In this issue:
Advantages of Cloud Computing
Defining Technical Translation
The Dynamic Duo of Swedish Crime Fiction

With this issue:
54th Annual Conference
San Antonio, Texas

Supplement to The ATA Chronicle
Preliminary Program
American Translators Association
Marriott Rivercenter
November 6-9, 2013
San Antonio, Texas
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Editor
Jeff Sanfacon
Jeff@atanet.org

Proofreader
Sandra Burns Thomson

Art Directors
Ellen Blank
Amy Peloff

Advertising
Caron Mason, CAE
advertising@atanet.org
+1-703-683-6100, ext. 3003
Fax: +1-703-683-6122

Executive Director
Walter Bacak, CAE
Walter@atanet.org

Membership and
General Information
Lauren Mendell
lauren@atanet.org
Website: www.atanet.org

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Requests for permission to reprint articles should be sent to the editor of The ATA Chronicle at jeff@atanet.org.
Our Authors

Arianna Aguilar is a master certified court interpreter for the State of North Carolina. She has been interpreting and translating since 1999. Contact: arianna.m.aguilar@gmail.com.

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

Mathilde Fontanet is a Swiss translator and reviser of French. She has been working for the European Organization for Nuclear Research’s Translation Service since 1991, and is currently the head of the French section. She has been teaching translation at the University of Geneva’s School of Translation and Interpretation since 2000. Contact: mathilde.fontanet@cern.ch.

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From the President

Technology and Productivity

In his remarks given at the Globalization and Localization Association conference in Miami this year, Don DePalma of Common Sense Advisory, a consulting firm that tracks and generates statistical information about the translation and interpreting industry, noted that the average daily work output of translators has not increased significantly since the days when Martin Luther translated the Bible. In fact, many of you can probably confirm that your average daily translation output is around the benchmark of 2,000-3,000 words. Why, asked de Palma, have the technological advances of the past decades not brought greater productivity for translators in spite of the wide range of different approaches? He had no ready answers, but promised further research into the matter.

Having spent the past 20 years sitting in front of a computer for my work, I greatly appreciate the advances we have seen in information technology. While computers have become faster, slicker, and “smarter,” the specialized software designed for translators has also evolved and relieved us of tedious copy-and-paste tasks. Interfaces have become more sophisticated and many functions have been added to make work easier. And yet, our basic daily output has remained almost the same.

In his most recent Tool Box newsletter, Jost Zetzsche writes that “lack of tactility with our computers is exactly what blocks many of us from success,” meaning that many of us do not make full and intuitive use of the functions our computers have to offer. Although that may be the case, technical solutions often seem to draw our attention to irrelevant details and away from the intricacies of meaning, register, and style. In my own practice, I spend time removing tags from text, combining segments that have somehow become separated, and adjusting tool functions. In the time that remains, I still write, craft sentences, and tease the intended meaning out of a wide range of texts in repeated editing steps once the tool has been closed.

So far, no one has provided any satisfactory answers to the productivity puzzle. Solutions would be welcomed by everyone, as higher productivity would translate into better earnings. To date, post-editing machine-translated content is only successful when certain criteria are met and language services provider management tools have streamlined everything except the actual translation process. As it turns out, the actual process of transferring meaning from one language to another still does—and should—consume most of our time.

In the years to come, freelance translators, language services providers, and tool developers will have to take a serious look at the paradigms underlying the current work flow and structure to get closer to a solution. ATA looks forward to facilitating this dialogue and to providing constructive solutions.

So far, no one has provided any satisfactory answers to the productivity puzzle.
Bundled with this issue of *The ATA Chronicle*, you will find a copy of the Preliminary Program to whet your appetite for ATA’s 54th Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, November 6-9, 2013. An extraordinary selection of topnotch speakers has raised the bar yet again, so grab your highlighter and dig in. In our two-translator household, there is still a mad dash to see who can grab the booklet first.

The multi-colored grid at the heart of the Preliminary Program offers a wide array of subjects and languages; new topics are represented alongside tried-and-true sessions. Between division topics are represented alongside tried-and-true sessions. Between division sessions, we are pleased to offer a great program of special events. Here is a quick peek at what we have to offer this year. Be sure to check out the Preliminary Program and the website for more details (www.atanet.org/conf/2013).

- Preconference seminars, all designed to let you delve in-depth into a subject with an expert. (Be sure to plan for these before you book your flights!)
- Divisions are already investigating watering holes and restaurants along the Riverwalk, and as of this writing, the SciTech Division is nailing down details on a brewery tour (and beer tasting!).
- There is also a new résumé exchange event.
- The popular multi-platform app and Wi-Fi hotspot will also return this fall with enhancements based on your feedback.
- The mellow morning Breathe, Stretch & Move is back by popular demand, and will be joined by the more upbeat Zumba! for those who prefer adrenaline to (or in addition to) caffeine.
- In your non-session time, in addition to strolling the Riverwalk, be sure to visit the exhibitors twice, since you are sure to miss things the first time. New this year: take a few moments to explore and contribute to an interactive project, where attendees will be invited to share their thoughts on what they love about the profession. And, of course, start thinking about who you want to meet up with for meals and coffee!

Something New for ATA’s 54th Annual Conference

Buddies and Newbies Session

Wouldn’t it have been nice to recognize a familiar face when you were a newcomer to the conference? This session will provide an opportunity for “newbies” (first-time attendees) to meet “buddies” (experienced attendees) with whom they can share a meal or attend a session. Your first conference will not seem so overwhelming if you can talk to someone who shares your interests and can help you make the most of important aspects of the conference, such as networking and planning your program.

Why be a buddy?
- Because you remember when you came to the conference for the first time and wished you knew someone.
- Because the questions someone asks might provide you with new insight.

Why attend this event as a newbie?
- Because a buddy will have a wealth of knowledge.
- Because you want some help getting started and learning how to network.

For more information, be sure to check out the conference website: www.atanet.org/conf/2013.

From the President-Elect

Familiar and New

In addition to more than 175 educational sessions, we are pleased to offer a great program of special events. Here is a quick peek at what we have to offer this year. Be sure to check out the Preliminary Program and the website for more details (www.atanet.org/conf/2013).

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It is an unfortunate truth that two sessions that are interesting to you will be scheduled in the same time slot. While we have tried to reduce these conflicts by shuffling subjects and languages, there is no way to eliminate them altogether. I can heartily recommend the session recordings that will once again be available on DVD and as an eConference. In addition to allowing you to be (virtually) in two places at once, the eConference can ease conference withdrawal by letting you revisit the event throughout the year!

So, pour a cup of coffee, pick up a pen, and start planning your program. I am sure you will see why so many of your colleagues continue coming back year after year!
The technology we build can collect signals from foreign adversaries, but protecting the nation requires a human understanding of nuance, context, cultural overtones and dialect that only you, a language specialist, can provide. The product of this combination of technology and your expertise will provide the most complete and accurate intelligence to U.S. policy makers, military commanders and other members of the Intelligence Community to help the nation stay a step ahead of foreign threats. Explore career opportunities at NSA and see how your language proficiency can have a direct impact on national security.

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Maggie Rowe, ATA’s long-time member relations manager, died on May 31. She was 68.

Just two years ago in the July issue of *The ATA Chronicle*, I wrote about Maggie’s retirement after 18 years with ATA. Here is an excerpt from that column:

Maggie started as a temporary receptionist. Over all the years of answering the phone, she quietly—not a word usually associated with Maggie—became the voice of ATA. She loved to help people. It is safe to say that during her nearly two decades with ATA, Maggie helped thousands of folks join the Association, sign up for exam sittings, and register for conferences—all while working the “angles” to stretch a deadline or make sure they got the best rate. […]

Maggie cannot be replaced and will not be forgotten. As ATA moves forward, we can thank Maggie for being a key and very human part of the Association’s success.

As I write this column in mid-June, Maggie would have celebrated her birthday this weekend. Thanks to Maggie and her hard work and dedication, ATA lives on.

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For more information on the conference’s outstanding networking opportunities and educational sessions, please be sure to check out ATA President-elect and Conference Organizer Caitlin Walsh’s column (page 6), the Preliminary Program (mailed with this issue of *The ATA Chronicle*), and ATA’s conference page: www.atanet.org/conf/2013.

Plan now to attend. Register online or by using the registration form included with the Preliminary Program.
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It was Saturday afternoon and I was just putting the finishing touches on a project. After going to the kitchen to get something to drink, I came back to my desk to find the dreaded blue screen (aptly referred to in technical circles as the Blue Screen of Death). After three hours on the phone with technical support, the only thing that could be done was to reinstall the operating system. The end result was that all data stored on the hard drive was lost; not even a computer technician was able to recuperate it.

Fortunately, I had some data backed up, but I was missing some key accounting files that would never be recovered. This is the point where I began to regret my decision not to use the “cloud” for my accounting data backup.

What Is the “Cloud”?

We have been hearing a lot lately about the cloud. It appears on television commercials for computers, smartphones, and tablets. So, what is it?

A huge advantage of using the cloud is that it is an inexpensive and nearly hands-off way to store and backup your data.

The term “cloud” seems a bit abstract and ethereal, and in some ways it is. Eric Griffith, a writer for PC Magazine, says the “cloud” is simply a metaphor for the Internet.

It goes back to the days of flowcharts and presentations that would represent the gigantic server-farm infrastructure of the Internet as nothing but a puffy, white cumulonimbus cloud, accepting connections and doling out information as it floats.¹

Griffith further explains that the computer industry functioned for decades by depending solely on hardware (e.g., a computer’s hard drive) to store information and run programs. Now, however, you can take advantage of various applications that allow remote data storage on the Internet and provide easy access to all of your files via a web browser. This is the basic definition of cloud computing.

You probably already use some cloud-based applications. Many people use online banking, for example. Also, web-based e-mail services such as Gmail, Hotmail, and Yahoo! are considered cloud applications, and are the most popular web-based services. All of your e-mail is stored online and is backed up automatically by your webmail provider,
so it is unlikely that you will lose files. In fact, according to technology reporter Niall Magennis, “current usage figures suggest that the three big names [Gmail, Hotmail, and Yahoo!] have around one billion users among them.”

Another example of a well-known and widely used cloud application is Google Drive. If you upload files to Google Drive, you can access and edit them from any computer, tablet, or smartphone. In addition to Google Drive, Mac users also have access to iCloud, which, according to Apple’s website, “lets you access your music, photos, calendars, contacts, documents, and more from whatever device you’re on.”

Some companies sell cloud SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) applications via a monthly subscription, which, as Samara Lynn from PC Magazine explains, is “a specific application or service offered to a customer as a subscription. Dropbox, Salesforce.com, and QuickBooks are all examples of SaaS.”

