ATA Public Relations Projects

Indigenous Languages and the Courts

Preparing for the Medical Interpreter Certification Exam

Reflections on Translation and “Untranslatability”
From the President
Caitilin Walsh
president@atanet.org

Old News

From the time I joined ATA nearly 25 years ago, I have eagerly anticipated each issue of The ATA Chronicle. Back then, the magazine was produced by a small team of volunteers and consisted of black-and-white pages held together with a couple of staples (which were useful if you wanted to remove pages of glossaries for your terminology files). As time progressed, we moved to a glossy magazine that included photographs and advertisements, and eventually production shifted to paid staff. Electronic media was introduced at the turn of the millennium, though the vast majority of our members still receive the familiar glossy magazine in their mailbox every month.

All along, the content of the Chronicle has reflected the Zeitgeist of our industry, from regular columnist to experts in their fields sharing their views and useful information. It has also served as a mode of communication between leadership and members, with regular columns and special articles, along with letters to the editor.

Time brings changes as well as new opportunities. Amidst the growing realization that expenses associated with the Chronicle were disproportionately high, the Board requested a cost analysis of the magazine and appointed a task force to examine all aspects of the publication, analyze comparative publications, and make recommendations to reduce costs, improve content and delivery, and leverage new technologies.

The results of both exercises were eye-opening. The Chronicle consumes 23% of what ATA collects in dues—that’s a lot. But we’ve also heard—loud and clear—that a print magazine is what our members want. Because a print magazine is just plain expensive, we need to make sure we get the most bang for our buck.

Altogether, the Chronicle Review Task Force made 17 recommendations, and the Board agreed to implement two of them immediately:

1. We are establishing an Editorial Board. This body, which will be appointed by ATA’s Board of Directors, marks a return to peers driving content. As fellow professionals, they will have their finger on the pulse of current trends and may be able to facilitate introductions and contacts with potential authors.

2. Because we have observed that sister associations maintain a strong link to their members, as well as offer broader scope and more relevant content, all without printing and mailing a magazine every month, we will shift the Chronicle to a six-issues-per-year rhythm beginning with the July 2015 issue. The “off-months” will give us an opportunity to offer more content using other media, which may include targeted e-mail, a mobile/tablet app, a dedicated (and indexed!) Chronicle website, and/or an online forum, depending on recommendations made by the new Editorial Board.

Smaller changes are already happening and will continue; you may have already noticed a shift in the cover art to something related to the content and more advanced content inside. Since only a small minority access the online flipbook, it will be retired, though the popular PDF will remain.

In an ideal world, we would make this transition very slowly, perhaps taking a full year of preparation before making a move, but acting now puts us in a position to reap savings immediately and free up funds for current and future programs. We certainly welcome feedback and suggestions as we move forward. As with any voyage, we hope the ride isn’t too bumpy and that we end up in a better place all around.

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Progress in Public Relations

By Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo, ATA Public Relations Committee Chair
The challenge for ATA’s PR Committee is to unite the voices of our members to promote the translation and interpreting professions.

Indigenous Languages and the Courts: Challenges in Providing Language Access to Indigenous Immigrants

By Dan DeCoursey
In certain areas of the U.S., there are large communities of indigenous immigrants from Latin America who speak no or very limited Spanish. Despite the efforts of community organizations and interpreter training programs, many courts continue to struggle to find interpreters for indigenous languages. Persistent misconceptions about these languages can exacerbate the problem. Here’s an up-close look at the situation, and some possible solutions.

Not Your Mother’s Latin: Honing Your Medical Terminology for Medical Interpreter Certification

By Marjory A. Bancroft and Katharine Allen
What’s one of the best study approaches for preparing for the written certified medical interpreter exam? An interactive one, of course! You need to enjoy honing your terminology instead of developing a migraine.

Untranslatable Text: Myth, Reality, or Something Else? A Translator’s Reflections on Translation and “Untranslatability”

By Christelle Maginot
As difficult to prove as to disprove, untranslatability has been a hot topic of debate for centuries. But what is it, really, and how closely is it related to everyone’s understanding of translation as a concept? Are we always using the word untranslatable correctly?

The Color of American Language: Figurative Usage of Words for Colors

By Mary Rubinstein
The translation of colors provides a challenge to translators that is more complicated than it seems, particularly when using a term figuratively.
Our Authors
May 2015

Katherine Allen is the co-president of InterpretaAmerica. She trains interpreters and interpreter trainers and provides curriculum design for academic and licensed training programs. Clients have included Kaiser Permanente, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Glendon College of Translation. She is a published author and frequent public speaker at conferences nationwide. She is also an interpreter and translator for state and local government, health services, and courts. She has a master’s degree in translation and interpreting from the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Contact: sierra.kyr@gmail.com.

Marjory Bancroft directs a national training agency for community interpreting, with 91 licensed trainers in 24 states and five countries. She has lived in eight countries and studied seven languages. After teaching translation, English, and French at universities in Canada and Jordan, she spent several years interpreting, translating, and directing a nonprofit language bank. She has an MA in French linguistics and advanced language certificates from Spain, Germany, and Jordan. She is the author of numerous publications. She serves on international committees and is the world project leader for a new International Standards Organization interpreting standard. Contact: ccc@cultureandlanguage.net.

Dan DeCoursey is a state and federally certified court interpreter in San Diego, as well as an ATA-certified Spanish-English translator. After working for several years as a teacher and textbook editor, he was ready to make a change, so he moved to Guadalajara, Mexico, where he earned a master’s degree in translation and interpreting from the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara. He has nearly a decade of experience working as an interpreter in both state and federal court, and as a freelance translator specializing in legal documents. Currently, he is a staff interpreter at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California (San Diego). Contact: dan@decoursetranslations.com.

Christelle Maginot has a master’s degree in English, French, and Spanish translation from the University of Avignon-Provence, France. She has over 20 years of experience as a professional translator. She has been working as an in-house translator for a major consumer goods corporation for over 12 years, where she supervises the translation of corporate, technical, and sales and marketing material into multiple languages. Contact: christelle_maginot@conoc.com.

Marv Rubinstein has been an engineer, lawyer, and international entrepreneur. He has also published 10 books on a variety of subjects, including the Fourth edition of his Compendium of American English (Rowan and Littlefield, 2014). This book was based on a course called “Quixotic English,” which he taught as an adjunct professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He has published articles in The New York Times, Japan Times, Hispanic Voice, and a number of sales and technical journals. Contact: marvin.alka.ck@gmail.com.

Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo is an ATA director and the chair of ATA’s Public Relations Committee. She is currently serving her second term as the administrator of ATA’s Medical Division. She is the owner and chief executive officer of Accessible Translation Solutions. She is a member of Women for Economic Leadership & Development, and has served as a mentor for the Latina Mentoring Program in Columbus, Ohio. A graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, she has a master’s degree in Spanish from the University of Louisville. Contact: madalena@accessibletranslations.com.
From the President-Elect
David Rumsey
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Decisions, Decisions...

So many sessions, so little time. For the second year in a row, we had the lucky misfortune of receiving a plethora of session proposals—389 to be exact. It’s very close to the 400 we had for last year’s successful ATA Annual Conference in Chicago.

The breadth of talent and expertise to be found among our members is simply amazing—from translating Chinese poetry to interpreting for gender nonconforming patients. With 25 different session tracks covering a wide variety of languages and subject areas, the conference offers something for everyone.

Each proposed session is reviewed thoroughly by the leadership of a related division or committee and by the conference organizer and ATA Headquarters staff. The division leadership provides feedback as to whether the session would be of interest. Headquarters provides feedback on the quality of the speaker based on past evaluations. As the conference organizer, I have the heavy burden of choosing from among the recommended sessions to create a balanced program. Emphasis is placed on sessions that provide a clear skill or offer valuable knowledge that can be shared by colleagues.

This year will also include sessions from the popular Distinguished Speaker program, where renowned experts in their respective fields are invited to the conference to share their expertise with attendees. The speakers come from a wide range of academic, governmental, and business backgrounds with unique insights to offer.

The majority of sessions are 60 minutes, but longer three-hour pre-conference seminars are scheduled for the Wednesday before the official start of the conference. These extended sessions offer the chance to explore specific topics in depth and provide an opportunity for a more hands-on experience, with practical exercises, group work, or lectures.

Continuing from last year, the popular CAT tool training sessions will return with tool vendors offering both beginner and advanced sessions. Related to the CAT tool sessions, the conference of the Association for Machine Translation in the Americas (AMTA) will take place from Friday, October 30 through Tuesday, November 3, immediately prior to ATA’s conference. AMTA’s conference will be located in the same hotel as ATA’s conference (Hyatt Regency Miami). If you are interested in the developments of machine translation (MT), this is an excellent opportunity. AMTA focuses its sessions on three tracks: MT research, governmental application of MT, and commercial application of MT. (See www.amta.web.org.)

In addition to expert speakers, there are many other learning opportunities at ATA’s conference that take place in a less academic setting. The conference hosts a number of fun, interactive activities for translators and interpreters alike. Last year’s popular Brainstorm Networking session will be repeated, where attendees get a chance to mingle while discussing typical problems that translators and interpreters face. The After Hours Café offers participants a chance to read their best translation efforts of literary works and other genres. For early risers, each morning begins with a couple of exercise options, such as the high-paced Zumba or the mellow Stretch, Breath, and Move—a great way to start your day!

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of ATA’s Annual Conference is the benefit we gain by connecting with other translators and interpreters. We often work alone in front of a computer or without daily contact with colleagues, and having the simple opportunity to share our stories and learn from each other is often the most valuable lesson of all.

Make sure to check ATA’s conference website for updates within the coming months (www.atanet.org/conf/2015). I look forward to seeing you all in Miami!

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Upcoming Events
Visit the ATA Calendar Online
www.atanet.org/calendar/
for a more comprehensive look at upcoming events.

June 12-13, 2015
InterpretAmerica
5th Anniversary
InterpretAmerica Summit
Monterey, CA
www.interpretamerica.com

The ATA Chronicle ■ May 2015
From the Executive Director
Walter Bacak, CAE
walter@atanet.org

Board Meeting Highlights

The American Translators Association’s Board of Directors met April 18-19, 2015, in Alexandria, Virginia. The Board met in conjunction with the Certification Committee and Language Chairs Spring meetings. (In ATA’s Certification Program, each language combination and direction, such as Spanish-English, has its own chair and graders.) Here are some highlights from this very productive Board meeting.

Delaying Opening ATA’s Certification Exam to Nonmembers: After much deliberation—including a review of the member survey results—the Board decided to set goals for meeting certain financial and logistical criteria rather than set a deadline for opening ATA’s Certification exam to nonmembers. (The original deadline was January 1, 2016.) The Board remains committed to opening the exam to nonmembers, but wants to ensure that ATA is able to implement it without negative impact.

The ATA Chronicle: The Chronicle Review Task Force, led by ATA Director Corinne McKay, gave its final recommendations to the Board. Among the recommendations, the Task Force proposed the inclusion of more advanced articles, revamping the magazine’s online presence, and refreshing the columns. To assist in overseeing the Association’s flagship publication, the Board approved the establishment of an Editorial Board. The Board also approved changing the frequency of the publication to six times a year. (For more information, please see President Caitlin Walsh’s column on page 2.)

Budget: The Board approved the working budget for July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016, and draft budgets for 2016-18. The $3-million working budget provides an interim financial framework that lets us incorporate changes and revisions based on decisions made at the meeting and on actual year-end figures. The final budget will be approved at the next Board meeting.

Public Relations: The Board discussed various options for funding ATA’s Public Relations activities, including media outreach, client education efforts, and speaker training. The Board consensus was to increase funding, so the final budget will include more funds for PR activities.

