next to the patient if there’s room. Wherever I can hear everyone and they can hear me is a good spot. (Don’t be afraid to move around as needed as long as it’s not drawing attention to you.) If the patient is having an exam or procedure, it’s nice to look at a neutral spot so you’re not staring while their boil gets lanced or their toenails get yanked out. If they are exposed, go behind the curtain if there is one, and if not, turn around. I like to actually say (especially with male patients), “I’m turning around now so I can’t see anything.”

The patient’s bilingual family members are not there to harass the interpreter—they just want their sister, mom, dad, etc., to be okay.

Sight translation for instructions: I like it when the nurse goes over the instructions with me first and then I sight translate them to the patient. It’s a nice touch and helps to maintain transparency if you let the patient know that the nurse is explaining the instructions to you first before you read them. You can sight translate anything to the patient without the nurse explaining it to you first, but you’ll want the nurse there so she can answer any questions you or the patient might have. Keep in mind that standards for accuracy in sight translation are the same for any other mode of interpreting.

Neutrality at the check-out desk: It might be tempting to fudge a little so that the follow-up appointment is at a time when you’re available to take the assignment, or to tell the check-out person that the patient requested you for the next visit. However, this creates an obvious conflict, so don’t do it.

Be prepared to take notes: Make sure to take a small notebook and something with which to write. I’m especially challenged by numbers, and they will come flying at you in the medical setting in the form of phone numbers, addresses, weight, height, dosages, times, and dates.

Smile: You can be professional and firm with your role boundaries, but be friendly.

Take time after the assignment to reflect on what went well and what could be done differently next time. Most of all, enjoy the experience of serving others! If you have any tips that might be helpful to new interpreters, I invite you to share them with me.

Elizabeth Essary has over a decade of experience as an interpreter in many different settings. She has a Master of Conference Interpreting from the Glendon School of Translation at York University in Toronto. In 2012, she received her national Certified Healthcare Interpreter™ certification (Spanish) through the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI), and in 2013 she was certified through the Indiana Supreme Court Interpreter Certification Program. She is an accredited trainer through the CCHI Continuing Education Accreditation Program, and in 2013 served as an item writer and subject matter expert for CCHI’s written exam. From 2011 to 2015, in her work as language services supervisor at Indiana University Health Academic Health Center, she educated hospital staff on working effectively with interpreters and oversaw the bilingual staff approval program. She also developed a series of workshops to prepare staff interpreters for national certification. You can find her blog at https://thatinterpreter.com. Contact: lizessary819@gmail.com.
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"How Long Will It Take You to Type This in English?"

There seems to be a commonly held belief (among translators, publishers, and readers alike) that the more books you translate, the faster you become.

Yes, I really was once asked this question! A Freudian slip that reveals how translation is sometimes seen as “typing in another language.”

I was prompted to pen this article in favor of “slow” translation after eavesdropping on a conversation between two veteran translators anxious about the fact that they felt they were “too slow”—as if that were a bad thing. There seems to be a commonly held belief (among translators, publishers, and readers alike) that the more books you translate, the faster you become. The opposite is true for me, because with experience I’ve become more alert to subtleties and complexities of which I was blithely unaware in my early days.

“Speed” is rarely discussed openly among translators, and I realized I had no idea what others consider a reasonable daily output or how they assess the amount of time a translation will take when negotiating a contract. For myself, I’ve developed a crude rule of thumb for a fairly challenging book (fiction or nonfiction), which is an average of 800 to 1,000 words a day. While I might be able to draft 2,000 to 3,000 words a day once I’m in my stride, when I take into account the multiple drafts, going through the copy editor’s suggestions, and then checking the proofs, it seems to work out at roughly 1,000 words a day. So, for a 70,000-word novel, I would estimate 70 days of work (i.e., 14 weeks, if I were working exclusively on that book). But since, like all translators, I usually juggle various projects and activities, I then double that figure, which comes to 28 weeks, so I would ask for at least six months to complete the translation. My ideal time is nine months, partly because it’s such a symbolic figure.

I decided to ask a number of award-winning literary translators whether they had a comparable formula and whether they felt that they had become faster with experience. Here is what they said.

**Anthea Bell**

Like all the colleagues I spoke to, Anthea Bell, OBE*, a translator from French and German with decades of experience and scores of titles to her name, doesn’t feel that her speed has increased. “No, I don’t go any faster than I used to. I do think that I probably get a first draft out a little faster than when I was working on a typewriter. That is partly just technical, partly because with time one does become more used to doing what I can describe only as thinking in two languages at once. As I’ve said before (and translation is incredibly difficult to describe without a metaphor), it’s as if the mind hesitates briefly between the language of the original and the native language of the translator, in a place where neither language exists, but ultimately tries to come down on the side of the language of translation. And that aspect doesn’t change. But I find myself, if anything, even less inclined to think that the result of the first draft is the best. Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn’t. I have to go back over it all and weigh up alternative phrasings.

I would certainly go along, in general terms, with your calculations. Yes, we do juggle several things at once. The easy parts are the rough draft at the start and the final read-through at the very end, when I read for English only, returning to the original only if what I’ve said strikes me as odd and in need of second thoughts. The hard work comes in between: revising, revising again, coping with copy editors’ queries, and then proofreaders’ queries. Yes, it’s all time-consuming, but I think it should be. We all know that it’s never

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just a question of substituting word-for-word between languages.”

Interestingly, Anthea has recently changed from her usual method of doing a full quick first draft of a book to revising each chapter or major section of the translation immediately to assist the publisher.

“I still need to do further revisions, and finally one of the whole translated book, but in case a publisher needs something in advance, I can then provide it. Although I point out that I may have to alter things in view of what follows.”

LAURA WATKINSON

Laura, who translates from Dutch, also emphasizes how crucial and protracted the revision process is.

“I usually produce my first drafts fairly quickly, but it’s the revision that really takes the time. I read and reread and reread, keeping the trickier parts bubbling away in the back of my mind and waiting for inspiration to strike. That means that my translations aren’t actually ‘finished’ until near the deadline. That revision time is essential. It’s something that I need to take slowly, and I think I’ve taken more time over that element of the translation process with each book I’ve translated.

You want to create a great text that the reader will enjoy, so it’s always a good idea to make space to put a good draft aside for a while and then come back to it with fresh eyes to make sure it’s doing what you want it to.

