DIGITAL STUDY AND COLLABORATION: Making the Most of Your Mobile Devices
FROM THE PRESIDENT
DAVID RUMSEY
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Making Ourselves Heard

Living in the Pacific Northwest, fog and ferries are an everyday part of life. There is no sound more mysterious and alluring than that of a foghorn as the boats make their way through the fog on the water, letting other boats and shoreline listeners know where they are.

From my own experience at the helm of ATA, I know it’s important to make ourselves heard, not only among the general public, but among our fellow members who are a part of this journey. Recently, we’ve been making an extra effort to create new communication channels so members can learn more about their organization.

Podcast: Not many people may remember, but back in the autumn of 2015, with the inspiration from one of our individual members, then-ATA President Caitlin Walsh and I were part of what became ATA’s first podcast. Modeled on FDR’s “fireside chat” during World War II, it was an opportunity to discuss informally the plans and behind-the-scenes efforts of ATA’s Board and its leadership. While our initial podcast covered the upcoming Miami conference, recent podcasts have included a behind-the-scenes look at Board meetings, the redesign of the Chronicle, and other issues. You can listen in here: www.atanet.org/resources/podcasts.php.

ataTalk: Early in the new Board’s term, we also added a new listserv devoted to ATA policies and activities, ataTalk. With a growing number of readers, ataTalk has become a great place for people to discuss the issues and activities of the Association. Although the intention is for members to talk among themselves, it allows a good opportunity for members to learn what ATA’s leadership is doing and to discuss new directions and potential new ventures to undertake. You can join the conversation here: http://bit.ly/yahoo-ataTalk.

YouTube Channel: Another outlet we’ve been promoting is ATA’s new YouTube channel. While our earlier online video efforts focused largely on recaps of ATA’s Annual Conference, we’ve recently added content that focuses on ATA’s outreach efforts to the membership, the media, and the general public. We’ve begun adding important content from popular conference sessions, including Jonathan Hine’s session on how to establish pricing. Subscribe now to receive updates when new videos are uploaded: http://bit.ly/ATA-youtube.

Divisions: One of the other key channels for ATA is actually through our divisions. Divisions represent the backbone of the Association. With 20 divisions—including the recent Dutch Language and Government Divisions—they host listserves, their own websites, and social functions that help spread the word about the work and activities of ATA. Extra efforts are being made to share information and take in comments via the divisions. If you haven’t joined a division or signed up for your division’s listserv, please do so. It’s a great way to connect with people with shared interests and get information targeted to your interests. You can learn more about ATA’s divisions here: www.atanet.org/divisions/about_divisions.php.

Newsbriefs: Many people have noticed and commented on the new look and content in The ATA Chronicle. It has been the flagship publication for the Association, and the staff and Editorial Board work hard to bring a wide range of articles and columns reflecting the broad scope of the industry. But many other people have noticed the dramatic change in our semimonthly newsletter Newsbriefs. Since switching the Chronicle to a six-issue printing cycle, ATA relies more on Newsbriefs to bring you recent news and updates, not only from the Association, but from the larger world of language and the translation and interpreting industry. Next time Newsbriefs shows up in your inbox, be sure to check it out: www.atanet.org/newsbriefs.

Of course, many members are able to stay abreast of news and events even more frequently using ATA’s Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest pages, and our new Google+ page. Be sure to read them all.

So, at the risk of “tooting our own fog horn,” we hope that these extra efforts will let you know that ATA is here for you.
Digital Study and Collaboration: Making the Most of Your Mobile Devices
Whatever your goal as an interpreter, the mobile device in your pocket or briefcase can help you attain it.

How to Spice Up Your Translation
It’s our job to find a balance between using the source text and still producing an original, well-written translation.

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Looking for The Translation Inquirer 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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What’s new for ATA57?

At every ATA conference, we try to strike a balance between maintaining the events that everyone loves while still injecting some new offerings into the program. A big change for this year is the slate of sessions and activities on Wednesday, November 2, the day before the main conference begins (often known as “preconference seminar day”). We’ve restyled Wednesday into our Advanced Skills and Training day, or AST for short, and we’re looking forward to a full lineup of three-hour courses—morning and afternoon—designed to offer either hands-on training or in-depth information on advanced topics.

In order to focus on advanced topics, we decided to select and invite the presenters for the AST courses. Some of them have received rave reviews for their presentations at past ATA conferences, while others are experts in their fields. We’ll be offering between 14 and 16 three-hour sessions on topics such as direct client marketing, International Financial Reporting Standards, note-taking, sight translation and presentation skills for interpreters, speech recognition software, improving your English writing skills, advanced Trados Studio skills, and more.

We’ll also have some special networking opportunities just for AST attendees, making this day like a conference-within-a-conference that you won’t want to miss.

Over the years, you’ve told us on your ATA conference evaluations that you want more advanced-level sessions, and more opportunities for the kind of training that is best done in person rather than by reading a book or attending a webinar. We hear you, and that’s why we’re looking forward to this inaugural AST day (and hopefully many more to come!).

Our plan for AST day has also allowed us to move our division guest speakers into the main conference lineup, where all attendees can attend their presentations without paying an extra fee. Since everyone’s registration fees support the guest speaker program, we felt it was important to make this switch to ensure that anyone can attend a guest speaker presentation.

For this year’s conference, we received nearly 400 proposals for 174 session slots. It’s not an easy job to narrow the pool to the number of sessions we can accommodate. I want to extend a huge thank you to our division administrators, assistant administrators, and other reviewers who took the time to review the proposals for their tracks at the conference and give us their feedback. As the conference organizer, I, along with Teresa Kelly, our dynamo meetings manager at ATA Headquarters, am responsible for the big-picture aspects of the conference and the overall program. But because Teresa and I aren’t experts in all of the areas covered by the conference presentations, we count on our proposal reviewers to tell us what sessions ATA members want to attend. We appreciate their work immensely, and we’re looking forward to a lively (and jam-packed!) program at ATA57.
Neuroscientists create ‘atlas’ showing how words are organised in the brain

"Scientists have created an ‘atlas of the brain’ that reveals how the meanings of words are arranged across different regions of the organ. Like a colourful quilt laid over the cortex, the atlas displays in rainbow hues how individual words and the concepts they convey can be grouped together in clumps of white matter.”


Comment on Tony Beckwith’s Interview with Cressida Stolp

Before I share my comments regarding Tony Beckwith’s interview in the January-February “Our World of Words” column, let me say that I think it’s a good idea to look at the other side of the coin (i.e., translation and interpreting agencies) to gain insight from another’s perspective.

I’m a professional conference interpreter and a member of the International Association of Conference Interpreters with the language combination German A, English B, and French C (and unofficial Dutch). My home base is Switzerland. I’ve covered more than 3,000 interpreting days, about one-fourth of which in the legal setting, mainly depositions and arbitrations. I receive about 10–15 unsolicited inquiries from agencies per week, mainly for translations and some for interpreting.

Here are some things (in chronological order) that struck me after reading Tony’s interview with Cressida Stolp.

Résumés: Most agencies who send an inquiry ask for a résumé. If I answer, I refer them to my website. Many times this is not good enough and they want a customized résumé for a particular job. This is presumably sent to the potential client. The agency may or may not get the job. Should it get the job, it often goes to a less qualified but much cheaper “colleague.” Needless to say, I stopped sending résumés a long time ago.

Benefits of working with an agency (as an interpreter): The only benefit I can see is when the agency offers a package. However, I’m usually asked to give a quote. I spend hours making travel arrangements, sometimes even put a team of colleagues together (free of charge), and get paid after 60–90 days. There is a lot of preparation for an assignment that is often unpaid. When the agency offers a package, which includes my rate plus travel fees, transfers, and the like, I can see the benefit. And there are agencies that just do that, and I love working with them.

Top-three qualities (for an interpreter): The ones listed go without saying when you’re a professional conference interpreter (and not someone who took a “three-month backpacking tour in Italy,” to quote Ms. Stolp).

I would like to add a fourth and fifth quality that agencies want: cheap/cheaper, experienced/highly experienced. Plus, “please quote your (very) best rate.” That’s a contradiction in itself.

I’m sure that many professional colleagues feel exactly the same. Agencies have their place, and I know some wonderful agencies and work with them. However, many should walk the talk and give priority to quality and not price.

Edith Kelly | Morcote, Switzerland
TA’s Board of Directors met April 30-May 1, 2016, in Alexandria, Virginia. The Board met in conjunction with the Certification Committee and Language Chairs meetings. (In ATA’s Certification Program, each exam language combination has a language chair administering the passage selection and graders. ATA currently offers testing in 30 language combinations.)

Here are some highlights from the Board meeting.

Secretary Vacancy: Secretary Rudy Heller resigned recently due to health reasons. The Board approved the appointment of Jane Maier, currently a director, to serve as secretary until the election this November. Lois Feuerle was approved to serve the remainder of Jane’s term as director, which expires this November. The bylaws (Article IV, Section 4) call for a Board vacancy to “be filled without delay,” which prevents the Board from leaving the vacancy until the November election. By bringing in Lois, who served as a director from 2009-2014, we have an experienced member who knows the process and is familiar with many of the current issues.

Working Budget: The Board approved the working budget for July 1, 2016-June 30, 2017, as well as draft budgets for 2017-2019. The approved budget of $3.1 million is a $200,000 increase over the current fiscal year. The working budget provides an interim financial framework. By using this interim budget, changes and revisions can be made based on the actual year-end figures. The final budget will be approved at the next Board meeting.

Presentation of Candidates: The Nominating and Leadership Development Committee, chaired by Past President Dorothee Racette, presented the slate of candidates for this year’s election for director (three positions, three-year terms): Maria Brau, Evelyn Yang Garland, Christina Green, Cristina Helmerichs, Karen Tkaczyk, and Tess Whitty. There will also be a special election for secretary for a one-year term to complete Rudy Heller’s term. Jane Maier is the candidate for secretary.

2020 Annual Conference Host Hotel: The Board approved the Westin Boston Waterfront as the host hotel for the 2020 ATA Annual Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. The conference is scheduled to be held in San Francisco (2016), Washington, DC (2017), New Orleans, Louisiana (2018), and Palm Springs, California (2019). The site selection process will likely look to the middle of the country for 2021.

Public Relations: The Board was briefed by ATA Director and Public Relations Committee Chair Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo on how the committee has been working successfully with an outside PR firm to place “penned pieces.” These articles have been written by members of the PR Committee’s Writers Group. The articles have been picked up by a diverse group of publications, including Retail Environments (store fixtures and design) and the International Association of Business Communicators’ Communication World Magazine.

New Affiliate: The Board approved the Association of Translators and Interpreters in the San Diego Area (ATISDA) as an ATA Affiliate. ATISDA is ATA’s 10th Affiliate. (ATA has 14 chapters.)