QuickBooks offers cloud or hybrid-cloud services as an alternative to software-in-a-box. Their hybrid service stores a backup of your data in the cloud, but you still install the traditional software on your computer’s hard drive. If you want to work completely in the cloud, you do not have to install the software on your computer. This saves money, since with traditional boxed software, you have to buy the newest version and update constantly, as the software becomes obsolete very quickly. Instead, as Uwe Muegge, a translation tools expert and professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, writes, “with cloud-based systems, users don’t have to worry about updating their software, as maintenance is performed on the server-side.”

Another example of an SaaS application that Lynn mentions is Dropbox, touted as a backup utility software. It is considered a hybrid service because when you install Dropbox on your computer, it retains a copy on your local storage and synchronizes it with an online version. With this service, you can log on using any web browser and access the files you need, and you can grant other users access to specific folders or files. That feature can make collaboration with colleagues and clients more manageable, since you can both see and work on the same data. Like most SaaS applications, Dropbox offers different tiers of service. You can get free service for up to 18GB, or you can purchase all the way up to terabytes of information. There are many other similar services available, including Box, SkyDrive, and SugarSync.

**The Cloud and Translation**

Muegge explains the advantages of a cloud-based translation management system:

In a cloud-based environment, […] the local computer serves primarily as an input/output device that communicates with a remote server, and it is within the remote server that most of the processing power and data reside. Consequently, the term ‘cloud-based translation management system’ refers to a TM system, where the translation software and linguistic assets (i.e., the translation management database, glossaries, etc.) are hosted on remote, web-enabled servers that linguists access using a thin client or a standard web browser.

Muegge says that this service started in the early 2000s, and at first was available only to employees or contractors of companies such as Lionbridge. However, in 2007, Lingotek launched a free cloud-based translation management system, and in 2009, Google launched the Translator Toolkit, which is intended to help human translators work faster, aided by technologies like Google Translate. With Google’s Translator Toolkit, the translator uploads the document to be translated and Toolkit produces a “pre-translation,” which is a machine translation that utilizes previous human translations. After the pre-translation, the translator can edit the copy and invite people to collaborate before publishing the document in a variety of desktop publishing file formats. Currently, Translator Toolkit has the largest user base and is still free.

Other applications that are fee-based include Wordfast Anywhere, Lionbridge Translation Workspace, MemSource Cloud, Wordbee, and XTM Cloud. However, even the fee-
based services are economical, as Muegge explains:

Cloud-based translation management systems are typically available on a subscription basis, and users only pay for what they use, month by month. With cloud-based TM systems, there are no huge up-front costs and no long-term commitments. And with plans starting at less than $50 per month, even translators just starting out in the translation business can begin using this incredibly powerful technology today.\(^8\)

**Advantages of Using the Cloud**

There are several advantages of using cloud computing. First, it is an inexpensive and nearly hands-off way to store and backup data. You can have practically unlimited storage. If your computer crashes, you just log on to a computer to regain access to your files. After my computer crashed and the operating system was reinstalled, the files I had stored on the cloud were accessible via the Internet. It took about five minutes to reinstall Dropbox, the cloud service I use, and my files were right back where I needed them. By using the cloud you do not have to worry about scheduling regular backups as often, which saves you time and money.

Also, since most cloud computing data storage programs provide a large amount of storage space, it facilitates the transfer of files that are too large to e-mail or to store on external storage devices such as a CD or USB flash drive. Cloud computing takes collaboration on a translation to a whole new level. With traditional desktop software, collaboration is usually done by e-mail, which is tedious and inefficient. By using the cloud, however, you can have your employees, clients, or colleagues access the same information remotely, which means better quality and fewer inconsistencies in the translation. Many cloud-based TM systems also have features, including instant messaging, quality assurance, customer management and reporting, as well as billing and online payment.

**Disadvantages of Using the Cloud**

Although much can be said for cloud computing, the reality is that there are some disadvantages. For example, even the best services have technical issues. Since you are dependent on a remote server to save your data, if anything goes wrong you can lose access to your information either completely or temporarily. Also, if you have an Internet outage, you may be stuck without service. Bloomberg’s Rochelle Garner reports that a power failure knocked out Intuit Inc.’s servers in June 2010, and 300,000 customers of programs such as QuickBooks, Quicken, and Turbotax were stranded. “It showed the challenges in shifting from selling shrink-wrapped software to Internet-based services,” says Garner.\(^9\)

Storing information in the cloud could also make you vulnerable to external cyber attacks and other threats. According to About.com’s Priya Viswanathan: “As you are well aware, nothing on the Internet is completely secure, so there is always the lurking possibility of the theft of sensitive data.”\(^10\)

Another disadvantage is the confidentiality of your data. This is why it is important to read the company’s confidentiality policy before agreeing to sign up for its cloud service, since you are basically surrendering all of your information to a third-party. Make sure you understand how they will use and store your information, although in most cloud applications, you can actually control how and who sees your data. However, be advised that some clients may not be open to allowing their information to be in the cloud due to confidentiality issues.

**Put Your Head In the Clouds?**

Whether or not you decide to expand your use of the cloud, taking advantage of cloud computing can be an inexpensive and efficient tool for your small business. Even if you decide not to use a cloud-based service exclusively to run your business, it would be a smart move to have it as an option in case of an emergency. If only I had stored everything in the cloud when my computer crashed, I would not have had to spend hours recreating my files. Lesson learned!

**Notes**


Cloud-Based Applications and Services

- Box
  www.box.com

- Dropbox
  www.dropbox.com

- Google Drive
  https://drive.google.com

- Google Translator Toolkit

- iCloud
  www.icloud.com

- Lionbridge Translation Workspace
  www.lionbridge.com/solutions/translation-workspace

- MemSource Cloud
  www.memsource.com/translation-cloud

- QuickBooks
  http://quickbooks.intuit.com

- Salesforce
  www.salesforce.com

- SkyDrive
  https://skydrive.live.com

- SugarSync
  www.sugarsync.com

- Wordbee
  www.wordbee.com

- Wordfast Anywhere
  www.wordfast.net/?whichpage=anywhere

- XTM Cloud
  www.xtm-intl.com/xtmcloud
UpcomingATA Webinars

Translating for the Pharmaceutical Industry: Resources and Translation Strategies for New Translators

Presenter: Carmen Cross  |  Duration: 60 minutes  |  CE Point(s): 1  
August 15, 2013  |  12 Noon U.S. Eastern Daylight Time

What is the difference between efficacy and efficiency, or between patient and subject? Terminology, types of documents, and linguistic style are all part of translating for drug research. Attendees will learn strategies to improve consistency and accuracy when translating for clinical trials.

A Comparative Analysis of Legal Systems in French-, English-, and Spanish-Speaking Countries

Presenter: Suzanne Deliscar  |  Duration: 60 minutes  |  CE Point(s): 1  
August 22, 2013  |  12 Noon U.S. Eastern Daylight Time

Understanding the differences and similarities between various legal systems is critical to legal translation. The way in which a court matter is handled from inception to end is a prime example of the way in which disparate legal systems are sometimes parallel, yet also extremely different. The common law and civil law systems are the two primary legal systems that French and Spanish source linguists will confront when translating legal documents. This webinar will provide a comparative analysis of the main characteristics of the legal systems currently in place in French-, English- and Spanish-speaking countries. Attendees will also learn about resources to assist them in researching accurate terminology.

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Can’t attend? Register now and a link to the on-demand version will be sent to you following the live event. For more information, visit www.atanet.org/webinars.
Two Translators with a Swedish Tattoo

By Tony Beckwith

Language is very important to identity. It makes your mind more flexible about how people see the world, and about how people express themselves.

What is it like to translate a blockbuster bestseller? How does it feel when your translation of a bestseller becomes a successful movie but you share in none of its financial rewards? What is it like to work as a husband-and-wife literary translation team? I learned the answer to these questions and many more when I was invited by the Austin Area Translators and Interpreters Association (AATIA, www.aatia.org) to interview Tiina Nunnally and Steven T. Murray for a Harvie Jordan Lecture Series event billed—in a nod to that blockbuster bestseller—as “Two Translators with a Swedish Tattoo.”

The two translators in question (neither of whom sports a tattoo) came to Austin for the weekend from their home in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My first question—the one that translators always want to ask other translators—was: how and where did they learn Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and German well enough to translate them into English?

Nunnally was born in Chicago and grew up in the Midwest. Her mother was Finnish, so there was a Nordic connection from the very beginning. Her father also spoke Finnish so both parents used it as their “secret language” to talk to each other without being understood by the kids. When she was 17, Tiina went to Denmark as an exchange student for a year of total immersion. (That is the way to learn a second language—by not speaking your first one for a year.) The experience changed her and made her “realize that language is very important to identity. It makes your mind more flexible about how people see the world, and about how people express themselves.” She then taught herself Norwegian and Swedish (she already spoke German and Russian). There were no academic positions open in her field at the time, so she spent 10 years with Scandinavian Airlines in Seattle, which she loved and which gave her plenty of opportunities to use her languages.

Murray was born in California and grew up in Manila, Mexico City, and San Diego. With that nomadic background it is not hard to understand his early interest in languages. He first went to Europe when he was 20, and over the next few years spent time in Germany and Denmark (including Jutland). Murray says he “was fated to become a translator” and, like many artists before and since, supported himself doing a number of different things along the way. Until now, of course, when he is fully occupied as a freelance literary translator. And not just any literary translator; he produced the English version of Stieg Larsson’s Millennium Series, setting the standard for Swedish crime fiction everywhere in the English-speaking world. And yet one looks in vain for his name in these books. Instead, in The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, for example, on the fourth page it says “Translated from the Swedish by Reg Keeland.” Huh? Murray explains that the publisher’s edited version differed enough from his translation to make him use a pseudonym for the
British edition. He has also used the *nom de plume* McKinley Burnett.

That makes five names between them, because some of Nunnally’s books are translated by Felicity David, a pseudonym she sometimes uses for works published in Britain. Make that five names and over 80 books. The couple has been translating literature for many years.

Regarding the use of aliases, Nunnally explains that she and Murray do not like to use pseudonyms because they are both firmly committed to the idea that translators should receive credit for their work, which is “something that literary translators have to fight for every inch of the way.” And, obviously, a pseudonym hides the translator’s true identity and prevents credit from being given where it is due. As happened, for example, when an article in *The New York Times* listed Reg Keeland as the translator of the *Millennium Series*, and Murray was not mentioned at all.