Interpreter Certification and ATA’s Directory of Translators and Interpreters: The Board discussed a report from the Interpretation Policy Advisory Committee (IPAC) on recognizing interpreter certifications in ATA’s Directory of Translators and Interpreters. Leading the discussion was IPAC member Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner. (IPAC member Izumi Suzuki was also present.) The committee, led by Cristina Helmerichs, is looking at various interpreter credentials with an eye toward establishing parity with ATA’s Certification Program for translators for the purposes of recognizing interpreters in our online directory and for conferring voting rights.

Finance and Audit Committee. The Board approved the appointment of Evelyn Yang Garland to the Finance and Audit Committee. Evelyn is an ATA director, an interpreter, and a company owner. She joins President Caitlin Walsh, President-elect David Rumsey, Secretary Boris Silversteyn, Director Corinne McKay, John Milan, and Treasurer Ted Wozniak, who chairs the committee.

The Board meeting summary is posted online. The minutes will be once they are approved at the next Board meeting. Past meeting summaries and minutes are always posted online as soon as they become available (www.atanet.org/membership/minutes.php). The next Board meeting is set for July 25-26, 2015, with the location to be determined. As always, the meeting is open to all members, and members are encouraged to attend.

Become an ATA Voting Member:
Apply for Active Membership Review

The qualification process is free and online!
www.atanet.org/membership/memb_review_online.php
Progress in Public Relations
By Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo, ATA Public Relations Committee Chair

ATA is one of the largest professional groups in the world for translators and interpreters. Members include freelance and staff translators and interpreters, teachers and students, project managers, technology developers, language companies and language company owners, hospitals, universities, government agencies, and even a First Nations tribe. The challenge for ATA’s PR Committee is to unite these voices to promote the translation and interpreting professions.

Those of us who volunteered to serve on the committee have been working hard over the past few months on several projects related to external public relations, laying the groundwork to continue expanding ATA’s efforts to promote professional translation and interpreting to the general public.

ATA Messaging and Spokespeople
We interviewed several PR consultants, finally hiring Jan Fox in September 2014. Locals in Washington, DC may recognize Jan as a former news anchor and reporter for WUSA TV 9. Jan’s 30 years in television, as well as her track record with her business Fox Talks, LLC, made it quite clear that she was the perfect fit for ATA and the PR goals we plan to achieve.

We began working with Jan immediately to refine the Association’s PR message. That message now appears on ATA’s website: “The expertise ATA members offer can help you save money, avoid mistakes, and grow your business. Put the power of quality translation and interpreting on
your side.” It was decided that the most visible place for the message—the place where many clients will start their search for information—would be in the “frequently asked questions” page on ATA’s website. The message will also be seen by journalists seeking information on ATA’s position regarding specific topics within the translation and interpreting professions.

To spread our message even further, all ATA members can take advantage of these FAQs and use them as talking points when discussing their professions and educating potential clients. We’ve placed many references with links to the ATA directories within the list of FAQs. (As such, it is equally important for you to update your directory profile so that potential clients can find and contact you easily.) Links are also available to the Getting It Right publications (for both translators and interpreters), as well as other resources that contribute to the conversation about hiring professional translators and interpreters.

A new set of guidelines and proposal forms for external PR events is available to members who wish to receive support for trade shows, specialized conferences, book fairs, etc. The PR Committee will review proposals and assist members by providing resources and speaker support, as needed.

ATA Spokespeople

In April, Jan Fox led a full-day training session for spokespersons for the Association. Participants included Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner, Judy Jenner, Corinne McKay, Jiri Stejskal, Jost Zetsche, as well as PR Committee Chair Madalena Sánchez Zampauro, ATA President Caitlin Walsh, and President-Elect David Rumsey. These individuals were selected to represent different fields of interest within the professions, and for their speaking abilities and congenial manner. As journalists contact ATA Headquarters for responses to issues in translation and interpreting—and as we move to actively pitching stories to the media—we can draw on a pool of well-trained and dynamic speakers to represent the Association.

A second day of training will follow for these speakers this year. In addition, a team is updating the Press Room landing page of ATA’s website with more recent and accessible information for journalists and current and potential members in anticipation of increased traffic.

ATA Speakers Bureau

Jan Fox will be providing additional training to those involved in ATA’s new Speakers Bureau. This group of volunteers will consist of members trained to speak at events, trade shows, conferences, chambers of commerce, etc. It is expected that these speakers will touch on a few of ATA’s talking points during their presentations. Their training will also allow them to be comfortable with answering questions about ATA. One or two trainings for the bureau are expected to take place this year. The team of volunteers helping to set up the Speakers Bureau is currently working to identify speakers. The goal is to begin speaker training at ATA’s Annual Conference in Miami. The team is making progress in the following areas:

- Drafting a Speakers Bureau policy based on a survey of similar programs.
- Highlighting the types of events and audiences speakers should address on behalf of the Association.
- Determining the most effective mechanism for promoting the bureau and ATA in other fields and specializations.

Careful planning in each of these three areas will make for a more effective and sustainable Speakers Bureau. The PR Committee will support members of the bureau and ATA spokespersons by providing resources, assistance in preparing speeches, as well as lining up interviews and continued media training. Our next big push will include contracting with a professional PR firm that will provide contacts to media outlets and pitch stories on behalf of ATA.

ATA School Outreach

ATA’s School Outreach team continues to support our members in reaching out to students interested in foreign languages, as they are potential future members of our Association—or potential future clients! This year, ATA will celebrate 10 years of the School Outreach Program and Contest. Members of the PR Committee are busy planning a special celebration for the 56th Annual Conference in Miami in recognition of this special milestone. Stay tuned!

The School Outreach team, led by Meghan McCallum and Birgit Vossler-Brehmer, dedicates many hours to school outreach. As members of ATA visit classrooms and spread the word to teachers and students about possible careers in translation and interpreting, these individuals help shape the public image of translators and interpreters, inform others about ATA’s presence and purpose, as well as provide information about pathways to becoming a translation or interpreting professional.

In recent months, the PR Committee has also restructured the School Outreach page on ATA’s website. Members report consistently that doing school outreach is incredibly satisfying, so consider visiting this page to find information on how to get involved (e.g., getting your foot in the door, presentation resource material, etc.). In addition, there will be a presentation about the School Outreach Program at this year’s Annual Conference in Miami
for those who wish to have more information and get involved.

The Future
The PR Committee and its various teams continue to dedicate many volunteer hours to these projects in order to promote our membership and to spread the word to our members’ potential clients about hiring and working with professional translators and interpreters. In addition, the committee is refreshing the online material for the Client Outreach Kit page on ATA’s website so that members can use it to help promote their own businesses to clients more effectively. Be sure to look for more information in a forthcoming article in *The ATA Chronicle*.

The Board of Directors is extremely supportive of the PR Committee’s efforts, and we expect increased funding for our PR initiatives in light of the strides we’ve made in just one year. We’re confident that our efforts in PR, both now and going forward, will bring positive attention to the translation and interpreting professions while serving the interests of all ATA members.

As chair of ATA’s PR Committee, I welcome any questions regarding the progress of our efforts. Please don’t hesitate to contact me: madalena@accessibletranslations.com.

Notes
1. You can find out more about Jan Fox’s credentials at http://foxtalks.com.

NEW TEXTBOOKS FROM JOHN BENJAMINS

Introduction to Healthcare for Interpreters and Translators
Ineke H.M. Crezee
Auckland University of Technology

*Introducción a la Salud* for Interpreters and Translators
Ineke H.M. Crezee
Auckland University of Technology

Allows interpreters and translators to quickly read up on healthcare settings, familiarizing themselves with anatomy, physiology, medical terminology and frequently encountered conditions, investigations and treatment options.

2013

Introduction to Healthcare for Spanish-speaking Interpreters and Translators
Ineke H.M. Crezee, Holly Mikkelson and Laura Monzon-Storey
Auckland University of Technology / Monterey Institute of International Studies

Just like the 2013 textbook, this practical resource will allow interpreters and translators to quickly read up on healthcare settings, familiarizing themselves with anatomy, physiology, medical terminology and frequently encountered conditions, diagnostic tests and treatment options.

2015

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Amsterdam/Philadelphia
Toll-free ordering: 800 562 5666
email: benjamins@presswarehouse.com
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Indigenous Languages and the Courts: Challenges in Providing Language Access to Indigenous Immigrants

By Dan DeCoursey

In 2010, California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), a non-profit legal services program, published a report stating that nearly all of California’s indigenous farmworkers were from a small region of southern Mexico (eastern Guerrero and Oaxaca). In fact, CRLA found that over 80% of these workers came from Oaxaca. In this region, a majority speak either Mixtec, Zapotec, or Triqui. It is no coincidence, then, that these are the most commonly requested indigenous languages at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California (San Diego), where I am a staff interpreter. In particular, the need for Mixtec interpreters has increased dramatically over the past three years, and this year’s statistics for the court suggest that the trend will continue. Other federal courts on the southwestern border, such as the federal courthouse in Las Cruces, New Mexico, are experiencing similar increases. Many state courts in California have also noticed a growing need for interpreters who speak the indigenous languages of Mexico.

Unfortunately, despite a decades-long effort by community organizations and interpreting programs to recruit and train interpreters in indigenous languages, many courts continue to struggle to find professional interpreters. Oftentimes, the courts must resort to short-term solutions, such as relay interpreting and remote interpreting via telephone, sometimes with interpreters who have limited or no courtroom experience. Regrettably, the ideal solution—a professionally trained interpreter fluent in English with courtroom experience—remains elusive to serve the needs of many speakers of indigenous languages.

While the shortage of indigenous-language interpreters at a time of growing demand presents numerous challenges, persistent misconceptions among other participants in the court process regarding these languages can make matters worse. A close look at this situation, however, might help set the record straight and provide us with some ideas on what needs to be done. The following article will focus primarily on the indigenous languages of Mexico, with commentary from various professionals in the field.
Indigenous Languages: A Quick Overview

Ethnologue.com, a comprehensive reference cataloging all of the world’s known living languages, documents over 250 indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. (This number varies widely, depending on whether dialects are counted as separate languages.) These are pre-Columbian languages that are completely unrelated to Spanish, although many employ some borrowed Spanish words.

Isolation between indigenous communities or regions often means that many communities speak their own variety, or dialect, of a certain language. For example, according to Ethnologue.com, Mixtec has 53 dialects and Zapotec 57. The website also specifies in which towns and regions certain dialects are spoken, as well as the amount of intelligibility between dialects. Two closely related dialects may have up to 85% intelligibility, whereas more distantly related dialects may have as low as 10% intelligibility, even in instances where both dialects are considered part of the same language.

Although Mexico’s indigenous languages have been marginalized in the past, many in Mexico have begun to view them as an important part of their cultural heritage. For example, in 2003, Mexico passed the General Law of Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which requires that the government make its services available in indigenous languages. The enactment of this law led to the establishment of the National Institute of Indigenous Languages (INALI), a Mexican federal public agency that aims to develop and promote the use of indigenous languages. Mexico’s new system of oral trials, which all states must adopt by next year, has also created a need for trained court interpreters. As a result, INALI has initiated such training in various indigenous languages.

Georganne Weller, a professor of translation at Anahuac University in Mexico City who has worked closely with INALI, including a three-year stint as director of language policy, explained to me that INALI has covered around 40 dialects in these trainings. Weller says that the language barriers faced by indigenous communities in Mexico can be enormous, especially in legal settings. Lack of formal education among many indigenous communities can hinder communication. Furthermore, Weller suggests that many speakers of indigenous languages tend to “overestimate their proficiency in Spanish, but when they start hitting the legal concepts, it is over their heads. To save face, they won’t admit that they don’t understand.”