Gode Medal Award Committee: The Board approved the appointment of the members of the 2016 Gode Medal Award Committee: Nicholas Hartmann (chair), Muriel Jérôme-O’Keeffe, Peter Krawutschke, Jiri Stejskal, and Thomas L. West III. (All are past presidents.) The Gode Medal is ATA’s highest and most prestigious award that recognizes outstanding contributions to the translation and interpreting professions. (Nominations are still being accepted.)

The Board meeting summary and minutes will be posted online once they are approved. Past meeting summaries and minutes are always posted online at www.atanet.org/membership/minutes.php. The next Board meeting is set for July 30-31, 2016. The location is to be determined. As always, the meeting is open to all members, and members are encouraged to attend.
Outreach to the Paralegal Community about Translation and Interpreting

Giving presentations to professionals in other fields helps create greater awareness about the importance of using bona fide professional translators and interpreters versus bilinguals without extensive formal training and certification in translation and/or interpreting.

On March 16, 2016, ATA President-elect and ATA-certified French>English translator Corinne McKay and I gave a presentation entitled “Working Effectively with Expert Translators/Interpreters” at the Rocky Mountain Paralegal Association’s (RMPA) monthly “Lunch and Learn” event in Denver, Colorado. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first presentation about translation or interpreting given by professional translators/interpreters at RMPA. A number of the association’s members attended, but many were also present by phone.

I proposed this presentation to RMPA after noticing that paralegals are often asked to find translators and interpreters for cases their employers handle. This presents a challenge, since there are times when paralegals are at a loss as to how the languages services industry works, or how to find a qualified professional to interpret for a deposition or translate a contract. RMMPA presents these brown bag events on various topics of interest to paralegals, and they enthusiastically accepted the proposal for an event focused on translation and interpreting.

Before I suggested giving a presentation, I had belonged to RMPA for a long enough time to have attended several events, so I was familiar with the organization. During that period, I also built relationships with many of its leaders. I’ve found it helpful to learn from and network with paralegals through this type of association.

THE VALUE OF TEAMWORK

At each “Lunch and Learn” I attended, the topic of the day was always presented by a team of speakers. For that reason, it seemed only natural to team up with a colleague. Prior to the presentation, Corinne’s feedback was instrumental in helping to make the presentation more listener-friendly. I’m certain that we succeeded in providing different perspectives, since our combined professional experience covers three languages, both translation and interpreting, and the two of us have substantial experience working directly with law firms.

WHY PRESENT TO PARALEGALS, AND ABOUT WHAT?

A couple of key factors motivated me to give this presentation. From years of experience working directly with law firms, I know that finding the right translation/interpreting assistance can be stressful for paralegals. I thought the members of RMPA would benefit from knowing how to obtain specific, vital information from potential interpreters or translators when conducting a provider search, beyond fees and availability.

With the goal of helping our audience serve the lawyers and clients for whom they work more effectively, I also thought it would be useful for them to develop a better understanding of translation/interpreting best practices and know how to search for qualified and certified language professionals more effectively. This was the vision I shared with RMPA’s then-board advisor (who was in charge of the “Lunch and Learns” at the time) when I offered to speak. She shared my vision with the rest of RMPA’s board, which led to this presentation materializing.

WHAT MADE THE PRESENTATION A SUCCESS?

During the presentation, we gave simple yet compelling examples as to what separates bilinguals without extensive formal training and certification in
There are times when paralegals are at a loss as to how the languages services industry works or how to find a qualified professional to interpret for a deposition or translate a contract.

We gave a brief overview of what good translation/interpreting entails and what makes it challenging. While we did give an overview of translator and interpreter certifications, we also provided the audience with further perspective on what to look for when searching for a translation or interpreting professional, whether directly with an individual provider or through an agency.

We found it interesting that those who attended the presentation in person seemed to be taking copious notes. I think the most interesting question from the audience was how, as an interpreter, I dealt with people who spoke too quickly and/or not loud enough. In part of my response, I stated that this is one of the many situational challenges that interpreters are trained to handle. As a real-world example, Corinne had me interpret for her in both consecutive and simultaneous modes. As she spoke extremely fast and only paused after a few minutes, this gave the audience a taste of the challenges that only expert interpreters are trained to handle.

After the presentation, we received very positive feedback, so it seems like there are many opportunities for translators, interpreters, and paralegals to collaborate on continuing education events.

David L. Lauman is an ATA-certified Spanish>English translator and a federally certified court interpreter. His experience includes extensive interpreting in legal, law enforcement, conference, seminar, medical, and community settings. His translation work focuses primarily on legal (especially international tax law), medical, and business-related documents. He has an MA in translation and interpretation from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies and a BA in Latin American studies from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Contact: david@2020translations.com.
Summary of the *ATA Translation and Interpreting Services Survey*

The fifth edition of the *ATA Translation and Interpreting Services Survey* serves as a practical tool, revealing general trends in the translation and interpreting industry.

The recently released fifth edition of the *ATA Translation and Interpreting Services Survey* is an invaluable benchmarking tool for nearly everyone in or affiliated with the translation and interpreting industry. The study allows an individual or company to easily compare their compensation levels to their peers. Translators and interpreters are able to review rates across languages, specialties, and location. Companies involved in translation and interpreting are able to refer to this report when determining their competitiveness with respect to compensation. Students considering careers in the translation and interpreting industry can use this tool to steer their specific career decisions and to gain insight about potential compensation. In addition, the study serves as a practical tool for a broader audience—individuals and businesses in the market for translation and interpreting services.

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

**SURVEY DESIGN**

Responses were received from translation and interpreting professionals worldwide. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents reside in the U.S., 15% in Europe, 6% in South America, 4% in Canada, and the remaining 6% in other locations.

Upon receipt, all data were checked both manually and by a custom software editing procedure. Strict confidence of survey responses was maintained throughout the course of the project.

Responses were received from translation and interpreting professionals worldwide. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents reside in the U.S., 15% in Europe, 6% in South America, 4% in Canada, and the remaining 6% in other locations.

The seven employment classifications analyzed in this report include:

- Full-time independent contractors
- Part-time independent contractors
- Full-time in-house private sector personnel
- Part-time in-house private sector personnel
- Company owners
- Educators
- Government employees

For detailed analysis, responses were broken down by age, gender, years in translation and/or interpreting, education level, ATA membership, geographic region, and certification and interpreter certification/credential. This comprehensive data allows users to compare their own income, hourly rates, and rates per word to individuals in similar situations.
SOME KEY FINDINGS

Respondent Demographics: Survey respondents had varying backgrounds and experience. As shown in Figure 1, more than two-thirds were female and nearly one-third were ATA-certified. More than 60% held a master's degree or higher, and more than two-thirds had over 10 years of employment in translation and interpreting. The typical (median) respondent was 50 years old.

Income Varied by Employment Classification: As shown in Figure 2, translation and interpreting company owners reported the highest gross income at $55,630, which is slightly ahead of full-time private sector employees ($55,547) and full-time independent contractors ($52,323). The lowest income was reported by educators and part-time independent contractors: $17,344 and $17,746, respectively.

Certification and Credentials Matter: On average, ATA-certified translators earned 21% higher compensation than those who were not certified. Similarly, on average, certified and credentialed interpreters earned 27% higher compensation than those who were not certified or credentialed. (See Figure 3 on page 11.)

Trends: Nearly half of the respondents reported that their 2014 gross compensation from translation and interpreting increased compared to 2013. Nearly one-third reported no change in income, while 23% reported a decline.

Education and Experience: Thirty percent reported having a degree in translation, while 12% reported having a degree in interpreting. Half reported having a non-degree certificate in translation or interpreting. Other credentials reported include state court interpreter certification (8%) and the U.S. State Department exam (6%).

Translation Volume: Translators' target output per day was reported at 2,855 words. On average, they translated approximately 380,000 words per year in 2014.

Translation Income: Responding translators reported three-quarters of their income was derived from translating, while 15% was earned by editing/proofreading.

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**Figure 1: Respondent Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>ATA-Certified</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
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<td>70.9%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Employment in T&amp;I</th>
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<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>0.4% 0-5 years 13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>11.7% 6-10 years 15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>19.0% 11-15 years 18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>30.1% 16-20 years 16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>26.0% 21+ years 35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 or older</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Work</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation or related</td>
<td>High School 3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting or related</td>
<td>Associate's Degree 3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both about equal</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree 32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master's Degree 45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate 10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Degree 5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: Personal 2014 Gross Compensation from T&I Language Services and Related Activities by Employment Classification (U.S.-Based Respondents)**

- **All Respondents**: $44,611
- **Full-Time Independent Contractor**: $52,323
- **Part-Time Independent Contractor**: $17,746
- **Full-Time Private Sector Employee**: $55,547
- **Part-Time Private Sector Employee**: $33,750
- **T&I Company Owner**: $55,630
- **Educator**: $17,344
- **Government Employee**: $37,388
**Translation Services:** A little more than 14% of translators reported offering editing/proofreading services, while more than 76% reported offering translation services. Only 1% of translators reported offering post-editing machine translation services.

**Interpreting Income:** Responding interpreters reported the bulk of their income was derived from the following settings: judiciary (27%), medicine/life sciences (22%), and business and conference (12% each).

**Interpreting Services:** The interpreting services offered most frequently were consecutive (96%), simultaneous (74%), sight (44%), and phone (42%).

**Compensation:** Thirty-two language combinations were surveyed. Translation rates were reported per word and hourly. Hourly rates were reported for editing/proofreading services. Hourly rates were reported for interpreting services.

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**ATA intends the survey to reveal general trends in the industry, not exact amounts.**

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**ORDERING INFORMATION**

ATA's 58-page Translation and Interpreting Services Survey, Fifth Edition presents the survey results in much greater detail than is possible in this summary article. The complete report includes translation and interpreting hourly rates and rates per word for a wide range of language combinations. It's important to remember that the statistics published by ATA should be regarded as guidelines rather than absolute standards. ATA intends the survey to reveal general trends in the industry, not exact amounts.

The full report is available to ATA members for free by logging into the Members Only area of ATAs website. Non-members may purchase the complete report for $95. Please order from ATAs Publications page at www.atanet.org/publications or write ATA to order your copy: ATA, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703-683-6100; fax 703-683-6122, e-mail: ata@atanet.org.

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![Simultaneous Interpretation Equipment](image-url)
Revisiting the “Poverty Cult” 20 Years On

Newcomers to translation may wonder why translator blogs make reference to the evils of the “poverty cult.” Veteran ATA member Neil Inglis looks back at his two keynote speeches to translator conferences in 1996, which helped bring this issue out into the open.

1996 was a year of change. From my present-day vantage point, I have been invited to revisit the events surrounding my 1996 speeches to the East Coast Regional Conference (held at George Washington University in Washington, DC) and at ATA’s Annual Conference (held at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado). These talks are still remembered for my attack on the drift and despondency (aka “poverty cult”) that prevailed in the U.S. translation profession at the time. More than that, my presentations were intended as a call for professional pride and higher standards. The ensuing response from colleagues changed the dynamics in the translation world in a way that continues today.