“On the other hand,” continues Nunnally, “if the translation has been so altered from what you originally presented—by the publisher, the editor, or the author—that it no longer represents your work, and you can no longer stand by it entirely, then you have to decide whether you want your name on that book. Is it going to hurt your reputation as a translator? Is it going to hurt your reputation as a writer?” That is how she felt about the British edition of *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* and told the publisher to remove her name from the translation. The publisher did so, but instead included “Translated by F. David” in *Miss Smilla’s Feeling for Snow*, as the book was called in England. Nunnally says that if they had asked her, she would have come up with a much better name, but since the die was already cast she decided to use it, once she had fleshed it out to Felicity David, which she thought sounded much better.

Nunnally is well known for her translation of Sigrid Undset’s *Kristin Lavransdatter*, the Norwegian trilogy, and *Pippi Longstocking*, the children’s book by Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren, among many other works. But *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, by Danish writer Peter Hoeg, was her highest-profile project. It became an international bestseller and was awarded ATA’s Lewis Galantière Award in 1994.

Literary translators will sometimes contrast the pros and cons of translating works by living authors with those of translating authors who are no longer with us. Murray, for example, notes that “dead authors are much less trouble.” In *Smilla’s* case, unfortunately, friction marred the experience of working with a living author. Not all writers trust a translation of their work into a language where unfamiliarity breeds doubt. Translation is, after all, an intimate affair between the translator and the text, and sometimes three is a crowd. In this case, Nunnally was paid by the word and received no royalties from a book that sold millions of copies. She saw people on the bus reading it and knew she “wasn’t getting a dime for all those books.” Then the movie was made and there was no stream of royalties from there either. “I don’t sign those kinds of contracts anymore,” she says.

Murray does not either. Contracts are a complex process in any context. Literary translators who negotiate their own are sometimes at a disadvantage and may leave too much on the table. Nunnally’s publisher was reluctant to demand payment from the production company for using her translation of *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* as the basis for the movie. They said they would sell a lot of books on the coattails of the movie, which is true, but beside the point. The publisher also told Nunnally that there was no precedent for translators getting paid when their work was made into a movie script. This is obviously where an agent can be of enormous help, and at a certain point becomes essential. As a beginner, of course, you have no leverage, no track record, but later on, with a few books under your belt, there are contracts you can walk away from if the terms are unacceptable.

The experience with *Smilla’s Sense of Snow* prepared Murray to negotiate when the books in the *Millennium Series* were going to be made into movies. “I called the production company and asked how much they planned to pay me for *copyrighted* [his emphasis] translation that they were going to use as the basis of the movie script.” The company made an offer and this time there was a happy ending.

A well-deserved one, too, because translating the *Millennium Series was*
Not all writers trust a translation of their work into a language where unfamiliarity breeds doubt.
What is a technical text? Is its subject matter the only criterion with which it can be defined? Many people would point to the use of technical terms as one of the main characteristics of this type of text. However, technical passages can be found in many different styles of writing, such as legal texts (e.g., memoranda of understanding), novels, advertisements (e.g., an advertisement for an electrical appliance), budget documents (e.g., items on a materials inventory), and educational material (e.g., a science textbook). These passages may or may not be purely technical, but the mere fact that they are part of a larger text with more than one intended purpose for the reader means that they cannot be classified strictly as technical writing. If a text betrays the slightest rhetorical, esthetic, humorous, or argumentative touch, its purpose cannot be said to be solely practical.

So, if the use of specialized terminology is not a sufficient identifier, what does classify a piece of writing as technical? Well, one feature that sets a technical text apart from other writing is its strictly utilitarian purpose: the sole function is to respond to a need for information or instruction generated by the reader’s need to perform a technical task. Would anyone read operating instructions or safety procedures for fun or moral enlightenment? The readers—or, more precisely, the users—of such texts feel that they have no choice but to consult instruction manuals because there is no other or better means of discovering how to, for example, mount their cupboard, follow a maintenance procedure, or repair their extractor fan. To simplify the discussion presented here, I will deal with technical texts in the narrowest sense of the term; that is, with texts whose subject matter concerns the use of applied sciences or the practical, mechanical, or industrial arts.

Importance of Writing Style

Technical texts aim to convey information in a completely objective manner in order to help the reader perform a predefined task. The nature of such texts makes them both a mirror and a means of access to technical reality, on which they have an immediate bearing. The text must reflect this reality directly and allow the reader to have a direct effect on it (e.g., by completing a task by following a written set of directions). Unlike scientific writing, technical writing does not aim to provide knowledge per se or develop ideas
in support of a theory. There is a rhetorical and argumentative dimension in scientific writing that is nowhere to be found in technical texts. The latter have nothing to prove: you just need them, and if you are reading one it is because you cannot do without it.

A notion quite foreign to technical texts is that of authorship. If properly written, technical texts do not contain any sign of an author or trace of subjectivity. The readership depends largely on circumstances independent of the text itself. You only read the user manual for a new jack because your car tire is flat, and you will follow the text as long as it is useful, whatever its quality. There is no need for the technical text to be entertaining, beautiful, or inspiring, which might explain why so little care is sometimes taken in its drafting.

Since the only function of technical texts is to convey information, one might think that writing style bears little importance, but this is not the case. It is crucial that such texts be written and organized in a way that meets one very specific requirement: efficiency. Their entire purpose is to make the content understood. This means that the writing style must be clear, concise, and as unambiguous as possible.

**The Translation Process**

The function of the translated text is to enable the reader (the user) to become an able agent in the relevant context. In this sense, the translation must meet the same criteria as the original. Its content must be accurate and contain only the information that is required for the specified purpose, neither more nor less. As Barbara Folkart, an adjunct professor at the School of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Ottawa, puts it:

> Transparency—i.e., immediacy of access to the referent—is the only feature of the source text qua text that need be preserved in translation.

Therefore, like the original, the translation has no named author and is neutral and objective. Its decisive characteristic is probably that it is entirely oriented toward its usefulness to the target reader. This means that the translator must be aware of all the differences between the two contexts (that of the original and that of the target text), and make necessary adjustments to ensure that the translation refers to the target reader’s sphere of action (the task to be accomplished). Of course, technical reality is generally similar wherever you go, but sometimes there are differences between the source- and target-language contexts (e.g., when dealing with power sockets, safety norms, or units).

The merely functional purpose of the text and its strict orientation toward the target reader’s sphere of action means that translators must constantly have function and context in mind. Translators must never allow themselves to be drawn too deeply into the text, but remain firmly anchored in reality. Technical translation is probably the type of translation that requires the translator to take the greatest distance from the text. Translators must switch constantly between text and reality, which influences the way context is processed. Whereas the translator of a literary or poetic text must pinpoint formal stylistic effects to reproduce them, and other translators must worry about what the author of the original meant by such and such a phrase, the technical translator must focus on practical context that can be understood easily by the target reader. Therefore, when processing the text, the translator must ensure its coherence with elements outside the realm of language that are rooted in practical application.

Translators must ask themselves if the context is straightforward enough for target readers to access the information necessary to achieve the task (which is the very reason they are consulting the text). If not, Folkart suggests that technical translators are allowed to distance themselves from the original text if the context provides them with a good reason to do so. In particular, if the text contains an illogical or inappropriate statement or a mistake, or if it is outdated or refers to a context that is very different from that of the source text, the translator may feel free to intervene and correct, update, or adapt it.

**Main Translation Challenges**

Understanding the source text is the main requirement for technical translation. So, if technical translators are not specialists in the field of the text they are translating, how can
they manage to understand the content? The greatest prerequisite here is the ability to manage uncertainty. By “uncertainty,” I am referring to deciphering the source text in relation to its semantic content, because this is what is specific to technical translation. To deal with difficult texts, translators must be aware of what they do not know. Good technical translators are those who never rely on probabilities or intuition, but keep challenging their own convictions and presuppositions. This means they cast doubt on just about everything they do not know. Of course, the more they know, the quicker the translation process will be, as there will be less to question.

Once translators have defined what needs to be explained, checked, or researched, the next stage is to set about clarifying uncertainties. The method applied to do so varies according to the translator’s habits and preferences. Some translators take the time to gain real insight into the subject matter (which is worthwhile for a long text or if there is a high probability of receiving work in the same field again). To do so, they might use encyclopedias, monographs, glossaries, or any other tools they choose. In general, translators begin the research process by looking for online documents such as theses and reference documents produced by authoritative institutes or authors. When these resources are exhausted, translators might have to turn to less reliable sites containing information that will need to be validated with due caution. Ideally, translators will have the opportunity to consult the author or an expert (who may be the client).

My focus here is with only part of the comprehension process—that which is related to “objective” difficulties of the source text—and not the problems linked to transfer or production. I use the term “objective” difficulties to describe aspects of the text whose meaning remains uncertain for the non-specialist. Of course, the types of difficulties encountered depend on the language pair. The following sections detail what I consider to be the main problems faced by a technical translator. Although the examples I use come from my work as a translator and revisor of French, I am sure you will be able to relate the challenges discussed to the ones you face in your respective language pairs.

**Reader’s Lack of Implicit Knowledge**

In our daily exchanges or while reading texts dealing with everyday matters, our cognitive resources help us clarify many ambiguities. Thus, people can live with a certain degree of vagueness of expression or some grammatical blur. Their prior knowledge helps them to eliminate spontaneously interpretations of the text that do not make sense within the context. When approaching a text referring to a field with which the translator is familiar, he or she can deduce or infer the meaning easily. The situation is quite different when the subject matter is totally unknown. For instance, one of the major difficulties is determining how many nouns an adjective is used to qualify, as can be seen in the following: “The contractor shall provide a helium leak detection service and execute acceptance tests of vacuum components, both on the CERN site or in companies working for CERN ….” With the term “vacuum” a constant element throughout the text, option #1 is clearly the correct choice because it indicates that the components discussed are all specific to a vacuum. The same problem may arise around a preposition, as the following example shows: “Connection to feed boxes equipped with industrial instrumentation for process monitoring, electrical equipment and other ancillary devices.” There are actually three possible ways of reading this text:

1. “Connection to”:

   a) feed boxes equipped with industrial instrumentation for process monitoring
2. “Connection to feed boxes equipped with”:

a) industrial instrumentation for process monitoring  
b) electrical equipment  
c) other ancillary devices

3. “Connection to feed boxes equipped with industrial instrumentation for”:

a) process monitoring  
b) electrical equipment  
c) other ancillary devices

From a grammatical point of view, all three options are possible. Only familiarity with the subject matter or, better, with the situation discussed will enable the translator to exclude two of the three possible meanings. In this case, option #2 is the correct option, but you cannot be sure unless you see the boxes, so, if possible, ask the author or get a drawing or a picture of the device.