Moreover, Weller says that even when immigrants understand the basic message in Spanish, they often still prefer access to an indigenous-language interpreter. Weller explains that this is because indigenous languages often lack precise terms for certain legal concepts, so an interpreter must offer a more detailed explanation.

Indigenous Immigrants in the U.S.: A Struggle for Language Access

Despite recent efforts by the U.S. Census Bureau, it is difficult to find exact numbers for immigrants of indigenous origin. This is because many don’t respond to the census and others are confused about how to identify themselves. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that indigenous immigrants make up 17% of the country’s farmworkers, and perhaps up to 30% of California’s farmworker population. It is believed that California has the largest population of indigenous immigrants from Latin America, estimated to be at least 200,000. CRLA’s report attributes this large presence to increased immigration from southern Mexico, especially Oaxaca, over the past few decades, due in part to various economic conditions that have made it more difficult for farmers in that region to make a living.

Indigenous immigrants in the U.S. often face additional challenges that others from Latin America do not. Since Spanish is the lingua franca among immigrants from Latin America, indigenous immigrants tend to have more difficulty than other immigrants accessing information in their languages on health care and government services. In the early 1990s, the Indigenous Oaxacan Binational Front, a human-rights group that represents native people from Oaxaca, began looking for solutions. At a Los Angeles news conference in 1997, members from this group expressed concerns that most judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys assumed that everyone from Latin America speaks Spanish. The group asserted that when assigned a Spanish interpreter, many indigenous-language speakers could barely understand court proceedings.

One of the most egregious examples of this language barrier was the case of Santiago Ventura Morales, a Mixtec immigrant from the state of Oaxaca. In 1986, Morales was wrongly convicted of murder in Oregon. During his trial, he was provided with a Spanish interpreter, even though Spanish was not his native language. Five years later, his conviction was set aside, in part due to his attorneys’ arguments that Mixtec witnesses had difficulty responding to questions posed in Spanish during the trial.

In 1997, CRLA and other community groups partnered with the Monterey Institute of International Studies (now the Middlebury Institute of International
Studies at Monterey to offer an intensive one-week training course in interpreting skills to several indigenous-language speakers, to include the dialects of Mixtec, Zapotec, and Quiche. Due to the limited English skills of many of the participants, the trainers decided to teach relay interpreting, which would allow those in the course to interpret between the indigenous language and Spanish. A Spanish interpreter could then interpret between Spanish and English.

In a paper published soon after this project, Holly Mikkelsen, one of the program's trainers, considered the program "a qualified success," while recognizing that "crash courses and relay interpreting itself are mere Band-Aid solutions to a serious and lasting problem." Mikkelsen hoped that the children of indigenous immigrants, after receiving formal education in English, could one day interpret between English and the indigenous language. She acknowledged that continued immigration by monolingual indigenous speakers would make relying less on relay interpreting difficult to achieve. Community groups such as the Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Communities (Fresno), the Natividad Medical Foundation (Salinas), and Maya Vision (Los Angeles) continue to provide community and medical interpreters in various indigenous languages.

Finding Indigenous-Language Interpreters: A Persistent Challenge

Despite these efforts, the courts continue to struggle to meet the growing demand for indigenous languages. The Judicial Council of California, in an attempt to recruit indigenous-language court interpreters, has added several indigenous languages as registered languages (for which speakers are tested in English, but not in the foreign language). But here’s a sobering fact: the entire state only has one registered Mixtec interpreter, one Zapotec interpreter, and no Triqui or Quiche registered interpreters. Los Angeles does have a handful of professional Quiche interpreters with courtroom experience in relay interpreting. These interpreters, however, are not registered because they might lack the English proficiency needed to pass the exam.

The Southern District of California is fortunate to have a Mixtec interpreter who is able to interpret between English and Mixtec. However, finding qualified interpreters for many other indigenous dialects, such as Zapotec and Triqui, continues to present many challenges.

Indigenous languages for which no interpreter is available locally often leave Rebeca Calderon, a manager of interpreter services for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California (San Diego), scrambling. Normally, a Spanish interpreter identifies the need for one of these languages on the morning of an initial appearance of a defendant or witness. When I spoke to her, Calderon explained that she must pinpoint the correct dialect, which involves numerous complications. One issue is that when asked what language they speak, most indigenous persons identify only the generic language, without naming the specific dialect. Moreover, the names of indigenous dialects catalogued on Ethnologue.com and INALI frequently do not match. Occasionally, this mismatching has meant that interpreters who were secured for a certain hearing actually spoke the wrong dialect.

To avoid this situation, Calderon always tries to determine which town an indigenous person is from. She then contacts community organizations in the U.S. and, if necessary, in Mexico. Since most of the interpreters who work with these community organizations have limited courtroom experience, she must review relevant terminology and court documents over the phone with the interpreter before the assignment. A staff interpreter then needs to set up a courtroom for remote relay interpreting over the telephone. Statutory time limits often mean that all of this needs to happen that same day, or the following day at the latest.

Remote Interpreting from South of the Border

Increasingly, Calderon has been turning to a community group in Oaxaca called Centro Profesional Indigena de Asesoría, Defensa y Traducción (CEPIADET) for help. CEPIADET offers legal translation and interpreting services in various indigenous languages that are spoken widely in Oaxaca, including several Mixtec, Zapotec, and Triqui dialects. Most of their interpreters have been trained as community interpreters, but not specifically as court interpreters. Many are also attorneys, but, as Calderon explains, "because of the huge differences in the legal systems, we still need to explain terms that are completely foreign to them." These concepts include what a grand jury is and the difference between a magistrate judge and a district judge.

Setting up remote relay interpreting—basically a three-way phone call with the defendant, the Spanish interpreter, and the indigenous-language interpreter—can be a daunting task. Before the hearing, a phone call is made from the courtroom to the remote interpreter in Mexico. If the interpreter lives in a rural area of Oaxaca, the call must be made to the
Unfortunately, despite a decades-long effort by community organizations and interpreting programs to recruit and train interpreters in indigenous languages, many courts continue to struggle to find professional interpreters.

Rosado believes that Mexico will have a cadre of professional indigenous-language court interpreters in a few years. He proposes that in the near future “American courts could offer workshops in Mexico explaining how to work remotely by telephone or video.”

Still, interpreters in the U.S. must look for signs that a person might need an indigenous-language interpreter. Rosado says that while making non-native grammatical mistakes and avoiding eye contact (doing otherwise is considered disrespectful in many indigenous cultures) might offer clues, “the best practice is to ask.” Rosado feels this is especially important when working with individuals who “come from Mexican states with a large indigenous population, such as Oaxaca, Guerrero, Yucatan, Chiapas, or Quintana Roo, or when they come from Central America.” When speakers of an indigenous language say that they speak Spanish, Calderon suggests that Spanish interpreters ask questions that call for a narrative, and not questions requiring a “yes” or “no” answer, to gauge understanding.

A Long Road Ahead
Limited resources might very well mean that ideal solutions are a long way off and that these challenges will not disappear any time soon. Let’s hope that Mexico continues to invest in its indigenous-language court interpreters, so they can provide remote relay interpreting for dialects that are rare in this country, and that community groups and interpreting programs in the U.S. continue to recruit and train interpreters for the indigenous languages with the widest diffusion in this country. In the meantime, clearing up common misconceptions about these indigenous languages would go a long way toward minimizing these challenges. For now, let’s commit to doing just that.

Notes
6. Cohn, D’Vera. “Millions of Americans Changed Their Racial or Ethnic Identity from One Census to the Next,” Fact Tank: News in the Numbers (Pew
Research Center, May 5, 2014),


13. Court Interpreters Program, California Courts,

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**Additional Resources**

**Binational Center for the Development of Oaxacan Communities**
A community group based in Fresno, California, offering an indigenous interpreters program.

**Centro Profesional Indigena de Asesoría, Defensa y Traducción**
www.cdi.gob.mx/cepiadet
A community group based in Oaxaca, Mexico, offering legal and translation services in Mixtec, Zapotec, and other indigenous languages.

**Ethnologue**
www.ethnologue.com
A website that catalogues the world’s languages by country.

**National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators**
“Preparing Interpreters in Rare Languages” (Position paper, 2005)

**National Institute of Indigenous Languages**
www.inali.gob.mx
A government organization in Mexico that promotes the use of indigenous languages.

**Natividad Medical Foundation**
http://interpretanmf.com
A community health organization based in Salinas, California, offering interpreting services in various indigenous languages.

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The Savvy Newcomer
ATA’s Blog for Newbies to Translation and Interpreting

Check out The Savvy Newcomer blog at: www.atasavvynewcomer.org
and on Twitter at: www.twitter.com/SavvyNewcomer
Not Your Mother’s Latin: Honing Your Medical Terminology for Medical Interpreter Certification

By Marjory A. Bancroft and Katharine Allen

So, you want to get certified as a medical interpreter. You’ve heard that the written exams for the two national certification programs require knowledge of medical terminology. Well, unless you’re already a veteran interpreter who works across multiple health care settings, chances are you will need to shore up your medical terminology.

In fact, of the two written exams, the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) bases roughly 75% of its exam on medical terminology, while the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) bases roughly 22-25% of its questions on medical terminology. Bottom line: you will need to prepare.

So, what’s the best approach? We would argue for an interactive approach. The following reviews some of the resources available to help you prepare for the exam, but a resource list is not enough. You need a strategy, a plan—preferably one that doesn’t involve memorizing lists until your eyes glaze over. Unless you have the self-discipline of Gandhi, that “tough it out” approach probably won’t work. The reasons are simple:

- Medical terminology, divorced from context, is dull and dry.
- Adults learn by doing.

- Memorizing long lists demands intense focus.
- It’s harder to remember terms that lack context.
- Practice is not only engaging, but builds skills and confidence and reinforces memory.
- Pairing an emotional stimulus to a cognitive task promotes retention (memory).

Now let’s talk about a plan.
What Works Best? A Two-Step Process

One of the most effective training approaches involves two steps: onsite (or online) training, followed by structured self-study. In our long observations as two veteran interpreter trainers, we feel that most interpreters do best if they can start with a live (in-person) structured program, even a short one, followed by a self-study program.

Failing that—that is, if you don’t have a local program to attend and lack the funds to travel—you can try starting with online training. But be warned: some online training programs for medical terminology lack “salsa.” They require tremendous self-discipline, and they can be dull. That said, dullness can be a problem for in-person training as well. So, get recommendations before you sign up for anything and choose your training carefully.

Where do you start? First, let’s look at your options for medical terminology training in the U.S.

1. Training Programs (Onsite or Online): One of the best resources to find onsite or online training is the website of the International Medical Interpreters Association. Click on the “Education” tab, then on “Education Registry.” Now you can search by state and look for medical terminology programs in your area. You can also do a search for online programs. It is important to note, however, that some of these programs are for Spanish interpreters, while others are non-language-specific. Also, the quality of these programs varies substantially.

If you are not sure which class is best for you, ask your interpreter colleagues for opinions. Ask what they think about the support material for a given program (handouts, handbooks, or textbooks). Go on the listservs of your favorite associations and post questions (e.g., ATA’s Interpreters Division, your local ATA chapter, or organizations such as the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care). Also consider Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social media groups for your favorite associations (you typically do not have to be an association member for such groups).

Many social media platforms also offer special interest groups, such as Facebook’s Interpreting and Translation Forum, which may require an invitation, but not an association membership. In short, try to vet the program before plunking down your money.

A second excellent local resource would be community college or university medical terminology programs for allied health professionals. Those courses are given entirely in English. They tend to be well-structured and comprehensive, with good textbooks. Simply contact your local community colleges or check out their course offerings online.