COMING TO THE U.S.

Shortly before my departure for the U.S. in 1984, a family friend informed me that he too “had been a translator for a time, but failed.” I chose not to regard his words as an ill omen.

When I arrived in Washington, DC, in the mid-1980s, I was keen to set to work. I believed then—as I believe today—that only the highest professional standards will suffice. A translator must follow the reasoning in the source text and produce translations that are credible in the eyes of specialists. Translators must also prepare documents that read naturally in the target text and not be hypnotized by source-language syntax and idioms. Last but not least, translation should be viewed as a viable long-term career.

If you want to land on the moon, you must shoot for the stars.

In consulting U.S. translator publications for guidance, I found that these common-sense assumptions did not appear to be universally shared—or at least, were not priorities—amidst the broader community. Typical comments ran along the lines of: “I love doing translation so much that I’d do it for free, or in order to spend money on books.” Fatalism rather than entrepreneurship was the order of the day (“I’ll translate until I’m automated out of existence—it’s all I’m qualified to do!”). Irrelevancy was common: “Translators of the world—you have nothing to lose but your chains!” Other commentators likened translators to bees in beehives (bees? Moi?). Such messages were calculated to leave a poor impression on newcomers and prospective clients, and to have a host of insidious effects in other areas. Most worryingly of all, I overheard people say that translator groups should represent failures as well as successes.

I wanted guidance from success stories, not from my gloomy family friend in London. I knew success stories existed because I was beginning to meet such people myself. Yet they were reticent. Why? Too busy? How might they best get their point of view across? This, of course, was at the dawn of the Internet, and the blogosphere lay years into the future. Despite these obstacles, I

Note: The views expressed herein are those of the author and should not be attributed to the International Monetary Fund, its executive board, or its management.
was impatient to stir things up and start a dialogue. I decided that an emphasis on quality would help isolate those who asserted that an amateur approach was acceptable. I was convinced that a correlation existed between higher standards and a better life.

THE EAST COAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE

I began to gravitate toward like-minded people in the profession who were thinking big and painting on a broader canvas. Marian S. Greenfield (who would go on to become ATA President) and ATA member Lillian Clementi invited me to deliver the keynote address at the legendary East Coast Regional Conference at George Washington University (GWU) in the spring of 1996. I spoke for over an hour, climbing the podium to the booming strains of Bruckner’s 8th symphony.

At this and other appearances, I urged translators to consider working directly, because direct clients care deeply about what they get and have an interest in sharing insights and special guidance, whereas intermediaries (there are exceptions) have historically erected firewalls between the linguist and the end-user. To put it another way, there is a limit to how far you can progress as a translator if you get no feedback. You might develop your own glossaries, you might gain in speed—but you will recycle your own misperceptions.

The “Poverty Cult” speeches were intended as a call for professional pride.

COLORADO SPRINGS

I had hoped the GWU speech would make the translator community sit up and pay attention, and so it did. Peter Krawutschke and Muriel Jerôme-O’Keeffe (then ATA president and president-elect, respectively) invited me to deliver a repeat performance at ATA’s Annual Conference in Colorado Springs later that year.

This took courage. ATA was embroiled in various challenges at the time and my message of professional success was calculated to have an electrifying effect. But the time was right.

I should add that my goal was to encourage, not judge, and in these and other speeches I invoked the spirit of a London friend—call him Mr. X (in fact, he was a composite of various friends, with a little of me in him as well)—tapping out translations on a golfball typewriter in cold, damp lodgings on the outskirts of London where the central heating was activated by pushing a coin into a slot. A better world lay in store for Mr. X—a world in which he could trade in his golfball for a decent computer, swap his pot of noodles for regular restaurant meals, and haunt bookstores all over Europe to his heart’s content! But in order for that to happen, Mr. X would have to make some changes in his life. Mr. X would, in short, have to grow up.

AFTERMATH

And that’s what happened. I like to think there was a ripple effect within the translator profession; certainly the ATA came of age during this time. Kindred spirits stepped forward to connect the dots and spread the word about quality translation and why it’s so important. A massive and successful public relations initiative was launched. A clearer understanding of translation’s intersections with the worlds of politics, policy, and decision-making emerged. Former White House press secretary Dee Dee Myers addressed the Public Relations Committee session at the 1999 ATA Annual Conference in St. Louis. Conference attendance also mushroomed and gained a more international dimension.

A NEW MILLENNIUM

In the 2000s, journalists called in with queries about hospital and battlefield interpreting (among other subjects), and questions were fielded by experts, not forwarded to machine translation vendors, which was the typical fall-back in the past. A new brochure for translation users (Translation: Getting it Right—A guide to buying translation) changed the face of the translation market. ATA began to be referenced in numerous publications and the organization’s catalytic role was much in evidence.

Today, the nature of translation debates has shifted with the march of automation. Many translators engage in spirited debate in the blogosphere. Voices of discouragement have by no means vanished. The low-end of the market has mutated. It can be hard to avoid sp ammy e-mailed translation requests from people with no surnames (Tom? Dick? Harry?), working for middlemen disconnected from any obvious geographic reality. Will Tom, Dick, or Harry provide you with the kind of specialist feedback you need to raise your game, to carve out a market niche, and build a career? I seriously doubt it!

I believed then—as I believe today—that only the highest professional standards will suffice.

Of course, working for direct clients is never easy. Rewarding client/translator relationships don’t fall into one’s lap like plums off a tree. First, you have to be talented. Then you have to do the deep work necessary to gain a client’s trust, for with greater rewards comes greater scrutiny. If you want to land on the moon, you must shoot for the stars. The one piece of advice I would give you is this: if you are to ascend to the next level you must bid farewell to the scoffers and naysayers and leave them behind. I believed that in 1996, and I believe it still.

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Roads Less Taken: Beyond the “UN6”

In my job, once you leave the UN6, a special set of complications comes into play. The less widely spoken the languages are, the more daunting these challenges can become.

“Divehi”—the word leapt from my monitor as I sipped my morning coffee at my U.S. State Department desk. Thoughts ranged from the exotic to the practical to the panic-stricken.

- **Divehi**: Official language of the Republic of the Maldives, the sublime tourist destination I dream of visiting with my family.
- **Divehi**: The proud language with Prakrit and Sanskrit roots, the distant Indo-European cousin of English.
- **Divehi**: Spoken by a mere 350,000 souls worldwide, thus ranking among what we in the translation business call a language of limited diffusion (LLD).

- **Divehi**: A language for which I had not one single translator on my roster of contractors, thus making the project virtually “unstaffable,” to use government-speak.

As I read the e-mail further, my heart sank. The client needed a 2,000-word guidance sheet translated into a number of Asian languages within three days! No matter that the final version was still in clearance and that the end product would need desktop publishing work; the deadline was immutable. Such was my cruel reality that morning—one I’m sure many language services providers (LSPs) have shared.

My office—the U.S. State Department’s Office of Language Services (LS)—concentrates on the languages that sovereign nations use routinely in their diplomatic relations. Up to that point, no Divehi project had ever crossed my desk, which led me to conclude that the Maldives was dealing with the U.S. primarily in English—which is used widely there—in its official correspondence and treaty-making. Given the sheer lack of work in the language, I had never recruited Divehi translators. I began regretting that decision, even though other “rainy day” recruiting efforts had led to “hurry up and wait” scenarios that frustrated eager translators.

I called the client and ultimately spoke with the person in her office far up the chain of command who had commissioned a translation into the noble Divehi tongue. The answer was one I had heard before in similar multi-language extravaganza projects. Someone, in an over-zealous but well-meaning moment of web searching, had tracked down every possible language in which the guidance sheet might be viewed. The client assumed that we had vast pools of Divehi translators eager to take on yet another bracing assignment! But when confronted with my reality, the client readily agreed that the potential readers of this particular Divehi translation would also understand the English original. Ultimately, she decided to pare down the request.

Would the world have been better with a hastily prepared Divehi translation? At least in this case, all indications were that a rushed translation by an untried team could have done more harm than good. For me, the episode served as a reminder of the challenges involved in projects that include the world’s less widely-spoken languages.

**THE CHALLENGES OF THE NON-UN6**

Call them what you like—languages of limited diffusion (LLDs), less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), or even “long tail” languages (from the shape formed when languages are graphed by number of speakers)—someone is apt to be displeased with the label. Depending on
the criteria chosen, Hindi, Bengali, or Portuguese—each among the 10 most-spoken languages in the world—could all be considered LCTLs. Each of these labels has its own membership criteria, and I have often been surprised to see the limited diffusion moniker attached—perhaps erroneously—to languages that have millions of speakers. Perhaps it’s a testament to how hard it can be to recruit in these languages in the U.S. market. My preferred and very bureaucratic term for these “hard to staff” languages is “the non-UN6”—that is, every language in the world besides Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish, which are the six official languages at the United Nations. Because in my job, once you leave the UN6, a special set of complications comes into play. The less widely spoken the languages are, the more daunting these challenges can become.

Translators of the UN6 are often regarded as having benefits that translators of other languages don’t enjoy, but one could argue that both sides have offsetting advantages and disadvantages. Certainly the recruiting pools for the UN6 often run deeper, but that only means that the competition can be fiercer. And because the amount of work is often greater in the UN6, the roster of translators has to be bigger, which can quickly exhaust even the deepest recruiting pools.

I have actually sometimes found it easier to zero in on talented translators in LLDs simply because the cohort is smaller. The website of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) has been a gold mine. It provides links to hundreds of academic programs throughout North America that specialize in LLDs.

Locality is an issue with any language. But because the UN6 are so often used in international organizations and in communications across many locales, translators in the UN6 tend to be well-versed in a time-tested international variety of these languages, one relatively free from localisms. This is particularly important in the State Department, where treaties and diplomatic correspondence tend to avoid glaringly local usage. Yet, we LSPs know all too well that given the enormous geographical spread of the UN6, clients requesting translations in these languages are nonetheless apt to ask that the target text be adapted to local usage, be it the French of Switzerland or the Arabic of Chad! It’s a dichotomy that my office wrestles with every day. How many locales can you support? How many versions will you translate?

Translators of the UN6 are often regarded as having benefits that translators of other languages do not enjoy, but one could argue that both sides have offsetting advantages and disadvantages.

Then there is the special burden—particularly for those who translate from the UN6 into English—of staying current in the cultures, institutions, and buzzwords of multiple locales—more than 20 each in the case of French and Spanish. As a translator of Romance languages into English, I felt it my duty to attempt to keep up with several dozen locales—including Timor Leste for Portuguese and Equatorial Guinea for Spanish—and I secretly envied my Icelandic or Malagasy translator colleagues who could focus on one primary locale!

Another contest between the UN6 and the non-UN6 concerns lexical resources. The UN6 can justly claim vast riches when it comes to print dictionaries or online glossaries. But again, this seeming advantage can be a double-edged sword. The sheer volume of potential resources can overwhelm the researcher, who is left to sort out which among many are the most authentic and reliable. Those working in LLDs are foraging for terminology on electronic shelves that may not be as well stocked, but may indeed be easier to comb through surely and rapidly.

