

TOPICS IN TRANSLATION 25

Editor for Translation in the Commercial Environment:
Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown

A Practical Guide for Translators (Fourth Edition)

Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown

راهنمای عملی مترجمان

آنچه می خواهید در باره حرفه مترجمی بدانید

ویرایش چهارم

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Foreword to the Fourth Edition

The fourth edition of *A Practical Guide for Translators*, which is now available, sees the training and work situation of translators much changed from when the book first appeared on the market.

In 1993, when the first edition was published, educational institutions in the UK had only started to acknowledge that in order for linguists to turn into translators training was needed at the academic level. Courses were gradually becoming available in order to prepare the student translator for the professional demands to be met by the functioning practitioner. Although the Institute of Linguists and its Postgraduate Diploma in Translation had already pointed to the requirements inherent in the profession, with the setting up of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting in 1986, the need for the special linguistic skills of the translator was further highlighted.

This new edition of the book finds practising translators as a firmly established group of professionals, much helped by the advice and guidance over the years of previous editions of the book advising on how to bridge the gap between academic training and real-life experience; it is a task for which Geoff Samuelsson-Brown is uniquely equipped, being himself a practising translator and the former manager of a translation company.

At the present moment, the dawn of the twenty-first century places new demands on the translator, the result of conflicting economic and linguistic developments. The need for in-house translators is giving way to a rapidly increasing use of freelance translators for whom awareness of the demands of setting up in business becomes imperative.

In a wider European context, as membership of new nations with speakers of languages less commonly known beyond their national borders will result in further growth of the EU, so will the need for translators. Also growing in strength is the might of English as the *lingua franca* of Europe and the means of global communication. In the near future, translators are likely to face new challenges; as technical writers and editors they will soon be asked to augment their roles as translators and to further widen the scope of their present work as language mediators.

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For many years a contributor to the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Translation Studies as well as to professional development courses offered to practising translators by the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Surrey, Geoff Samuelsson-Brown's cutting edge experience in forming the fourth edition of *A Practical Guide for Translators*, will be of benefit to anyone with an interest in translation, on course to become an even more highly skilled profession in the years to come.

Gunilla Anderman

Professor of Translation Studies
Centre for Translation Studies
University of Surrey

Preface to the Fourth Edition

*‘The wisest of the wise may err.’
Aeschylus, 525–456 BC*

In the early 1990s, after teaching Translation Studies at the University of Surrey for seven years at undergraduate and postgraduate level, I felt there was a need for practical advice to complement linguistics and academic theory. ‘A Practical Guide for Translators’ grew from this idea. The first edition was published in April 1993 and I have been heartened by the response it has received from its readers and those who have reviewed it. I am most grateful for the comments received and have been mindful of these when preparing this and previous revisions.

I started translation as a full-time occupation in 1982 even though I had worked as a technical writer, editor and translator since 1974. In the time since I have worked as a staff translator and freelance as well as starting and building up a translation company that I sold in 1999. This has given me exposure to different aspects of translation both as a practitioner, project manager and head of a translation company. It is on this basis that I would like to share my experience. You could say that I have gone full circle because I now accept assignments as a freelance since I enjoy the creativity that working as a translator gives. I also have an appreciation of what goes on after the freelance has delivered his translation to an agency or client.

Trying to keep pace of technology is a daunting prospect. In the first edition of the book I recommended a minimum hard disk size of 40 MB. My present computer (three years old yet still providing sterling service) has a hard disk of 20 GB, Pentium III processor, CD rewriter, DVD, ISDN communication and fairly sophisticated audio system. My laptop has a similar specification that would have been difficult to imagine only a few years ago and is virtually a mobile office! When looking through past articles that I have written, I came across a comparison that I made between contemporary word processors and the predecessors of today’s personal computers. The following table is reproduced from that article. DFE is the name of a word processor whereas the others are, what I called at the time, micro processors. This was written in 1979.

The DFE I purchased in 1979 cost around £5,400 then but was a major advance

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System	RAM (kB)	Disk capacity		Software included		
		standard (kB)	optional (kB)	Text processing	Data retrieval	Maths
Commodore (Wordcraft 80)	32	950	22	Yes	No	No
Eagle (Spellbinder)	64	769	–	Yes	Limited	No
Olympia (BOSS)	64	2 × 140	1 × 600 + 1 × 5 MB	Yes	No	No
DFE	64	2 × 121	up to 192 MB	Yes	Yes	Yes

compared with correctable golfball typewriters. Just imagine what £5,400 would be at net present value and the computing power you could buy for the money.

New to this edition is looking in more detail at the business aspects of translation. Legislation on terms payment for work has been introduced in the United Kingdom which I welcome. So many freelance translators have terms imposed on them by clients (these include translation agencies and companies!). More of this in in Chapter 4 – Running a translation business. I have also endeavoured to identify changes in information technology that benefit the translator – I find being able to use the internet for research an excellent tool. The fundamental concept of the book remains unchanged however in that it is intended for those who have little or no practical experience of translation in a commercial environment. Some of the contents may be considered elementary and obvious. I have assumed that the reader has a basic knowledge of personal computers.

I was tempted to list useful websites in the Appendix but every translator has his own favourites. Mine have a Scandinavian bias since I translate from Danish, Norwegian and Swedish into English so I have resisted the temptation. I have given the websites of general interest in the appropriate sections of the book.