2. Creating a Self-Study Program: Taking at least one class, even a short one, gives you a medical terminology foundation on which to build. Taking classes will require you to reflect and become self-aware, but you’ll need to find ways to make the process fun or you won’t study. To this end, you really need to find out how you learn. Are you mainly one type of learner or a mixture of any of the learning styles below? (There are a number of others.)

- Kinetic: learns best with tactile reinforcement (e.g., flash cards, interactive activities with movement, or working with a live partner).
- Auditory: learns best by listening (e.g., to online auditory files of medical terms in both languages or recorded-practice resources, such as those listed at the end of this article).

We are all a mix of different learning styles, which is why we need a variety of teaching methods, even when we teach ourselves, to keep us engaged and learning. After all, you can’t learn if you’re asleep! Let’s take a look at what generally works best for most interpreters.

Build Your Own Self-Study Program from the Ground Up

Hands down, what seems to work best for interpreters when implementing a plan are three important features of self-study: 1) a partner, 2) a schedule, and 3) an interactive approach.

The Study Buddy Approach: A buddy system with active participation works better than studying alone because interpreters:

- Learn more from each other than on their own.
- Stick to the schedule (“I can’t let my buddy down!”).
- Correct and help each other.
- Keep each other on task.
- Pool experiences.
• Find solutions.

• Have fun!

**The Schedule:** We absorb and retain new information far better when learning is spaced out over regular intervals than we do cramming at the last minute. You know this already, so act on that knowledge. Besides, are you taking the certification exam for the piece of paper—or because you want to be a good medical interpreter?

**The Interactive Approach:** By working with flashcards with your study partner, competing and testing each other, comparing glossaries, doing timed practice tests, and so forth, you will find yourself enjoying terminology instead of developing a migraine. You’ll be excited, motivated, and challenged, and develop a collegial relationship with your study partner. As a result, you’ll learn more. Here are some examples of how to work with a partner using an interactive approach:

• Create different activities based on good terminology textbooks and resources to eliminate boredom (see the next few tips).

• Develop exercises that require your active input, such as filling in tables, crosswords, “fill-in-the-blank” activities, etc.

• Focus on activities for Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes that work like puzzles where you piece together the medical meaning from roots and affixes. This could be the single most valuable exercise because it helps you understand medical terms with which you are unfamiliar. Remember, medical terminology in English is 75% derived from Latin and Greek roots and affixes.

• Create specialization-specific glossaries (e.g., for pediatrics or internal medicine) by yourself and then compare glossaries with your partner. What terms does your partner have that you don’t? Educate each other.

• Test each other with flashcards that you make based on your weakest areas.

• Do role-playing exercises with each other using progressively more challenging situations. (See the resources listed in the following sections.)

• Hold a medical abbreviations contest to see which of you can correctly spell out a list of medical abbreviations first.

These are only a few examples. The point is to build a self-study program that works for you.

**What Do You Need to Learn?**

Based on a needs assessment and the content of the CCHI and NBCMI national certification exams, at a minimum you will need to focus on:

• Latin and Greek roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

• Body parts and body systems (basic anatomy and physiology).

• Medical specialties and terms related to those specialties.

• Diseases and disorders.

• Symptoms.

• Tests and procedures.

• Medical abbreviations.

### Figure 1: Sample Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admitting Office</td>
<td>Oficina de Admisión, Mesón de Recepción/admission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axilla, armpit</td>
<td>axila</td>
<td>Axila is higher register than subshe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beep</td>
<td>sonido electrónico intermitente</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bending</td>
<td>inclinarse, agacharse, doblar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood relative</td>
<td>pariente consanguíneo, un familiar de sangre</td>
<td>Higher register, Lower register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body arocho</td>
<td>branquido</td>
<td>Slower than normal heart rate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection agency</td>
<td>agencia recolector, agencia de cabriana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crutches</td>
<td>muñequera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressings</td>
<td>vendaje, apósito, gasa, cuna, coraón</td>
<td>Dressing vs. Band-Aid—varies by country/region and size. Try searches to verify translation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, look closely at the preparation material and guidance offered by the two national certification programs.  

**Create Your Own Study Glossaries**

One of the best ways to self-test and develop knowledge that will help you along after the certification exam is to create your own glossaries. For example, CCHI offers free multilingual mini-glossaries you can download from its website.  

Whether you create glossaries in Word, Excel, or a database, you will want to have at least three columns: one for the English term, one for your other working language, and a column for comments (e.g., about the register, usage, regional variations, synonyms, etc.). You might also consider adding a fourth column to write in the definition of the word, so that you not only know the linguistic equivalent in your non-English language but the medical meaning of the term. Finally, whatever file format you use, set up your table so that you can re-sort your glossary alphabetically whenever you add new terms. (See Figure 1 on page 17 for an example.)  

**A Parting Word**

As you build your knowledge of medical terminology, you will eventually say to yourself, “Yes, I can do this!” You will feel engaged, positive, and enthusiastic. This confidence can help you perform more smoothly on oral certification exams as well. Bottom line: there is no escaping the fact that if you want to get certified, you will probably have to study medical terminology. However, with the right plan, strategies, and resources, study can be fun. Good luck!  

**Notes**


3. The LinkedIn group “Professional Interpreters, All Languages” has 8,400 members, but more importantly, it has a lot of discussions where working interpreters post questions and get advice from fellow members. Just go to http://bit.ly/LinkedIn-interpreters.


Untranslatable Text: Myth, Reality, or Something Else?

A Translator’s Reflections on Translation and “Untranslatability”

By Christelle Maginot

There inevitably comes a time in a translator’s life when he or she starts to challenge translation/translatability as a concept. More often than not, this occurs as a result of finding oneself confronted with a term that is deemed untranslatable and questioning not only the meaning of the word itself, but also the reality of the concept. In doing so, the translator joins the ranks of the thousands who have reflected and debated on the subject throughout the history of translation. Indeed, the notion of untranslatability has been argued by the best minds for centuries, including translation theorists, philosophers, linguists, writers, and poets. Therefore, no article can pretend to even introduce the subject, let alone offer any new and startling revelation. But humor me, as I reflect on the topic and attempt to demonstrate that when it comes to untranslatability, everything may be a question of definition, that using the term lightly may backfire, and that the answer to the translatability/untranslatability conundrum is as elusive as ever.

The only certainty is that one cannot question untranslatability without questioning translatability.

Untranslatability: An Arguable Reality

According to Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, “some degree of partial untranslatability marks the relationship of every language to every other.” Total untranslatability, however, is believed to be rare. In fact, it is generally agreed that the areas that most nearly approach it are poetry, puns, and other word-
The question is to know whether texts that have no equivalents should be labeled as untranslatable, and whether “non-equivalent translations” are less or more accurate translations than equivalent ones.

In other words, the term untranslatable is most often used to refer to lexical gaps (i.e., terms or expressions that do not exist in another language) or cultural gaps (i.e., concepts that do not exist in another culture). However, it is not necessarily because a language doesn’t have a direct lexical or cultural equivalent for a term/expression/concept that there is absolutely no way to express it in another language. Translators have many methods at their disposal to do so (think: adaptation, borrowing, calque, loanwords, compensation, paraphrase, translator’s notes, etc.). Does this mean that all words, expressions, verbal forms, honorifics, etc., can be translated precisely? No. But it is generally agreed that most, if not all, texts can be exported into another language, even though all elements of those texts (e.g., cultural connotations, rhymes, rhythms, puns, etc.) may not always be exported alongside successfully. So, in essence, no text would be truly untranslatable, but the translation of culturally irreconcilable texts would inevitably result in some degree of loss. It is that loss that validates the notion of untranslatability, even though the text itself can be translated.

In truth, our world is home to so much cultural diversity, so many languages, and so many disparities among them that there are bound to be terms/expressions/concepts that fall so deeply into the lexical and cultural voids that they are labeled untranslatable. Indeed, who could argue that some notions are so incredibly specific to a culture that no other culture has a direct equivalent for them?

Take the word mamihlapinatapai, for example, which is Yahgan for “a look shared by two people, each wishing that the other will offer something that they both desire but are unwilling to suggest or offer themselves.” Not surprisingly, it appears in the Guinness Book of World Records as the “most succinct word,” but it is also considered one of the most difficult words to translate. But is it really untranslatable? Would you say that “an expressive, meaningful look between two people wishing to initiate something but reluctant to do so” is a translation (versus a definition or an interpretation)? The answers to those questions depend on your definition of translation.

Translation/Translatability:
A Less-Than-Absolute Truth

Translation as a concept is subject to many interpretations, and countless definitions have been put forth by translation theorists over time. The American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, for example, defines translation as “a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language, which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation.” Venuti’s argument
supports the deconstructionist ideas that everything is about context, that any text may have more than one interpretation, and that all forms of reading a text (including translating it) are forms of interpretation.

Like many, when it comes to certain types of translation, I find it difficult not to agree with the deconstructionists. In fact, I often find that in order to reach the intended goal (e.g., a text that reads smoothly, elicits an emotional response, convinces, etc.), I have to take “interpretive liberties” that prioritize sense over words. More times than not, I feel that the boundaries between translating and rewriting/transcreating are rather blurry. But without getting into the debate of whether translation is a creation or “regurgitation” process, or arguing over the merit of fidelity over transparency (or vice versa), we can all agree safely on the fact that translation is an elaborate deconstruction-reconstruction process that involves a great deal of creativity and “stretching” of the target language.

While translation always captures the meaning of a text, the way and form in which the message is communicated may depend as much on personal interpretation as on lexical interpretation and lexical choices. The more idiomatic or culturally laden the text, the more room for interpretation of both sorts, and the more creative the result.

In truth, when words/concepts such as “good and evil” (in the way we relate to them today) find their way into time-honored religious texts and become embedded so deeply into our collective cultural heritage, even when they are said to have had no equivalent in the language(s) in which they were originally written, isn’t it possible that everything is a question of interpretation? Isn’t this also implying that translation is always the subjective expression of an idea, which is itself rooted in a specific cultural, historical, and linguistic context? Going further, isn’t it possible that translatability is not so much an absolute truth as a relative notion—at least as relative as untranslatability? The only certainty is that one cannot question untranslatedability without questioning translatability, and that both concepts are two sides of the same coin with one thing in common: loss, or at least some degree of it.

Because language is a cultural phenomenon, loss is ever present in translation. Some connotations are bound to elude target-language readers who are unfamiliar with the cultural context behind them, or don’t associate them with the same emotion as source-language readers—even when a text is deemed translatable. Because translators typically have one foot in each culture and are accustomed to bridging the gap between the source and target cultures, they will most likely always understand the text and its connotation, but may not always be able to export the latter across cultures. However, as long as the message (i.e., the meaning of the text) makes it through gracefully, a text will generally be deemed adequately translated. The question is what happens when the message cannot make it through? Can we then talk of untranslatedability? Or rather, should we?

**The Everyday Untranslatable Text**

Translators often come across texts whose idiomatic nature makes it necessary to rethink their definition of untranslatedability and to stretch the target language to its very limit. (All of us know how much flexibility, creativity, and innovative thinking are required in the process!) In some instances, a translator will come up with a culturally appropriate equivalent (albeit distant from the original idea). Where choices are limited by factors that cannot be controlled, the translator may substitute the text with something else altogether. In rare instances where a concept is completely unknown to a culture, the translator’s work will go even further to make up for the conceptual void. In all cases, the text will be deemed adequately (albeit creatively) translated and, by extension, translatable.

However, there are instances when translators simply cannot make the decision to stretch the language, substitute text, or explain an alien concept, because that decision is simply not theirs to make. These are instances in which translators may find themselves using the word *untranslatable* to refer to something else altogether.