Having overspent hundreds of translation projects involving LLDs, I can identify six recurring problems that many LSPs will recognize.

1. **No Lifetime Guarantee of Work:**

   You scour the globe for a translator of Lingala, Kyrgyz, or Hawaiian. You find two ideal translators—one to translate, the other to review. The project goes swimmingly, and the client is ecstatic. You thank the translators profusely. Then come the e-mails: “When is my next assignment?” The solution: be honest with the translators from the start that this may be their only gig with your company. But promise to keep their name on file and get it in writing that you can share their contact information with other LSPs.

2. **Few Translators, Many Critics:**

   It’s not always possible to recruit overseas, and emigre communities in the U.S. that use an LLD can be very small worlds indeed. Don’t be surprised if, after finding almost no one willing to translate or review, you learn that there is no shortage of people willing to critique the final translation without being asked. A good way to stem this criticism is to ask, at the project’s outset, organized groups within these communities to provide you with a glossary or at least a list of “word allergies” among the terms to be translated. Once potential critics know they have been consulted, they also feel they have a stake in the project, and are less likely to criticize unduly.

3. **North, Central, and North Central:**

   Most LSPs have established protocols for dealing with the issue of locales and dialects within the UN6. They are less apt to have a protocol on hand for dealing with Afghan versus Pakistani Pashto, or Peruvian versus Bolivian Aymara. Ask one expert, and you may be told there are no major differences in usage between one variety and another. Ask another expert, and you could be told the exact opposite. For some community-level translation projects, an LSP under pressure to assign an unfamiliar LLD will
sometimes find it safer to choose a single, widely-used variety of the language and to draft a disclaimer in the language acknowledging that translator resources are limited and that the variety used is not the sole means of expression in the language in question. It’s also very helpful to make sure that both the translator and the reviewer understand whether the text they are producing is intended to be used within one locale or across several locales within the language. In many cases, a proactive stance by the LSP will ensure that the translator and the reviewer compromise and collaborate, rather than compete and obfuscate.

4. Not Your Grandfather’s Albanian:
Many LLDs are evolving rapidly in response to the political changes that have shaken the world in recent years. Think of the languages of the former Soviet Union or the former Yugoslavia—proud, ancient languages that are now enjoying a whole new existence. New countries have been born, obliging users of these languages to coin names for new institutions and practices constantly. Loan words pour in from English and other languages. Purists decry what they see as a degradation of the language, while a younger generation revels in the changes and condemns what it sees as quaint, outmoded forms of expression. How does an LSP keep up? Consider first and foremost the intent of the document in question. Contracts and laws can sometimes afford to be “stodgier” than ad copy or marketing correspondence. Ask your translation and review team to agree on style and usage rules from the outset and to collaborate on word choices. Which loan words can they accept; which will they avoid? Just as with the issue of locale, the style and terminology debate is not one you want to occur at the closing phases of any job. The consensus your team forges at the start will help you defend the phraseology used if the client or end user challenges the translation.

5. Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don’t: Sometimes you’ll throw up your hands. Your translators will craft a sublime lexicon, based on the finest academic sources and usage studies, which the end users will then reject as being unintelligible. “So what do you suggest instead?” asks the LSP. “Well, we have a slang term we use in the office, but no one else knows it,” the end user replies. There are times when a translation can hinder, not help communication. Consider a technical training course in English that fails to take into account the education level of the students in other languages. Is the technically correct, but largely unintelligible translation into their language better than no translation at all, especially in locales where English coexists with other languages? If you must translate, do three things: 1) find a local subject matter expert from the outset to provide terminology guidance; 2) use disclaimers that acknowledge that technical equivalents are sometimes best attempts and that solicit input to improve future translations; and 3) convene a focus group of potential users to try out an initial installment of the translation before you get in too deep.

6. No, or Almost No: Don’t be afraid to scale client expectations back—even way, way back. “The best I can do in two days is give you a summary translation from Samoan into English.” “I can translate your 12-page overview paper into Lithuanian, but not the 222-page report it introduces.” Sometimes, less can really be more. And if you just can’t make a go of it, it’s better to tell the client. This is particularly true of those assignments into umpteen languages. “We need this sign translated into 45 languages.” If you can only make a credible showing in 40, so be it. Don’t risk your reputation. Tell the client that beyond those 40, you can’t guarantee the same quality for which your LSP is justly proud. If the client respects that decision and goes ahead with the 40, that’s a client worth keeping.

The LLD projects I’ve overseen have been among the most rewarding in my career. We were once asked to provide a translation into an African language. We were proud of our delivered product—even when the client began balking over the system of diacritical marks used. When I asked the translator to justify the diacritics, she responded proudly that she had used the system developed by her father, who was responsible for authoring the definitive orthographic rules for his language in the early 1960s, when his country became independent. I knew I had selected the right translator! I’m a firm believer that any language can rise to any occasion—it only takes the genius of an author, or a translator, to make this magic occur. So, next time you’re asked to provide an animated high-tech PowerPoint in Xhosa or Lenni Lenape, don’t despair. You may be embarking on the adventure of your career.
The Mother-Tongue Principle: Hit or Myth?

An experiment performed at the Dutch National Translation Conference demonstrated that the “mother-tongue principle” is no guarantee of quality.

One of the hottest of hot potatoes in the translation industry, and the Dutch translation industry in particular, is something called the “mother-tongue principle.” It’s a subject on which most people have an opinion, but which is often swept carefully under the carpet for fear of causing offense. My colleague Marcel Lemmens and I decided to test the principle at the 2013 Dutch National Translation Conference (Nationaal Vertaalcongres), hopefully without offending anyone. I would like to share our findings with you.

INTERPLAY OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND

First, allow me to set the scene. Back in 1980, when I got my first job with a translation agency in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, I realized that there was something called a moedertaalprincipe, or “mother-tongue principle.” It all seemed pretty obvious: you get better results if you translate into your native language. The agency for which I worked employed a number of foreign native speakers working in-house, and the translations that were outsourced to freelance translators were also sent to people working into their native languages.

Later on, I encountered Dutch-speaking translators on a regular basis and found, somewhat to my surprise, that many of them worked “both ways.” Indeed, I even heard the head of the translation department of a large state institution say the department didn’t employ English native-speaking translators for into-English translations because “they didn’t understand the Dutch source texts well enough.” However, this was the exception rather than the rule, and it soon became clear that the practice of “translating both ways” was a result of the interplay of market supply and demand. In other words, there was much demand for translation into English and simply not enough native speakers to do it all.

TRANSFORMER TRAINING BASED ON TEACHER TRAINING

Moreover, at that time, translator training in the Netherlands seemed to focus on “doing it both ways.” The emphasis was on mastery of the foreign language rather than on writing skills in a student’s native language. This was no doubt because translator training in the Netherlands was something that had simply grown out of language courses, and in some cases had emerged as an appendage to a teacher training course. Even when the first full-time, non-literary translator-training institute was set up in Maastricht, the curriculum still leaned heavily on mastery of two foreign languages. The director and many of the teaching staff hailed from teacher training. There was a Dutch department, but it seemed to play a supporting role more than anything else.

When I moved to Maastricht in the late 1980s to work as a lecturer at the College of Translation, it did seem a little odd to me, especially as an English native speaker with a background in business translation, that I should be training native speakers of Dutch to translate into English. After all, I wouldn’t have dreamt of translating into Dutch myself, and I’m sure this is also true of other native speakers of English working in the Netherlands. However, I was familiar with the state of the market and the exam regulations, so I didn’t really think twice about it.

THE OFFICIAL POSITION?

Little did I know. For example, I was unaware that there was a stricter version of the mother-tongue principle that read something like “Thou shalt not translate into a foreign language,” and which was the cause of some considerable—and
THE MOTHER-TONGUE PRINCIPLE continued

generally unspoken—tension among translators. Scratch a translator and you’ll usually find they’ve got a strong opinion about the subject, but don’t always like to express it as it’s bound to lead to an argument with colleagues. Many translators associations are also a bit coy about the whole thing. For example, the main Dutch translators association, the Netherlands Society of Interpreters and Translators (NGTV), says on its website:

What is the mother-tongue principle?
The mother-tongue principle means that a native speaker of English translates into English, a native speaker of German into German, a native speaker of French into French, … and a native speaker of Dutch into Dutch. In other words, a translator’s mother tongue is the language into which he or she translates, i.e., the target language.

Why should this be?
[…]
Even though many translators nobly strive to attain a native-speaker standard in a foreign language, even the most talented of translators find themselves constrained when required to translate into a second language. For the average translator, it is a practice that causes their standard of work to fall below an acceptable level. Moreover, translating into a second language is generally more time-consuming—and sometimes far more time-consuming—than translating into your mother tongue. It is not a financially viable practice, either for the translator or for the client.¹

Article 12 of the 1976 UNESCO Recommendation on the Legal Protection of Translators and Translations and the Practical Means to improve the Status of Translators states:

(d) a translator should, as far as possible, translate into his own mother tongue or into a language of which he or she has a mastery equal to that of his or her mother tongue.²

Obviously, the words “as far as possible” are key here. Curiously, the codes of conduct published by the two main Dutch translators associations (i.e., the Dutch Association of Freelance Professional Translators and NGTV) do not mention the mother-tongue principle. Nor does the “official” code of conduct for Dutch state-certified translators.³

TRANSLATORS’ CODES OF CONDUCT

IN THE U.K. AND U.S.

In the U.K., on the other hand, the native-speaker principle is applied. In fact, it’s enshrined in the codes of professional conduct for both the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) and the Chartered Institute of Linguists. For example, ITI’s Code of Conduct states:

4. STANDARDS OF WORK

4.1 Translation

4.1.1 Subject to 4.4 and 4.5 below, members shall translate only into a language which is either (i) their mother tongue or language of habitual use, or (ii) one in which they have satisfied the Institute that they have equal competence. They shall translate only from those languages in which they can demonstrate they have the requisite skills.⁴

This practice is also reflected in one of the pieces of advice given in ATA’s Translation: Getting it Right, a publication for translation buyers that has been produced in many different languages and distributed worldwide, in addition to being accessible on ATA’s website:

Professional translators work into their native language

If you want your catalog translated into German and Russian, the work will be done by a native German speaker and a native Russian speaker. Native English speakers translate from foreign languages into English.

As a translation buyer, you may not be aware of this, but a translator who flouts this basic rule is likely to be ignorant of other important quality issues as well.