Elusive Micro-Relationships Between Words

The English language has the ability to juxtapose words and imply a relationship between them. For the translator whose native language does not allow this type of parataxis, there is a problem because this relationship must be made explicit. If he or she does not know what the text is about, there is generally no way to infer the type of relationship at stake. For instance, the following list, when translated into French, would require the use of very different connecting words:

- fusion bonding  →  liaison par fusion  
- fusion face  →  face fusionnée  
- fusion weapon  →  bombe à fusion  
- fusion point  →  point de fusion  
- Fusion Committee  →  Comité sur la fusion  
- fusion food  →  cuisine fusion  
- fusion fuel  →  combustible pour la fusion  
- fusion protein  →  protéine hybride

How can you determine whether the second term is produced by fusion, to be treated by fusion, relying on fusion, compatible with fusion, concerning fusion, involving fusion, or necessary for fusion? As it happens, there is no real uncertainty, because these are fixed terms, with equivalents in French, but without knowledge of the subject matter or a good technical glossary, there is no way to tell. Here are the French translations:

- fusion bonding  →  liaison par fusion  
- fusion face  →  face fusionnée  
- fusion weapon  →  bombe à fusion  
- fusion point  →  point de fusion  
- Fusion Committee  →  Comité sur la fusion  
- fusion food  →  cuisine fusion  
- fusion fuel  →  combustible pour la fusion  
- fusion protein  →  protéine hybride

Again, if you do not know the terms or are unfamiliar with the field, there is no way you can determine how the words should be linked in the target language. This type of question is the daily lot of the technical translator. For example, in a press release about a new discovery concerning the role of cosmic rays in cloud formations, I had difficulties figuring out the meaning of the following sentence: “Ion-enhancement is particularly pronounced in the cool temperatures of the mid-troposphere and above.” At first, the expression “ion-enhancement” led me to think that ions were enhancing some phenomenon. Then I came across the following explanation in a document detailing the background of the same experiment: “We have found that natural rates of atmospheric ionization caused by cosmic rays can substantially enhance nucleation.” From this, I was able to deduce that “ion-enhancement” meant the multiplication of ions, not “by ions.” When it comes down to it, technical translators are trained detectives looking for every possible clue to help them unlock the mysteries within a text.

Reader’s Inability to Identify “Sub-Units” (Parsing)

Another significant problem for the technical translator is the analysis of information. For example, the following phrase was the title of an adjudication document:

Supply of fine blanked austenitic steel collars for the cold masses of the LHC superconducting dipole magnets.

In order to translate this title, the translator needs to decipher the following: 1) that there is a machine called the LHC; 2) that this machine contains dipole magnets; 3) that
these dipole magnets are superconducting: 4) and that these magnets are contained in cold masses. Another piece of information needed to translate the title is that the collars are part of the cold masses and that they are made of austenitic steel and fine blanked. Only after this stage of parsing can the translator start looking for the appropriate terms in the target language. A good means of processing a title like this is to go through the text in order to see what words and phrases form syntactic units. For example, the expressions “austenitic steel” and “superconducting magnets” are recurrent in the text. Then, by deduction or by duly validating the inferences made, the translator can work out how the title must be analyzed to determine the intended meaning.

Sometimes it is hard to establish whether a word is a verb, a noun, or an adjective. For instance, the following instruction, taken from an aeronautic maintenance procedure, is not easy to dissect:

Remove safety pin, nut, washer and bolt attaching trigger lever assembly to ear on body.

Beside the need to establish whether “safety” is to be associated with the four successive nouns or if “safety pin” is a fixed term (which it is), one cannot exclude right away that “attaching” is a verb (to be understood as “by attaching”), or that “ear” is also a verb (to be understood as “in order to ear on body,” whatever that means). Indeed, the parsing process looks a bit like a combinatorial analysis exercise, where you first consider all possibilities and then methodically reject those which are unacceptable until you find the right one.

**Numbers and Units of Measure**

Surprisingly, numbers and units also need to be translated sometimes. If you need to convert miles per hour into kilometers per hour, degrees Fahrenheit into centigrade, or any unit of the British imperial or U.S. customary systems of weights and measures into the metric system, you have to be careful not to make a mistake. However, this is not only a question of arithmetic, but of common sense.

**Distance:** Should “200,000 miles” be translated as “321 868 km”? This does not seem very probable. The absence of any significant digit below the hundred thousands leads one to think that the value is given to the nearest hundred thousand. In some cases, the measure may be extremely precise even if it is a round number, but, provided nothing in the context indicates otherwise, it seems wise for the translator to identify the smallest significant digit and reproduce the same level of precision in the translated text. Whenever there is an indication that the number is an approximation, one should be careful to reproduce it logically. However, translators are sometimes too anxious to get on with the text to remember to check if their translation makes sense. For instance, knowing that one mile equals 1609.344 meters, many students focus on the numerical conversion and forget to consider the consistency of their understanding of distance. They might translate “a distance of about 35 miles” as une distance d’environ 56,32704 kilomètres, which suggests a precision on the order of four inches. Of course, if there is an indication of the degree of precision or of the measuring process, this can be taken as a basis to round the result.

**Punctuation:** A detail not to be neglected when dealing with numbers is punctuation. Whereas the separator (or radix point) is indicated with a decimal point in English, a comma is used in French (as in the example above). Conversely, whereas the thousands separator is a comma in English, it is a decimal point in French. This is why it is particularly important to pay close attention to any numbers appearing in a text. For example, there is a real difference between the following sentences:

- The machine weighs precisely 1.354 kg.
- The machine weighs precisely 1,354 kg.

In some cases, using commas and decimal points interchangeably could have very serious consequences. Similarly, if you translate “The marathon is a long-distance foot race with an official distance of 42.195 kilometers.” into French without dealing with the punctuation, you end up raising the length of the race by a factor of 1,000: Le marathon est une course à pied de grand fond, sur une distance officielle de 42.195 kilomètres. This description will most likely not appeal to rational runners, since, for a French speaker, the wording implies running more than 40,000 kilometers.

**Units:** Even if they sometimes complicate matters, it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to units, because they are a great support for the technical translator. Units function like a verb (to be understood as “in order to ear on body”), whatever that means). Indeed, the parsing process looks a bit like a combinatorial analysis exercise, where you first consider all possibilities and then methodically reject those which are unacceptable until you find the right one.
can have different meanings. If the power is measured in watts, however, then you know the intended meaning is a work per unit of time. Sometimes this term can be used to refer to energy or electrical power (if it can be assimilated with a current). If you read “The screws were driven with a power of 3.9 ampere,” you understand that it is referring to an electric current.

Recently, I had to translate a specification for cleaning services. The requirements for firms included the phrase “work rates.” The firms had to “indicate the work rate adopted per work programme and per type of premises for the presentation of [their] offer” and complete a table. The first column was devoted to “maximum work rate for ordinary cleaning” and the second to “maximum work rate for floor restoration.” I was at a loss as to how to translate this until I discovered the units \([\text{m}^2/\text{h}]\). Once I understood that this meant square meters per hour, I could determine that the firm was being asked to indicate the speed of work it had taken into account to calculate its price. This would enable the company issuing the requirement to be suspicious of firms that were planning to work unusually fast.

**Terminology**

Contrary to what many people think, terminology is not always a problem for the translator. If the text relates to a very specific field and if this field is not new, there is a high probability that the terms can be found in glossaries. Identifying the terms is the real difficulty. Some parsing is necessary here, and the greatest problem is seeing where the term starts and where it ends (that is, to establish whether it corresponds to one word or more).

The first task is to identify the field to which the term belongs. The translation of the term “beam,” for example, varies according to the different domains. If you look it up in a technical dictionary, you will discover that a beam can be part of a press, an engine, a balance, or a plow. The term is to be found (sometimes with different translations within a single field) in the areas of fishing, construction, or particle physics. Beam can also be an acronym (BEAM actually stands for “Brain Electric Activity Map” in medical imaging). So, what do you do if you find this term in a text about a press in the context of particle physics? Sometimes the only solution is to ask the author what is meant. Of course, one should never exclude that what looks like a specialized term could be a simple word. For instance, a beam can be a ray of light, and, used as a verb, it can mean to smile.

To use an example from one of my own classes, students had quite a hard time translating a text I assigned, entitled “A Falcon 50 PIC Makes a Steep Approach and Encounters 2 Different Aircraft.” Most of them thought that a “Falcon 50 PIC” was an aircraft and decided that, since it was a code, 50 PIC did not need to be translated. They did not recognize that the acronym “PIC” refers to “pilot-in-command” and that this term has been officially approved by the International Civil Aviation Organization. The lesson here is that it is necessary to ascertain the field to which a term belongs and to check that your reading of the text is the only one possible.

**Technical translation is probably the type of translation that requires the translator to take the greatest distance from the text.**

**Weaknesses of the Original**

In his book, Technical Translation: Usability Strategies for Translating Technical Documentation, Jody Byrne establishes a parallel between the technical writer and the technical translator, his idea being that both could be called technical communicators.

That the lines separating the role of technical translator and technical writer have become somewhat blurred is inevitable. (…)

Perhaps first and foremost, technical writers are, to a certain extent, not unlike translators in that they need to “translate” what Van Laan and Julian (2002:18) call “geek-speak” into clear and understandable English. (…) a technical writer gathers information from a variety of sources, including documents that were produced by and for experts such as programmers and engineers. With this come the inevitable infelicities of style, excessively technical content, or indeed missing information. This information needs to be rebuilt, reinterpreted, remodeled, and restructured so that it can be understood and used by the reader. Likewise, the translator needs to transform information from a form which was produced by and for speakers of the source language into a form which can be understood by the target audience. This is
achieved by editing, rearranging, adding, and even removing information.7

Byrne refers to Susanne Göpferich’s notions of the translator becoming an “intercultural technical writer” or “cross-cultural writer.” In his book, Byrne underlines that:

• Additional information is sometimes required “to help ensure that the information and text are as usable and effective as possible”8

• Omission, condensation, or implication are sometimes necessary, “in order to protect the integrity of the communication.”

• Rewording, editing, or upgrading of a text may be useful if the source text is poorly formulated.

• Reorganization of the text may be useful, for example, where instructions from a user guide do not “match the actual sequence of actions the reader needs to perform.”

• Changes to the sequencing of sections are sometimes useful to adapt to “cultural norms relating to the structure of a particular type of document.”

• Addition or clarification of segments may be useful to conform to legal requirements on technical texts in the target language.

In my view, technical translators should make use of their relative freedom whenever the source text is not accurate. In reality, the rather low quality of the text is one of the main difficulties for the translator, who must sometimes translate irrespective of what the text appears to say.