**When Untranslatable = Does Not Translate Effectively**

One such occurrence of a text that is often labeled untranslatable is “must-translate” text that may not translate effectively. We’ve all been there. In order to avoid a simple (to us) explanation that will confuse our monolingual client, we might refers to that text as *untranslatable*. But should we? Let’s use a simple case of marketing translation gone wrong to illustrate that particular dilemma.

We’ve all heard of the Braniff Airlines’ “Fly in Leather” campaign that sought to highlight the airline’s luxury leather seats, but was a fiasco in some parts of Latin America, where the slogan “Vuela en cuero” was interpreted as “fly naked/in the nude/topless.” Braniff’s misstep has become a classic example of unfortunate translation choices, but it might as well have been a case of unheeded warning. Consider the following scenario (with which more than a few marketing translators may be familiar).
Translator: The copy is untranslatable to a degree. If translated literally, it will miss the mark with the target audience because of XYZ.

Client: We’d like to keep it as is. It worked well here.

Translator: To readers from another culture, the text has a different connotation. I’ve taken the liberty of coming up with a few alternatives and their back translations to give you an idea of what would make sense to your target audience.

Client: We don’t like how any of those sound.

Translator: They sound better in the language. The back-translations are only aimed at giving you an idea of what the text means.

Client: We would rather use our original copy.

Translator: You may want to consider retaining an in-country consultant who could advise you further as to how to market your brand/product effectively.

Client: We’ve taken your advice under consideration, but we really feel our original copy is the best way to go. We’ve asked our bilingual employees and they think it sounds good, so please translate the copy as is.

Obviously, if a client trusts the translator’s expertise and already appreciates the fact that cultural differences make it necessary to adapt copy rather than translate it verbatim, the above scenario is unlikely. But clients new to intercultural communication, ignorant of the intricate differences between languages/cultures, or overly confident in the global effectiveness of their copy/message may not understand why writing copy for a specific market is preferable to translating copy written for another. To these clients, words and expressions such as “untranslatable,” “not translatable,” “not translating well/effectively,” and the like often equate to “failure to understand [the copy because of its idiomatic nature]” and “failure to translate,” so using them to avoid a likely ineptual explanation rarely leads to the desired outcome. On the contrary, it often leads to a situation where translators find themselves trying to prove that they understood the copy and can translate it “as is.” However, it’s not in the client’s best interest to do so (so back to square one).

A better approach might be to avoid all explanations having to do with translation (and especially the word untranslatable). State simply that target readers will not relate to the message because of a cultural gap and request a more culturally neutral text. If trained as a marketing writer, for example, one may go as far as to ask the client what other directions they may consider taking and offer to come up with alternative copy based on those. Recommending that the client seek the advice of a target-language writer is another option. Regardless of the road we choose to take, staying away from the word untranslatable and adjectives like it will save a lot of time and effort.

When Untranslatable = Incomprehensible

Another case of text that a translator might refer to as untranslatable is one that is so unintelligible or inarticulate that the translator cannot commit to a translation. At least not without first attaining a reasonable degree of certainty about its meaning as it was intended originally. Bible translators know this dilemma well, as religious texts are fertile grounds for impenetrable copy (which more and more translators are now choosing not to translate). For example, the new Swedish Bible reportedly features some 67 such instances! In the January 2007 issue of The Bible Translator, published by The United Bible Societies, Christer Åsberg, a professor of Swedish language and literature, explains:

Those who read Ps 141.6b in a sample of modern Bible translations may wonder why the verse is translated in so many different ways.

- RSV [Revised Standard Version]: Then they shall learn that the word of the LORD is true.
- CEV [Contemporary English Version]: Everyone will admit that I was right.
- NAB [New American Bible]: and they heard how pleasant were my words.
- NJPSV [New Jewish Publication Society Version]: but let my words be heard, for they are sweet.
- EHS [Evangelical Homiletics Society]: sie sollen hören, daß mein Wort für sie freundlich ist (they will hear that my word is favorable for them)
- TOB [Ecumenical Translation]: cux qui s’était réglés de m’entendre dire: (those who were invited to hear me say:)
- DB [Die Boodschap]: og man skal erfare, at mine ord var gode (and people will find, that my words were good ones)

In the 2000 Swedish translation (SB/Svenskbibel), the verse is not translated at all; it is indicated with three hyphens inside square brackets, [-,-].

But translators don’t have to specialize in ancient texts or languages to face that particular dilemma, and the challenges that the situation creates are not any less exacting. Indeed, when translating current texts, leaving the copy blank is not an option, and dealing with actual writers/clients may at times be even more challenging than translating texts from the ancient ones who are no longer around to explain them.
When confronted with texts so incoherent that they cannot be translated in a way that makes sense, a translator’s first reaction might be to inform the client that the copy in question is untranslatable. Honestly, this sounds better than a candid truth that may alienate the client. However, by doing so we may be doing ourselves (and our client) a disservice. Not only might the client equate “untranslatable” with “failure to understand/translate” (something that sounds perfectly comprehensible to them), but they might also get defensive, thereby lessening the chance of getting the text edited for both translation and publication purposes.

A better approach might be to inform the client that you are having trouble understanding the copy and asking them to explain it. Most clients will realize when verbalizing their thoughts that the copy is in need of editing/rewriting and thank you for your careful reading of their text. (If not, you may at least use your newly-found understanding of the copy to make sure that the translation is intelligible.)

If previous or subsequent content allows you to ascertain without a doubt what the text should say, then you may also take it upon yourself to rewrite the copy. Whether you should and the consequences of such an action are another matter entirely. (See “The Translator as an Editor” in the March 2014 edition of The ATA Chronicle.) As to how to deal with clients who think their carelessly written text makes enough sense to be translated and insist that you translate it “as is,” the best approach may be simply to stay away. After all, a translator’s ethics and reputation are worth more than the number of clients on a list.

Regardless of the translation challenges we face and how we choose to respond to them, reserving the term untranslatable to actual instances of untranslatability will go a long way. In everyday translation scenarios, most of the challenges that present themselves to us (besides lexical gaps, which can generally be managed without much fuss or client input) are typically either oversights in the source text or cultural discrepancies. Presenting them as such may serve us and our clients well.

Which leaves us with one big question. If texts deemed untranslatable can be translated and texts that cannot be translated are not untranslatable, what are we to make of the notion of untranslatability as a concept?

**Myth or Something Else?**

Although much has been said and written about the “myth of untranslatability,” the concept keeps defying black-and-white categorization. Both rare and commonplace, real and not, and certainly as difficult to prove as to disprove, untranslatability may masquerade as a paradox. However, it is, more than anything else, a relative notion linked to the very definition of translation/translatability, and the extent to which text and meaning can be exported across languages satisfactorily—if ever.

There is no question that terms, expressions, and concepts that have no direct equivalents or do not exist in another language pose great difficulties to the translator, regardless of how many compensation methods may be used to render the translation. There is also no question that a certain amount of loss (both lexical and non-lexical) is inevitable as a result of circumventing the challenges that lexical and cultural gaps present, and that the more culturally-bound the text, the greater that loss. The question is to know whether texts that have no equivalents should be labeled as untranslatable, and whether “non-equivalent translations” are less or more accurate translations than equivalent ones. When non-equivalent translations yield better results than equivalent ones, couldn’t it simply suggest that untranslatability is inherent to language itself and that the myth is actually translatability?

Finding the answer to that question seems as elusive as ever. After all, there is a reason translation theorists, philosophers, and linguists have been debating the subject for centuries. So let’s leave it as that. As Friedrich Nietzsche said: “Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon the absolute truth.” And neither does there seem to be any absolute truth in the notion of untranslatability (or translatability, for that matter).

**Notes**


The Color of American Language: 
Figurative Usage of Words for Colors

By Mary Rubinstein
Back in 2001, I published a piece in *The ATA Chronicle* entitled “Translation Problems with Colors,” dealing with literal translations of numerous colors in a variety of languages. I emphasized that the translation of colors provided a challenge to translators that is more complicated than it seems. For example, all languages have words for primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) and for black and white. All other colors result from blending these (e.g., you get gray from blending black and white). The U.S. National Bureau of Standards alone recognizes 267 variations in colors, shades, and hues. Further complications arise from the fact that terminology for skin and hair color are often totally different from those used for paint. Modifiers such as “light” and “dark” add to the complexity.

I would like to take the discussion a step further here by dealing with the use of colors, not in their literal sense (e.g., blue eyes or brown hair), but how they are used as tropes in a variety of figurative ways. For example, the expressions “blue-eyed boy” and “fair-haired boy” have nothing to do with color, but are used to refer to a favorite or cherished child, often one who is treated with special consideration. If I feel “blue,” it means that I feel sad or unhappy. If I sing “the blues,” I am singing one of a group of songs whose tone and lyrics deal with sorrow, sadness, depression, or melancholy (very often, it seems, as a result of a dying love affair). Translating these terms may require using the literal rather than the figurative base (e.g., “sad” as a translation for “blue”).

Some languages, however, give you a choice of words. In Japanese, for example, a translator could use *kanashiti* (sad) or alternatively a transliterated word, *burt*, for the color blue, depending on context. Something similar is true of French. You have the choice of *j’ai cafard* (I feel down) or *Je me sens bleu* (I feel blue). (Note: a *cafard* is a cockroach.

It’s an expression—don’t ask me why.) Your choice in Spanish seems more limited, namely *triste* (sad). Other examples of the figurative use of the word “blue” include:

**Bluebeard:** A man who murders many wives. Origin: an old French tale by Charles Perrault.

**Blue blood:** An individual of noble birth. Origin: a medieval belief that aristocratic blood was blue.

**Blue chip:** Stock Market stocks that are considered safe and reliable investments, though less secure than gilt-edged stocks.

**Blue-collar:** A term used to characterize working-class employees who do not wear a shirt and tie to work. Origin: the color of rugged denim work shirts often worn by manual laborers. Navy and light blue colors conceal potential dirt or grease.

**Blue dog Democrat:** A Democrat from the South who usually votes with conservatives. (See Yellow dog Democrat on page 27.)

**Blue laws:** Laws (usually of religious origin) prohibiting certain activities or commercial sales on Sundays or religious holidays. These laws were first promoted in Colonial New England. Also known as Sunday Laws.

**Blue movies:** Pornographic or risqué films that offend religious values.

**Blue Nile:** One of the headwaters of the Nile River originating in Ethiopia. It joins the White Nile when it enters Sudan and Egypt.

**Bluenose:** A prig; a puritanical person who advocates a rigorous moral code. Origin: a derisive name dating back to the late 18th century used to refer to a person residing in Nova Scotia; allegedly so called from a variety of potato with a bluish tip.

**Blue note:** A minor musical interval replacing an expected major interval. Used primarily when referencing jazz.

**Blue plate (special):** A restaurant meal consisting of only one main course. Probably originally served on a large blue plate.

**Bluestocking:** An educated, intellectual woman with literary interests. Originally used to refer to a member of the 18th-century Bluestocking Society in London.

Note that the use of the word “blue” to designate pornography is interesting, because other countries and languages use different colors to deal with the same concept. In Japanese, for example, they use “pink.” (For those who are interested, there is an excellent book on the history of sexual morality in Japan, entitled *The Pink Samurai: The Pursuit and Politics of Sex in Japan*, by Nicholas Bornoff.) In Spanish, they use “green,” as in *un viejo verde*, which literally means “a green old man.” (A better translation would be “a dirty old man.”) In parts of Mexico, the key word is “red,” as in *un viejo rojo* (“an old red man”).

Now let’s explore the use of some other figurative uses for terms found in the color spectrum.

**Green**

**Green (slang):** Not quite mature; new at the job. Origin: probably refers to being not quite ripe.
Greenback: Used to refer to the U.S. dollar. Origin: probably first used as a reference in sports betting or criminal activity.