[...] Sometimes a linguist with special subject-matter expertise may agree to work into a foreign language. In this case, the translation must be carefully edited—and not just glanced through—by a language-sensitive native speaker before it goes to press.⁵

At one stage, an even stricter version of the native-speaker principle came into vogue, which held that translations should be performed by native speakers based in a country in which the target language is the dominant language. However, this principle seems to have disappeared almost as quickly as it appeared. It’s certainly hard to find any mention of it these days.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

So what does all this mean? Is the mother-tongue principle in operation in the Netherlands or not? Does it have any relevance in today’s rapidly globalizing world? How easy is it to produce a workable definition of the term “mother tongue” anyway? What about translation work in languages reflecting refugee flows, which is more or less the exclusive domain of native speakers (i.e., non-native speakers of Dutch who are also required to translate into Dutch)? Is an unqualified native speaker necessarily a better translator than a qualified non-native speaker? Are native speakers proficient enough writers in their native languages? Can you still claim to be a native speaker if, like me, you’ve spent decades living and working in a “foreign” country?

DEFINING A MOTHER TONGUE

To answer some of these questions, Marcel Lemmens and I decided to devote our afternoon session at the 2013 edition of the Dutch National Translation Conference to the issue. A series of distinguished speakers proceeded to tell us:

▪ How difficult it is to define a “native speaker.”

▪ That a “mother tongue” is not a static concept. A person’s “first language” is in a constant state of flux, depending on circumstances such as age, location, surroundings, etc. (Professor Antonella Sorace of Edinburgh University).

▪ That, over the course of time, the in-house translation service at the European Commission had dropped the terms
“mother tongue” and “foreign language” entirely in favor of alternatives such as “first language” and “second language” (Dik Huizing, DG Translation, European Commission).

- That the Dutch agency in charge of the register of certified translators did not use the term “native language” due to its complexity and the problems of interpreting (Han von den Hoff, director of the Bureau Wbv).

- That, for much the same reasons, the organization running the Dutch national exams for translators and interpreters distinguished between A and B languages rather than between native and foreign languages (Fedde van Santen, associate professor at ITv Hogeschool).

In other words, it’s difficult to espouse the “mother-tongue principle” if it’s not at all clear what a “native speaker” or a “mother tongue” actually is. That’s the first problem.

### STEP TWO: DOES THE PRINCIPLE HOLD UP?

The second problem is whether the principle works in practice. This is something we investigated with the aid of an experiment. We used four anonymous English translations of a passage (about 300 words) from a Dutch museum guide, two of them produced by native speakers of Dutch and two by native speakers of English. All four translators were experienced professionals.

We presented the translations to two panels of assessors, one consisting of six Dutch-speaking translation buyers (i.e., not translators themselves, but people used to commissioning translations) and the other consisting of six English-speaking language professionals. We asked them to rank the four translations. The Dutch panel thought that translation B was the best and translation A the worst. Interestingly, our English panelists took a different view, favoring translation D as the best and citing B as the worst (closely followed by translation A).

When we translated both sets of ratings into figures and combined them, this is what we found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Combined score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>16 + 14 = 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>22 + 13 = 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>19 + 19 = 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>18+ 24 = 42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The scoring system worked as follows: “poor” = 1 point, “unsatisfactory” = 2 points, “satisfactory” = 3 points, and “good” = 4 points.)

### THE FINDINGS

From this experiment, we concluded that:

- Both panels were pretty unimpressed by translation A.
- There was a major difference of opinion about translation B, which the Dutch panel liked but which the English panel found to be substandard.
- Translation C met with approval from both panels.
- The Dutch speakers liked translation D, which the English speakers loved.
- The Dutch panel preferred translation B and the English speakers were unanimous in their preference for translation D.

The big question was: who had done which translations?

- Translation A: native English speaker
- Translation B: native Dutch speaker
- Translation C: native English speaker
- Translation D: native Dutch speaker

In other words, translation D (by a non-native speaker of English) scored highest. Translation A (by a native speaker of English) scored lowest. The other two translations (B and C) ranked more or less evenly.

As a final touch (and before announcing the results), we asked our audience (consisting of over 200 translators of varied feathers) to rank the four translations themselves. On balance, their scores closely reflected those awarded by our two panels, especially the English-speaking panel. Translation D (by a non-native speaker of English) ranked first by a wide margin, with translations A (native speaker) and B (non-native speaker) at the bottom of the pile.

It was a fascinating experiment. The conclusion? Even if there is such a thing as a “mother tongue,” the mother-tongue principle is no guarantee of quality.

### NOTES


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Digital Study and Collaboration: Making the Most of Your Mobile Devices

The wealth of apps on mobile devices broadens the possibilities for study and practice beyond oral flashcards.

Technology, like language, is never static, and as technology continues to evolve, it offers new opportunities and options to study, learn, improve our language skills, and collaborate. Tablet and smartphone technologies have changed exponentially since I first wrote about using oral flashcards in the June 2012 edition of The ATA Chronicle, and with these advances, opportunities for term study and acquisition have exploded. In fact, there are so many apps available that the options can sometimes seem overwhelming. Let’s consider some of the powerful apps that are now available and how you can include them in your individual or group study, training, and collaboration to make the most of your mobile devices.

ORAL FLASHCARDS

As I wrote in my previous article, paper flashcards have been a standard go-to for second language (L2) term acquisition for years. They allow us to practice both forward and backward translation (into and from the L2), and we can divide and organize them by topics of study. Oral flashcards push this concept further by converting flashcard practice into a listening and speaking exercise. Tapping into these two modes of communication more clearly mimics what we do as spoken-language interpreters by drawing on our vocal and auditory skills. What’s more, moving our flashcard study to a digital format improves portability and ease of access beyond what we would have with a stack of traditional paper flashcards.

Oral flashcards are simple to make and tailor to suit your study needs. This take on flashcards consists of creating audio recordings of the terms you want to practice and learn so that you’re both hearing and speaking terms. Before you begin creating sets of cards, however, I recommend you first open a cloud storage account (such as Dropbox or Google Drive) and download the app for the account to your device, since it’s always a good idea to back up your files in case your phone or tablet crashes or is lost. Similarly, if your device has limited internal memory, you’ll want to free up space by saving your files elsewhere.

To create your flashcards, follow these simple steps:

- **Prepare Your Content:** Make a list of the phrases and terms to learn, usually grouped by topic. Keep your lists relatively short so that your recording is no longer than five minutes. This will allow you to do quick practices even when you have limited time. It also keeps your audio files smaller, which facilitates moving and uploading them.

- **Create Your Flashcards:** Record yourself as you speak each term in the first language (L1), leave a brief interval to allow time to speak its L2 equivalent during practice, and then say the term’s L2 equivalent. You’ll also want to make a set of flashcards to practice L2 to L1. Practicing both sets will strengthen your backward and forward interpreting skills.

There are a variety of options available for making and practicing oral flashcards on your mobile device. If you have an iPhone, one of the simplest approaches is to use the pre-installed Voice Memos app on your device (available in the Utilities folder). Once you’ve recorded your set of flashcards, you can rename the file and begin to study or export it to the cloud. For Android, Cogi Notes & Voice Recorder is a free app that likewise offers unlimited recording and allows you to upload files to e-mail, Dropbox, Google Drive, or Evernote. Hi-Q MP3
Voice Recorder is another uncomplicated option for Android users, available as both a free and a full version. Both work off a user-friendly interface that includes record, pause, and done buttons. This app lets users select and set a storage location. Although the free version places a 10-minute limit per recording, the full version ($3.99) offers unlimited length.

If you’re studying from a tablet, there are a number of different third-party voice recording apps available. Voice Record Pro is a free professional grade voice recorder app available for iOS. You can record into various formats (MP3, MP4, WAV) and export directly to Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive, iCloud, SoundCloud, and Box Cloud. The app also allows for some simple editing, such as trimming or appending recordings. Hokusai Audio Editor is a free voice recording and editing app that includes copy, cut, paste, and delete capabilities. You can also upload directly to iCloud, Dropbox, or Google Drive from Hokusai.

**Oral flashcards convert flashcard practice into a listening and speaking exercise.**

GarageBand is a fantastic app that has been ported to iOS from Mac OS. It integrates seamlessly with iTunes, which is a simple and quick way to access your recordings for practice. Originally designed for those wanting to create music, GarageBand can also be used for simple voice recordings (although you’ll want to turn off the metronome in the song settings). You can split and trim clips easily for more advanced editing. Once you’ve created your recording, you can export it directly to iTunes and iCloud, or to other services such as SoundCloud, YouTube, or Dropbox.

**DIGITAL FLASHCARDS**

The wealth of apps on mobile devices broadens the possibilities for study and practice beyond oral flashcards. If you like the flashcard approach but want more variety, digital flashcard apps can combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning. Flashcards by NKO (available for both iOS and Android devices) allows you to create flashcards with text or pictures. Language selection for each side of the card links the visual image or written word with the spoken for reinforcement, since you can turn on sound and listen to the terms. This app also includes a variety of games, such as memory, matching, true/false, word search, bingo, flappy dog, and more to keep your study fun and interesting. The app uses Spaced Repetition to monitor your progress and helps you focus on items that are challenging for you. You can easily organize decks of cards into folders by topic. If you want to share your decks of cards with other colleagues, or if you are an interpreter educator, you can create a class and share your files with a link and access code. The free version of this app limits you to only 10 decks with 100 cards each and a 30 student limit (if you share), whereas the individual edition ($7.99) gives you unlimited decks and cards and a limit of 100 students.

Flashcards Deluxe ($3.99) also uses Spaced Repetition to help you identify the cards you miss. It includes text-to-speech audio, images, and sounds. The app offers spelling and multiple-choice tests to vary your practice. Organizing your cards is made easy with the app’s searchable list and the ability to organize folders of decks. You can create flashcards on your mobile device or on a computer and download them to your device.

Other flashcard apps are more traditional. Quizlet comes to mobile devices from its original website. This app, available for iOS and Android, lets users include images, select language, and hear items in 18 languages. In addition to traditional practice, Quizlet includes a matching game and practice tests. With StudyBlue, users can create their own digital flashcards as well as class notes. It lacks the variety of games that Flashcards by NKO offers, but it does track user progress and offer quizzes. Both Quizlet and StudyBlue allow you to share your flashcards with others.

**TRAINING AND COLLABORATION**

We can also use mobile devices to enhance other areas of our profession such as training and collaboration. If you’re an interpreter trainer or educator, for example, you can create content for your courses on your mobile device. One of my favorite apps is Explain Everything, a tool that, as the name indicates, makes it possible to explain virtually everything through video. Begin with a blank template, or import a variety of file types, such as a picture, video, PDF, or PowerPoint. From there, you can record a narration to better explain your content and add text with a stylus or by typing in a textbox. In essence, Explain Everything can be used to create an entire lesson, a short review, or a video practice exercise. Once you’ve created your lesson or practice video, you can save and export your finished product to YouTube or Vimeo or to storage services such as Dropbox, Google Drive, iCloud, and OneDrive. From there, you can share with learners or trainees. In the interpreting field, Explain Everything could be used to deliver lessons on topics as diverse as interpreter ethics or court procedures, to introduce terminology in context, and to provide practices.