First, the translator should correct the style if it is not clear, concise, unambiguous, and consistent. For example, if a user manual contains the following instructions:

• Put the kettle base on a cool, solid, even surface.

• The kettle should never be immersed in water.

• You must keep the kettle out of the reach of children.

The translator had better harmonize the instructions above so that they all follow the same pattern, as this will ease the reader’s task. The text would indeed have gained clarity if it had read as follows:

• Put the kettle base on a cool, solid, even surface.

• Never immerse the kettle in water.

• Keep the kettle out of the reach of children.

A poor writing style can sometimes blur the information given in a text. For example, in “Parts of a Nuclear Reactor – Pressurized Water Reactor,” the following description is given:

The fuel assemblies are collections of fuel rods. These rods are each about 3.5 meters (11.48 feet) long. [See my comments in the section “Numbers and Units of Measure.”] They are each about a centimeter in diameter. These are grouped into large bundles of a couple hundred units called fuel assemblies, which are then placed in the reactor core.9

The way information is given here is not as effective as it could be. The translator would be wise to reorganize the paragraph so that it becomes clearer. Indeed, the notion of a “group” is repeated too many times (i.e., assemblies, collections, grouped, bundles, a couple hundred, and assemblies). In addition, the text goes from the assemblies to the rods, back to the assemblies, and then to the rods again. By rephrasing the original, one could make it easier to understand and to translate. The translation would be the equivalent of: “Rods, which are each about 3.5 meters long and about 1 centimeter in diameter, are grouped into bundles of a couple hundred units called fuel assemblies, which are placed in the reactor core.” Translating the text this way would reduce the number of words from 48 to 33. In my opinion, the translator should not hesitate to intervene if this improves the precision, accuracy, logic, and semantic coherence of the text.

To give a final example of cases where the translator may “correct” the meaning, here is a description found on a website:

Precipitation is water being released from clouds as rain, sleet, snow, or hail. Precipitation begins after water vapor, which has condensed in the atmosphere, becomes too heavy to remain in atmospheric air currents and falls.10

The second sentence is not logical because it suggests that rain is heavy vapor falling to earth. If I had to translate the sentence, I would formulate it differently.

A first possibility would be:

Precipitation begins after water, which has condensed in the atmosphere, becomes too heavy to remain in atmospheric air currents and falls.
A second possibility would be:

**Precipitation** occurs when water, which was in the form of vapor in the atmosphere, has condensed and becomes too heavy to remain in atmospheric air currents and falls.

As soon as there is uncertainty concerning a text’s quality or relevance, the translator must question the original and should not hesitate to intervene to improve it, provided he or she is absolutely certain that doing so will indeed improve the text.

**Parting Thoughts**

The special status of technical texts with respect to their strict adherence to efficiency has a definite effect on the approach required for their translation. As the main function of a technical text is to reflect reality as it is, the translator should focus as much on this aspect as on the source text. Whereas a literary translator might focus on the form of a novel and the translator of a political discourse might concentrate on the intention of its author, the pre-eminence of objective content in a technical text allows its translator to disregard both its form and the author’s intention in some cases. The translator may well rephrase the text quite freely, reorganize its structure, and even redefine some of its elements if this serves to improve clarity and adequacy. If the original text lacks coherence or does not correspond to the context of the target readership, translating it might involve a certain amount of redrafting.

**Notes**


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**Some Quick Tips for Technical Translators**

- A wise skepticism is the first attribute of a good technical translator.
- It is necessary to ascertain the field to which a term belongs and to check that your reading of the text is the only one possible.
- Do not neglect punctuation when dealing with numbers.
- A good means of processing a title is to go through the text in order to see what words and phrases form syntactic units. Then, by deduction or by duly validating the inferences made, the translator can work out how the title must be analyzed to determine the intended meaning.
- Texts should be written and organized in a way that meets one very specific requirement: efficiency. This means that the writing style must be clear, concise, and as unambiguous as possible.
- The translator must constantly have function and context in mind.
- Technical translation requires the translator to take the greatest distance from the text.
- Good technical translators are those who never rely on probabilities or intuition, but keep challenging their own convictions and presuppositions. This means they cast doubt on just about everything they do not know for certain.
- Sometimes reorganizing paragraphs might be necessary to clarify the text.
- Sometimes the answer to your question can be found elsewhere in the text. Use the entire context to search for clues to meaning.
- When possible, consult the original author or document for clarification.
- Translators must always remember that there is no certainty regarding the original writer’s syntactic competence.
- As soon as there is uncertainty concerning a text’s quality or relevance, the translator must question the original and should not hesitate to intervene to improve it, provided he or she is absolutely certain that doing so will indeed improve the text.
The Technical Translator: The Sherlock Holmes of Translation? Continued

Volume 29 (University of Montreal, September 1984), 230.

2. Folkart, 239.

3. Source: (CERN) Advance information on forthcoming market surveys and calls for tenders.


6. Termium defines PIC as follows: the pilot designated by the operator, or in the case of general aviation, the owner, as being in command and charged with the safe conduct of a flight.


10. Source: WGBH Educational Foundation.

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Please Discuss

Corinne McKay
corinne@translatewrite.com

Literary Translation Meets the New Media: What Comes Next?

Translated works represent about 3% of the U.S. publishing market. But e-books, print-on-demand publishers, and self-published authors eager to expand their international readership have given literary translators a wider range of potential projects and publishing platforms from which to choose. What effect will these have on literary translation in the 21st century? Our experts weigh in with some predictions.

Tony Beckwith: A writer and literary translator in Austin, Texas

Recent statistics for the U.S. publishing market indicate totals of almost 350,000 titles a year. Based on that figure, and on the 3% share referred to in this month’s question, roughly 10,000 translated works will be published in the U.S. in 2013. Given the context of this column, the following article is of enormous interest: “Publishing Market Shows Steady Title Growth in 2011 Fueled Largely by Self-Publishing Sector” (http://bit.ly/Self-publishing-market). The article was released by Bowker, a leading provider of bibliographic information services, in connection with the results of its annual report on U.S. print book publishing for 2011, compiled from the company’s Books In Print database.

Conventional publishing houses—which, until recently, were the sole option for aspiring literary translators seeking to publish their work in book form—are certainly a portal to that goal, but are also a barrier (sometimes an impenetrable one). There are several reasons for this. Some publishing houses are perfectly reasonable, considering that book publishers, like any other business, must be successful in order to survive. Therefore, editors have been cautious, and their caution has often been exacerbated by the fact that many are unable to read in a foreign language.

But then the 20th century introduced the Internet and made us all publishers. The democratizing effect of the resulting “new media” has given every literary translator the tools to bypass the traditional publishing world and publish one’s own work. Inevitably, this will create a flood of translated literature made available to anyone with access to an electronic device of some kind. Some translators believe that the American reading public is not adventurous enough to appreciate foreign literature, but surely this cannot be true when we recall the popularity of works like 100 Years of Solitude, Tintin, and, more recently, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, among many others. No, the market is there; the status quo has merely created an artificial bottleneck. It will surely be tapped more deeply than ever by those who learn how to use the new tools at their disposal, just as self-published writers have done to achieve the growth mentioned above.

In the 21st century, translators will have to reinvent themselves. When we drop the final syllable of “new media,” we are left with a “new me.” Literary translators will have to take on many of the roles traditionally assumed by conventional publishers and become their own talent scouts, editors, copy editors, designers, publicists, marketing specialists, legal advisers, and so on. Will everyone be up to wearing so many hats? That remains to be seen. For those who are not, we can assume that a whole new cadre of experts will be lining up to support them in their online ventures, creating new hierarchies that may one day prove to be just as powerful as the publishing houses they would like to replace.

Rafa Lombardino: ATA-certified English>Portuguese translator working with self-published authors

These are exciting times for book translators because technology is facilitating a shift in the publishing paradigm.

In a traditional scenario, literary scouts look for interesting books in a foreign language so that publishers can go through the process of acquiring rights and having them translated for the national market. However, historically, we have seen that only a few U.S. publishers are actually willing to publish translations, unless world-renowned foreign authors can bring a solid following after receiving major literary awards in their own language.

Today, with a variety of self-publishing platforms available to authors—such as Lulu and CreateSpace for print-on-demand paperbacks and Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing or Smashwords for electronic formats—there are so many doors being opened to authors and translators alike. There are successful cases, such as that of Hugh Howey, whose self-published Wool series became so big that his agent landed him several translation deals with foreign publishers even before he signed with Simon & Schuster to have his book available in paperback in the United States.

The math is simple. More books being published means more potential work for translators, who can now tap into the market by partnering with independent authors who wish to expand their readership, crossing language and cultural borders to offer their work to non-English speakers. Now that the filter of publishers and literary scouts is not a mandatory path anymore, we, the translators, can be in direct contact with content creators.
which brings a whole new dimension to the work we do.

Additionally, we can now take ownership of content available in the public domain. Authors have been doing it already, taking on classics such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and adding zombies to the mix for a fun final product. So, why not bring classic works from one language to another instead of waiting for a publisher to wake up and smell the coffee?

**Lisa Carter: Spanish-English literary translator and winner of ATA’s 2012 Alicia Gordon Award for Word Artistry in Translation**

These are tumultuous times for the publishing industry. Though the changes are radical and consequently a bit unsettling, they do present many opportunities for literary translators.

The barrier to entry is already weakening. With the rise of digital and self-publishing, literary translators no longer have to knock on publishing house doors. We are free to find fascinating projects, contact authors, and pursue alternate routes.

Easier access to publishing means more translations on physical and virtual shelves. As the audience for our work grows, the stigma that translated works are somehow “beyond” the average reader will diminish.

Payment models are changing, too. Agreements with publishers have traditionally been fee-based, with the possibility of 1-3% royalties. Arrangements with authors, however, are trending toward a 20-50% profit share, with a smaller or no up-front fee. Translators could earn more under such a model if a work sells well. More importantly, though, such a split recognizes the proportionate value of our work.

Overall, this new publishing scenario requires an entrepreneurial spirit. Rather than an x-per-word job awarded by an editor and a publisher who handle everything from printing to promotion, our role is becoming much more involved. Like original language authors, we need to assume a certain amount of risk and invest in editing, layout, design, and marketing, with the expectation of future reward.

For those who favor the current print model, traditional publishing will remain a viable, if limited, option. Publishers are adapting to keep pace with global industry changes, and literary translators may be able to capitalize on this transition. Now is the time to advocate for more translations in e-book format because of lower production costs. And, like authors, translators need to start negotiating for more equitable royalty agreements.

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This column is designed to promote discussion of pertinent issues in our industry. Moderator Corinne McKay proposes a topic and asks industry experts to respond. The dialogue will then continue on ATA’s LinkedIn group (www.atanet.org/linkedin.php).