Green card: A permanent residence document allowing someone from another country to live and work in the U.S. (These cards were originally green.)

Green-eyed (monster): Refers to jealousy. Origin: used in Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice, published in 1596.

Greenengage: A variety of very flavorful green plum.

Greenhorn (greenie): A newly-arrived U.S. immigrant; a naïve or inexperienced person. Origin: late Middle English, 1425.

Greenhouse gas: A gas that traps heat in the atmosphere and causes global warming (e.g., carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide).

Green party: A political party that concentrates on environmental policies.

Green thumb: Someone with a natural talent for gardening.

Orange
Orange man: An Irish protestant, often a member of a protestant political society in Northern Ireland. Origin: historical supporters of King William III of the House of Orange. The Loyal Orange Institution, more commonly known as the Orange Order, is a Protestant fraternal organization based primarily in Northern Ireland. It was founded in County Armagh in 1795, during a period of Protestant-Catholic sectarian conflict, as a Masonic-style brotherhood sworn to defend Protestant supremacy.

Orange pekoe: In the Western tea trade, a grade of black tea grown high in the mountains.

Expressions such as “a blue-eyed boy” and a “fair-haired boy” have nothing to do with color. Translating these terms may require using the literal rather than the figurative base.

Orange stick: A thin pointed stick used in manicuring, usually made of orange wood.

Pink
Pink: Pinko: Showing left-wing or communist beliefs. Coined by Time Magazine, the term first appeared in the publication several times in 1925. This is a variation of an older term, “parlor pink,” which dates back to at least 1920.

Pink (in the...): In excellent shape; top notch.

Pink elephants (seeing): Having hallucinations, usually while drunk. Often attributed to the 1975 Pink Panther cartoon series, but, according to Wikipedia, the expression was used as early as 1905 or perhaps even before.


Pink slip: A reference to a dismissal notice, originally printed on pink paper.

Purple
Purple: Used to designate someone of high social rank. Origin: in ancient Greece, purple Tyrian dyes, made from a type of shellfish, were very expensive.

Purple heart: A military medal issued to those killed or injured in battle; established in 1782 by George Washington.

Purple passage: Used to refer to writing that is highly passionate, particularly in novels.

Purple prose: Lurid, exaggerated, often sensual writing.

Red
Red is a very popular figuratively-used color word. It is frequently the adjective preceding references to China, Russia, or to Communism (e.g., Red Army and Red Guard).

Red (derogatory): Used to refer to a Communist or socialist. Origin: the red flag has been used by the international Communist movement since 1940, though the color is also associated with earlier radical groups.

Red (to see): To rise to sudden anger. Origin: bull fighting.

Red bait: To harass or persecute one suspected of having Communist sympathies. The expression goes back to the mid-1880s.

Red carpet (to roll out): To give special welcoming treatment to an honored guest. Traditionally used on formal occasions for heads of state.

Red-handed: Used to refer to someone caught in the middle of committing a crime or other devious act.

Red herring: A deceptive or misleading clue left behind deliberately. Origin: the practice of using the scent of a red herring in training bloodhounds.

Red Indian (redskin) [slang; derogatory]: An American Indian. The first recorded use was in the late 17th century to distinguish American Indians from the people of India. The actual origin is obscure, sometimes
attributed to the Beothuk Tribe in Newfoundland, who often used red ochre on their skin as a cosmetic. A more likely explanation of how the term came about is that American Indians were often depicted with skin that had a reddish hue.

**Red light district:** A part of a town or city with many strip clubs, houses of prostitution, and sex businesses. Origin: brothels historically showed a red light in their windows.

**Redlining:** A practice (often illegal) used by banks and insurance companies to designate certain locations or districts as bad risks for loans or mortgages or for renting to minorities.

**Red meat (colloquial):** News or oratory aimed deliberately at inflaming emotion.

**Red tape:** Excessive bureaucracy; too many regulations. Origin: first noted in 16th-century historical records. Red or pink tape was often used to bind official documents.

**Yellow**

**Yellow dog:** A cowardly person or thing. This expression has been used since the 1900s.

**Yellow dog Democrat:** A voter, in days long past, usually from the South, who it was said would even vote for a yellow dog as long as it was a Democrat.

**Yellow-dog contract:** A labor agreement, usually written by an employer, where the employee agrees never to join a union.

**Yellow journalism:** Crude, sensational journalism, usually presented without evidence. Origin: late 19th century, when newspapers battled for circulation by trying to outdo one another by printing sensational stories to increase readership.

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### Related Resources

Information for this article was gathered from a number of dictionaries, including:


And the following online dictionaries:

- The Online Slang Dictionary
  - onlineslangdictionary.com

- The Phrase Finder Online
  - bit.ly/phrase-finder

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**Black, Gray, and White**

And finally, the achromatics: black, gray, and white:

**Black**

**Blackball:** To reject; to veto a membership application, often by secret ballot.

**Black book:** A list of people to be punished or rejected.

**Black book (little):** A small book listing girlfriends or boyfriends.

**Black Death:** Refers to the Bubonic Plague, a devastating pandemic in the 1300s, originating in China and wiping out nearly half of Europe. It was spread by rats.

**Black Friday:** The day after Thanksgiving, which is the first shopping day of the Christmas season. The expression origi-
nated in Philadelphia around 1960, and nowadays retailers offer special discounts on that day.

**Blackguard:** A dishonorable or despicable person; a scoundrel (pronounced blaggard).

**Black hole:** A region in space with an extremely high gravitational field. Also used to refer to a dungeon, a very punitive underground jail cell (e.g., the Black Hole of Calcutta, 1756).

**Black (in the...):** An idiomatic expression in accounting, meaning making a profit; having a net gain. (Opposite of "In the red" or "Showing red ink.")

**Blacklist:** A list of people to avoid or to be denied a special service or privilege; to make or add to such a list.

**Black lung:** Pneumoconiosis; a lung disease caused by inhaling coal dust (common with coal miners).

**Black magic:** Magic involving the invocation of evil spirits.

**Blackmail:** Extortion; using the threat of revealing someone’s secrets. A criminal offense.

**Black Maria (slang):** A police vehicle (usually black) used for transporting prisoners. This was also the nickname of one of the first motion-picture studios, built by Thomas Edison.

**Black market:** Illegal trade in scarce or illegal commodities. Origin: World War II.

**Black sheep:** An odd or disreputable family member considered a disgrace. Origin: a genetic recessive gene in sheep, making them black.

**Gray**

**Gray eminence:** The power behind the throne; one exercising power in a concealed manner, normally in a non-public or unofficial capacity. Originally applied to the right-hand man of Cardinal Richelieu in the 1600s.

**Gray beard (derogatory):** An old man.

**Graying:** Getting older. Origin: graying of the hair and beard during aging.

**Gray matter:** Brains.

**White**

**WASP (acronym):** White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

**White (to bleed someone):** To take all of someone’s money; to deprive someone of all his resources. (Probably refers to the paling of skin as one loses blood.)

**White bread:** Bland; having white middle-class cultural values.

**White elephant:** An extravagant but burdensome gift, expensive to maintain and difficult to get rid of. Origin: probably Thailand but possibly India, where kings and maharajas reputedly gave rare, pale-colored elephants as gifts as a means of impoverishing or bankrupting those who had offended them.

**White feather:** A symbol of cowardice.

**White flag:** An internationally recognized symbol of surrender or truce.

**White knight:** A hero who comes to one’s aid; also applies to someone who saves a failing company.

**White lie:** A small, trivial lie, supposedly innocuous, sometimes used to avoid hurting someone’s feelings.

**White sale:** A sale of household linens (not necessarily white in color).

**White shoe:** A company (frequently a law firm) owned or run by conservative WASPs.

**White-tie:** The most formal evening dress code, requiring tails and usually a white bow tie. (Black-tie events are semi-formal, requiring a tuxedo or at least a dark suit.)

**White trash (derogatory):** Used to refer to uncultured or poor white people, especially in the South.

The above constitute just a small selection of figurative uses of colors. Those cited are either in common use or needed for understanding literature and history. Since the figurative meaning of these expressions often has a historical or cultural base, direct literal translations may be difficult, particularly with languages without Latin roots and with radically different historical cultures. Those with French, Italian, or Spanish lineage are more likely to find similar uses in their native languages.

**Notes**


6. There is no identifiable relationship between the American Indian and the Indians of India. A better term for American Indians would be Indigenous. In Mexican Spanish, they do not use the term Indians. They use *Indigena*. 
Whatever your role in the translation and interpreting industry, ATA56 is the place for dedicated professionals wanting to expand their knowledge and their network.

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Judy Jenner

Risky Business?

Readers of this column might remember that I’ve frequently mentioned that while translators and interpreters can work globally thanks to this wonderful thing called the Internet, we usually have some specific markets that we can target because of where we live. For instance, if you live in Portland, you might get work from the Nike Oregon Project because you happen to live there. (And it wouldn’t hurt if you ran track.) If you live in a city like Brussels, you probably have greater access to high-level government contract work than someone who lives in a small town in the Midwest. In the Midwest, however, you might have advantages over other non-local translators, since it would certainly be easier for you to get work in the agricultural sector than for someone who lives in the Mojave desert, like I do, where no agricultural companies are headquartered.

This brings me to my next point. Vegas is a unique market for both translation and interpreting, and most of the businesses for which Vegas is known are not fit for everyone (users or translators/interpreters). Yes, I am talking about some (legal) vices here.

One of the best questions I’ve received over the years is whether there are certain industries for which I would not work, and it’s a question that doesn’t have a good answer. Being in Vegas, I have access to some industries and markets that others don’t. I am referring mainly to casino gaming and affiliated businesses. We’ve worked for casinos, manufacturers of slot machines, ancillary services, businesses in the nightclub sector, and a few others (fill in the blanks here, readers). While I certainly understand that working for these types of businesses isn’t for everyone, I’ve had very positive experiences. However, I do think about the importance of ethics in our work quite frequently.

My usual question to myself is: “Would you like to see the business contract you have with _____ on the front page of the Las Vegas Review Journal?” If the answer is no, I know what to do. However, if we really start analyzing things, many companies can fall into a gray zone of ethics, and this goes way beyond the industries that are traditionally considered risky. For instance, clothing manufacturers, pharmaceutical companies, hardware companies—you get the idea. If we started shying away from all of the companies that do anything with which we don’t agree, I bet we wouldn’t have any customers left.

When this issue comes up on listservs and in conversations with colleagues, I think it best to let everyone determine who they would like to work for rather than issuing blanket statements such as “No one should ever translate/interpret for ______.” There are no right answers. In my case, I’d prefer not to translate for the Republican National Convention or interpret at the next Smith & Wesson trade show, but I certainly respect those who do. And vice versa, so it’s not surprising that many industries that are often times considered to be in gray areas and fall under the “vice” category are also some of the fastest growing (e.g., the adult entertainment industry).

On the other hand, what is vice (to you)? Would you translate for Grey Goose but not for Vivid Entertainment or the medical marijuana industry? It’s up to you. I think what’s important is being able to live with our individual choices. It’s often times pointed out that as a society, we sometimes fall prey to the double standard of turning up our noses at certain businesses (tobacco, alcohol, adult entertainment, etc.) while consuming these products and services in private. Would you translate for these businesses but keep it quiet so as not to alienate other clients who might not share your views? Tough questions indeed, and there are no easy, right, or wrong answers.
Blog Trekker

When Bad Translations Happen to Good People

(Posted by Marie Brotnov on her blog, Translation Wordshop, http://translationwordshop.com.)