I also take on other projects. As much as you may love a book, you don’t usually want to be cloistered away with its characters all day long, so I wouldn’t ideally choose to work on a single project for more than about three hours a day. You need time to think and time just to rest. An average of 800 to 1,000 words a day sounds reasonable to me. I’ve also heard the recommendation that a maximum of 2,000 words a day is advisable, but of course it all depends on the text. I generally tend to request a year for book projects, which feels comfortable. It’s not too intimidating and it’s short enough to keep things fresh.”

Laura wonders whether the language combination makes any difference to speed. “I’ve sometimes heard people suggest that certain language combinations are ‘easy’ and therefore make for faster translations. I don’t think I buy the idea of ‘easy’ combinations, though, particularly as I believe the bulk of the process lies in creating and polishing the target-language text.”

NICKY HARMAN

Nicky Harman, a translator from Chinese, says that she believes that Chinese is much more demanding and tiring to translate than European languages.

“I’ve no evidence for this since I only translate from Chinese, but I think that languages that are very different from English are harder to translate because you have to do more mental gymnastics to get an acceptable English version. Not even the simplest sentence can be translated ‘literally’ (yes, I know that word opens another can of worms!). Plus the fact that you’re reading characters makes even the reading process slower. There is nothing particularly scientific in my observations, but in my experience it’s mentally and physically (e.g., eye strain) more tiring.”

Nicky also has a formula for assessing the time needed.

“First, I estimate 2,000 (English) words (i.e., not Chinese characters) a day for the first draft (but believe me, they are very rough!). Then I estimate 4,000 words a day for the second draft. Then I add the same again for a third draft, and a few more weeks for further revisions/polishing, etc. I also calculate in a month or two for holidays and sickness, then another month because I’m fitting in other work. I sometimes add a month for luck. Then I compare that total to how I did on a previous book of similar length and see if it seems realistic. I have a dread of being late, or being under pressure at the last minute, because I like to leave a text to settle in my head and read it again with fresh eyes. Actually, I would say that my final calculations are pretty much like Ros’ estimates—six to ten months for a 70,000-word book (that would be about 105,000 Chinese characters).

Amazon Crossing has a bizarrely tight optimum turnaround (around two-three months for a book). What’s the point of putting that kind of pressure on people? Having said that, I negotiated 11 months for my current novel with them, though I’ll probably only need ten.”

ALISON ANDERSON

Alison, who translates from French, responds: “I think that in the first few years after I became a freelance literary translator (fairly recently), the more books I translated, the faster I got. I was rather pleased with my newfound speed because it meant I could actually make a living doing exclusively literary translation, taking on several books at a time. But inevitably—whether from age, burnout, or just regular old fatigue—I did eventually find I couldn’t keep up the pace anymore. My impression is that I’ve slowed down over the past two years.

Speed, for me, depends on the difficulty and style of the book. I did a difficult book this spring where I was pleased if I got five pages a day done, probably just over 1,000 words for that text. Most books I do about ten pages a day, sometimes close to 3,000 words. But that’s not counting the second and third draft, which is where I iron out all the kinks that may well have been induced by speed in the first draft. When I negotiate the contract I generally count eight to ten pages a day (once I know it’s of average difficulty) and then add on several weeks at the end for revision, plus weekends. The publisher is usually fine with this. I did once do a book where I had to churn out 5,000 words a day: never again. I got paid time and a half, as it were, but the long-term impact on my health and sanity weren’t worth it! And the quality must have suffered, although in this case the editor was going to ‘rewrite’ it.

Like most things in life, moderation is key. Finding the right speed to suit each individual text may be a luxury we don’t always have, but ideally it would make for the most careful, finely crafted work.”

MARGARET JULL COSTA

Margaret Jul Costa, OBE, who translates from Portuguese and Spanish, responds: “I’m not sure if I’m slower so much as ever more pernickety and neurotic. I
keep going through translations again and again, and this seems to get more obsessive the older I get. When I started out, I would do four drafts, maximum (then, of course, read through it again at proof stage). Now I tend to do nine to ten drafts, and then the proofs on top of that. It’s probably just that I’m more aware now of how easy it is to miss infelicities, and I’m a better editor of my own work. Or maybe I’m just neurotic.”

SARAH DEATH

Sarah, a translator from Swedish, who is also a literary scholar and worked as an editor of the U.K.-based journal Swedish Book Review, says that she is actually getting slower.

“I was never the quickest of workers, but now I seem to have so many elements to weigh in my mind. I probably feel less confident in my choices than I did at an earlier stage of my career and make even slower headway. Plus, once one has a reputation of sorts to live up to or lose, the fear factor is always lurking there as a further inhibitor of carefree productivity.

I’ve never got as far as establishing a rule of thumb, partly because each project seems to present new and unforeseen problems and my calculations then go out the window. I very often have a backlog and cannot start immediately, and that puts me under pressure not to ask for a comfortable amount of time to do the job, as I’m afraid of losing it (and I do lose some). I would always prefer to have six months, but occasionally have to settle for four. Of course, length and difficulty of books vary wildly. I very comfortably did a children’s book in a couple of months last year. I agree with Ros’ practice of taking 1,000 words a day as a rule of thumb and then doubling the number of days you have estimated. This sounds a lot nearer to what I can achieve than figures I’ve heard from some other translators.

In my 12 years as an editor for the Swedish Book Review, I at least had a reasonable chunk of regular income I could rely on, even if the job monopolized masses of my time. But now that I’m back to relying primarily on translation income I feel under even more pressure to say yes to things, so I’m battling to remind myself that rushed jobs produce poor results and I’ll have to reconcile myself to losing a proportion of the books I’m offered because I can’t agree to unrealistic deadlines.

Among the book-length jobs, I’m also taking on a lot more short samples, which have their pros and cons. They are almost always required pretty quickly, but I still don’t want to compromise on quality.

In recent years, in part with the rise of literary agents in the Nordic countries, a good deal more work and aggravation has been added to the approval and copy editing stage, with authors becoming much more inclined to claim a good knowledge of English and to want a finger in the pie. This can all take an excessive amount of time, often eating into the allocation I’ve made for the subsequent project. It also increasingly takes some of the pleasure out of the job, as well as undermining one’s own confidence and turning translators into (unwilling) warriors battling to uphold the standards of the English language.”