The status of the translator has grown but the profession is still undervalued despite a growing awareness of the need for translation services. The concept of ‘knowledge workers’ has appeared in management speak. The mere fact that you may be able to speak a foreign language does not necessarily mean that you are able to translate. (This does not mean, however, that oral skills are not necessary. Being able to communicate verbally is a distinct advantage.) Quite often you will be faced with the layman’s

question, ‘How many languages do you speak?’. It is quite possible to translate a language without being able to speak it – a fact that may surprise some people.

Translation is also creative and not just an automatic process. By this I mean that you will need to exercise your interpreting and editing skills since, in many cases, the person who has written the source text may not have been entirely clear in what he has written. It is then your job as a translator to endeavour to understand what the writer wishes to say and then express that clearly in the target language.

An issue that has become more noticeable in the last few years is the deterioration in the quality of the source text provided for translation. There may be many reasons for this but all present difficulties to the translator trying to fully understand the text provided for translation. The lack of comprehension is not because of the translator’s level of competence and skills but lack of quality control by the author of the original text. The difficulty is often compounded by the translator not being able communicate directly with the author to resolve queries.

Documentation on any product or service is often the first and perhaps only opportunity for presenting what a company, organisation or enterprise is trying to sell. Ideally, documentation should be planned at the beginning of a product’s or service’s development – not as a necessary attachment once the product or service is ready to be marketed. Likewise, translation should not be something that is thought of at the very last minute.

Documentation and translation are an integral part of a product or service and, as a consequence, must be given due care, time and attention. As an example, Machinery Directive 98/37/EC/EEC specifies that documentation concerned with health and safety etc. needs to be in an officially recognised language of the country where the product will be used. In fact, payment terms for some products or services often include a statement that payment is subject to delivery of proper documentation.

In addition to the language and subject skills possessed by a translator, he needs skills in the preparation of documentation in order to produce work that is both linguistically correct and aesthetically pleasing.

The two most important qualifications you need as a translator are being able to express yourself fluently in the target language (your language of habitual use) and having an understanding of the text you are translating. To these you could usefully add qualifications in specialist subjects. The skills you need as a translator are considered in Figure 1 on Page 2.

There are two principal categories of translators – literary and non-literary. These categorisations are not entirely accurate but are generally accepted. The practical side of translation is applicable to both categories although the ways of approaching subjects are different. Since the majority of translators are non-literary, and I am primarily a non-literary translator, I feel confident that the contents of this book can provide useful advice. Most of the book is however relevant to both categories.

Those who are interested specifically in literary translation will find Clifford E.

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Landers' book *'Literary Translation – A Practical Guide'* extremely useful and readworthy.

Many books have been written on the theory of translation and are, by their very nature, theoretical rather than practical. Others have been written as compilations of conference papers. These are of interest mainly to established translators and contain both theory and practical guidance.

The use of he/him/his in this book is purely a practical consideration and does not imply any gender discrimination on my part.

It is very easy for information to become outdated. It is therefore inevitable that some of the details and prices will have been superseded by the time you read this book. Comparison is however useful.

This book endeavours to give the student or fledgling translator an insight into the 'real' world of translation. I have worked as a staff translator, a freelance and as head of a translation company. I also spent around ten years in total as an associate lecturer at the University of Surrey. I hope the contents of this book will save the reader making some of the mistakes that I've made.

When burning the midnight oil to meet the publisher's deadline for submission of this book, I am painfully aware of all its limitations. Every day I read or hear about items I would like to have included. It would have been tempting to write about the structure and formatting of a website, running a translation company, the management of large translation projects in several languages, management strategy, international business culture and a host of other related issues.

By not doing so I could take the cynical attitude that this will give the critics something to hack away at but that would be unkind. I will have to console myself that now is the time to start work on the next edition. I am reminded of John Steinbeck's words with which, I am sure, every translator will sympathise.

'To finish is sadness to a writer – a little death. He puts the last words down and it is done. But it isn't really done. The story goes on and leaves the writer behind, for no story is ever done.'

*Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown
Bracknell, July 2003*

1 How to become a translator

'They know enough who know how to learn.'
Henry Adams, 1836–1918

People usually become translators in one of two ways. Either by design or by circumstance. There are no formal academic qualifications required to work as a translator but advertisements for translators in the press and professional journals tend to ask for graduates with professional qualifications and three years' experience.

Many countries have professional organisations for translators and if the organisation is a member of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) it will have demonstrated that it sets specific standards and levels of academic achievement for membership. The translation associations affiliated to FIT can be found on FIT's website – www.fit-ift.org. Two organisations in the United Kingdom set examinations for professional membership. These are the Institute of Linguists and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting. To gain a recognised professional qualification through membership of these associations you must meet certain criteria. Comprehensive details of professional associations for translators in the United Kingdom are given in Chapter 10.

If you have completed your basic education and have followed a course of study to become a translator, you will then need to gain experience. As a translator, you will invariably be asked to translate every imaginable subject. The difficulty is accepting the fact that you have limitations since you are faced with the dilemma of '*How do I gain experience if I don't accept translations or do I accept translations to get the experience?*'. Ideally as a fledgling translator you should work under the guidance of a more experienced colleague.

1.1 'Oh, so you're a translator – that's interesting!'

An opening gambit at a social or business gathering is for the person next to you to ask what you do. When the person finds out your profession the inevitable response is, 'Oh so you're a translator – that's interesting' and, before you have chance to say anything, the next rejoinder is, 'I suppose you translate things like books and letters into foreign

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languages, do you?’. Without giving you a chance to utter a further word you are hit by the fatal catch-all, ‘Still, computers will be taking over soon, won’t they?’. When faced with such a verbal attack you hardly have the inclination to respond.