I received an assignment from a long-standing client last week that made my Spidey-sense tingle as soon as I read the instructions. It was billed as a super easy review of a translation done in-house at a hospital, which should take no more than half an hour. Uh-huh. A quick glance at the translation told me that this was going to take a lot more than 30 minutes, especially since they also wanted me to explain every change I made and check the terminology against a reference document. I explained that I’d only be able to scratch the surface in that time, so the agency agreed to pay me for an hour and asked me to do what I could within that time frame.

It was a textbook case of “You Get What You Pay for” and “Why the #$&!! Did You Not Hire a Professional in the First Place.”

The Dutch text, an informational document intended to guide patients through various decisions, had obviously been translated into English by a non-native speaker, so predictably I found the following mistakes: unidiomatic expressions, Dutch sentence structure, Dutch rules of punctuation, and incorrect terminology.

On top of that, there were problems that had nothing to do with native fluency, but were simply the result of the additional fact that the person was not a professional translator:

- Inconsistent terminology.
- Going back and forth between U.S. and U.K. English.
- Lack of conformity with the source (missing/added words, and in one case a whole paragraph that only loosely corresponded to the source, perhaps copied and pasted from a similar document under the motto of “close enough”).
- Entire sentences skipped and left untranslated.

The good news is that this hospital apparently suspected that the quality of the translation might be a bit sketchy and decided to subject it to a professional review. A more cynical person might believe that they were confident everything was just fine and figured they could save money on the translation and just pay for a review to satisfy their own quality assurance requirements, but we are going to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Whatever the case may be, though, this experience underscores the need to refrain from stamping “I TOLD YOU SO” all over the offending document and, instead, figure out how to become more effective in communicating the importance of hiring a professional translator.

Why is this so hard? Our basic message is simple enough:

Poor translations cause damage that will cost you money/damage your reputation. Expert translations add value that will bring in more money/enhance your reputation.

I would love just to be able to print “I believe in me” on the back of my business cards, hand them out, and watch the clients roll in. Doing so would avoid pain and reap benefits—what’s not to love, right? Unfortunately, as advertisers already know, facts alone don’t move merchandise (or services).

Clients don’t just want to hear that your service makes a difference; they want to know specifically what difference your service will make to their bottom line. In order to do that we have to know what they deal with and what their concerns are, which is yet another reason it is important to keep up with the developments in our chosen field.

For example, I specialize in medical/pharmaceutical translations. A major paradigm shift that is taking place in the health care industry right now is a shift from a procedure-based system to an outcome-based system. What this means is

Continued on page 33
“The Measure of Intelligence Is the Ability to Change”

Whether or not this quote is really by Einstein, it certainly ought to be because it rings so true. Plus, it explains in a nutshell what I’d like to share with you here.

Within the past few weeks, I prepared several talks and articles that tried to sketch out what has happened in translation technology in the past few years and what likely will happen in the coming years. To summarize, I’m in awe of how much has changed and how much change is ongoing.

I remember a time when we felt the need to argue about whether it was even wise to use translation technology. When we finally more or less arrived at an agreement that, for most translators, the employment of some kind of translation technology was indeed helpful, we argued about whether we should use Macs or Windows PCs, Trados or Déjà Vu. (Yes, there once was actually a time when those seemed to be the only viable choices.)

Contrast this to today. We no longer really discuss operating systems. Between virtualized instances of operating systems and web-based computing, this topic has been made largely obsolete. And out of the (perceived) two-fold competition has blossomed a field of several dozen viable contenders. But there’s even more. Many emerging changes require us to be flexible, curious, and—to come back to Einstein—willing to change. Here are some of those moving targets:

• We now know that machine translation will play a role in many of our professional lives in the near future. Notably, though, this is no longer such a feared change.

Instead, it is a positive transformation, one that will prove to be another of many tools that we will use to enhance our productivity (as opposed to simply editing machine translation output).

• We long ago entered the age of collaboration where we use shared translation memories and term bases when working for technology-savvy clients, but it’s now easier than ever to organize these kinds of virtual workgroups with our peers.

• With the advent of sub-segmentation, the concept of translation memory has changed. Many of us used to follow the “Big Mama” concept, where everything we worked on ended up in one mammoth translation memory. While some still do, most of us have turned our backs on that model to embrace translation memories of higher quality that in turn deliver higher-quality sub-segments.

• Sub-segmentation and the corresponding techniques of AutoWrite, AutoComplete, writing with the Muse, or whatever the tool of your choice might call it, have also changed our approach to terminology. It’s become more important because we get it delivered right to our cursor as we type. This comes at a time when term handling and maintenance has finally become less cumbersome in most tools, and when external tools are becoming more fine-tuned to building up terminology resources and using them productively.

• Voice recognition has been around for a number of years and has long been praised as a tremendous productivity boost by its early power users. Now, many more are using it. What is exciting is that there seem to be real possibilities to make this technology available to translators in languages beyond the small number supported by the official Dragon NaturallySpeaking products.

• Web-based translation environments have become ubiquitous. While most of us agree that they still lack some of the productivity features we are used to from our desktop translation environments, they have made huge progress and feature-parity is visible on the horizon.

Information and Contacts

The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost is the co-author of Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World, a perfect source for replenishing your arsenal of information on how human translation and machine translation each play important parts in the broader world of translation. Contact: jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.
GeekSpeak Continued from p. 32

So, it’s really no longer so much a question of what technology to use. Instead, it has become a question of how to use technology, and how to shape it in a way that fits your particular need.

Of course, this isn’t where it stops. Here are some developments that will be necessary within the next few years:

- Tools will have to finally develop morphological abilities for a wide variety of languages. It remains to be seen who will develop this, but it will have to happen. Once we have that, the possibilities for term recognition, quality assurance, and fixing faulty translations automatically will be boundless.

- The concept of the “translation environment” will become more central to the imagination of tool developers—and not just to the developers of the actual translation environment tools. For instance, I think dictionary publishers will try to bring their content right into the translation environment where the translator needs it. And so will others.

- There will be increasingly creative ways to access external bilingual and monolingual data seamlessly. MemoQ has already paved the way for this with the successful implementation of a corpus tool feature that other tools will surely follow. Does this strike a creative chord as you begin to hatch your own ideas of what’s possible? Please don’t keep these to yourself. Be sure to communicate them to our community of translation professionals and developers.

Every translation professional is unique in the clients we serve, the languages we translate, the subject matter with which we work, and the technology we employ. What’s common to all of us is that we need to be vigilantly and creatively on the lookout for the best suite of solutions. And since y’all agree with me that we’re smart, it shouldn’t be a problem for us to continue to change, right?

Note

Blog Trekker Continued from p. 31

that more and more, physicians and hospitals are no longer reimbursed per test or per procedure, but rather on the basis of the quality or outcome of the care they provide, and they are held accountable via penalties for poor outcomes (like excessive readmissions, for instance) and incentives for good outcomes. In other words, hospitals and doctors are ranked and reimbursed on the basis of the quality of the care they provide, and this quality is assessed by means of quantifiable, objective metrics like patient satisfaction or number of readmissions.

Now let’s go back to this translation I reviewed and consider it in the light of an outcome-based system. Poorly translated patient materials do not just lead to frustration and extra work for hospital staff dealing with the inevitable confusion, but to patients expressing their dissatisfaction in surveys or, worse, to misunderstandings with horrible consequences like overdosing or the need for readmission. Either way, the poor translation will eventually be reflected in the hospital’s ranking, its reputation, and its pocketbook.

Hospital administrators will not be fascinated by some all-purpose claim that expert translations “add value,” but they might be interested to find out how a well-written, engaging patient brochure in English can effectively improve their hospital’s metrics. This is just one approach in one field, of course, and there are many ways to make this message relevant to potential clients. Have any of you taken advantage of current developments in your field of expertise to communicate the value of what we do? I’d love to hear from you.
Rechtsenglisch: Deutsch-englisches und englisch-deutsches Rechtswörterbuch für jedermann

Author:
Gerhard Köbler

Publisher:
Verlag Vahlen

Publication date:
2011 (8th edition)

Number of pages/entries:
521 pages
25,000 entries

ISBN:
3800641968

Price:
€ 15.00

Specialty Field:
Legal

Available from:
Amazon.com

This compact, light-weight dictionary is a helpful travel companion (e.g., for use at business meetings). As the title of this inexpensive reference indicates, the Rechtswörterbuch für jedermann is a legal dictionary for general layperson use. It was not written as a dictionary for specialists, such as legal translators and interpreters or jurists, but is intended to serve as a practical tool for anyone in need of basic legal vocabulary. It may also be a helpful resource for translators working in other specializations who occasionally need information on a legal term.

Content and Layout
The dictionary contains over 12,500 German entries and more than 17,500 English entries. In his introduction, Gerhard Köbler describes the increasing relevance of other countries’ legal systems for legal professionals in Germany, which has led to the need for more information about foreign legal systems. This observation is followed by an overview of different jurisdictions, divided up into British law and its various systems (common law, equity, administrative law, public law, etc.). The dictionary even touches on the law in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Isle of Man, but explains the American legal system in far less detail. Köbler delves into history (as far back as 41 A.D.) and describes the development of each legal system up to the present. Also included are educational requirements for jurists in the U.K. and the U.S. along with career choices for jurists in these countries. (As a side note, this would have been an appropriate place to explain the difference between a notary public in the U.S. and a Notar, or öffentlich bestellter Notar, in Germany. After all, this significant difference might not be general knowledge, but Köbler did not include this highly relevant information.) Although these renderings are educational and interesting, it is rather surprising that in a dictionary described as “compact,” 26 pages are devoted to a lengthy introduction.

Terminology Choices
Considering the goal of providing a legal dictionary for everybody, it is surprising that the dictionary does not contain cross-references or context information, which can easily lead to errors. To give an example, the translations provided for the German term Orden are “medal, decoration, order,” without any mention of the religious connotation of the last term. The dictionary also contains general terms.
that are rather unusual for a legal dictionary, such as Nizza, Nonne, or "cab" and "telephone."

Numerous German nouns have separate entries for the female and the male form, even though the female and male form are the same in English, at least most of the time. For example, there are two separate entries for Normadressat and Normadressatin, with the same rendering in English. This concept is taken to yet another level with the term "attorney." There are two different entries each for the female and male form of the term "attorney" and "attorney-at-law" (instead of using "attorney [at-law]"

with the same translation: Anwalt, Rechtsanwalt, and then Anwältin, Rechtsanwältin). It seems that a single entry (e.g., "notary") followed by the male and female form in German (Notarin), where nouns always have the female ending, would have been a more effective use of space. Of course, in the rare cases where an actual female form exists in English, this should be stated (e.g., heir/heiress).

This approach would also have freed up space for terms that are not included in this dictionary, such as terminology pertaining to cyber law (the term is not even mentioned), communications, or the Internet in general. These are legal sub-fields that certainly should have been included in a dictionary published in 2011, at a time when the Internet and the associated legal ramifications were very much a reality.

Given the broad applicability of family law, it is surprising that the term "custody" is included without any reference to parental custody or its variations, such as "legal custody," "full custody," "shared custody," or "physical custody." Similarly, the dictionary's German translations for "representation" are rather limited and fail to take into account the term's meaning in the context of a will. It would seem that terms of this nature would be of particular interest to laypersons handling legal documents.

It is certainly important to include antiquated terms. After all, one might come across those terms in old legal documents, but they should be denoted as such. One example would be Notzucht, which is rarely encountered nowadays. Also, three translations (Notzucht, Schändung, Vergewaltigung) are offered for the English equivalent "rape" without noting their proper use in modern German legal language.

The short list of abbreviations that is provided only pertains to grammatical abbreviations. Common legal abbreviations such as cf., et al, id., or ff. are not listed. However, the abbreviations "am." or "brit." in parentheses is a useful feature and indicates whether a term pertains to U.S. or British usage.