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*Visit ATA’s Calendar Online for a comprehensive look at upcoming events.*

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This month’s column is about two of my favorite things: lunch and clients, and was inspired by my colleague Anabella Tidona, a court-certified Spanish interpreter in California.

I have often written about the fact that it is a nice business gesture to take a current or potential client to lunch, even if you do not get an immediate project out of this small investment. It is amazing how different a business relationship can be once you have shared a meal. Please read on for my tips about the art of the business lunch, which I have acquired during many business lunches in several countries.

Extend an invitation. Simply e-mail or call and, if the person is not your client yet, you could say: “It was nice meeting you at XYZ. Since the weather is so great this week, may I treat you to an alfresco lunch at ______, which is very close to your office?” It is perfectly fine if you do not have a specific business purpose for the lunch. Do not worry about people declining, as a free lunch is usually an attractive proposition.

Pick a restaurant. Ask your lunch partner if he or she has any preferences. If the person is a vegetarian, it probably would not be a good idea to take him or her to a steak house. Pick a restaurant that is convenient for the client. Ideally, go to a restaurant (at least mid-range in terms of prices) at which you have eaten before so you know it is good and can make recommendations.

Arrive early. You should be waiting for your (potential) client, not the other way around. Arrive 5-10 minutes early.

Order wisely. You should be able to handle your lunch and the conversation at the same time, and do so gracefully.

Remember your table manners. I hope you listened to your mother, but if you did not, review some basic table etiquette. Also, be nice to the wait staff.

Make conversation. If this is your first long face-to-face conversation, it could be a bit of a challenge to get things going, but most Americans are proficient at small talk. Come prepared with some non-controversial topics, such as local sports, a recent event, something interesting that happened at the client’s company, etc. Do not start the conversation with: “So, let me tell you about my business.” Let the conversation develop organically. Most business professionals will, at some point, ask about your business, so have something intelligent to say about it.

Ask questions. Most people feel very comfortable talking about themselves, so ask some questions that are not too personal, but still interesting. The point of this exercise is to find things that you might have in common. You could ask your lunch partner where he or she is from, about their alma mater, etc.

You need to pay. You should make it abundantly clear that this is your treat. No splitting the bill, and under no circumstances should you allow the other person to pay. This is where your business credit card comes in handy.

Follow the client’s lead when it comes to dessert. If your client wants dessert and/or coffee, you should probably join him or her, even if it is just a few bites. No one likes to eat alone and feel guilty about eating dessert. You can go to the gym later.

Do not forget to enjoy yourself! Ultimately, clients do business with people they like, and this is your opportunity to spend time with a (potential) client in a casual atmosphere. You might just discover that you really like your client.

This list of tips is not meant to be exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination, but I think it is a start. Enjoy your next lunch!

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Yahoo! Business Discussion Group

ATA members can discuss business issues online at the following Yahoo! group:

Judy Jenner is a court-certified Spanish interpreter and a Spanish and German translator in Las Vegas, Nevada, where she runs Twin Translations with her twin sister. She is a past president of the Nevada Interpreters and Translators Association. She hosts the translation blog, Translation Times (www.translationtimes.blogspot.com). You can also find her at www.entrepreneuriallinguist.com. Contact: judy.jenner@twintranslations.com.

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This column is not intended to constitute legal, financial, or other business advice. Each individual or company should make its own independent business decisions and consult its own legal, financial, or other advisors as appropriate. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of ATA or its Board of Directors. Ideas and questions should be directed to judy.jenner@entrepreneuriallinguist.com.
What do a Brazilian butt-lift and a Kindle book have in common? They are two examples of our society’s penchant for instant gratification. At the other extreme, language proficiency and, by extension, interpreting are not abilities you acquire overnight. They improve exponentially as you practice, and reflect (consciously or not) the experiences of a lifetime.

I came to the U.S. as a Cuban exile with my family at the age of nine, speaking almost no English. We arrived in a completely new environment; one of my brothers and I classified naively, from our limited exposure to American folklore, as Davy Crockett country. Our new home was located in a wooded enclave where we largely fended for ourselves after school and learned to adapt to the New England lifestyle.

While my brothers were out trapping and hunting for fun, I devoted myself to self-development through reading, favoring fairy tales as a form of escapism from the inevitable household chores that no one else wanted to do. One of my fondest memories as a kid is of creating a tepee in bed with my covers after “lights out,” when I would read by flashlight so as not to wake my siblings. Above all, I wanted to speak English well enough to fit in, get good grades, and make my parents proud. Imagine my discouragement when I learned that the “F” grades I was so proud of did not stand for “Fine.”

After initially cutting my ties to Spanish, as many first generation exiles do, I went back to my native language by reading an eclectic mix of periodicals. They included magazines my parents’ Cuban friends would give us when they were finished reading them, some of which contained what were, to me, riveting excerpts of unbridled passion. These came via the stories of Corín Tellado, a prolific writer of romantic novels that were very popular in Spanish-speaking countries—definitely not permissible reading for an 11-year-old at my house. Fortunately, my parents had no time to read magazines, so they were unaware of this content. I remember that “tepee-time” required a dictionary to figure out what Tellado was even writing about. Thankfully, this material was balanced by the classical texts my mother eagerly shared from the classes for her MA in Spanish literature that she would eventually earn.

Another favorite secret childhood activity that fed my avid love for reading in English was also one that I could not share with my parents, since they would have never allowed it. There was a semi-abandoned paper mill a few blocks from my house. It consisted of a warehouse dotted with mysterious, boiling, gurgling vats filled with chemicals, where printed material was dumped for recycling. Looking back, the place was an accident waiting to happen, without any type of security, but that was the least of my worries. The allure it had for me was that it was a clandestine, eerie, half lit treasure trove of all kinds of books with adult content that I would never have access to otherwise, as well as comic books, which became a great source of information on American pop culture. I would sneak in after school when the workers had left and have a field day going through the musty piles of publications messily stacked in the aisles, beckoning half-heartedly to see if I would spring them from death row.

Ko-ching, in More Ways Than One

While in college studying plastic arts, I had a revelation. The puritanical work ethic I had eased into in New England had a silver lining—work could be fun! At the time, my husband-to-be was writing a dissertation for his PhD in French literature, and to supplement his income as an assistant professor, he used to do conference interpreting. To me, as a 20-year-old, that simply meant he was paid to talk, which seemed infinitely easier to accomplish than my career path at the time.

Now, fast-forward 30 years. Unfortunately, interpreting as a career was not as simple as I thought then. However, if you are able to align your values consciously with activities you enjoy and produce something of worth to a paying segment of society, you will usually end up in the right place. Fortunately, over the years, I have been able to harness my desire to work “speaking” in another language—which, initially, had never occurred to me to pursue as a career path—along with my interest in studying and the discipline to work hard. The universe opened the right doors for me. I audited what conferences I could, signed up for whatever workshops were available, and trained hard with generous professionals who shared their time. As many before and after me, I did not have the option to go away to school, nor were there many programs offered back then, but I made it a point to secure the mentors and the practice needed to pursue my dream of becoming a professional interpreter.

If interpreting/translating is a field that interests you, rest assured that “where there’s a will, there’s a way.” With expanding opportunities, choosing a career path in languages nowadays will not seem as daunting as it may have been in the past because of a lack of standardized resources. After all, now we even have our own section in the Department of Labor’s Occupational Outlook Handbook (http://bit.ly/Occupational-Outlook-Handbook).
Wild Wild West Conditions Persist in Medical Interpreting

(Posted by Katharine Allen and Kaitlin Heximer on the blog of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, http://najit.org/blog.)

“When I think back to the first time I ever interpreted in a formal setting, I would have done things differently if I knew then what I know now about interpreter ethics and best practices. A ‘simple’ medical appointment turned into an epic 11-hour saga at the hospital emergency room with a patient whose sinus problems were quickly overshadowed by his mentally unstable condition.”

So begins the story that Kaitlin Heximer, my co-author, has to share. Kaitlin is currently a student in the newly-minted Masters in Conference Interpreting Program, offered through the Glendon College School of Translation at York University. She already has a master’s degree in translation, and is no stranger to the healthcare system. She started interpreting just a year ago as a volunteer interpreter for a refugee resettlement agency.

Her story is worth hearing. It is a stark reminder that despite so much rapid change transforming the healthcare interpreting profession, the “bad ‘ol days” of pressing untrained bilingual staff or volunteers into service are not yet a thing of the past. Today, hospitals are jumping on the technology bandwagon in droves, doctors now access video medical interpreters through their smartphones, and there are not one but two validated national medical interpreter certifications in the U.S.1 However, patients and the bilingual individuals trying to help them are still put in high-risk situations with depressing frequency.

Multiple studies show the relationship between poor health care outcomes, costly medical errors, and increased litigation when professional interpreters are not used.2 We know the critical difference formal training makes, but outside awareness of this reality has yet to reach a tipping point where it becomes an automatic practice to call in a professional interpreter. Until we reach that point, many entering our field will be subjected to the Wild Wild West conditions Kaitlin describes below. Please note that the patient’s medical details have been changed for the purposes of confidentiality.

Kaitlin’s Story

My first official interpreting assignment while volunteering for a social service agency was to accompany a male client to a medical appointment. The client had a sinus condition and was prescribed medication to treat it. When I thought we were wrapping up the session, the client asked me to tell the doctor that his throat was closing. I said, “Mr. X says his throat is closing.” The doctor said to me, “Tell him he should go to the emergency room,” so I turned to the client and said, “The doctor says you should go to the emergency room.”

After leaving the doctor’s office I phoned the social worker who had assigned me to the case to see if another interpreter could cover. I was trying to show awareness of my own limitations as an interpreter, but at the same time I wanted to make sure that the client had access to the language services he needed. Though my intentions were good and my instincts on the right track, this was the point where my many mistakes began!

The social worker informed me that there were no other interpreters available and asked if I could accompany the patient to the emergency room. Despite misgivings, I said yes. I got the client through triage pretty quickly, but then a long wait ensued. During this time, the client became increasingly attached to me. I attempted to provide some physical distance between myself and the client, but he followed me wherever I moved or begged me not to leave. After about four hours, the client was becoming increasingly delusional about the hospital staff, screaming and saying they were going to hurt him. I did not know what to do.

I felt it was heartless not to be near him, that he obviously needed help, and that I was the only one with whom he could communicate. I realize now that I am not a mental health professional equipped to deal with people in his state. At the time, I had no guidance on how to handle the situation. My first instinct was to get the hospital staff to put him ahead in the order of patients to be seen. I went up to the desk and said, “I am an interpreter. I have to get home, and my client is very agitated. Could you please do something to get him seen faster?”