The skills clusters that the translator needs at his fingertips are shown below.

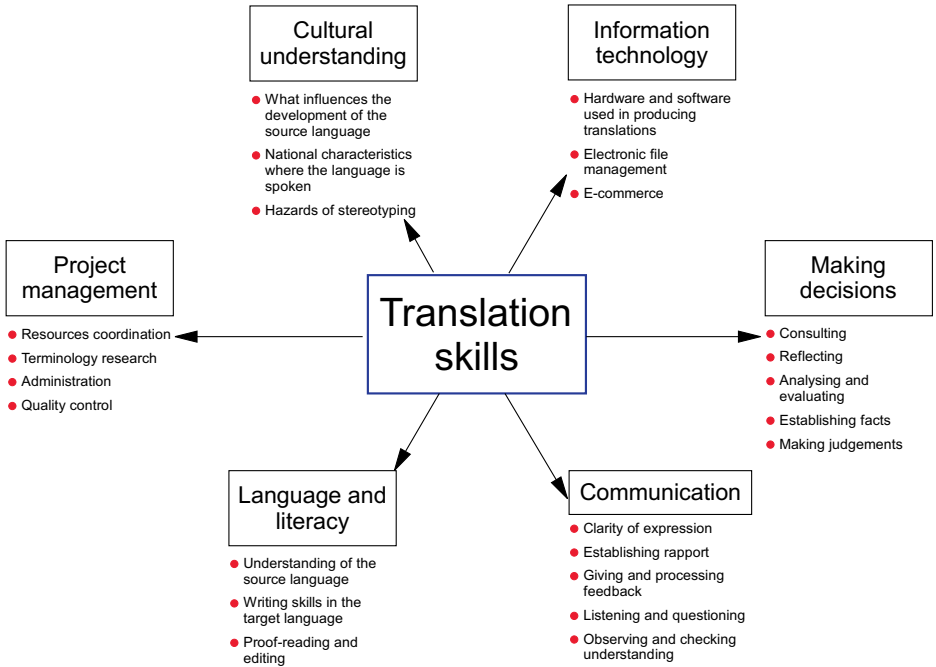


Figure 1. Translation skills clusters

Regrettably, an overwhelming number of people – and these include clients – harbour many misconceptions of what is required to be a skilled translator. Such misconceptions include:

- As a translator you can translate all subjects
- If you speak a foreign language *ipso facto* you can automatically translate into it
- If you can hold a conversation in a foreign language then you are bilingual
- Translators are mind-readers and can produce a perfect translation without having to consult the author of the original text, irrespective of whether it is ambiguous, vague or badly written

- No matter how many versions of the original were made before final copy was approved or how long the process took, the translator needs only one stab at the task, and very little time, since he gets it right first time without the need for checking or proof-reading. After all, the computer does all that for you.

1.2 A day in the life of a translator

Each day is different since a translator, particularly a freelance, needs to deal with a number of tasks and there is no typical day. I usually get up at around 7 in the morning, shower, have breakfast and get to my desk at around 8 just as my wife is leaving to drive to her office. Like most freelancers I have my office at home.

I work in spells of 50 minutes and take a break even if it's just to walk around the house. I try and take at least half an hour for lunch and try to finish at around 5 unless there is urgent work and then I will perhaps work in the evening for an hour or so. But I do the latter only if a premium payment is offered and I wish to accept the work. I spend one day a week during term time as an associate university lecturer.

If I were to analyse an average working month of 22 possible working days I would get the following:

Task or item to which time is accounted	Time spent on the task
Translation including project management, research, draft translation, proof reading and editing, resolving queries and administration	Thirteen and a half days
Researching and preparing lectures, setting and marking assignments, travelling to university, administration and lecturing. (This is based on teaching around 28 weeks in the academic year)	Two days
Office administration including invoicing, purchasing and correspondence (tax issues and book-keeping are dealt with by my accountant)	Two days
External activities such as networking and marketing	One day
Continuous personal development including – and this is not a joke – watching relevant TV programmes or reading articles on subjects in which you have or wish to improve your expertise.	One day
Public or other holidays (say 21 days leave and 7 days public holidays)	Two and a half

My average monthly output for these thirteen and a half effective days is around 34,000 words. If this is spread out over effective working days of 8 working hours (8 50

minutes in reality), my effective hourly production rate is 315 words an hour. This may not seem a lot but it may be worth considering that to expect to work undisturbed on translation eight hours a day, five days a week, is unrealistic. There may also be times when you are physically or mentally unable to work – how do you take account of such eventualities as a freelance?

1.3 Finding a ‘guardian angel’

Under the Institute of Translation and Interpreting’s mentoring or ‘guardian angel’ scheme, you as a fledgling translator will have the opportunity to measure yourself against realistic standards through contact with established translators at the ITI’s workshops, seminars and at continuing education courses covering practical as well as linguistic matters. Under the ITI Mentoring Scheme you can ask for advice from an established translator working into the same language as yourself and who will take a personal interest in you at the beginning of your career.