Video editing apps allow us to create videos for interpreting practice. Video production is simplified with mobile devices because each of us can become our own cameraperson and producer. iMovie now comes included on all iOS devices because each of us can become our own cameraperson and producer. From there, you can share with others in the field, Padlet facilitates collaboration. Padlet is a digital bulletin board available for iOS or accessible online through your web browser. You can post a discussion question or conversation starter, or share a link or image to your Padlet wall. Your fellow collaborators can respond with a digital Post-it note that may contain a file, picture, text, video, or link. Similarly, use VoiceThread (available for iOS and Android) to create...
One of the most advanced tools for collaboration and training is iTunes U. This free iOS app is a course management system without the usual price tag. As a trainer, you can create lessons and provide a wide array of teaching material, such as videos, photos, documents, web links, apps, podcasts, and more. You can create discussions or one-on-one chats, or use push notifications to keep learners up to date. For a graded course, iTunes U offers an integrated grade book. In addition to trainings or classes, iTunes U can be used as a contained and private space for discussions and for sharing ideas and content with colleagues.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MOBILE DEVICE

In today’s busy world, it can be difficult to find the time we truly need to keep our interpreting and translation skills fresh, to learn new terms, or to collaborate with others in our field. Taking advantage of our mobile devices can help facilitate these important tasks since they are so portable and we often have them with us. Whatever your goal as an interpreter, the mobile device in your pocket or briefcase can help you attain it. Take it out, dust it off, and try out some of these apps for term acquisition and professional collaboration.

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Julie A. Sellers is a federally certified court interpreter (English<>Spanish), as well as a certified interpreter in Nebraska, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Colorado. A native of Kansas, she lives in Atchison, Kansas, where she is an assistant professor of Spanish at Benedictine College. She is the author of Bachata and Dominican Identity/La bachata y la identidad dominicana (McFarland & Company Inc., 2014) and Merengue and Dominican Identity: Music as National Unifier (McFarland & Company Inc., 2004). Contact: julieann129@yahoo.com.
How to Spice Up Your Translation

Conveying the content of a source text is not enough. As translators we should also be writers.

Machine translation may be in the news a lot these days, but in the real world there are many clients who are looking for quality translations. But what is a quality translation? A translation that correctly reflects the content of the original, uses the correct terminology, is grammatically correct, and does not contain any typos or spelling mistakes. Obviously. But is this enough? For many clients it isn't. They want a translation that is well written and that appeals to the reader (their client). And this is not just limited to advertising texts.

Do we always deliver this? Apparently not, judging by a comment I once heard from a client: “We’ve worked with translators before, but we weren’t happy with their work, so we want to work with writers.” Ouch! Mind you, this was not the type of client who would hire cheap, inexperienced translators. The message is clear though: translators should also be writers. How can we achieve this?

BEFORE YOU START

Before you start translating a text, it’s essential to know who you are writing for. Not only do you need to know the target audience, but you also need to know what the goal of the text is and how it will be used. For example, is it an advertising text aimed at selling a specific product to teenagers, or is it a text aimed at convincing an audience of all ages to be more aware of the environment? Is the text going to be published online or in print? All this information will help you decide which style and register to use and how to address the readers to get them interested and, more importantly, to keep them interested.

WRITING TIPS

Once you have determined, based on the input from the client, who and what the text is for and which style and register to use, you can use all sorts of techniques to make your text more lively. Some of the writing tips listed here may not be appropriate for all types of texts, but you shouldn’t be afraid to try something different every now and then. People don't want to read the same sort of text over and over, but they do want to be surprised occasionally.

People don’t want to read the same sort of text over and over again, but they do want to be surprised occasionally.

Make sure your style is consistent, but don’t be afraid to play with style. Your writing style should be consistent in all documents for the same client. Style is like a corporate identity: it should be recognizable in all types of texts, whether it’s a website text, a newsletter, or a brochure. But feel free to play with style within those limits. There are many shades of formal and informal writing, so where appropriate, you can always add a dash of humor, for example, in the form of word play, to lighten up a text.

Don’t be afraid to try something different. People don’t want to read clichés. Use a thesaurus to come up with new alternatives. Go crazy in your first draft (don’t worry, nobody is going to see it!). Keep in mind that you can tame a wild idea, but you cannot make a tame idea wild. In other words, you can tone down an exaggerated text to fit your target audience, but it’s a lot harder to rewrite a bland text into something more exciting.

Don’t make your text too formal. Even if the client has asked you to use a formal tone of voice, don’t make it too formal. And make sure you talk directly to the reader. As soon as we feel a pen in our
PRACTICAL TIPS
Apart from using writing tips and tricks to improve your text, there are a couple of practical tips that might help you create a better translation.

Ask for briefs, style guides, and sample texts. Style guides, previously translated texts, or any relevant texts from the client can give you an idea of the style used by the client. If the client doesn’t have any sample texts, it might be difficult to figure out which shade of formal or informal writing they want. In this case, it’s a good idea to send the client a sample of your translation as soon as possible (just one page is usually enough), so they can see whether this is what they want or use it to indicate what they don’t want.

Try to “sleep” on the text. We’ve all experienced it. You’re in the middle of a translation and you get stuck. You’re trying to find a good translation for this one knotty sentence, but every alternative you try sounds awkward. So you set it aside. The next day you open the file on which you’re working and immediately come up with a perfect translation for that particular sentence. This is why it’s not a good idea to accept short deadlines if you want to deliver a well-written translation. It’s so much better to sleep on it. And if you can’t leave it until the next day, take a break. Go and do something else. Do you always get your best ideas when taking a shower or when you’re standing in line at the supermarket? Then go take a shower or go to the supermarket! This is easier for those of us working as freelance translators, but if you can’t do that, maybe you can take a short break and take a walk outside.

Read the text out loud. Does your translation sound natural? Do you stumble over certain sentences or have to read them again? Every time you have to stop, check the text and rewrite it. It also helps to read the text in a different format, for example, on paper instead of on your screen. Even changing the font can help: the text will look different to you and it’s almost as if you are looking at it with a fresh eye.

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WRITING
Tips and tricks are not enough. If you want to become a translator and a writer, you’ll have to work continuously on improving your writing skills.

Read books and attend courses on copywriting. Even if you don’t offer copywriting services, books and courses on copywriting offer a lot of useful advice on how to write well. There are plenty of books on copywriting available, so just try a few and see which one works best with the type of texts you usually translate.

Work with a proofreader. This is already common practice in translation, but in my experience it’s especially helpful when you translate more creative texts. If you simply can’t come up with a fun solution for that unusual expression or that hilarious pun, it helps to be able to brainstorm about it with someone else. If possible, try to find someone who is more experienced than you or has copywriting experience. Partnering up with the same proofreader is especially useful when working on long-term projects that have to be consistent when it comes to style: if the translator and the proofreader know each other well, they can develop a consistent style together. Being able to discuss the text is really useful and something which, unfortunately, is not always possible when working on a job for an agency.

Specialize. Specialization isn’t just about terminology, it’s also about understanding the language used by specialists and being able to talk to them in their own language. Fashion texts, for example, are very informal and use a lot of word play, so you should be able to reproduce that in your translation.

SPICE IT UP!
As translators, we’re not authors who can write whatever we want. We’re limited to the source text and clients often want us to stick to that source text, but at the same time they don’t want a literal translation. It’s our job to find a balance between using the source text and still producing an original, well-written translation. One way to do that is to spice up your translation and make it just that little bit different than every other text.

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1. Here are two books on copywriting that I’ve found useful:

Percy Balemans graduated from the School of Translation and Interpreting in the Netherlands in 1989. After working with a translation agency as an in-house translator for a few years, she served as a technical writer and copywriter, information designer, web editor, and trainer for an information technology business. She has been a full-time freelance English>Dutch and German>Dutch translator since 2007, specializing in advertising (transcreation), fashion, art, and travel and tourism. In addition to ATA, she is a member of the Netherlands Society of Interpreters and Translators and the Chartered Institute of Linguists. Contact: contact@pb-translations.com.
Men ever had, and ever will have leave,
To coin new words well suited to the age,
Words are like leaves, some wither every year,
And every year a younger race succeeds.

—Horace, poet and satirist (65-8 BC)

These ancient words tell a story that is still true today. Translators delve to some extent into the field that Horace refers to, the field of new names for new things. But terminologists spend all their time there, immersed in that intriguing baptismal process.

Barbara Inge Karsch, my guest for this edition of OWOW, has been a terminologist for over 15 years. She has a BA and MA in translation and interpreting, and has done PhD-level research in terminology management. Now, as a consultant and trainer for BIK Terminology, she assists clients with terminology projects. She also teaches at New York University and is a U.S. delegate to ISO Technical Committee 37 for Terminology and Other Language and Content Resources. She was recently appointed chair of ATA’s Terminology Committee. Her blog (http://bikterminology.com) addresses terminology issues. Contact: bikterminology@gmail.com.

I’ll start by referring to something you said that helped me get a better grasp of terminology as a field. “Every product, whether a physical, software, or information product, consists of ideas which, in terminology management, we call concepts. Concepts are reflected in text through terms and names. So, when we as terminologists or translators research terms and names, we research the concepts at the root of a product.” That seems to sum up what you do in general terms. Now, can you give us a brief day-in-the-life? Someone asks you to consult on a terminology issue. What happens next?

My day-to-day projects depend on whether I’m working on a consulting and training project or whether I’m doing terminology work in an established terminology management system (TMS). I’ll start with consulting work. If clients want to manage their terminology, they must identify processes and the people involved in these processes. For example, product developers come up with new features and brainstorm names for them. Maybe others, such as marketing and branding specialists, are included in those discussions. If the result of their conversations is not recorded somewhere the knowledge is lost. Therefore, we need a terminology management system to document the names that have been proposed. So, we figure out how names and terms get established at the company, capture these processes, and make sure they follow best practices. Then we establish a centralized system where the terminology is documented so that people can use it to look up terms and names and their underlying concepts.

When I do terminology work, I may receive a few files, run them through a term extraction program, and then research the most important concepts. Once I have researched and understood the concepts and figured out the correct—and sometimes also the incorrect or, at least, less preferred terminology—I fill the database with the terminological information that people, and machines, need.

How did you get into the field? How does one become a terminologist?

Many terminologists learn by doing. But as with translation, formal education helps you to leap ahead. A student who had taken my terminology course in the translation master’s program at New York University still needed over a year to understand the tools, the processes, the different people, and the company culture at a client organization for which I consult. There are just so many different scenarios that can come up. And the more you understand the people involved, the easier it is.

I had a master’s degree in translation and interpreting from the Monterey Institute but had taken a terminology course while I was working on my bachelor’s degree in Munich, Germany. In my first job at J.D. Edwards, we decided that each translation team needed a terminologist, and I “was volunteered.” We brought in former ATA Terminology Committee Chair and Kent State Professor Sue Ellen Wright as a consultant and trainer. I studied all the available literature and then learned by doing. Actually, as a translator, I really liked terminology research. So, to research and document full-time seemed fun and exciting. And it still is today.
The terminology field is not very old. Please tell us something about the emergence of the discipline. Was the spread of computer technology the driving force?

