

QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE TRANSLATION BUSINESS PROJECT

Do you have any suggestions related to setting rates for the project?

It depends on your project, but charge per word if possible. If you are transcribing, then you can charge per minute of speech. An hourly rate for services can also be requested.

Do you have any advice for the Final Gala?

- The judging panel notice that it is a team effort, and want everyone to play their roles.
- They are always impressed by the presentation skills and professionalism.
- Get your pricing right – give value rather than the lowest price, and remember your overheads.
- Ensure the quality of translation is as good as it can be.
- It is a short presentation; practice and be brutal with regards to getting it within the time limit.

TRAINING TO BECOME A TRANSLATOR

Do you have any tips for applying to Masters Courses?

Show that you are keen and passionate!

Is there any disadvantage to studying for a Master's in Specialised Translation, rather than a more general course in Translation?

When working as a translator, it is important to specialise as much as possible, and you can always learn to do another branch of more general translation. The sooner you start specialising the better, as this can allow you to become a company's go-to translator for a certain type of job. However, if you are the main wage earner in your family, you may not be able to be too picky about which jobs you accept. From an agency's point of view, most of their translators have preferred specialisms, although some are more general. The majority start off more general and then specialise. It is important to be aware that deadlines for certain jobs can be tight, so unless you specialise it can be hard to meet these.

Why did you decide to work within translation rather than interpretation?

Translation and interpretation are two very different disciplines. Simultaneous interpreting requires excellent listening and speaking skills, and is very difficult. You have to have the ability to remember what people have said while figuring out the English translation of it. Your brain can either work like that, or it can't! Therefore, the professionals felt like their skills were better aligned to translation.

Do you need to have knowledge of specific software tools?

If you do a Master's they will teach you how to use Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools, such as MemoQ, WordFast and Trados. There are other shorter courses that can teach you to use them though, and the best way to learn is to practice using them. Some programmes use different file formats, so a translator may need to have knowledge of more than one CAT tool to be able to complete a certain job. Agencies look for proof of ability to use CAT tools and an awareness of what is going on in the translation industry when deciding whether to hire a translator. However, a willingness to learn and keep up with the latest developments is also valued.

What are the most important non-linguistic skills and qualifications?

- It depends what you want to work on.
- General administrative skills.
- Time management and organisation
- Business skills such as invoicing.
- Customer service skills; don't get defensive over your translations; you have to get used to sharing work with others and accepting criticism.
- Sarah (who works for an agency) emphasised how important it is to be good with communication, as a project can change a bit in the middle. Agencies sometimes want to ask how a job is going, but it is nicer for the translator to let them know.

WORKING WITHIN THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY

How long do translators normally have to meet deadlines?

Although you can sometimes get a surprisingly long deadline, most of the time the turnaround for a single job is due in a matter of days. It is always best to do a job one day, then sleep on it and then look at it with fresh eyes the next day, because this allows you to notice mistakes more easily. Most agencies will look for 2,500 words to be translated per day, although this can vary between 2,000 and 3,000.

What do you do if you can't meet a deadline?

Depends if this happens before or after you have said that you can take the job on; it is important to say learn to say no. If you have taken it on already, it is important to let the client know that you are unable to meet the deadline as early as possible. This is not best practice, but it is important to say if you can't finish a job on time, as it can be passed on, or you can ask for extension; offer an alternative deadline that you believe you can meet.

How do you market your services?

The bulk of most translators' work is provided by agencies, who you can approach yourself. Getting business through word of mouth is more common rather than online, although it is still helpful to have an online profile (social media such as LinkedIn, a website). It is also important to network with other translators, as if one translator cannot help with a particular job they may be able to recommend someone else whose specialism is more aligned to that area. There are several websites that freelance translators can create profiles on, that agencies use to find people for jobs (for example ProZ, which allows translators to receive ratings from clients for completed jobs).

Can working as a translator ever get repetitive?

The job itself is never boring, as you are constantly researching new words and trying to improve your style. However, the documents can sometimes become repetitive, particularly if you often do work for the same client.

How does one get started as a freelance translator?

Often, it is due to a "lucky break" that an agency will give a freelancer some work and come back; it is important to be helpful and cooperative, and most importantly to meet their deadlines. It is important to ensure that you are not being taken advantage of; agencies do not tend to reveal what rates are, so set your rate and see what they say. It is important to have savings, as being a freelance

translator is not always reliable enough to pay a mortgage. It is good to have reserves of cash to fall back on.

Join professional bodies: the ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting) and the Institute of Linguists. These can be helpful when starting up, as there are forums where you can ask questions to established translators, and courses that you can take about starting up as a freelance translator. Getting put in their directory adds credibility as you are easily searchable.

The key is to find as many contacts as you can!

How did you start your own business?

- Alison would never have got into translation if she had not lived in Germany; she didn't work as a translator originally, but got into it gradually, and only started looking for work when she finished her diploma in translation. Remember that no two translators have the same background. It is good to have a company name and a logo as they stand out to clients and agencies. Approach it as if you were an employee.
- Natalie gets most of her work through agencies that come to her with jobs. She gets some work through her website, and once even got a job through Twitter! She recommends applying to agencies.

How long did it take to get enough work before you didn't have to have another job?