SANDRA SMITH

Sandra, a translator from French, says:

“The first book I translated was important, and I was new to it so I took my time. I worked on Irène Némirovsky’s Suite française (about 425 pages) for about three or four hours a day (I was still teaching at a university ten hours a week) and took about nine months to complete it. The next 11 novels by the same author went much faster, but only because it was the same author and most of the other novels were not as difficult as Suite française. I’m not sure if I would have become faster had I not been used to Némirovsky’s style.

I don’t think experience is the most important factor. I think it’s the inherent difficulty of the work being translated. Is it subtle, does it have plays on words, slang, long descriptive passages, etc.? As a general rule, I aim to translate 20 pages a week, which means four pages a day with weekends off. (This may not sound like a lot, but I also still teach part-time and have a life!) So, a 200-page book should take me about three months, but then I add at least four weeks for re-editing. But then other things come up so I always try to negotiate extra time. My 20-page a week formula also gives me leeway if I need to work over the weekend. With rare exceptions, I’ve never had less than a six-month contract, and most are nine months. Moreover, it’s always so much better to submit early and be a hero than to have to ask for extra time.”

Sandra emphasizes the usefulness of doing a sample translation: “I always insist on doing one (for contract reasons), and I can then judge how difficult the text is and add time if needed. I would also stress that it’s important to make it clear to the publisher that the timing starts from the date you receive the signature fee. Many publishers will get the contract to you fast and put the due date in—especially if they’re in a hurry—but you could wait months for the signature fee. However, if I’ve worked with a particular publisher before and know they are trustworthy, I always start as soon as I can, whether I received the fee or not. But you really have to know and trust them.”

ROBERT CHANDLER

Robert, a translator from Russian, gave an emphatic “No!” when asked if he had increased his speed with experience.

“I’m constantly in the position of trying to dissuade publishers from trying to rush things. There was one American publisher who seemed to consider it entirely normal to be spending almost a year over the negotiation of the various contracts involved, and then he wanted the translation done in less time than they had spent over the negotiations.

I’m still unable to assess reliably how easy, or difficult, a project will be. I once agreed to translate Pushkin’s unfinished novel Dubrovsky. At the last moment the publisher suggested that we also include a separate fragment, ‘just ten pages,’ called The Egyptian Nights. I agreed, only realizing the next day that half of this was in verse, which, for reasons to do with the plot, absolutely had to be
translated into strict metre and rhyme. The verse was mostly at the end of the piece, but I decided to translate it first. I didn’t want to waste my time translating the prose and then find that I was unable to cope with the verse and would have to abandon the piece.

To my astonishment, I translated the 70 to 80 lines of verse in only a few hours, and barely needed to revise at all. I was then equally astonished to find myself struggling with enormous difficulty through what I had imagined to be relatively straightforward prose. With the verse, everything had been clear-cut. A passage either worked or it didn’t; either the key turned in the lock, or it didn’t. If it did turn, that was that—there was no need to fiddle around further. With the prose, the number of possible translations of even the shortest sentence seemed almost infinite, and I found it very hard indeed to decide which I preferred. There were countless subtle ironies and shifts of tone, and I had the constant feeling that my English version was, in comparison, flat-footed or heavy-handed."

DONALD NICHOLSON-SMITH

Donald, a translator from French, emphatically endorses the hypothesis “that the more experienced one is the slower one is.”

“To my financial detriment no doubt, I rarely pay attention to speed at all. I’m a perfectionist after my fashion and concerned solely with doing the best job I can. Time constraints enter the picture only when a deadline I can’t overshoot serves as a sword of Damocles. I’ve never had the nerve to calculate my ‘speed’ by any method. It’s strange: I must work a good deal, but I’m always astonished when I finish, especially if I meet a deadline. And once the job is done I simply can’t remember the doing of it. I suppose this reflects my degree of absorption, and I guess that’s a good thing?

The last word on the subject in view of our general situation as translators in the world-as-it-is must surely be: bad pay = fast work = rotten translations! But À bas le travail bâclée! (No to botched work!)."

SARAH ARDIZZONE

Sarah, a translator from French, finds that when she hankers after a change of tempo, co-translating can greatly energize the translation process and accelerate the pace, but the proof stage still proves unavoidably time-consuming.

“Try as I might, the older I get, the less I hold out hopes of finding a way of short-circuiting this final and excruciating aspect of the translation process. Each time it feels like pulling teeth in ever-slower motion; and each time, the stabs of raw, un-anaesthetized pain are keener. Am I succumbing to all my worst obsessive compulsive tendencies and derangements, as I fail to see the wood for the trees? I mean, would any sane reader really notice the improvement afforded by that tweak? Or am I a crafts-person diligently holding the hand of my translation as I walk it to the finishing line? And would anything less be a dereliction of duty?

I live in the hope that one day I will be able to abide by the rule that Mairi Kidd, managing director of Barrington Stoke publishers, recently shared with me. It’s one that she wheels out at the final proof stage when she senses there are only so many ways a hair can be split: ‘Apocalyptic errors only!”

MAX PORTER

The final word goes to Max Porter, publisher at Granta Books and author of his much-acclaimed first novel Grief Is the Thing with Feathers, which is currently being translated into 15 languages.

“Every experience I’ve had of translation, as a reader, editor, and author, leads me to write here in praise of slowness. When I acquire a translation, I implore my colleagues in charge of scheduling to be more flexible than is the case with English-language books. First, translation itself should not be rushed. If it takes as long to translate a book as it takes to write one, so be it. I go out of my way to protect a translator from the pressures of the publishing schedule. If we have to move the book forward a few months, or into the next season, so be it. Our priorities should be literary, not commercial.

I believe in a discursive edit, especially when the conversation is triangular between an author, a translator, and an editor. If we have to go back again and again, so be it. An equality of voices, and an insistence on the quality rather than the speed of the conversation, should be the priority. If this sounds like wishful thinking borne of a luxuriously sympathetic publishing environment, then it probably is. I imagine my peers publishing bestselling crime novels to a vast and ravenous readership might roll their eyes at this pro-choice slowness.

As an author, I’ve been startled by the range of experiences in different languages. As an editor, I find it alarming when a translator asks no questions of an author. As an author, I find it frankly terrifying. Especially with a book filled with nonsense poetry, puns, literary homage, and carefully concealed allusions. I’ve fallen in love with my French translator, Charles Recourse, who unpicked the language of my book word by word, etymologically. Back and forth we went countless times (Does it mean this? Does it mean that? May I explain a certain liberty I’m taking here that I think will make something right, something different but true?). The result is a book that I’m certain sings the same tunes as my book does in English. It wasn’t just that he asked many questions, it was that his questions were intuitive and generous. It wasn’t that he was slow, it was that he wasn’t in a rush. The distinction seems vital.”