The kind of points on which he can advise will be:

- The presentation of your work, reasonable deadlines, whether to insert translator’s notes, how literal or how free your translations should be; what rates you can expect or demand; word, line or page counts.
- What is the minimum equipment you need to start up in the profession? Which dictionaries and reference books are really useful and worth buying (and which are not)? Is it worth advertising your services and, if so, how?
- Producing a good job application; job interview techniques; telephone manner; invoicing your work.
- Helpful, kind and honest feedback on the quality of a piece of work you have done, recognising your strengths and advising what you can do about any limitations you may have.

A guardian angel cannot employ you or find you work directly, but he should be able to help to acquire a more realistic idea of what the work entails. He can also be supportive and positive in appraising your good and not-quite-so-good points and suggesting ways of overcoming your initial difficulties.

1.4 Literary or non-literary translator?

Though used quite generally, these terms are not really satisfactory. They do however indicate a differentiation between translators who translate books for publication (including non-fiction works) and those who translate texts for day-to-day commercial, technical or legal purposes.

1.4.1 What is literary translation?

Literary translation is one of the four principal categories of translator. The others are interpreting, scientific and technical, and commercial/business translation. There are also specialist fields within these categories. Literary translation is not confined to the translation of great works of literature. When the Copyright Act refers to ‘literary works’ it places no limitations on their style or quality. All kinds of books, plays, poems, short stories and writings are covered, including such items as a collection of jokes, the script of a documentary, a travel guide, a science textbook and an opera libretto.

Becoming a successful literary translator is not easy. It is far more difficult to get established, and financial rewards, at the bottom of the scale, are not excessive by any measure. Just reward is seldom given to the translator – for example, the translator of Thomas Mann’s ‘Death in Venice’ doesn’t even get a mention. Your rewards in terms of royalties depend on the quality and success of your translation. You would be well-advised to contact the Translators Association of the Society of Authors on matters such as royalties, copyright and translation rights.

1.4.2 Qualities rather than qualifications

When experienced members of the Translators Association were asked to produce a profile of a literary translator, they listed the following points:

- the translator needs to have a feeling for language and a fascination with it,
- the translator must have an intimate knowledge of the source language and of the regional culture and literature, as well as a reasonable knowledge of any special subject that is dealt with in the work that is being published,
- the translator should be familiar with the original author’s other work,
- the translator must be a skilled and creative writer in the target language and nearly always will be a native speaker of it,
- the translator should always be capable of moving from one style to another in the language when translating different works,
- the aim of the translator should be to convey the meaning of the original work as opposed to producing a mere accurate rendering of the words,
- the translator should be able to produce a text that reads well, while echoing the tone and style of the original – as if the original author were writing in the target language.

As is evident from this description, the flair, skill and experience that are required by a good literary translator resembles the qualities that are needed by an ‘original’ writer. It is not surprising that writing and translating often go hand in hand.

1.4.3 Literary translation as a career

Almost without exception, translators of books, plays, etc. work on a freelance basis. In most cases they do not translate the whole of a foreign language work ‘on spec’: they go ahead with the translation only after the publisher or production company has undertaken to issue/perform the translation, and has signed an agreement commissioning the work and specifying payment.

As in all freelance occupations, it is not easy for the beginner to ensure a constant flow of commissions. Only a few people can earn the equivalent of a full salary from literary translation alone. Literary translators may have another source of income, for example from language teaching or an academic post. They may combine translation with running a home. They may write books themselves as well as translating other authors’ work. They may be registered with a translation agency and possibly accept shorter (and possibly more lucrative) commercial assignments between longer stretches of literary translation.

If you are considering a career in literary translation, it is worth reading a companion to this book. It is entitled *Literary Translation – A Practical Guide* (Ref. 1) and is written by Clifford E. Landers.

Clifford E. Landers writes with the clean, refreshing style that puts him on a par with Bill Bryson. His book should be read by all translators – not only because it is full of practical advice to would-be and practicing literary translators but also because it has a fair number of parallels with non-literary translation.

The title embodies Practical and this is precisely what the book is about. Practical aspects include The translator’s tools, Workspace and work time, Financial matters, Contracts. These words of wisdom should be read and inwardly digested by all translators – Yes, even we non-literary translators who seldom come in serious contact with the more creative members of our genre. Literary translators have a much harder job, at least in the early stages of their careers, in getting established. You probably won’t find commissioners of literary translations in the Yellow Pages. In this context Clifford Landers provides useful information on getting published and related issues such as copyright.

Selectively listing the contents is an easy but useful way of giving a five-second overview and, in addition to what it mentioned above, the book also considers Why Literary Translation? (*answered in a concise and encouraging manner*), Getting started, Preparing to translate, Staying on track, What literary translators really translate, The care and feeding of authors, Some notes on translating poetry, Puns and word play, Pitfalls and how to avoid them, Where to publish and so much more.

1.5 Translation and interpreting

The professions of translation and interpreting are significantly different but there are areas where the two overlap. As a translator I interpret the written word and the result of

my interpretation is usually in written form. I have time to deliberate, conduct research, proof-read, revise, consult colleagues and submit my written translation to my client. An interpreter interprets the spoken word and does not have the luxury of time nor a second chance to revise the result of the interpretation. Many translators will have done some interpreting but this will probably have been incidental to written translation.

To find out more about the profession of translation I would recommend you read *The Interpreter's Resource* (Ref. 2) written by Mary Phelan. This book provides an overview of language interpreting at the turn of the twenty-first century and is an invaluable tool for aspiring and practicing interpreters. This guide (with the accent on practical) begins with a brief history of interpreting and then goes on to explain key terms and the contexts in which they are used. The chapter on community interpreting details the situation regarding community, court and medical interpreting around the world. As with any other profession, ethics are important and this book includes five original Codes of Ethics from different professional interpreter organisations.