No one was available to tend to my client, so I sat with him for several more hours as he told me the sad story of his life, past and present. He said, “You’re the only person who has ever listened to me.” I did not know what to say, so I said nothing, which was pretty easy because the client was basically ranting by this point. I knew his throat was not really closing because he could still talk, however it was clear to me that he needed some help. I felt obligated to stay with him. When we finally got in to see the doctors, one of them ordered an EKG. The client asked me to go with him to the changing room to help him take his clothes off. I told him I was not comfortable with that. No one told me that I must not accept requests to physically aid patients.

I told the client that I would try to get him a male nurse to assist. He agreed but 20 minutes later when I found one, I went back to where I had left him and he was not there. The doctors asked me...
to search for him and bring him back, which I did. They did the test and left us alone again. By this time I had been with the patient, mostly alone, for about seven hours. Now I was alone with him in a hospital waiting room with a bed. No one told me I should not stay alone with the patient.

He asked me for ice chips, so I went in search of a nurse who could bring him some. Instead, a nurse gave me some ice chips in a cup and told me to “bring these back to him.” No one told me it was not my job to fill in for nurses or medical assistants.

When it was time for the next step, the client grabbed my hand firmly. Even though I was just his interpreter, he was now seeing me in more of a maternal, comforting sort of role.

In the next hours, I worked very hard to get us seen. I told the hospital staff the patient was agitated and that I was tired and that a doctor needed to attend. I inquired (as I had twice before) whether there were any interpreters on call in the hospital. They said no. Eventually, the possibility of a phone interpreter was brought up, but the client said that frightened him and that, after many previous visits to the emergency room, he deserved a real live interpreter.

After an 11-hour shift “on the job,” the client was finally served. I felt good about providing him this service, but I was very tired.

Despite my best intentions, I failed to establish myself as a professional with this client. I did not yet have formal training in medical interpreter ethics and standards of conduct. That initial failure led to a relationship with him where he not only wanted, but expected, me to be a confidante and to advocate for him with his counselors, his housing workers, and other service providers.

Since that first assignment, I have learned about proper role boundaries for a medical interpreter. I have adopted the use of first-person interpreting, conduct pre-sessions for new clients, and never stay in the room with the client when the provider leaves. I know now that clients who are showing mental stress or imbalance need an additional level of care that requires specialized training. I greatly appreciate the new knowledge about interpreter roles that I am gaining in my current educational program, but realize that it represents the exception and not the norm. Knowing what I do now, it is my goal to raise awareness in and outside the field about the limitations and complexities of health care interpreting work.

**Still Work to Be Done**

As Kaitlin’s story illustrates, public awareness of the critical role interpreters play and of what constitutes a professional medical interpreter lags far behind the level of professionalization our field is reaching. Even those who hire, oversee, and use interpreter services are often woefully ignorant of the complex skill set required to bridge language barriers competently. Until those who are outside of our profession know this as well as those of us inside our profession, the “bad ol’ days” will remain, in actuality, “now.”

Let Kaitlin’s story be a reminder to all of us about the need for continual client education and of the importance of supporting, in any way we can, the generation of interpreters now entering the field. I look forward to the day when stories like Kaitlin’s truly are a thing of the past.

*Katharine Allen is the co-president of InterpretAmerica (www.interpretamerica.com).*

**Notes**


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**Send a Complimentary Copy**

If you enjoyed reading this issue of *The ATA Chronicle* and think a colleague or organization would enjoy it too, we will send a free copy.

Simply e-mail the recipient’s name and address to ATA Headquarters—ata@atanet.org—and we will send the magazine with a note indicating that the copy is being sent with your compliments. Help spread the word about ATA!
The purpose of the Bulgarian Dictionary & Phrasebook: Bulgarian-English/English-Bulgarian, as stated on the back cover, is to be “a concise, practical reference ideal for travelers, businesspeople, and students.” There is an eight-page introduction covering Bulgaria’s geography, important statistical information, government, and history. Fifty pages are devoted to basic Bulgarian grammar and the Bulgarian alphabet, including the pronunciation of each letter. The Bulgarian>English and English>Bulgarian dictionary consists of over 3,000 entries, and the 95-page phrasebook is divided into groups of phrases on various topics, such as etiquette basics, language, travel and transportation, money, accommodations, food and drink, shopping, services, culture and entertainment, time, weather, health, and measurement conversion.

Pronunciation

It is not clear to me why Burilkovova chose to use the English alphabet for transcribing pronunciation in this book over the International Phonetic Alphabet. The grammar section includes a presentation of the Bulgarian alphabet detailing the pronunciation of each letter. Some of these are presented with incorrect pronunciations. For examples, see Table 1.

Grammar

The presentation of Bulgarian grammar in this book is too dry, theoretical, and not fit for its stated purpose. It strikes me as a compilation of quotations from academic research rather than accessible, practical information for the layman, supported by a sufficient amount of easy-to-understand (and remember) examples, which would have been appropriate for a reference book of this size. Learning how to employ proper Bulgarian grammar is the most difficult part of learning Bulgarian. The author attempts to explain very complex grammatical forms in an extremely concise way, but without examples. The result is convoluted explanations that are vague and extremely difficult to understand, much less to remember, even for an educated native speaker of Bulgarian. Therefore, I do not think the examples used are appropriate for a basic reference book. The following is a direct quotation from the explanation of “Verbal Aspect,” complete with the examples given:

Verbal aspect – imperfect and perfect

The imperfect form of the verbs (abbreviation imperf.) expresses that the action is, was, or will be existing, without limitation in time. The English equivalents are present and continuous tenses and future tense with “will be.” This aspect can indicate future, present,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Pronunciation Guide</th>
<th>Correct Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>А</td>
<td>a (as in “arm”)</td>
<td>“a” is a shorter vowel (as in “articulate”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И</td>
<td>i (as in “sit”)</td>
<td>ea (as in “eagle”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ц</td>
<td>tz (as in “tsar”)</td>
<td>tz (as in “matzo”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ъ</td>
<td>u (as in “cut”)</td>
<td>er (as in “herb”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ЬО</td>
<td>yo (as in “canyon”)</td>
<td>yo (as in “Yonkers”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 2: Grammar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Bulgarian translation in the book</th>
<th>What a native Bulgarian would normally say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your name?</td>
<td>Какво е Вашето/твоето име?</td>
<td>Как се казвате/казваш?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take bus #5.</td>
<td>Отидете с автобус №5.</td>
<td>Вземете/качете се на автобус №5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I find a travel agency?</td>
<td>Къде мога да намеря пътна агенция?</td>
<td>Къде е най-близката туристическа агенция?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is the bus stop?</td>
<td>Къде е спирката на автобуса?</td>
<td>Къде е автобусната спирка?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetcar station</td>
<td>Спирката на трамвая</td>
<td>Трамвайна спирка</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border Control</td>
<td>Грачачна контрола</td>
<td>Контролно пропусквателен пункт/Граничен контрол.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far is it?</td>
<td>Колко е далеч?</td>
<td>На какво разстояние е …?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I get a bus/streetcar map?</td>
<td>Къде мога да получя картата на автобуса/трамвая?</td>
<td>Къде мога да получна карта с маршрут на автобуса/трамвая?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call a taxi for me, please.</td>
<td>Викнете такси за мен, моля.</td>
<td>Моля, повикайте ми такси. Или Повикайте ми такси, ако обичате.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

or past. Example: (а) купувам [(a) koupouvam] to buy.

The perfect form of the verbs (abbreviation perf.) corresponds roughly to the English perfect tense. These verbs cannot express the present, their present form expresses the future, and they also have past forms. Example: купя [koupya] to buy. (Page 32)

Ignoring the grammatical imperfections, I doubt that the text quoted above would serve the purposes of a visitor to Bulgaria who is trying to learn how to communicate with Bulgarians at a very basic level.

It is important to note that the official language of Bulgaria is formal/literary Bulgarian. The use of dialects, slang, and/or profanity carries a heavy stylistic connotation. Hence, it is inappropriate to encourage the use of dialect/slang forms in a grammar book without designating them as dialects/slang. However, some of the examples in the grammar section contain dialect/street slang words. For instance, the inflected forms of the verb съм (“to be”), which appear as examples on page 26, consist of a mixture of formal forms and street slang without distinguishing between them. The book gives the following sentence as an example: Ние сме тук (“We are here.”). The correct literary form is: Ние сме тук. A foreigner saying Ние сме тук is sure to warrant a chuckle.

Similarly, the translation of “English meal” with английско ядене is incorrect because ядене in literary Bulgarian is the equivalent of the English gerund “eating,” only the slang word means “a meal.” The correct translation would be английска гозба.
The example on page 215 is grammatically incorrect and inconsistent with the explanation of the use of the full and short forms of the definite article on page 47.

- “Where is the telephone?”
- Translation: Къде е телефонът?

Къде е телефонът? is the grammatically correct form. When the gender of the noun with which the definite article is used is masculine and the noun is the subject of the sentence, the full form of the definite article should be used.

Another issue is that some of the words and expressions in the examples are archaic and rarely used in contemporary Bulgarian. For example, “I have not,” translated as (аз) нямам. This is incorrect because (аз) нямам means “I don’t have.” It is true that (аз) нямам could be translated as “I have not” in translations of poetry, but it is confusing to give it as an example to someone who has had little or no exposure to Bulgarian.

Another example from the text, which is quite amusing to a native Bulgarian, is the translation of the sentence “I am an unmarried woman” as Аз съм мома. A Bulgarian woman would never use the word мома to describe herself unless she is making a joke, or is from a very isolated part of the countryside and poorly educated.

Some of the examples of Bulgarian phrases and sentences provided in the text are word for word translations of English phrases and sentences that, to say the least, sound awkward in Bulgarian. For examples, see Table 2 on page 35.

An easy way to avoid this problem would have been to organize the material differently. The first step would have been to compile a list of the most commonly used Bulgarian words, phrases, and sentences in the exact way native Bulgarians would use them. Then, the list could have been organized by topic and presented with idiomatic English translations and explanations, where necessary.

**Dictionary**

In the dictionary section, each word is presented with only one of its meanings and defined only as a part of speech (i.e., noun, verb, adjective, etc.). There is no indication of gender. Ironically, the lack of indication of gender defeats the purpose of the lengthy explanations of different grammatical forms, since all of those forms are expressed by the use of different suffixes entirely dependent on the gender of the noun. Even some of the verb forms are gender-sensitive.