NOTES

* OBE stands for Order of the British Empire.
Interview with Thierry Fontenelle, Head of the Translation Department of the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union

Project managers at U.S. translation agencies are very familiar with the challenges involved in organizing and coordinating large projects across a range of languages. My guest for this column faces those same challenges as they apply to the European Union, which consists of 28 member states with 24 official languages. His department handles translation projects for over 60 clients in more than 550 language combinations.

Thierry Fontenelle is the head of the Translation Department at the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union. He has a PhD in linguistics from the University of Liège, Belgium (1995). He is the author of many publications on lexicography, natural language processing, computational linguistics (in particular, computational lexicography), proofing tools, and translation and terminology, including Practical Lexicography: A Reader (Oxford University Press, 2008). His PhD thesis, “Turning a Bilingual Dictionary into a Lexical-Semantic Database,” was published in the Lexicographica Series Maior (Niemeyer, 1997). He is an associate editor of the International Journal of Lexicography (Oxford University Press) and a past president of Eurexlex, the European Association for Lexicography.

A native of Belgium, Thierry worked as a research and teaching assistant at the University of Liège (1986–1996), then at the European Commission Translation Service as a computational linguist. He also worked as a translator and an interpreter for NATO before moving to the U.S., where he worked as a developer and subsequently as a senior program manager for Microsoft (2001–2009) creating proofing tools (spell-checkers, grammar checkers, and linguistic technology for Microsoft Office). He returned to Europe in 2009 to work for the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union in Luxembourg, where he currently manages a team of around 110 translators.

Thank you, Thierry, for spending time with us today. Your linguistic background speaks for itself. What languages do you speak and how/where did you learn them?

My mother tongue is French. I speak English, which I started learning when I was 12, and Dutch, which I started learning when I was 13. I also speak some German.

What originally got you interested in languages and then in the computational aspect of linguistics?

I graduated from the University of Liège in 1986 with a BA in English and Dutch language and literature. I also have an MA in English translation and a PhD in English linguistics. Initially, I was involved in research projects related to machine-readable dictionaries and machine translation in the 1980s. I was intrigued by the similarities between teaching language to non-native speakers and “teaching” a computer to understand language (e.g., for machine translation or grammar checking).

You were a translator and interpreter for NATO some years ago. Where were you stationed? Did you work as a computational linguist there, or were you engaged in the more traditional form of translation?

Between 1999 and 2001, I worked in Luxembourg for the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, as it was called at that time. (Today it’s known as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency). I worked as a translator from and into English and French (NATO’s two official languages) for about 75% of the time. I was an interpreter in the same language pair for the remaining 25%. That’s where I learned to work in a booth doing simultaneous interpreting.

Let’s talk about your current job. First, who are your clients? What types of documents are involved? The Translation Centre’s website mentions trademark translations. What exactly does that entail? What else does your team translate?

The Translation Centre’s mission is to provide linguistic services (mainly translations) to decentralized EU agencies, as well as to European institutions that use our services on an ad hoc basis. As an EU agency, we can only work for EU agencies and institutions, which are located all over Europe. We cover many subject fields, including drugs and medicine, maritime security, chemicals, education, railways, food safety, and intellectual property. Our biggest client is the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) in Alicante, Spain. The EUIPO deals with the registration of EU trademarks and designs, and we translate the descriptions of goods and services associated with a given trademark into all official languages of the EU. For the other agencies, the documents we translate include activity reports, guidelines (e.g., in the financial supervision field), work programs, websites, leaflets, brochures, and press releases.
With this kind of diversity, presumably there are different specifications and formats to respect. How much standardization is there? How much influence does the Translation Centre wield in this area?

We receive original documents in a wide range of formats, including Word documents, PowerPoint, Excel files, InDesign documents, XML files for websites, and MP4 files for videos to be subtitled. There are de facto standards, but the variety of clients prevents us from imposing any one in particular. This is because we need to be able to deal with the formats of the documents created in all the agencies we work for.

Finding the right mix between technology and a human approach to our operations is always a precarious balance.

The Translation Centre has three language groups. Please tell us what those groups consist of and how they are organized.

The Translation Centre has a little over 110 in-house translators covering the 24 official languages of the EU. These 24 languages are grouped into three language groups:

- **Language Group 1:**
  - Finno-Ugric, Baltic, and Slavonic

- **Language Group 2:**
  - Germanic and Slavonic

- **Language Group 3:**
  - Romance and Mediterranean

Each language group is subdivided into translation teams, one for each official language. The size of each team varies according to the translation workload into each target language.

The translators in these groups translate into their native languages and have varied academic backgrounds, mostly linguistically-oriented. Please tell us about their specific duties and what sort of on-the-job training they receive.

The Centre’s business model is based on extensive outsourcing because we don’t have enough in-house translators to handle the volume of work we’re expected to process. Around 80–85% of our translations are outsourced to external contractors. Our in-house translators then assess and revise all outsourced translations. This is an essential step because the in-house translators are familiar with our clients’ preferred terminology, their specific requirements, and the linguistic and stylistic conventions used across all EU institutions and agencies. The in-house staff translates urgent or very urgent documents and confidential documents that cannot be outsourced. They are also involved in creating client glossaries that are eventually fed into the Inter-Active Terminology for Europe (IATE) database, the joint terminology database for all the institutions/bodies of the EU. The Translation Centre manages the technical aspects of the IATE project on behalf of the project partners.

Translators are offered training throughout their careers at the Centre, both in terms of language learning (developing existing language skills and acquiring new languages) and client-specific activities (seminars and workshops on specific thematic domains, such as financial supervision or border guard training).

The Translation Centre also has a section that liaises with its clients. Please tell us something about this process.

We have a small external relations and communication section that serves as a link between the in-house staff and our clients. We process the feedback we receive from our clients about the quality of our translations. We also organize seminars and workshops with our clients, and they bring their experts to provide our translators with information about the key terms they use in their documents and explain the basic concepts of their specific mission. These experts can tell our language teams why they prefer to use this or that variant in a particular context. The knowledge we acquire at these seminars is incredibly useful to our translators, who then use it when they revise translations done by our freelance contractors.