While this discussion could migrate to other areas where language skills are used, another form of translation is that of forensic linguistics. My experience of this, and that of colleagues, is listening to recordings of telephone calls to provide evidence that can be used during criminal or disciplinary proceedings. This can present an interesting challenge when various means such as slang or dialect are used in an attempt to conceal incriminating evidence.

But let's get back to translation.

1.6 Starting life as a translator

A non-literary translator needs to offer a technical, commercial or legal skill in addition to being able to translate. Fees for freelance work are usually received fairly promptly and are charged at a fixed rate – usually per thousand words of source text.

If you are just starting out in life as a translator, and have not yet gained recognised professional qualifications (through the Institute of Linguists, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, or some other recognised national body) or experience, you may be fortunate in getting a job as a junior or trainee staff translator under the guidance and watchful eye of a senior experienced colleague. This will probably be with a translation company or other organisation that needs the specific skills of a translator.

Having a guide and mentor at an early stage is invaluable. There's a lot more to translation than just transferring a text from one language to another, as you will soon discover.

You will possibly have spent an extended period in the country where the language of your choice is spoken. Gaining an understanding of the people, their culture and national characteristics at first hand is a vital factor. There is the argument of course that you can translate a language you may not be able to speak. This applies to languages that are

closely related. For example, if you have gained fluency in French you may find that you are able to translate Spanish. This is perhaps stretching the point though.

What do you do when faced with slang words, dialect words, trade or proprietary names? This is when an understanding of the people as well as the language is useful. If you have worked or lived in the country where the source language is spoken, it is very useful to be able to contact people if you have difficulties with obscure words that are not in standard dictionaries. If the word or words can be explained in the source language, you have a better chance of being able to provide a correct translation.

You will inevitably be doing your work on a computer. Have the patience to learn proper keyboarding skills by mastering the ability to touch type. Your earning capacity will be in direct proportion to your typing speed and, once you have taken the trouble to learn this skill properly, your capacity will far outstrip the ‘two-finger merchants’. Of all the practical skills you need to learn as a translator, I would consider this one of the most essential and directly rewarding.

Let’s summarise the desirable requirements for becoming a translator by design:

- education to university level by attaining your basic degree in modern languages or linguistics
- spending a period in the country where the language of your choice is spoken
- completing a postgraduate course in translation studies
- gaining some knowledge or experience of the subjects you intend translating
- getting a job as a trainee or junior translator with a company
- learning to touch type
- the willingness to commit to lifelong learning.

This gets you onto the first rung of the ladder.

1.7 Work experience placements as a student

The opportunities for work experience placements as a student are difficult to find but extremely valuable if you are fortunate enough to get one. The company that I managed considered applications to determine if there was a suitable candidate and appropriate work that could be offered. On the following pages is an example of a memo issued with an eight-week programme designed to offer a French university student broad exposure to what goes on in a translation company.

There are, of course, routine tasks that everybody has to do – these include photocopying and word counting. Make sure that a structured programme is offered, that you are not being used as a dogsbody, and that you derive benefit from the experience.

Since the company offering the placement will incur costs as a result, not least by providing a member of staff as a supervisor and facilities for you to use, you as a student on placement should not expect to receive a salary even though some discretionary

1996 Summer placement programme – Cécile X

Distribution: All staff

Introduction

The purpose of this Summer placement with ATS Limited is to provide Cécile with a broad exposure to the different operations that are performed at a translation company, and an appreciation that being a translator is a very demanding and exacting profession.

Where applicable, the relevant procedures in ATS's Quality Manual shall be studied in parallel with the different operations, e.g. ATS/OPS 02 Translator Selection. Comments should be invited on the comprehensibility of the procedures by an uninitiated reader.

Cécile will be here from 1 July – 31 August and her supervisor will be FS. This responsibility will be shared with those looking after Cécile in the various sections:

- *Production coordination – KN*
- *Proof-reading and quality control – AL and SM*
- *Administration – JA*
- *Freelance translator assessment – MS*

I'm sure that all members of staff will do their best to make Cécile's stay with us both enjoyable and rewarding.

Information to be provided

Information pack about the company to include:

- *ATS's leaflet in English*
- *Organisation chart*
- *Copy of 'A Practical Guide for Translators'*

Other information will be provided by the various section supervisors.

Translation, proof-reading and editing

- *Familiarisation with the C-C project.*
- *Reviewing ATS's presentation slides in French*
- *checking overheads produced by SH. Emphasis on the importance of accuracy.*

(continued)

Read through SRDE manual in French and English to provide a concept of what is involved.

- *One-to-One session with SM on the different types of proof reading:*
 - *proof-reading marks as per BS 5261*
 - *scan-check for information purposes only*
 - *full checking*
 - *checking for publication*
 - *checking documents for legal certification*

Database management

MS will provide an introduction to database management and the way freelance translators are selected. The emphasis shall be on stringent criteria for selection and the way in which the information is managed.

KN will supervise an introduction to the way database management is used as a tool in production coordination.

Project management

JA and KN will provide an introduction to project management and its significance as a key factor for success in a translation company. This will include:

- *Familiarisation with the quality control and project management aspects of Client XXXX*
- *Project management of Client YYYY assignments*
- *Administration associated with an assignment from initial inquiry to when the work is sent to the client*
- *Use of different communication media such as fax and electronic mail.*

Library and information retrieval

A familiarisation with ATS's library and its collection of dictionaries, glossaries, text books, reference books, company literature and past translations will be provided by HJ.