- Alison taught English until you she couldn't do both. When starting out, it is too risky not to have another job; she is amazed that she has managed to make full time living of translation. She recommended trying to make the best use of your time, and not worry about it. Accumulate savings to be on the safe side.
- For Natalie it took a year and a half; she worked evenings at a theatre, until this got in way of translating. The amount of work she has varies, and she can sometimes have gaps; when this is the case, it is often like it for all translators, and there is something going on in the market.
- Sarah pointed out that sometimes the agency will have a few weeks when it is really quiet, and some areas are naturally busier than others.

What challenges does being self-employed bring?

The main issue that arises is that you have to do your own tax return, book-keeping and VAT. There are plenty of programmes for doing your books, although an Excel spreadsheet is sufficient. It is easier for this profession than for some others, as there is no need to account for employees/driving etc. Some translators have accountants that check things over for them. None of this is difficult but it can be a faff. It is important to keep up with it, as you could get into trouble.

As a freelance translator, how do you know what rates to set?

If you set your rate too low, it will look suspicious and the quality of your translations will be questionable. It is important to take your own lifestyle into account. Higher rates can be requested due to specialisms. Agencies will have a higher rate than this as they have other members of staff to pay, and capitals (such as computers).

How do freelance translators cope with the need to proofread?

Work can be outsourced to another translator and a margin added (as you are project managing the other person). The other translator can then send you the final version to help you to improve in the future. If working through an agency, they would do the proofreading, although this needs to be checked; it is nice to get feedback on completed jobs. This helps freelancers to develop their skills.

Why did you decide to be a Project Manager?

Sarah finished her Master's degree in Translation at Exeter and decided it would be the best way to have a stable income while increasing her knowledge of the translation industry. Her ultimate aim is to become a freelance translator.

How does one find a job as an In-House Translator?

These are a bit more difficult to come by due to a lack of availability of jobs; most companies choose to outsource. Some companies with in-house translators also combine this with outsourcing when they have too many jobs, and they will use LinkedIn for marketing. The work will mostly be more specialised (for example patents), and a larger language base is often required: when looking for jobs, it will be most common to find that 3 languages are required (a combination of 2 source languages and 1 target language).

How do you stop freelancing taking over your life?

- You have to be very strict with yourself as you could theoretically just work all night and it can be hard to not answer emails, so make good use of out-of-office emails.
- Freelancing could be too lonely for some people, as you must be motivated to get out of the house.
- Very important to build in social events if you work from home. Ensure have weekly activities within local communities.
- Very fine line as it is a mentally strenuous job, getting too stressed out with deadlines etc.
- The flexibility means that you can arrange to meet up at non-standard office hours. Could be harder with people working regular hours. It is important to find a balance and manage clients' expectations.
- Doing things within the house like watching films can be good. Do not read as much as doing that all day. Sarah: know how much you can take on, working with clients on the other side of the world can also make things more difficult.
- Agencies mostly contact freelancers 9-5:30 Monday-Friday but this can vary slightly.
- Going away on holiday, it can be hard to tie up the ends before you go. Have to time it right.
- Alison said that she had never worked as a translator without a dog! This gets her out of the house and keeps her fit.

Do you ever hand in jobs that you are not happy with?

Agencies can tell if a job has been rushed, as with experience it is easier to know how long it can take you to do a job. When starting out, it can be easy to take on too much work and not have enough time to do it. Sleeping on a completed job then looking at it the next morning is often a good plan. From the agency point of view, if it is someone who is normally reliable then that is normally fine; it is what proof-readers are there for.

How much room for creativity is there in translation?

It varies depending on the type of text, and is often down to the translator's intuition, and an agency will always let you know if there are any specific instructions:

- Marketing texts will often lend themselves to more creative licence.
- Legal documents have to stay much more closely to source texts and often have to be certified
- If you want to be more creative, pitch yourself as such as you would definitely would get more work.
- Transcreation/Copywriting is coming up with a really creative text – these are often more expensive than translations, and if your main concern is creativity then this may be a more suitable path for you than translation.

In terms of creativity within the text:

- As long as the words flow, you do not have to follow sentence structure. Get more confident in explaining your choices.
- This is daunting as first, but it comes with experience.

How do you develop your translation skills once you have started and deal with complex translations?

You can only get better as a translator the longer you do it, as you will be improving your writing and tone of language. Looking at other people's work can be helpful with tricky words, as you are always looking for the perfect answer. You can look difficult words up on the internet, for example finding the website of the company to find the particular terminology that they use. If there is a particular word that you are unsure of, don't be afraid to ask the client/agency. If you don't ask it can reflect badly on your understanding of the text, and it shows willingness on the part of translator. They are usually happy to help as they want it to be as good as possible. If they are unwilling to help, they are not a good agency. They would always endeavour to contact client to ask for clarification.

Can you make use of automatic translation technology and is this a danger to the translation industry?

- It can be a help.
- Some agencies use automatic translation; they will give the translator a pre-translated document and expect them to know if it is wrong.
- Technology may start translating basic texts, but this will still take a few years.
- There are 'deep learning' machines that are always learning from human inputs, but some things will just never work (i.e. highly specialised texts).
- Natalie showed us an example of a text translated by different methods from an ITI conference (Google Translate vs an agency-brokered translation vs a high-quality human translation by a direct-client). The Google Translate version barely made sense, whereas the two translations with human input kept the meaning of the original text and the final version was highly sophisticated. So while there is a need for high-quality translation, machines will not take over the industry.