All this is part of a global holistic approach to quality assurance. If we didn’t have this internal pool of in-house revisers and translators or organize these seminars, we wouldn’t be able to integrate our clients’ preferred terminology and specific requirements into our workflow and processes. This mechanism is a crucial aspect of our activity. I’m sure we would fail in our mission if we were “just” a mailbox between hundreds of freelancers and our clients. We would miss many
opportunies to capture and transmit this specialized knowledge and incorporate it into our translations.

At the heart of the Centre there is a Translation Support Department. What does this group do?
This department is at the hub of the Centre's operations. Its Workflow Management Section oversees the entire translation process, from the reception of clients' requests to the final delivery of translated material. This is where requests are analyzed and documents are pre-formatted and pre-processed with translation memories, then assigned to external contractors or to in-house translators. This section also manages the deadlines for the various actors along the production chain. In addition to the Workflow Management Section, the Translation Support Department also includes a Business Development and Workflow Support Section, which deals with several important aspects of our activities, including examining technology and the maintenance of language resources (e.g., corpora, translation memories, term bases, and glossaries). It also manages the workflow for the translation of EU trademarks. The department is also responsible for managing the IATE project on behalf of the institutions that contribute to what is estimated to be the largest terminology database in the world today (over eight million terms covering all 24 official languages).

What are the other components of the Translation Centre? The Centre has an Information Technology (IT) Department, which manages the IT assets and infrastructure, a service desk, and a Development Section that develops and maintains an entire range of state-of-the-art computer applications and equipment. The Centre's Project Management Office is also integrated into this IT Department. The Administration Department provides administrative and technical support in the areas of human resources, budgetary and strategic planning, legal affairs, calls for tenders, accountancy, facilities, and security.

You manage a team of about 110 translators. Is there much turnover or is the team pretty stable? The department is pretty stable with rather low turnover.

Tell us about an average day in your life as head of the Translation Department. What do you actually do? My department performs a rather impressive range of activities. Our structure is shallow; so I attend regular strategic meetings with our director and the other department heads. I meet regularly with the section heads and the heads of language groups in the department to identify new needs, but also to monitor the progress of the development of some crucial computer applications. Because quality assurance is our key concern, I spend a lot of time on the various processes that allow us to collect client feedback, measure their satisfaction, and respond to their concerns, if any. I travel all over Europe to meet with clients to better identify and understand their needs and concerns, but also to market our services and explain how we work. I also frequently meet with representatives of the translation services of other EU institutions.

Your department has worked with different IT tools over the years to handle the workflow. What are you using these days? What are the benefits of this system compared to what the Centre has used in the past? Our translators use an off-the-shelf computer-assisted translation tool that we licensed via an interinstitutional call for tenders (SDL Trados Studio). We also use an in-house workflow management tool that the IT Department developed, called eCdT. This tool manages the entire workflow, from the reception of requests to the final delivery, via the various intermediate stages—analysis, pre-formatting, pre-processing with translation memories, outsourcing to contractors via framework contracts or negotiated procedures, and assessment and revision by in-house translators. We also integrated SDL WorldServer into the eCdT workflow tool to manage our translation memories and automate a number of pre-processing tasks.
Given your background in computational linguistics, are you directly involved in the design and implementation of the Centre’s language processing systems?
Not directly, because the natural language processing systems are part of the software packages we license via our interinstitutional calls for tenders. My knowledge of computational linguistics and experience with the development of natural language processing systems allow me to better understand the possibilities and limitations of these systems.

We must educate our clients so that they understand that translation is an intellectual activity that requires time.

Is all the Centre’s translation work processed through an IT tool of some kind?
Is there any sort of literary translation that’s done the old-fashioned way?
Most of our translations are done with our computer-assisted translation tool and we use translation memories whenever we can. We’ve also started offering a new service for video subtitling that’s very useful for EU agencies interested in publishing videos about their activities on YouTube, Facebook, and other social media. Our translators are trained to use a sophisticated subtitling software package. We don’t really do any kind of “literary” translation because of the highly specialized nature of the activities of EU decentralized agencies and the fairly technical nature of the documents they produce.

Given your huge databases, how do you handle storage?
Our IT infrastructure is quite complex, with lots of servers and a data center located outside of our building to ensure business continuity in the event of major problems onsite.

You were recently invited to the Colloquium on Lexicography in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. One of the discussions there claimed that: “Because simple equivalence between terms in multiple languages is not enough, terminologists who create term bases need to be able to structure the data in such a systematic way that they are usable not only by humans, but also by the authoring or translation tools used in the translation process.” Please tell us more about this process.

Creating a term base requires some thought concerning the structure of the linguistic data one wishes to represent. Twenty years ago it was not uncommon to find glossaries compiled as Word documents, where the various fields corresponding to the various pieces of linguistic information would simply be concatenated, without any kind of separators. Such glossaries were meant exclusively for human use. Today, it’s important to make sure that the data can be exploited not only by a human user (the translator) who looks up a given term, but by computer applications. This means that different fields must be used to store the various bits of information (e.g., the term proper, its abbreviation, the part-of-speech, definition, context, usage note, reliability code, and equivalent in another language). For a term to be recognized automatically in a text, the application needs to know from what field the information should be retrieved.

What do you consider the greatest challenges your department faces?
Our clients expect us to translate greater volume more quickly, with fewer resources and no mistakes. I believe this is a goal we should all have. We should never rest on our laurels, but strive to make the best use of what technology can offer. We must also educate our clients so that they understand that translation is an intellectual activity that requires time. Quality will inevitably suffer if everything has to be done in a rush. Sometimes clients remind me of Alain Delon, the actor in Man in a Hurry (L’Homme presse), a movie about a man who doesn’t realize that it takes nine months to make a baby and that there is no way to shorten his wife’s pregnancy, which he thinks takes way too long. That said, our clients have their own constraints, so we must constantly strive to improve our processes to respond to their increasingly complex requests. Finding the right mix between technology (to automate what can be automated) and a human approach to our operations (based on a thorough awareness of the limitations of tools and technology) is always a precarious balance.

What else would you like to say about the Centre and the work you and your team do there?
We should remember that people are always the most valuable part of any organization. My colleagues are incredible and we have an amazing pool of talent. We produce around 750,000 pages of translation a year for clients from all over Europe, from 24 different linguistic backgrounds, with over 550 possible language combinations (not counting combinations involving nonofficial languages such as Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Norwegian, and Icelandic, which we also offer to our clients). Thanks to what we do, Europeans can read—in their own languages—about the work being done by several dozen highly specialized European agencies. I’m proud to be part of the team that makes this possible!