(continued)

General administration

Cécile will be delegated routine administration tasks such as photocopying and word counting.

Client visits

If the opportunity arises, and if deemed relevant, Cécile will be invited to accompany members of staff on client visits as an observer. Clients will be contacted in advance to seek their approval.

Weekly reviews

FS will hold weekly reviews with Cécile to assess progress and seek solutions to any problems.

Bracknell, 28 June, 1996

payment may be made. You can gain considerable benefit through meeting experienced practitioners and seeing what goes on in a translation company. You may decide after the placement that translation is not for you. You then have a chance of redirecting your studies.

1.8 Becoming a translator by circumstance

Becoming a translator in this way is a different kettle of fish. The advantage in this case is that the person concerned will usually have gained several years' experience in a chosen profession before translation appears as an option. Many people become translators when working abroad, either with their company as a result of being posted to a foreign country or after having married a foreign national and moving to an adopted country. Probably the best way to learn a language is to live in the country where the language is spoken. The disadvantage is perhaps the lack of linguistic theory that will have been gained by a person with a formal education in this discipline.

Are you suitable as a translator? I suppose the only answer is to actually try a translation and see how you feel about it. In my own case, I was working in Sweden as a technical editor in a company's technological development centre using English as a working language. I did some translation as part of my work and it is from this beginning that my interest in the profession grew.

Working as a freelance translator is a fairly lonely occupation. The work is intense at times, particularly when you are up against very tight deadlines. Translators tend not to be gregarious.

Initially it is tempting to tackle all subjects. Ignorance can be bliss, but risky. After all, how do you gain experience if you don't do the work? I suppose it is rather like being an actor – if you're not a member of Equity you can't get a job and, if you don't have a job, you can't apply to join Equity. (An interesting but not quite parallel situation is that of the non-Japanese sumo wrestler Konishiki. Despite having won the requisite number of tournaments to become a *yokozuna* or Grand Champion, Konishiki lacks the vital element essential to become a Grand Champion sumo wrestler – a quality called *hinkaku*. Loosely translated, it means 'dignity-class' and it is sumo's Catch 22. To become successful in sumo, you need to have *hinkaku*. But since only Japanese are supposed to understand the true meaning of *hinkaku*, only Japanese can become Grand Champions.)

You will have enough problems to wrestle with but the opportunity to work as a staff translator will smooth your path.

1.9 Working as a staff translator

Before you consider working as a freelance, you would be well advised to gain at least a couple of years' experience as a staff translator – if you are fortunate in being offered a position. This offers a number of advantages:

- An income from day 1 and a structured career path.
- On-the-job skills development under the watchful eye of an experienced translator or editor. This will save you many attempts at re-inventing the wheel.
- Access to the reference literature and dictionaries you need for the job.
- The opportunity to discuss translations and enjoy the interchange of ideas to the extent not normally possible if you work in isolation as a freelance.
- An opportunity to learn how to use the tools of the trade.

If you work with a large company you will have the opportunity of gaining experience and acquiring expertise in that particular company's industry. You will have access to experts in the relevant fields and probably a specialist library. If you are fortunate, you will be involved in all stages of documentation from translation, proof reading and checking through to desktop publishing. You will also be able to view your work long term.

If you work for a translation company, you will be exposed to a broader range of subjects but will not have the same close level of contact with experts. Your work may be restricted to checking and proof reading initially so that you can gain some feeling for the work before starting on translation proper. The smaller the company the more you will

be exposed to activities that are peripheral to translation. This in itself can make the work more interesting and heighten your sense of involvement.

Your choice will be determined by what jobs are on offer and what your own skills and aspirations are. I would advise working for an industrial or commercial company first since working in a translation company often demands more maturity and experience than a newly-qualified translator can offer.

You may wonder how many words a translator is capable of producing in a day. Having worked together with and consulted other translation companies, the norm for a staff translator is around 1500 words a day or 33,000 a month. This may not seem a lot but there is more to translation than initially meets the eye. Individual freelance translators have claimed a translation output of 12,000 words in a single day without the use of computer-aided translation tools! The most I have completed, unaided, is just over 20,000 in three days. These are rates that are impossible to sustain because the work is so mentally draining that quality starts to suffer. Using a translation memory system I have been able to plough through 36,000 words in six working days. But, as you might surmise, this contained a high degree of repetition.

Working as a staff translator should provide a structured approach to the work and there should be a standard routine for processing the work according to the task in hand. Paperwork is a necessary evil or should I say a useful management tool and, if used properly, will make organisation of your work easier. Some form of record should follow the translation along its road to completion. This is considered in detail in Section 7.10 – Quality control operations.

1.10 Considering a job application

Any salary figures quoted in a book will, by their very nature, rapidly become outdated. Income surveys are carried out from time to time on rates and salaries by the ITI with results published in the *ITI Bulletin*. Present figures (2002) range from about £15,000 at the lower end to somewhere in the region of £25,000 for a translator/project manager.

As in any job, the salary you can command depends on your experience, expertise, any specialist knowledge you may have and, not least, your own negotiating powers. Results of surveys are published from time to time by the professional associations. Job adverts also give some indication of what salary is being offered.