**Overall Evaluation**

As the subtitle implies, this compact legal dictionary is a useful tool for non-professional users who need to look up a term quickly. Legal professionals as well as legal translators/interpreters may find the dictionary a helpful basis for further terminology research online or in other bilingual and monolingual legal publications. The dictionary offers a good introduction to legal terminology for general use at an affordable price. However, it cannot replace more thoroughly researched standard legal dictionaries such as the ones written by Clara-Erika Dietl, Egon Lorenz, and Alfred Romain.
An author whose book I have been e-reading, and just finished, says that Americans in the period prior to the Civil War lived “intensely local lives,” and could get away with it because they responded to concerns about the power of government by—as he puts it—chopping government up into thousands of tiny pieces, down through the state and county level, to the township level. They would have gone even further if they could. An 1876 atlas of the county in which I live, plus the one to the east of it, shows township districts—subdivisions of townships—which have both numbers and names. As far as I know, these never became active, but were on paper only.

Our profession requires us to live “intensely non-local lives,” with dealings around the globe. Much of my translation work, once completed, is edited and proofread in the People’s Republic of China, and probably your experience is not too different.

New Queries

(English>Swedish 5-15.5) Ingrepp seems too serious a word for one of our colleagues dealing with this general medical text, which speaks of the need for a patient to “regularly undergo various tests and procedures to check how the study treatment is working.” We know that “procedure” has become the new buzzword for “operation,” but clearly that is not what is meant here.

(French>English 5-15.6) Liaison Titres appears to be a non-standard balance sheet item. What does it represent?

(French>English 5-15.7) “Land tenure” in Guinea will certainly never be a topic in this column again, so let’s run with it. The problem term is parcelle d’habitation. Part of the legal text in which it was found states: ces étrangers recevaient une parcelle d’habitation et un terrain attenant prévu pour l’exploitation de cultures associées (pérérennes et annuelles). The Translation Inquirer sincerely hopes he picked out the most helpful sentence in this long quote.

(German>Hungarian [English] 5-15.8) Veranlagungsfreibetrug is a tax-related query, about which one can learn more, in a general way, at http://bit.ly/WKO-tax. The term can be found on the site in the paragraph immediately under the heading Steuerklauungspflicht (Einkommensteuer). What is this highly arcane term, and can someone at least supply the English?

(English>Czech [English] 5-15.9) A user’s manual contained nodo di
inastro, and that was enough to make one of our colleagues petition for help. Her context paragraph should suffice to enable someone out there to assist: *Il collegamento trave principale – trave secondaria nelle strutture in legno è schematizzabile tramite un nodo di cerniera che vincola gli elementi alla traslazione ma non alla rotazione e si differenzia quindi dal vincolo di inastro (ricorrente viceversa nelle strutture in calcestruzzo). L’unione è infatti in grado di trasferire lo sforzo di taglio e la sollecitazione assiale dalla travel secondaria all’travel principale ma non momento flettente o torcente.*

*(Russian>*English 5-15.10)* Medical terminology, a rich source of obscurity, yields us this query: *штампованные гранулемы, as in Гистологическое исследование ЭМБ показало штампованные гранулемы из гигантских многоядерных клеток с вакуолями и астероидами, эпителиоидных клеток, лимфоцитов. What are the terms in bold?*

*(Russian>*Spanish [English] 5-15.11)* The concept that is the subject of this query, иммунотрансплантабельная продукция, was, at one time, a fashionable term in Argentina and in Franco’s Spain. No particular context is available here, except a general engineering one, and the statement that a certain aggregate or unit is иммунотрансплантабельная продукция.

**Replies to Old Queries**

*(English>*Spanish 3-15.6)* (non-faith-based organization): Melissa González prefers organización sin afiliación religiosa. For Pablo Julian Davis, organización no confesional (used by the es.catholic.net website) is by far the best of several choices, where confesional means “related to religion,” but does not carry such narrow connotations that it means only a place of worship. He is willing to admit that if U.S. Hispanics are the target audience, a different solution might apply, since “faith-based” and “non-faith-based” are terms heard repeatedly in American politics. Organización no basada en la fé and organización no religiosa are disqualified in his opinion, the former because it is an awkward calque, the latter because it is too narrow.

*(English>*Spanish 3-15.6)* (hair casts): Melissa González discovered that these are called cilíndros pilosos or vainas perifilares in Spanish, according to an article published in a Mexican dermatology journal. What is being dealt with here are 2-7 millimeters long, discrete, firm, shiny, white, and freely movable tubular accretions that encircle the hair shafts of the scalp.

*(French>*Spanish [English] 3-15.9)* (zungerie): Kathy Foster calls this “zinc work” or “sheet metal work,” and suggests that perhaps this is a reference to a type of flashing. Isabelle Pouliot found this in an online dictionary: *Articles en zinc; en partic., ensemble des éléments en zinc (ou revêtus de zinc) d’un bâtiment.* In other words, items that are zinc-plated. The context sentence stated that one element of the roof was not zinc-plated (probably by request).

The Translation Inquirer wishes there had been more than these good replies above, but only three weeks have elapsed since the last column was submitted, so it is natural that the list would be short. Those who responded this time enriched the dialogue.

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Fictional Translators and Interpreters

The May 2012 edition of this column was about fictional translation—original work masquerading as translation. This is covered to some extent in Transfiction: Research into the Realities of Translation Fiction, edited by Klaus Kaindl and Karlheinz Spitzl (John Benjamins, 2014), but the book consists mainly of articles about translators and interpreters who appear as characters in novels and films.

Unusually for a scholarly book, Transfiction includes the warning:

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Are translators and interpreters often depicted fictitiously? According to this book, more times than most of us might imagine. Nitsa Ben-Ari’s article “Reaching a dead-end—and then?” lists four types of novels that include translators or interpreters as characters: 1) post-colonial novels in which the protagonists are east-west hybrids fully at home nowhere; 2) post-structuralist novels with “death of the author” themes; 3) best-sellers, including thrillers and love stories; and 4) parodies.

The problems of fictional translators and interpreters can be depressingly familiar. In “From La dolce vita to La vita agra,” Giovanni Nadiani quotes:

And then you had to work every day of the week, including Sundays, so many pages a day to meet all your obligations and, if you fell ill and had no [health insurance], you would have to pay out hard cash for the doctor and the medicines and, as your earnings would cease, you would be doubly in the soup. (Nadiani: 133; quoting and translating Luciano Bianciardi’s La vita agra [The Harsh Life], 1965:128)

Natalia Olshanskaya, in “From a faltering bystander to a spiritual leader: Re-thinking the role of translators in Russia,” writes:

For several centuries, the immediate impact of translated literature on Russian culture has promoted a variety of ideological debates … from Pushkin’s famous 1830 diary entry, “Translators are the postal horses of the enlightenment” … to [Turgenev’s 1854 letter about a translator of one of his novels], “What a shameless Frenchman!” to [Nabokov’s 1981 rant about “the three grades of evil” committed by translators], “errors due to ignorance, … [omission of words or passages,] … [and patting] a masterpiece … into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. This [last] is a crime, to be punished by the stocks as plagiarists were in the shoe buckle days. (Olshanskaya: 142-43)

In “The apocalyptic interpreter and the end of Europe: Alain Fleischer’s Prolongations,” Dörte Andres tells of novels that satirize international conferences, “drawing on barely conceivable, but all too real incidents” (272). He quotes from A Heart So White (London: Vintage, 2003) and Margaret Jull Costa’s translation of Corazón tan blanco (London: Vintage, 1992), by Javier Marias:

… the task of the translator or interpreter of speeches and reports is boring in the extreme, … because of the identical and fundamentally incomprehensible jargon universally used by all parliamentarians, delegates, ministers, politicians, deputies,
ambassadors, experts, and representatives of all kinds from every nation of the world. (Andres: 278; quoting from A Heart So White, 2003: 47)

As has often been mentioned in this column, translation has historically been an endeavor open to women even when other forms of writing were not. At least one misogynist could not abide this even, at least not if the translator were independent, educated, and feminist: “She opened her jaws and swallowed him comfortably” (Woods: 288). So said Wyndham Lewis in his 1930 novel The Apes of God, about a fictionalized Willa Muir, swallowing up her supposedlyemasculated husband Edwin Muir. The Muirs were the first English-language translators of Franz Kafka. The quotation is taken from “Willa Muir: The ‘fictional’ translator: How Muir self-fictionalized her translations of Kafka’s work,” by Michelle Woods. Muir was not only fictionalized by Lewis but also fictionalized herself in Mrs. Mattoe and the Top Storey, a novel which, according to Woods, reveals more about her life as a translator than does Belonging, her non-fictional memoir.

The role of women is the main subject of Daniela Beuren’s “Neither is a translator, unless they’re transauthors [sic]: Confusion and (re-)gendering in feminist fiction/translation.” Beuren discusses two translators:

Cassandra Reilly, in Barbara Wilson’s Gaudi Afternoon (1991), who is puzzled by the ever-changing gender composition of her social environment, and Reta Winters, in Carol Shields’s Unless (2002), who is at a loss in her role as mother and finds comfort in her work as author and translator—a transauthor, or, in a re-gendered construction: Transauthor. (Beuren: 316)

Alice Casarini, in “Magical mediation: The role of translation and interpreting in the narrative world of Harry Potter,” considers translation within the Potterverse. She writes:

... the frequent need for mediation between non-magical English and the languages of the wizarding world, and on the actual dietic role of mediation [that is, as explicitly used by one or more of the characters] as a powerful tool to escape from dangerous situations, to complete elaborate tasks, and to foster the characters’ process of self-definition. (Casarini: 329)

According to Casarini:

The empowering, literally life-infusing effect of translation fits perfectly in Rowling’s attempt to portray a world in which language is the ultimate form of magic. (Casarini: 341)

Of course, translation in the real world was also important for the success of Harry Potter:

The seven volumes of the saga ... have been translated into seventy-three languages ... Some translations have also been revised to accommodate the saga’s increasingly experienced readers, who started to advocate a less domesticated rendition as they grew more and more acquainted with the story. (Casarini: 329)

No book on fictional translators would be complete without mentioning their role in science fiction. In “Future imperfect: Translation and translators in science fiction and films,” Monika Wozniak states:

All the translators featured in works of fiction are fictional, but somehow, in science fiction, they seem just a bit more fictional than in other genres. (Wozniak: 345)

In addition to discussing translation machines, and the tacit implication in many stories and novels that a “single language will in some way replace the multilingual world of today” (349), Wozniak argues that:

... in the majority of science-fiction works the issue of translation is not considered so much as an interesting linguistic or philosophical problem, but as a kind of nuisance that must be somehow dealt with efficiently and rapidly in order to preserve the plausibility of the imaginary world. The creativity of the proposed solutions as to how to overcome communication problems with extraterrestrials is quite impressive if not always based on a scientific foundation, and ranges from highly unrealistic to outright stupid. (Wozniak: 349)

It is interesting that the two most discussed novels in Transfiction are both about the Holocaust. Each has an entire article devoted to it and both are also mentioned in other articles throughout the book.

The first is Давид Щуйай, переводчиц (2006) by Людмила Улицкая, translated into English in 2011 by Arch Tait as Daniel Stein, Interpreter, by Ludmila Ulitskaya, for which Tait won the PEN Literature in Translation award. The article devoted to it is entitled “Interpreting Daniel Stein: Or what happens when fictional translators get translated,” by Brian James Baer.

The second, Jonathan Safran Foer’s Everything Is Illuminated (Harper Perennial, 2002), is discussed in the article “Translation as a source of humor,” by Waltraud Kolb. Despite its subject matter, this novel does indeed contain much humor and will be the subject of next month’s column.

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