Notes
2 European Economic Community Council: Regulation Number 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community, http://bit.ly/EU-Regulation-1.

Tony Beckwith was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, spent his formative years in Montevideo, Uruguay, then set off to see the world. He moved to Texas in 1980 and currently lives in Austin, Texas, where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. Contact: tony@tonybeckwith.com.
DeepL Questions

When DeepL, the neural machine translation engine (www.deepl.com/translator), was released at the end of August, it took me a few weeks to talk to someone at DeepL/Linguee about, well, DeepL. (By the way, it’s pronounced deep-L.) The company has been a little overwhelmed by the immediate attention it received when, with great fanfare, it released its neural machine translation engine between English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish, and Dutch. This new engine is producing results that in many cases seem to be better—sometimes significantly better—than both Google Translate and Microsoft Bing Translator.

When I finally got to talk to Jaroslaw Kutylowski, DeepL’s chief technology officer, there was a lot he couldn’t legally and strategically say. What he could say, however, was still very interesting. For instance, when I asked him how long they’ve been planning to have a machine translation engine, he told me that it really only started to occur to them about a year ago, when neural machine translation first popped up and became everyone’s favorite topic of conversation. It does make sense, though, that the company known for Linguee (its multilingual dictionary and corpus tool) is using its somewhat curated corpus in the European Union languages, plus Russian, Chinese, and Japanese, to train a neural machine translation engine. (The entire company is actually called DeepL now, with Linguee being one of its products.) How much the company estimated that curation/editing/dictionary-building plays a role in the relatively high quality was among the questions for which I received no answer.

While there was no time commitment to the immediate roadmap, there is much emphasis on adding new languages, which likely will be those already covered by Linguee but could include others as well. Also on the roadmap is the development of an application programming interface (API). The API is particularly important if DeepL is to be used by professional translators who want to use it not on a webpage, but integrated into a translation environment tool. And at that point of the discussion I knelt down (actually I didn’t, but I would have if it would have made a difference) and asked that, in exchange for payment for the use of this API, if DeepL would commit itself to not use the translated data for training purposes. Its current practice is to use the data.

While Jaroslaw didn’t completely commit himself to this proposal, he said the likelihood of this commitment was high. This is really, really good news because this is what makes the tool usable for professional translators. Microsoft has remained stubbornly set on its policy of using the data you upload through its API for training purposes. (Some of your clients might not mind this, but many others will, no matter how much Microsoft assures us that it will only happen at a high level and in a temporary manner). Google has understood the issue and assures us that it’s not using the data if used through the API, and now, seemingly, DeepL has as well.

One thing I had been very surprised about was the “voice” of the press release for the launch of DeepL. Despite the fact that the company is located in Germany, the announcement was decided American in the sense that it was rather uncompromising. (The actual term that came to my mind was “hyperbolic.”) Jaroslaw says that you have to be self-confident when you have good reason for it, even if it might not match your surrounding culture. I guess that’s a pretty healthy way of looking at things.

To come back to the quality, you can see some numbers in the company’s press release (www.deepl.com/press.html) that show impressive quality gains. My own—very subjective and limited—testing showed similar results. Particularly when it came to advanced technical and semi-technical texts, the quality of the English-German direction was decidedly better and more natural than Google’s and Microsoft’s neural output. When it came to relatively high-brow press material, however, the pendulum seemed to swing the other way. But again, the sample I had was obviously very small.

Here is something I found interesting and reassuring. When we first looked at the neural output produced by Microsoft and Google in comparison to their earlier statistical engines, they seemed oh-so elegant and fluid. Suddenly, though, when compared to the results of DeepL, they look terrible again. This reinforces how easily impressed we are with advancements while often forgetting to examine the results on their own merits and realizing that they all have a very long way to go, including DeepL.

For fun, try this interesting little experiment. If you retrieve data from Linguee (www.linguee.com) to be translated by DeepL, you won’t get the existing translation already found in Linguee, the one on which DeepL was trained. Instead, you’ll receive a completely new one, all carried out by the neural computer “brain.” Chances are this would have been different if they had built a statistical machine translation program where the original fragments might in fact have been reassembled, but that’s just not how neural machine translation works. ✤

Jost Zetzsche is the co-author of Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World, a robust source for replenishing your arsenal of information about how human translation and machine translation each play an important part in the broader world of translation. Contact: jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.

This column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and to encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals.
Attending Industry-Specific Conferences and Events

By the time you read this, you’ll have come back from yet another extraordinary ATA Annual Conference, this year in our nation’s capital. I don’t have a crystal ball, but if the past 15 years or so are any indication, I bet it was amazing indeed.

The week of ATA’s Annual Conference is one of my favorite times of the year, especially when I have the chance to go with my twin sister and business partner, Dagmar, as was the case this year. That being said, to acquire new and/or more direct clients, it’s essential that linguists also attend events in their specializations or fields of expertise, as that is where the clients are. This is not to say that you won’t meet potential clients at translation and interpreting (T&I) conferences (e.g., colleagues and agencies), but, in my humble opinion, a solid marketing strategy involves attending a combination of T&I conferences and what I call industry-specific conferences.

Depending on where you live, the industry in which you work, your travel budget, and availability of events, you might want to make it a goal to attend one or two events per year—or one a month, or whatever works for you. Finding the event might require some research, but it’s worth it.

Before committing to a large annual conference or expo-type event, I highly recommend checking the attendee list and visiting the website of the companies in attendance to make sure they are a good fit. As opposed to T&I conferences, large annual conferences in other industries tend to be pricier. For example, I attended a digital marketing conference in Silicon Valley years ago that cost around $1,500 a day, so make sure you spend your money wisely. Also keep in mind that you should stay away from doing any hard selling at the expo—the goal of the companies attending is to sell products and services rather than buy them. A better approach is to treat these conferences just like T&I events—as an opportunity to learn and network using a softer approach. While signing up for educational sessions tends to be more expensive than just attending the expo, this is usually a good use of your time and monetary resources, as learning new things about the industries in which you specialize is always a plus.