When considering a position as a staff translator make sure that you get a written offer which encloses a job description to indicate your responsibilities, the opportunities for personal development and training, and a potential career path. Don't forget that you are also interviewing a potential employer to determine whether he can offer the type of work and career development that you are looking for. The following is an actual example of a job offer made to a fresh graduate without any professional experience. Though it is from 1997 it is still relevant.

Candidate
Street address
Town, County, Postcode

May 27, 1997

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Offer of employment – Staff translator and Checker

Dear (Candidate's Name),

As a result of discussions, and successful completion of two test translations under commercial conditions during your visit, I am pleased to offer you employment at our office in Bracknell. The principal terms of this offer are:

Position: Staff translator and checker.
Starting date: Monday 1 September 1997. Actual date to be confirmed by mutual agreement.
Working hours: Full time. 35 hours per week. Core hours 9.00 to 17.00 with 60 minutes for lunch. Flexibility subject to approval.
Holidays: 20 days per annum (pro rata for 1997) plus all public holidays.

The probationary period applicable to new employees is three months. Thus your position will become permanent on 1 December 1997 subject to satisfactory completion of this period. The period of notice during this period is one week.

The following are your specific terms and conditions of service with Aardvark Translation Services Limited as of 1 September 1997 until further notice.

Position

You will be employed as a STAFF TRANSLATOR AND CHECKER.

Your principal duties are translation from Norwegian and Swedish into English, and checking other translators' translations. It is anticipated that your language skills will be extended to Danish with exposure to relevant texts.

Salary and benefits

Your salary as from 1 September 1997 will be £XX,000 per annum with the next scheduled salary review on 1 December 1997. Your salary will be paid monthly in arrears on or about the 23rd of each month. No sickness or injury benefits in addition to National Health provisions are provided at present.

(continued)

The company runs a non-contributory pension scheme in association with High Street Bank plc. You will be eligible for this benefit after 12 months' employment with the company. This will be in addition to statutory government provisions that are in operation. Time off will be allowed to attend medical or dental appointments on the understanding that some flexibility of hours worked is offered in return.

Proposed starting date

1 September 1997. Actual date to be confirmed by mutual agreement.

Working hours and holiday entitlement

Your normal working hours will be between 09.00 hrs and 17.00 hours with 60 minutes for lunch. Thus the total working hours per week are 35. Flexible hours are permitted providing these are agreed in advance.

Your initial holiday entitlement is 20 days paid holiday per calendar year plus all public holidays. If your employment does not span a full year, your entitlement will be calculated on a pro rata basis.

Responsible manager

Your responsible manager will be JA, Commercial Director. CL will act as your guardian angel – other translation staff can be consulted as appropriate. I will act as your guide and mentor where appropriate through One-to-One Consultations.

Training

Training will be carried out on the job and will be supplemented with in-house seminars on work-related tasks.

Notice of termination of employment

The period of notice of termination of employment to be given by ATS Limited to you is one calendar month. The period of notice of termination of employment to be given by you to ATS Limited is one calendar month.

Further education

Once you have completed one year of full-time service (31 August 1998), the company is prepared to consider sponsorship of further education that is pursued through a recognised educational establishment such as a local college or the Open University. This will form part of your structured career development.

(continued)

Sponsorship is subject to the discretion and approval of the Managing Director. Such further education shall be deemed to be of benefit to the company.

The company will pay for the cost of the courses you wish to attend, plus the cost of the necessary books and course materials. Course books that are paid for by the company will remain the property of the company and shall be kept in the company's library once the course is completed.

If you discontinue your employment of your own volition while the course is in progress, or within one year of the course being completed, you will be obliged to reimburse the company to the full extent of the sponsorship of that course. This condition may be waived under special circumstances and at the discretion of the Managing Director.

Professional association fees will be reimbursed at the discretion of the company.

ACCEPTANCE OF TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

I hereby agree to and accept the above Terms and Conditions of Service.

Dated, August 1997.

.....
(Candidate)

Please reply with your acceptance or rejection of this offer by Friday, 15 August 1997.

A non-disclosure form is also enclosed and requires your signature. We look forward to your joining the team.

Yours sincerely,

*Managing Director
ATS Ltd.*

*Enc. Staff Regulations
 Non-disclosure agreement*

When discussing your employment, look at items that are general and not related specifically to the job of translator. These include:

- what induction procedure does the employer have?
- what do staff regulations cover?
- what career structure is in place?
- what personal and skills development is offered?

Don't forget that you are interviewing a potential employer as much as the employer is interviewing you.

1.11 Working as a freelance

Unrealistic expectations of freelance translators include:

- The ability to work more than 24 hours a day.
- No desire for holidays or weekends off.
- The ability to drop whatever you're doing at the moment to fit in a panic job that just has to be completed by this afternoon.
- The ability to survive without payment for long periods.
- . . .

No, that's not really true (unless you allow it to happen!). The essential attribute you *do* need is the discipline to structure your working hours. Try and treat freelance translation like any other job. Endeavour to work 'normal' office hours and switch on your answering machine outside these hours.

There are many temptations to lure the unwary (or perhaps I should say inexperienced) freelance. There could be unwarranted demands on your time by clients if you allow yourself to be talked into doing an assignment when, in all honesty, you should be enjoying some leisure time.

Plan your working hours to allow sufficient time to recover the mental energy you burn. There are of course times when you need to stretch your working hours. **Try not to make a habit of it.** If you become overtired it is all too easy to make a mistake.

There is the temptation to think that if you take a holiday, your client may go elsewhere. The answer to that is if your client values the quality of your work then he will come back to you after your holiday.