**Overall Evaluation**

Despite its useful general tourist information and basic Bulgarian glossaries, the *Bulgarian Dictionary & Phrasebook: Bulgarian-English/English-Bulgarian*, as a whole, does not meet the criteria to be deemed a quality linguistic reference book on the Bulgarian language for travelers, business people, and students visiting Bulgaria. This dictionary and phrase-book is neither intended, nor fit for use by translators and other language professionals.

Emilia Balke is the administrator of ATA’s Literary Division. She has been working as a Bulgarian-<>English translator, court interpreter, and conference interpreter since 1994. She also translates from Russian-English, German-English, and Macedonian-English. Her major areas of specialization are legal, medical, pharmaceutical, scientific, technical, business, government, and finance. She has a master’s degree in English philology with specializations in translation, conference interpreting, and foreign language teaching. Contact: ebalke@language-web.net.

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I am happy to say the Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch that I mentioned in an earlier column has found a good new home in sunny Florida, where presumably it will get more use than it did in this gloomy, frosty Northern climate.

New Queries
(English>Swedish 7-13.1) In the world of hair styling—into which I’m sure this column has never before ventured—“rinse-out replenishing mask” is a real challenge when going into Swedish. Here is some context: “XXX offers an easy to use but intense pampering for your tresses, including their rinse-out Replenishing Mask.” This is no easy query!

(French>German [English] 7-13.2) This is about robotics, folks. A manufacturer of machines and robots for the food industry, particularly for the processing of cheese, is extending his warranty: Cette prolongation de garantie exclut les pièces d’usure non exclusivement: Câble du petit élévateur – Routements – Joints, Simmer, o-ring, etc. ... – Paliers lisses, Glissière table, Glissière de guidage etc. – rouleaux de table et leurs axes – Tapis – Courroies. To what do the words in bold print refer? English is acceptable as an answer, although the original query did not involve English.

(Iranian>English 7-13.3) What kind of landform is a vall salmastre? Obviously it is close to the Adriatic, because the context sentence says, La ricchezza è dovuta alla grande diversità di ambienti presenti nel Parco del Delta del Po, dalle spiagge e dune costiere, alle lagune e valli salmastre, dalle paludi e prati umidi d’acqua dolce, ai boschi igrofili, mesofili e xerofili.

(Iranian>English 7-13.4) From something as large as a landform we shrink down to jewelry. Specifically, what might orafo incassatore be in a jewelry context?

(Norwegian>English 7-13.5) Veggis og bris med lime proved difficult for a colleague working on a survey about general soft drink purchasing habits. Why would a respondent who repeatedly stated elsewhere that he liked lemon-flavored drinks include these cryptic words that refer to lime? What are they?

(Polish>English 7-13.6) Evidently, an Aparat Krzyżowy is a device typically used in Poland to test visual-motor coordination in individuals, including those trying to obtain a driver’s license or training to be forklift operators. Is there an equivalent elsewhere? What is it?

(Polish>English 7-13.7) If you can, figure out what the five words in bold mean in this legal contract: Przedmiotem niniejszej umowy są zasady współpracy między stronami przy skupie i sprzedaży dzicyzyny w proporcjach naturalnych w skórce: jelenia, żubra, daniela, sarny i dzika, po badaniu na własność zwanej dalej towarem zgodnie z BN 82/92 41-04.

(Portuguese>English 7-13.8) In a mini-biography of someone in the entertainment industry, the phrase de se desdobrar em muitos em torno de outros is puzzling. If you need more context, here it is: Alguns podem, por um jogo artístico violentamente buscado, ganhar o direito ... outros que também se desdobram.

(Portuguese>English 7-13.9) This query seems to involve a non-sequitur, so I will provide much more context than usual. The query term is valores mobiliarios and the nation of origin is the Dominican Republic. Here goes: Art. 221. – Bajo todos los regímenes, y so pena de nulidad de cualquier cláusula contraria contenida en el contrato de matrimonio, la mujer casada tiene sobre los productos de su trabajo personal y las economías que de éste provengan, plenos derechos de administración y de disposición. Ella puede hacer uso de esto para adquirir inmuebles o valores mobiliarios, y puede enajenar los bienes así adquiridos, así como tomar a préstamo sobre los mismos, e hipotecarios. What are they?

Replies to Old Queries
(English>French 4-13.1) (launching pad in mountain biking): Jeanette Fornadel believes this to be rampe de lancement, a term on which several French extreme sports websites agree. If other problems like this appear, the translator should do a web search using the abbreviation VTT, meaning vélo tout-terrain. Bruno Sterckemann believes that regardless of whether such a section of road is man-made or naturally present in the terrain, it is best rendered as tremplin or bosse de saut.

(English>Hebrew 4-13.3) (judicial expert activity): In Josephine Bacon’s opinion, this is ספיגות של מומחה משפטי.

(English>Spanish 4-13.6) (cycling time): According to Jean-Pierre Maldonado, this is either ciclado or periodicidad.

(German>Czech [English] 4-13.7) (Spontanerfassungssystem): Cynthia Klohr states that this corresponds to a “spontaneous reporting scheme,” enabling continual monitoring of the use of a pharmaceutical product throughout its life span and by all patients, including adverse reactions. Such systems are found in Britain and the
United States. The Brits call it the Yellow Card System.

(German>English 4-13.8) (Aufhebung der Streckung): The key to understanding this, says Cynthia Klohr, is that here Aufhebung means “loss.” The left foot in this report has an extensor tendon that lacks contour (lacks relief, as in sculpture). The fifth toe on that foot has lost its capacity for stretching, which is the Aufhebung der Streckung, with the result that the toe is in a bent position.

(Italian>English 5-13.6) (mezzo breve): This, says Manuella Francavilla, is a “short news item.” To provide an interview with the gentleman per mezzo breve (exchange of letters or e-mail), or are asking the gentleman or his lawyer to write them to answer possible questions they may have.

(Polish>English 5-13.8) (przedmiotowy versus podmiotowy): Piotr Graff prefaced his explanation of these terms with natura naturata and natura naturans, a dichotomy crucial to Spinoza’s system of “ethics,” as he called it (really metaphysics derived from ethical principles). The Polish text describes them respectively, as “created” (i.e., subject to being acted upon [przedmiotowy]) and “creating” (i.e., being itself the active agent [podmiotowy]). The literal English equivalents of these problematic words (“subjective,” “objective”) are entirely different concepts that are normally used in epistemological or psychological contexts. The Polish terms derive from grammar: the simple sentence “I am eating soup” contains a podmiot (the active “I”) and a przedmiot (the passive soup).

(Russian>English 4-13.9) (Слепышовины): Sure enough, says Alex Lukoff, the term refers to mole rats, for which the Russian term for one species (Spalax) is слепыш. Gardeners invented this term to refer to the system of burrows that mole rats create. Perhaps “burrow systems” can be used. Leonid Gornik calls it a “mole rat burrow.”

(Swedish>Norwegian 4-13.10) (Skarvbleck): Leonid Gornik says it would be better to define this term in English as a “splice plate.”

Keep the responses coming, please. It is a joy to see them pile up in my in-box for several weeks prior to actually incorporating them into a column. You all are great.

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The History of a Sacred Text

Stories told and retold have a tendency to change as they pass over time through different languages and cultures. When the stories collectively comprise a sacred text, such as the stories about Rāma and other gods in the Hindu Rāmāyana, controversies arise as to which is the "true" version, the version considered to be divinely sanctioned. Sometimes, even a scholarly discussion of the extant versions is regarded as sacrilege.

In a guest column in the May 2012 issue of Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA), Vinay Dharwadker, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and a winner of India's multiyear national translation prize in 2008, writes about the attempts by Hindu fundamentalists, starting in 2006, to suppress a 30-page essay, “Three Hundred Rāmāyanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation” by A. K. Ramanujan. Among other things, Ramanujan (1929-1993) was an interdisciplinary scholar of India, the world's leading modern translator of Indian poetry and fiction, and a professor at the University of Chicago from 1961 until his death. The fundamentalists tried to end the selection of Ramanujan's essay as required reading by the history department at Delhi University and to stop Oxford University Press from printing it.

“Three Hundred Rāmāyanas” is a discussion of the spread of the Rāmāyana over time and space, from the earliest known epic version first written down in Sanskrit about 600 BC to other versions in languages as far apart as Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khotanese, Laotian, Malaysian, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, and Tibetan, in societies that identify themselves broadly as Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Muslim … (437)

Some of these versions show the Hindu gods behaving in ways the fundamentalists disapprove. The only acceptable version, they claim, is the earliest Sanskrit epic. But, unfortunately for their argument, most fundamentalists, like most Indians, cannot read the ancient language of Sanskrit and have no idea what the earliest text actually says. Indeed, it was probably the translation by Ramanujan in his essay of an episode from that text that actually outraged and appalled them the most:

fundamentalists were probably taken aback to discover how Vālmiki [the author of the original epic] narrates this story. Indra, chief of the Vedic gods, seduces a willing and curious Ahalyā, beautiful wife of the sage Gautama, in the latter’s ashram in a forest. When Gautama catches Indra slinking away after the tryst, in a towering rage he curses both errant god and errant wife. Indra is condemned to lose his testicles, which fall to the ground immediately, and Ahalyā is doomed to live on in the ashram, in a state of suspended animation … (442)

This is strong stuff for those who believe that humiliation of a god is blasphemy.

So where did the fundamentalists, and most other contemporary Indians, really obtain their idea of what the Rāmāyana consists of: from watered-down children’s stories, temple and community rituals, comic books, and, above all, a “mammoth seventy-eight-part series” (443) on television, which Dharwadker calls a “pop culture travesty” (443). Some fundamentalist leaders have actually admitted this, proclaiming, “I grew up watching the Rāmāyana as shown on the TV. … There can be no other version of it” (443).

This particular attempt at suppression of a scholarly essay ultimately had a happy end: the essay was not suppressed, or at least suppressed only temporarily. But that is small consolation considering that we live in an age of religious fanaticism when, in addition to the murder and mayhem of political terrorism, Muslim extremists blow up statues of Buddha with impunity, Al Qaeda destroys Sufi shrines in Timbuktu, the construction of mosques divides communities in New York and Tennessee, and the same group of Hindus that failed to suppress Ramanujan’s essay did succeed, in 1992, in rising to national power in India by destroying a mosque, thereby setting off riots in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh during which at least 3,000 people were killed.

Submit items for future columns via e-mail to mnh18@columbia.edu (that is 18, not el-8) or via snail mail to Mark Herman, 2222 Westview Drive, Nashville, TN 37212-4123. Discussions of the translation of humor and examples thereof are preferred, but humorous anecdotes about translators, translations, and mistranslations are also welcome. Include copyright information and permission if relevant.
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