To keep things more manageable and less overwhelming, it might be a good idea to start with a simple industry networking event on a smaller scale. For instance, if you work in the biology sector, look for (I’m making this up here) the Dutch Association of Biologists and attend an event they happen to have in Amsterdam. In my experience, lawyers love happy hours, so I’ve attended many a local Bar Association event at a bar, which is always nice. You’ll often be the only linguist there, which is a great opportunity to meet the people you need to reach: potential clients. Just remember to stay away from selling your services directly. Instead, start by asking people what they do. Invariably, they will eventually ask you what you do. This is where you get to do your elevator pitch, meaning talking intelligently and concisely about what you do for a few minutes.

I also enjoy attending smaller one-day professional development events in my fields, especially the legal field. I’ve tried to ask intelligent questions from a language perspective and have had many people come up to me after to inquire what it is that I do. One year I went to a workshop on immigration and asked the presenter if her firm had informational materials in other languages, as her services would probably sell better if she addressed potential clients in their own languages. She thought it was a great point and we ended up chatting after the event. Even though she didn’t become my client, she recommended my services to fellow lawyers.

Finally, attending these industry events is one of the best ways to keep your finger on the pulse of the industry in which you work. What are the new trends? What are the industry influencers excited or worried about? Which new software is going to change the direction of the business? Which new buzzwords are being coined as we speak? As specialized linguists, it’s very much our job to keep abreast of changes and developments in our fields of expertise. Clients appreciate it when they notice that you are an industry insider just like them. So with that, perhaps you can make the commitment to attend at least one industry event before the end of the year. Who’s in? I am. 😊

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Speaking with OmegaT’s Project Manager

There are only a handful of open-source translation environment tools primarily geared toward the professional freelance translator. Without a doubt, the platform-independent OmegaT, a free open-source translation memory application, is the king of the hill.

When you start the program, the initial screen displays information on how to get started with OmegaT in five minutes. (See Figure 1 on page 33.) And they’re not kidding. To use the basic features, you just start using the program and it works. When it comes to fine-tuning the OmegaT setup, you might find some items available in menus with an easy-to-use graphical user interface, but for other features you’ll have to manually set up files and edit configuration files.

I decided to talk with Didier Briel, OmegaT’s project manager, about the tool and its users. After a first career in computing, notably as product architect, technical director, and marketing and strategy director within European enterprise software vendors, Didier became a translator and a consultant in 2004. He started contributing to OmegaT in 2006, became development manager in 2007, and project manager in 2014. In parallel to his translation activities, he provides consulting, training, support and development services, mostly on free translation environments. He is also a member of the Société française des traducteurs. You can contact him at didier@didierbriel.fr.

Can you give us some idea of OmegaT by the numbers?

Date of first release: November 28, 2002

Number of supported file formats: 40 native formats, plus 15 formats provided by the Okapi plugin, for a total of 55.

Number of current OmegaT team members: I’m the project manager and the Twitter community manager. For development, we have occasional contributors rather than a fixed number of developers who might contribute after months or even years of inactivity.

Didier Briel

Currently, we only have two people contributing regularly (the integration manager and I), but we had seven different contributors in 2017. We have one documentation manager, one localization manager, and two Facebook community managers. We also have a large number of translators, some regular and some occasional. OmegaT is available in 35 languages, with complete documentation in 14 languages.

Frequency of updates: We don’t schedule updates. We release them when we feel they are stable and contain enough new things to justify a release. We have two versions: a “Standard” one, with mostly bug fixes, and a “Latest” (or “Beta”) one with new features. The Latest is generally stable, but may not have an up-to-date manual. We’ve released three updates so far this year for the Standard version and five for the Latest version.

Number of downloads per month: 10,000

Estimated number of regular users: We don’t have reliable numbers for this. We have 2,596 members in the Yahoo user group. Not all these members are regular users, but there are plenty of users we only hear about by accident.

Percentage of Windows versus Mac versus Linux users: Based on downloads for 2017, the breakdown is 70% Windows, 12% Linux, 11% Mac, and 4.5% “Unknown.”

What makes one decide to become a part of the OmegaT team?

We’re an informal association. This means that apart from very specific roles, such as localization manager, you don’t even have to be a permanent member of a team to contribute to the program. In addition to development, some of the areas where we ask for volunteers include document authoring, localization, and testing. Volunteers can choose to contribute a single time, once every few months, or several times a month.

I think there are two main reasons to contribute to the program. The first is “selfishness,” as defined by Linus Torwald, the creator of the Linux operating system. He explained that the best reason to contribute is because it does something useful for you. For instance, I started to contribute because OmegaT didn’t have a filter for the HTML Help Compiler files I had to translate. By contributing, I also make the project more useful for others, who will then contribute to the project for their own “selfish” reasons, and I will benefit.

The second reason is gratitude—to give something back to the project. When a free application is your main tool, some will want to show their gratitude with a donation and others by volunteering their time to help make it better.

What makes one decide to become a user of OmegaT?

Our user base is very diverse.

■ Some like the fact that OmegaT is free of charge (gratis).
■ Some because it’s one of the few computer-assisted translation tools running on their platform (Mac, Linux, but also BSD—Unix-based operating systems).
Some because it’s free (libre) software (that’s important for a number of users).
Some because they consider it to be very efficient.
Some because it’s the only program with filters for their formats.
Some because it allows team projects with an unlimited number of concurrent translators.
Some because it’s open-source and can be modified, which is how we get a good number of contributions.
Some because they love the community.

Are there translators for whom OmegaT would not be a good match? For instance, how does it deal with server-based or cloud-based workflows that are provided through other tools? If your client works with an online tool or one that’s server-based, it depends on whether that tool offers a roundtrip (i.e., a way of exporting and re-importing data). If yes—that’s the case for XTM, for instance, with XLIFF export and import—you can probably use OmegaT. If not, that might not be possible.

With some server-based tools, you can find a limited workaround. For instance, with the memoQ server, you can pre-translate documents with the online translation memory and then use those pre-translated documents as translation memories inside OmegaT. That way, you get the best matches from memoQ in OmegaT.

If your client insists on sending you proprietary packages (e.g., Trados Studio) and wants target documents in those packages, OmegaT will probably not be a good choice. On the other hand, if the client is happy with a form of XLIFF files (.sdlxiff, mqxmliff, etc.), then you can probably use OmegaT.

OmegaT often introduces technology before the commercial competition (e.g., links to machine translation engines, morphological rules, grammar checking, etc.). Why is that? Does that mean the average OmegaT user is more technically inclined or needs to be more technically inclined than the typical translator?