What you can expect to earn as a freelance translator depends on your capacity for work and the fees you can negotiate. Your net pre-tax income, to start with, will probably be in the region of £20,000. As you become more experienced, your production capacity will improve. Little differentiation is made in fees offered since translators are inevitable asked, 'How much do you charge per thousand words?' and that's about it. Certainly,

little consideration is made of experience, evidence of specialist knowledge, continuous personal development since qualifying, or tangible evidence of quality management.

1.12 What's the difference between a translation company and a translation agency?

One decision you will need to make at one stage is whether to work for translation companies and agencies or whether to try and build up your own client base. There are advantages to both approaches.

It is perhaps worth giving a brief definition of translation companies and agencies. The former have their own in-house translators as well as using the services of freelancers whereas the latter act purely as agencies, or translation brokers, and thereby rely solely on freelancers. (I'll refer to translation companies and agencies collectively as 'agencies' for convenience since this is how clients perceive them). If you work for translation agencies you will be able to establish a good rapport. This will ensure a reasonably steady stream of work. You will also have the option of saying '*No thanks*' if you have no capacity at the time. It will also keep your administration to a low manageable level.

The fees offered by translation agencies will be lower than you can demand from direct clients. But consider the fact that agencies do all the work of marketing, advertising and selling to get the translation assignments. All you need do as a freelance, essentially, is to register with them and accept or reject the assignments offered. Working for translation agencies will also allow you to build up your expertise gradually.

Reputable translation agencies also make additional checks on the translations you submit. They may also spend a considerable amount of time reformatting a translation to suit a client's requirements. The fact that an agency performs these additional tasks does not in any way absolve you from producing the best possible translation you can for the intended purpose.

A word of caution

It is unethical to approach a translation agency's clients directly and attempt to sell them your services. You may consider it tempting but it is viewed as commercial piracy. (Remember all the legwork done by the agency in cultivating a client.) It will take you some time to establish a reputation as a translator. That reputation could be damaged irreparably if you attempt commercial piracy. The world of translators is quite small and word gets around incredibly quickly if you act unprofessionally.

1.13 Working directly with clients

If you decide to work with translation agencies, all you need to do is register with a number of them and hopefully you will receive a regular supply of work. The level of

administration you will need to deal with will be quite small. You will need to advertise if you want to work directly with clients and this requires quite a different approach. There will be additional demands on your time that will swallow up productive and fee-earning capacity. Approaching potential clients directly requires a lot of work. The table below will perhaps allow you to make your own judgement.

Working with translation agencies	Working with direct clients
All major agencies advertise in the 'Yellow Pages' and are easily accessible.	How do you identify potential clients? How do you make yourself known?
A letter will usually suffice as an introduction after which you may be asked to complete an assessment form and carry out a test translation.	Who do you contact in a company? You may need to make a number of phone calls before you get to the right person. In fact, you may need to make around 100 phone calls before you can gain a single client.
If you produce a satisfactory test translation you will be listed as a freelance and, hopefully, will receive a regular supply of work that is appropriate for your individual skills.	You will be lucky to find a potential client that does not already have a supplier of translations. You also have to convince a potential client that you have something special to offer.
Most agencies pay at pre-arranged times. Make sure you negotiate acceptable terms of business!	Getting paid by some clients can take a long time. Make sure you have written agreement on terms of payment.
Holidays are 'allowed'.	What happens when you go on holiday?
You can decide which assignments you wish to accept from a translation agency.	It could be an inconvenience being at the beck and call of a client.

Table 1. Choosing to work with agencies or direct clients

1.14 Test translations

Some people are a bit tetchy about doing a test translation. After all, you may argue that you have your degree – isn't that enough? Consider the small amount of time you may have to spend on a test translation – it's not very long. (Would you buy a computer or car without testing it first?) A test usually amounts to a page or so. I have however seen a case where a potential client has asked for a complete chapter from a book to be translated free of charge as a test! I often wonder if the client concerned has got the whole

book translated free of charge by sending a different chapter to the required number of translators. Performing a test translation will give you a chance to shine and could be the start of a long-term working agreement.

Most clients demand that translation agencies provide test translations (often several in the same language using different translators). You can image the response from the potential client if the agency declined to provide samples. Consider the provision of test translations as a way of differentiating yourself from your competitors.

1.15 Recruitment competitions

Two major users of multilingual skills are the European Community and the United Nations. Both organisations employ a large number of multilingual service providers (translators, checkers, interpreters, lawyers, administrators, etc.).

1.15.1 The European Community

The qualifications required depend on the post for which the candidate intends applying. To give an indication of the qualifications required for the European Community, a Translator is required to have a full university degree or equivalent, two years' practical experience since graduating, a perfect command of the relevant mother tongue and a thorough knowledge of two other Community languages. An Assistant Translator is required to have obtained a full university degree within the last three years, a perfect command of the relevant mother tongue and a thorough knowledge of two other Community languages – no experience is required.

The European Community announces recruitment competitions for the following organisations:

- The Commission of the European Communities
- The Council of the European Union
- The European Parliament
- The Court of Justice
- The Court of Auditors
- The Economic and Social Committee

The information which follows pertains only to *written translation*.

For information about *interpreting* you need to apply to the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service.

The Commission's Translation Service consists of large subject-based departments, four in Brussels and two in Luxembourg, which specialise in translating documents relating to specific fields. Each department comprises eleven language units, one for each official language of the Union (the official languages of the European Union are