Or you could say that the terminology field is very old. Think of Carl Linnaeus (the “Father of Taxonomy”) establishing the modern system of naming plants. The organizational principles behind concept systems go back to Greek philosophy. Though the underlying methods are old, we’ve certainly seen changes in how the work is done and who does it. In the past, subject matter experts were the keepers of their terminology and the documentation thereof. Today, communication specialists are often the ones who do this part of the job. And while some of us were still working with index cards 25 years ago, the profession of terminologist has changed considerably with the advent of powerful networked computers.

Though terminology work is not entirely geared toward the support of translation work, let’s focus on that. Technology has evolved to help us in many ways. It allows us to identify term candidates semi-automatically rather than having to use a highlighter to mark new terms and names in a printed document. It allows us to do wide-ranging searches over corpuses rather than having to visit a subject matter expert. It allows us to store the results of these two steps in a database rather than on an index card so that many people can use the information, not just the person with the index card. So, yes, the job has changed due to technology. Yet, many of the best practices have been around for some time. Though terminology work is not entirely geared toward the support of translation work, let’s focus on that. Technology has evolved to help us in many ways. 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If companies don’t name their new concepts well, their identity will suffer, either because people realize that the name is lousy or because it has been changed five times in six months, or because lots of documentation is required to express what could be expressed through good naming. Two examples come to mind.

When I worked for J.D. Edwards, there was a feature name in the database that had been changed five times in less than five years. And, recently, when doing descriptive terminology work for a client, I encountered a single concept with three outdated names (a long form and two short forms), and three new names we were waiting for the marketing team to confirm. The team confirmed them, but recommended that we not get used to them because they were about to rename the concept. I believe it would be really hard for a user to keep up with this many changes. Usability problems are never good for a company.

You’re the U.S. delegate to ISO Technical Committee 37 for Terminology and Other Language and Content Resources, leading the revision of ISO 12616 (Translation-Oriented Terminography). In that role, your job is to “bring to the ISO meetings the real issues that I see day-to-day, and then devise solutions with my ISO colleagues.”

What are those issues?

One of the issues is that data categories in a database should reflect documentation needs in real-life environments. Of course, anyone can make up a data category. But, in that scenario, data exchange is obstructed. So, at ISO meetings, I can report on what type of data organization needs exist in the real world and how we address them. Those solutions can then be integrated into the Data Category Registry, which is an inventory of document categories.

I can also report on how an existing solution isn’t working as well as it could. An example would be the data category called “Administrative Status,” which tells us whether a term is preferred or should not be used. But “Administrative Status” doesn’t really convey the idea very clearly. The more easily understood synonym in English is “Usage Status.” So, my ISO colleagues and I can decide to stop using the old name and adopt the more user-friendly term to be used from that point on.

Another scenario involves the underlying models. While these models (such as the semantic triangle\(^1\)) are helpful, they’re not perfect and must be adjusted. For example, in discussions concerning ISO 704—which is our field’s main theoretical standard—we have been reviewing new models, many of which come from my colleagues in academia. I then run these models through my scenarios to see whether they hold up and should consequently replace the existing ones and be taught as part of the standard.

In translation circles we occasionally receive e-mail about “funny” brand names that don’t play very well in other cultures. How would a TMS prevent the cost and embarrassment of such situations?

A TMS database would identify faux pas as depreciated terminology and offer the user a correct synonym. If the database is connected to a style-checking tool, such as those increasingly being used in American companies, the incorrect name would then be flagged and the writer could thus avoid it.

You’ve said that automated machine translation or quality assurance processes will play a much bigger role in the future, and claim that this is a good thing. Please tell us something about that expanded role, and explain why it’s a good thing.

The questionable brand name scenario we just mentioned is one where automated quality assurance processes would obviously be beneficial. Machines can, and do, free us up to perform more creative functions. If I look back at my own career I can say that, rather than hire me to translate the same software string 500 or 1,000 times—we really did that in the 1990s—translation memory now takes care of that part of the work. This means that I can focus on finding the right technical term, which is a more creative process and one where I can add value. The machine is perfectly happy to perform repetitive tasks.

What lies ahead? Will globalization make terminology management an increasingly essential, integral part of the product development and marketing process? Do you see it playing a more dominant role in the broad field of translation?

I do think that translators will work more and more with terminology management systems because, for certain jobs, it’s the only way to be fast and have consistent terminology. Whether we will succeed in infiltrating, if you will, the decision-making departments in the U.S. is another question. I think more people need to understand that it makes sense to be more systematic in the naming approach and in the management of an organization’s linguistic assets. Maybe our conversation can help encourage others to learn more about terminology management.

Thank you, Barbara. I’m sure our readers will appreciate your enthusiasm for your field and, like me, will come away with a new understanding of terminology management and the role it plays in our world of words.

NOTES

1 Now the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey in California.

2 An Enterprise Resource Planning software company in Denver, Colorado; now the Oracle Corporation.

3 The semantic triangle can be traced back to the 4th century BC in Aristotle’s De Interpretatione (book II), but was first published by C.K. Ogden and A. Richards in The Meaning of Meaning (1923). The triangle is a model that describes the relationship between thought (reference), a linguistic sign (or representamen), and a referent (the things they try to represent or refer to).

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.
Freelance language services in the U.S. have traditionally been priced in two ways: translators charge out for their work per word, while interpreters charge out per hour or per day.

In recent years, however, businesses, agencies, and even a few translators, have begun discussing the possibility of translation services being paid by the hour as well. At a recent ATA Annual Conference, one speaker rhetorically asked why translators can’t be paid by the hour, like lawyers. The audience grumbled in response.

Hourly pay has been rebuffed by translators who assume that it will result in less income than they might earn per word, especially if they are good at their jobs. They believe that their speed and proficiency will work against them. And indeed, their fears are justified, unless both productivity and total cost can be taken into account.

The traditional per-word (or line, or even page) pricing model is based on the idea that the more words there are to translate, the longer it takes to complete a job. Words are proxies for the translator’s time. This concept is fairly easy to understand. Given two similar documents, translating 500 words takes considerably less time than translating 5,000 words. Therefore, with per-word pricing, the total cost of these two jobs will differ by a factor of 10.

The pricing calculation is less straightforward when hourly pay is added to the mix. While it’s clear that it takes longer to translate 5,000 words than to translate 500 words, the exact number of hours is often difficult to estimate ex-ante. Though, undoubtedly, it differs from one translator to the next, in light of their relative familiarity with the subject matter, their educational background, and their experience, among other factors.

Hence, we arrive at an hourly pay paradox. All things being equal, an experienced translator will require less time to complete a job than an inexperienced one, resulting in fewer billable hours for the more experienced translator, and thus, less income. This is simple math. However, before dismissing hourly pay out of hand, it’s important to examine a few of its underlying assumptions to determine what else is going on here.

The first, and most significant assumption, is that all translation—and all translators—are equal. In other words, translation services are a commodity. This claim is based on the (fallacious) belief that it doesn’t matter who translates a file. Words are words, according to those who subscribe to this theory, and the final product will be the same, regardless of the translator.

At this point, you’re probably either laughing or angry (or both). Because, of course, anyone who works in language services knows that this statement is patently untrue. The final product depends on the translator’s background, experience, and above all, writing skills. There’s a reason why everyone isn’t a
famous novelist, journalist, or essayist. Despite the fact that we all know how to write, our skill levels differ. The same thing applies to translation. Some translations are better than others, because some translators are better at what they do.

The second assumption is that translation services—and by extension, translators—can be compensated at a single hourly rate. This premise depends on the first assumption being true; that is, that all translators are equal. This misconception is commonly held by monolinguals, who have a tougher time assessing qualitative variations across languages. Yet, even among language service providers, varying quality is often marketed as non-existent, it having been attenuated by proofreading and editing.

Of course, all translators know that translation quality varies from one professional to the next. Consequently, compensation for translation services must reflect these qualitative differences.

Under the current pricing model, some of these differences can be seen in per-word rates. New translators may earn half, or even a third, of what experienced translators can garner per word for their services. This makes economic sense: a new translator's output is often going to take longer to produce, have more mistakes, and require more time editing and proofreading. In simple terms, it is going to be an inferior product. As a result, compensation is usually lower.

So, while a client may be willing to pay an experienced translator $0.15 a word for a finished product that requires little to no proofing or editing, they may only offer an inexperienced translator $0.05 a word for the same job, because it needs more work on the back end (and thus, has an additional cost).

As such, not only can an experienced translator charge more per word—given their experience and quality—but that same translator can produce more words a day, and thus earn more income overall. The upshot is little economic incentive to move away from this model.

This is how experienced translators view this issue, but what about final clients? From their perspective, whenever they request an estimate for a job, what they really want to know is how much the project will cost. As translators, over the years, we have taught clients that we determine our costs per word (line or page). However, this is just one way of valuing our work. In the end, money is money, regardless of the calculation used to come up with that final number. In general, a final client doesn’t care how the price is determined. It’s the total cost that matters.

Thus, if the market moves in the direction of an hourly fee, translators might be forced to rethink the way in which they quote jobs, focusing on total cost instead.

A theoretical example may help clarify this idea. Let’s say that a client has 1,000 words to be translated. Normally, translators quote a price based on their per-word fee. For simplicity’s sake, let’s use a hypothetical rate of $0.15 a word. With per-word pricing, the translator gives the client an estimate for this thousand-word job of $150. The client gets the quote, and if the deadline is feasible, the job gets approved based on this total cost.

If pricing shifts to an hourly fee, then productivity needs to be added to the mix. An experienced translator may think, “I can do this thousand-word job in about two hours”; whereas a less experienced translator may say, “This job is going to take me six hours.” In both cases, with per-word pricing, the client is going to be invoiced $150, but the first translator will earn $75 an hour, while the less experienced one makes $25 an hour.

Doing this calculation is a freelancer’s first step in determining whether an hourly fee is acceptable. As in the per-word model, the experienced translator will make three times as much as the inexperienced translator, reflecting differences in quality, knowledge, skills, etc. But hourly pricing still has other issues that need to be addressed.

For instance, this first thousand-word job may only take two hours to translate, but the next thousand-word job may take three hours to complete, because it involves more research or more formatting. Under the per-word model, the translator would only make $150 in both cases; but if the experienced translator has set an hourly fee at $75, then the new job would have a total cost of $225. When submitting this estimate to the client, the translator would need to be able to justify the extra cost by explaining the extra amount of time needed for research and/or formatting. In this case, having an hourly fee works in the translator’s favor.

From total cost to output per hour, it’s possible for translators to charge out hourly and still earn the same amount of total income as they made when charging per word. But they must be able to explain why fees vary among translators and between jobs. The explanation starts with productivity, which is a function of training, knowledge, experience, and skill.