With our limited resources, we have to make the most of our development time. So, when something really useful is already developed, why not take advantage of it? We are also very “agile.” With no fixed schedules and no marketing plans, we can sometimes have a technology developed and delivered in a few weeks instead of months.

Our developers are all involved in translation. We introduced Google Translate because our lead developer was from Belarus and Google had just added Belarus to its list of languages. Because of the ”selfishness” mentioned above, our developers tend to add what matters most to them.

I don’t think the average OmegaT user is more technically inclined than the typical translator. Some of our users are self-professed technophobes. For morphology, if you have the choice between entering regular expressions in your glossary and having OmegaT manage it for you automatically, what option do you think the not-technically-inclined translator will prefer?

What would you describe as the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of OmegaT?
If I really had to pick only one of the greatest strengths, I would say efficiency. Of course, there’s also the community. It’s hard to pick between those two. One of the greatest weaknesses is the price. For some, this prevents OmegaT from being taken seriously.

What do you see happening with OmegaT in the mid-term future? For instance, might it ever morph into a browser-based tool?
I have no real idea what might happen. A lot of our features were not even planned a few months before they happened. As for becoming only a browser-based tool, that’s unlikely. There was an OmegaT-based tool called Boltran, but it didn’t attract much attention (though it’s true that its features were limited). What would be more likely is a close tie between team projects and a web-based interface to define projects, select translators, etc., while still using the desktop application to actually translate.

Figure 1: OmegaT’s Quick Guide to Setting Up

Remember, if you have any ideas and/or suggestions regarding helpful resources or tools you would like to see featured, please e-mail Jost Zetzsche at jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.
Who Wants to Fail ATA’s Certification Exam?

Self-help books and websites have recently been featuring “not-to-do” lists as a way of improving work habits, enhancing productivity, and generally boosting quality of life. ATA’s certification team can’t claim to offer anything so grand, but we can enumerate several (unfortunately) tried-and-true actions that have stood in the way of candidates passing ATA’s certification exam.

1. **Cut to the chase.** Who reads instructions anymore? Actually, we expect you to use the valuable resources available at your fingertips, from the general information on ATA’s website down to the specific translation instructions (TIs) printed at the top of each exam passage. Ultimately, it’s up to you to educate yourself about the exam process before registering, to click on the link that comes with your registration confirmation, and to read the TIs. Or not! In which case, you’ve already turned the page. If you’re still with me, read on.

2. **Skip the practice test.** Life isn’t a dress rehearsal, right? Well, when it comes to the certification exam, rehearsals are a good thing. Like all exams, ATA’s certification exam is a hybrid of a real-life situation combined with exam conditions. The practice test is a retired passage marked by ATA graders and is the only chance to receive direct feedback prior to the exam. Don’t miss this opportunity—unless you like surprises.

3. **Use the exam as your ticket into the profession.** Despite its description as “an exam that assesses the language skills of a professional translator,” many new graduates and career changers sign up with no experience, assuming the exam is an entry-level credential. Caveats against this appear on ATA’s website, as well as in this column, webinars, and candidate preparation sessions, but you’ll be unaware of this if you “cut to the chase” (see point 1 above).

4. **Start with your native language.** As a general rule, our native language is our strongest, but this doesn’t mean we should use it as our source language (i.e., the one from which we translate). As language teachers know, the most difficult skill to master is writing—and that’s what translation is. This is why most experts recommend we translate into our native language, even if we’ve spent many years learning and using others. There are exceptions, of course, but should you assume you’re one? ATA’s exam is difficult, so taking the exam into a non-native language will likely increase the difficulty. In addition, not checking your exam registration email to ensure you’re actually registered for the correct language and direction will definitely add unwanted challenges. Showing up on exam day only to discover that you don’t have passages in the right language will definitely hurt your chances for success. Bottom line: double-check everything!  

5. **Travel light.** Don’t assume that all test-taking resources will be provided at the exam site. Actually, the only thing ATA promises to provide is your exam packet. If you’re taking the computerized exam, you must bring your own laptop, as clearly stated on the website and in the registration information. (And yet there have been cases where candidates have left theirs at home!) Also, ATA cannot ensure that links to online resources will be up and running on exam day. I know, I know, nobody carries books around anymore, but do you want to take a chance and leave your dictionaries at home that day?

6. **Be spontaneous.** Actually, some advance planning is crucial. If you join ATA and register immediately for the next exam sitting, even if it’s only a few weeks away, you deprive yourself of the opportunity to familiarize yourself with the exam by taking a practice test, listening to a webinar, attending a candidate preparation session, or working with colleagues. Some people perform better under stress, but the certification exam is not the time to find out if you’re one of them.

7. **Cross the bridge when you come to it.** If you wait until exam day to ask an important question (or to realize you have one), you may be out of luck. Many exams are given on weekends, when ATA Headquarters is closed. The head proctor’s contact information is included with your registration in case you have a last-minute question or need directions to the venue. Your registration email containing this information is sent to
you twice, once when you register and again just prior to the exam date. But if you don’t open the link or read the instructions ahead of time, you may find yourself in a pickle. If you do manage to reach someone, whether it’s the proctor or ATA staff, even if you feel desperate or stressed, try to remember the advice of authors like Dale Carnegie and Stephen Covey: treat folks with respect and you’re more likely to get what you want!

8. Think of yourself as a snowflake—unique and exceptional. Well, yes, everybody is exceptional, but that doesn’t mean ATA will make exceptions for you. Perhaps you asked a question about using a certain resource, but didn’t get the answer you wanted. Perhaps you are someone who always runs late. Whatever the case, don’t assume exceptions will be made to accommodate you. If the answer was “no” from ATA staff, the answer from the proctor will still be “no” on exam day. Rooms for exam sittings are rented for a certain period of time, which cannot necessarily be extended to accommodate latecomers. ATA relishes the diversity of its members, but you may have to stifle some aspects of your uniqueness on exam day. Rules are rules.

This all might seem to be just common sense, but ATA’s certification team has seen candidates make these mistakes more times than we can count. Sure, candidates don’t set out to fail. But certification is just one of many short- and long-term goals in our busy lives, so we may not feel we have time to “sweat the small stuff.” We might skip over instructions in our rush to meet the registration deadline, and when exam day is upon us we may even forget basic guidelines in the stress of the moment. So, if you want to give yourself the best chances for success on the exam, take the time to inform yourself and prepare. Good luck!

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