Hourly pay for translation services is not inevitable. The per-word model seems to be working just fine. However, if the market does move in that direction, translators need to be prepared to justify and defend differentiated charges. They can do so by focusing on productivity and total cost.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**


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**John M. Milan** is an ATA-certified Portuguese>English translator, economist, and independent researcher with nearly 20 years of professional experience. He was a foreign language fellow at Ohio State University, where he earned an M.Sc. in applied microeconomics. He worked for 10 years in São Paulo, Brazil, as an adjunct professor of economics at Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado University, concomitantly freelancing as a translator, interpreter, researcher, and consultant. He is the president of the Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters, an ATA chapter. He is also a member of ATA’s Finance and Audit Committee. Contact: john@milanlanguageservices.com.
Taking Advantage of an Opportunity

The story of how one translator taught himself what he needed to know to be able to take advantage of an opportunity.

Let me tell you the story of Terence Lewis.

Terence is a Dutch>English translator. In the 1990s, one of his clients, Siemens Nederland, required a machine translation (MT) solution for Dutch>English to enhance communication between Dutch and English speakers within Siemens. So, Terence developed a rules-based MT system based completely on Word macros. He released it in 1994, and Siemens used the system until it needed a standalone application that could be used anywhere.

So, Terence taught himself the programming languages Java and C++ and developed that as well. And again it was used successfully by Siemens and a number of other large multinationals for internal purposes.

Then statistical MT became a more feasible option, especially with the availability of the open-source Moses engine in the 2010s. Terence taught himself how to develop and use that code, took what he had already developed for his rules-based engine, and created a “hybrid engine,” where the statistical part of the program suggests lots of phrases and the rules-based part picks some and attempts to combine them correctly.

As with any MT system, it creates “RobotSpeak” (original quote by Terence), but of a kind that Siemens likes well enough for its purposes. According to Terence, it’s about as good as Google Translate, and even better when it’s applied on Siemens stuff.

Just recently, Terence launched MyDutchPal.com to the general public with the TrasyCloudBox, a Java-based tool that allows you to copy Dutch text into one half of the two-paneled program and get the English MT that was generated on Terence’s server on the other half. It may be a little onbeholpen (read: clunky) and not really well integrated into the way translators work, so Terence wasn’t particularly dismayed when this didn’t become a huge bestseller.

Terence will soon begin offering the pre-translation of TMX and XLIFF files with his MT engine that can then be imported into translation environment tools. My sense (and Terence agreed) is that this also won’t be quite what the Dutch>English translation community is looking for. So, the next integration is already in the pipeline: the integration into memoQ as a plugin and, further down the road, into Trados Studio. Terence will do this in partnership with Jon Olds, who is also the developer of memoQ’s newly released Moses plugin.

As I chatted with Terence recently, he envisioned all kinds of possibilities to make this into a much more interesting plugin than just one that suggests MT segments. How about getting to all those many different phrases and presenting those to the translator through predictive typing? How about continuous training of the data? And so on and so forth.

I love this story. Not because I’m personally really that interested in Dutch>English MT, but because of how Terence responded to the possibility that opened up and took hold of that opportunity. He was a translator—not first and foremost, perhaps, but that’s what he was. Seeing a need, however, he taught himself what he needed to know to be able to provide the services that presented themselves to him, and throughout all of that he stayed true to his translator ideals (see “RobotSpeak” above).
Could a free CAT tool like MateCat really be of use to translators? Naomi Sutcliffe de Moraes, chair of ATA’s Translation and Interpreting Resources Committee, interviews Fernando Furlani, a translator of 28 years, to find out.

**TOOL NAME, VERSION:** MATECAT 0.6.6 (FEBRUARY 18, 2016)
www.matecat.com

**Company:** MateCat is the result of a three-year research project led by a consortium composed of the international research center Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Translated srl, the Université du Maine (France), and the University of Edinburgh.

**Cost:** Free. The MateCat website says: “It is and will always be free for all users: enterprises, translation agencies, freelancers, universities, etc. Unlimited users, projects, and storage.”

**Category (Translation Environment Tool (TEnT), word counter, etc.):** TEnT

**Platform (online or download to computer):** Online interface only

**Reviewed by:** Fernando Furlani

**Ease of Use**

*Was the tool easy to use right from the start, or was there a steep learning curve?*

MateCat was very easy to use from the beginning. I had just a few questions on the first day, which were clarified quickly online by the support team. Questions were answered, on average, 15 minutes after posting. Depending on the time zone, answers can take up to eight hours. I was really surprised by the fast, high-quality support service.

*Had you ever used this type of tool before (thus making the learning curve easier)?*

Yes. I had used SDL Trados 2007 before, but, in my opinion, SDL Trados 2007 was an outdated and complicated application. MateCat was a great surprise in the sense that it’s easy to use and intuitive.

**Training**

*Is training available? At what cost? Is it useful, or unnecessary because the tool is so intuitive?*

I’m not aware of any training available besides what’s provided on MateCat’s website. In my opinion, getting started with MateCat is so intuitive that additional training would be unnecessary. On my first day using this tool, I managed to finish a real translation job earlier than for users to type a keyword to search for a related article.
What are MateCat’s worst features (or missing features)? What leaves you most frustrated?

MateCat doesn’t allow you to “join” or “split” segments. I don’t like this, but I have accepted it because the advantages of this tool outweigh the problem. Another drawback is that you can’t work offline. If you lose your Internet connection temporarily, you can translate up to 30 segments and MateCat will synchronize the segments when the connection is reestablished.

Does MateCat have integrated machine translation?

Yes. MateCat recommends selecting “MyMemory” when creating a project. It uses a combination of Google Translate and Microsoft Translator to provide machine translation suggestions. You can also disable machine translation by selecting “None” from the drop-down menu. In addition, you can connect machine translation engines provided by Microsoft Translator Hub, iPTranslator, Tilde MT, or Deeplingo, or your own Moses engines directly to MateCat.

Can you consult the translation memory (TM) and terminology database (TB) when not using MateCat to translate (for example, when you’re translating a document received on paper)?

As far as I know, I believe that you cannot consult your TM or TB through the online interface. However, you can import and export translation memories. MateCat does allow you to store your private TMs and assign them to your projects when creating a new project or during translation. After creating a new TM you can import TMX files into MateCat so you can re-use your previously translated content. You can also export TMs in TMX format for all your active and inactive TMs once you finish translating or during the translation process itself.

How does MateCat maintain the formatting in the original document? Does it use tags or something else? How easy are they to deal with?

MateCat uses tags to keep the same layout and formatting of the source files. MateCat is great at maintaining the same appearance of the original document. Throughout 2015, I had many problems with “tag

If I have a translation job to finish and my computer suddenly breaks, with MateCat I just turn on another computer, whether new or used, mine or borrowed from someone else, to finish the job.

expected. After that, I took my time to read up on a few topics in the “Support” and “FAQ” sections to become more familiar with MateCat’s features and to learn how to use the program better. At most, this took 60 minutes. Other questions were clarified easily by clicking on the “Get Support” tab that is available at all times through the online interface while users work. As mentioned previously, support questions are usually answered within a few minutes. When the time zone is unfavorable, answers come via e-mail a few hours later.

Features

What are MateCat’s best features? What do you love about it, compared to not using the tool, or compared with using some other tool you have used for the same task?

For me, MateCat’s best feature is the fact that it’s online, requiring no installation or license, since it’s free (and “it always will be,” as stated on its website). In addition, my translation memories are always saved and ready in the cloud.

Translators usually need to finish their jobs punctually, no matter where they are on the planet and no matter what happens. Even high-end computers eventually fail, and even the best technical support takes a while to fix them. If I have a translation job to finish and my computer suddenly breaks, with MateCat I just turn on another computer, whether new or used, mine or borrowed from someone else, to finish the job, without having to install any software or uninstall a license from my broken computer. If I’m away from home and my computer breaks, I don’t worry because I know that I can just buy another computer or even go to an Internet cafe and finish my job, as my translation memories and my job will be there in the cloud! So, all you need to work with MateCat is a computer connected to the Internet—no need to install software, memories, or anything else.

In other words, before MateCat, I was worried before finishing a job because I was very dependent on my three computers that were “super-prepared” with my CAT tools and licenses. Computers can break, be stolen, freeze, etc., but now that I use MateCat I know I’ll be able to finish my job without any pre-installed software.

www.atanet.org
mismatches” that I believe were caused by a software bug, but since January 2016 this bug seems to have been fixed. A tag mismatch could still appear, so I highly recommend that users read the special section called “Understanding and fixing tag errors and tag issues in MateCat” on the “Support” tab of the online interface.

Would it be easy to work with a partner on a large translation with this tool? Have you tried it?
Yes, I’ve tried it once, and it worked perfectly and was very easy. MateCat provides an easy-to-use split functionality to split large translation jobs among several translators. It also lets you work simultaneously using the same translation memories and glossaries, and even allows users to comment on any issues related to the translation right within the tool itself.

MateCat provides an easy-to-use split functionality to split large translation jobs among several translators.

Before starting a translating job, MateCat asks if you would like to split the job and into how many parts. Then MateCat checks the text and divides it into the number of words indicated, avoiding overlaps between segments. Next, you see a detailed analysis of the split jobs and a “Translate” button for each part. You just need to send each translator the “Job URL” (created by MateCat) for the part on which they will be working.

When clicking on their link, translators will see only the part of the document assigned to them as editable. They can also see the rest of the file, but they will not be able to edit it. They will see the rest of the document being translated in real time and can refer to the other parts for comparison, as well as leave comments for the other translators.

They will also share a private TM, if previously associated, where all translations will be stored. This means that each translator will also receive matches for segments already translated by the other translators within the same project. They will also get matches from the public TM.

Is there anything else you would like to add? I just can’t believe that so many translators I know don’t use MateCat. I presume that this is due to the fact they are used to their tools and don’t want to leave their comfort zones. Some professionals are also concerned with privacy issues, as MateCat is also owned by an Italian translation services company. Moreover, I believe that some may think “A free CAT tool can’t possibly work even better than the costly CAT tool I have been using and paying for all this time.”

I had to use SDL Trados from 2000 to 2007 because clients required it. I was so badly traumatized by that unfriendly, complicated software that I almost gave up on using CAT tools altogether. I admit that I tried MateCat for the first time in early 2015 because I enjoy trying new things, and I’m now a satisfied user of MateCat.

Fernando Furlani has been translating English and Spanish into Brazilian Portuguese for 28 years. He is also an attorney-at-law in Brazil. He provides legal and business translations.

Naomi Sutcliffe de Moraes has a PhD in linguistics (University of São Paulo), a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering and a master’s degree in physics (University of California, Los Angeles), and a bachelor’s degree in law (University of London). She translates both Portuguese and Italian into English. She is currently a visiting professor at the Federal University of the ABC Region, Santo André, Brazil. She is chair of ATA’s Translation and Interpreting Resources Committee.

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MateCat uses tags to keep the same layout and formatting of the source files. MateCat is great at maintaining the same appearance of the original document.
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