

# Summary of ATA's *Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey*

By Shawn Six

The recently released third edition of the *ATA Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey* should prove to be an invaluable benchmarking tool for nearly everyone in or affiliated with the translation and interpreting profession.

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

An e-mail was distributed to approximately 8,200 ATA members and non-members in May 2005 containing a link to an online questionnaire. In total, 1,509 completed the questionnaire, and useable survey forms were submitted directly to Industry Insights, Inc. This represents a response rate of 18%. Forms received after the final deadline and questionnaires with incomplete information were not included.

Upon receipt, all data were checked both manually and by a specially designed computer editing procedure. Strict confidence of survey responses was maintained throughout the course of the project. Final results were tabulated, and the report was completed in October 2005. The survey data uses information as of December 31, 2004.

The seven employment classifications analyzed in this report include: full-time independent contractors; part-time independent contractors; full-time in-house private sector personnel; part-time in-house private sector personnel; company owners; educators; and gov-

ernment employees. For detailed analysis, responses were broken down by geographic region, education, years of employment, primary language combination, ATA membership status, and ATA certification status. Some of the key findings of the report follow.

**Respondent Demographics.** Survey respondents had varying backgrounds and experience. As shown in Figure 1, two-thirds were female and

“... This comprehensive data allows users to compare their own income, hourly rates, and rates per word to individuals in similar situations...”

nearly 40% were born in the U.S., 75% had a bachelor's or master's degree, and nearly two-thirds had 15 years or less of employment in translation and interpreting.

**Income Varied by Employment Classification.** As shown in Figure 2, T&I company owners reported the highest gross income at \$59,230, slightly ahead of the Full-time In-house Private Sector (\$58,147), Government Employee (\$54,306), and Full-time Independent Contractor (\$54,205). The lowest income was reported by the Part-time In-house Private Sector, at \$18,083.

**U.S. Based Respondents Earned More Than Non-U.S. Based.** For example, Full-Time Independent Contractors based in the U.S. earned an average gross 2004 income from translation and interpreting of \$54,207,

**Figure 1: Respondent Demographics\* By Percentage**

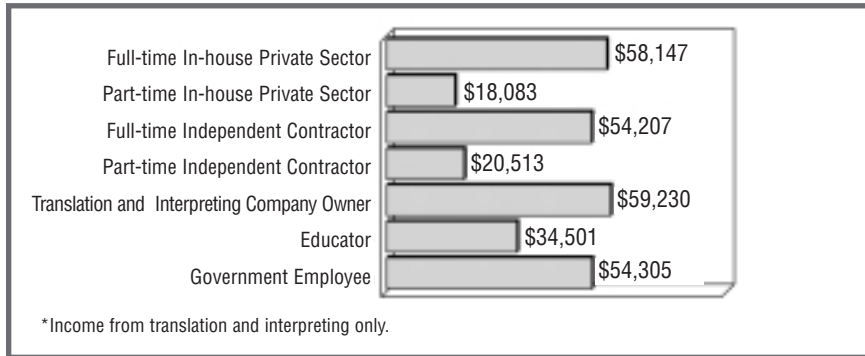
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	32.9%
Female	67.1%
<b>Born in U.S.</b>	
Yes	36.4%
No	63.6%
<b>Education Level</b>	
High School	3.1%
Associate Degree	6.2%
Bachelor's Degree	32.1%
Master's Degree	42.5%
Doctorate	10.2%
Professional	5.8%
<b>Years of Employment in Translation and Interpreting</b>	
0-5 years	20.7%
6-10 years	23.0%
11-15 years	20.6%
16-20 years	13.4%
21+ years	22.3%

compared to only \$47,587 for those based outside the U.S. (see Figure 3).

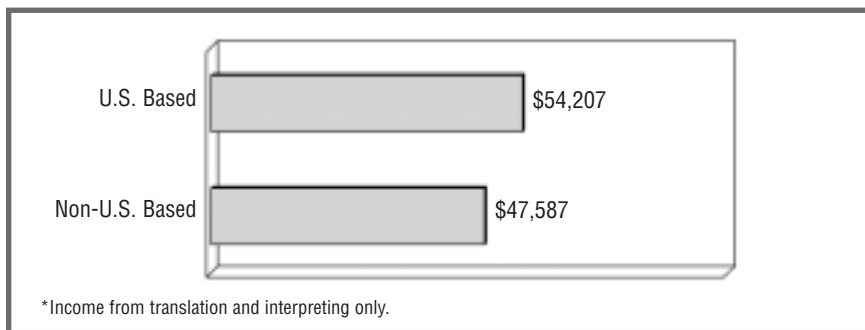
**ATA Certification Counts.** Respondents who were ATA-certified earned a higher gross income in 2004 than those who were not ATA-certified. Using the Full-Time Independent Contractor as an example, Figure 4 shows the impact ATA certification had on gross income. Those with ATA certification earned 12% more than their non-certified counterparts (\$56,294 vs. \$50,211).

**Rates Per Word and Hourly Rates.** At an average of \$0.18 per word, the language combinations commanding the highest rate per word were English-to-Arabic, Danish-to-English, and Finnish-to-English. At an average of \$0.11 per word, the language

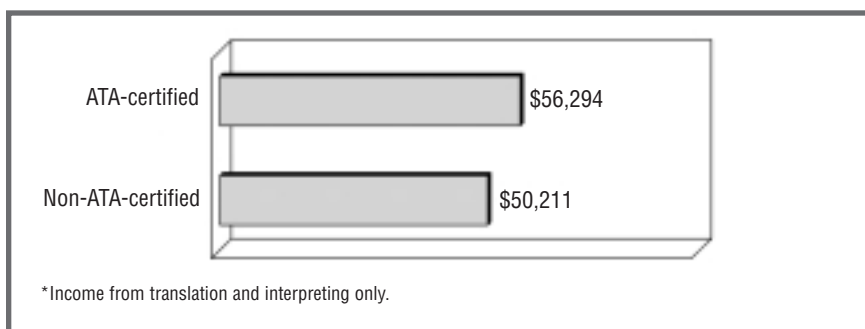
**Figure 2: 2004 Average Gross Income\* By Employment Classification (U.S. Based Respondents)**



**Figure 3: Full-Time Independent Contractor Average Gross Income\* By U.S. versus Non-U.S. Based Respondents (U.S. Dollars)**



**Figure 4: Full-Time Independent Contractor 2004 Average Gross Income\* By Certification Status (U.S. Based Respondents)**



combination commanding the lowest rate was English-to-Italian.

The highest average hourly rates by language combination were Japanese-to-English (\$67.09), and English-to-Japanese (\$62.27).

**Trends.** More than half of the respondents reported that their 2004 gross income from translation and interpreting increased compared to 2003. One-quarter reported no change in income, while 18% reported a decline.

**Education and Experience.** Three out of four respondents had achieved either a master's degree (42%) or a bachelor's degree (32%). Nearly one-fifth reported having a degree in translation, while nearly 11% reported having a degree in interpreting. One-third reported having a non-degree certification in translation, while 26% reported having a non-degree certification in interpreting. Other credentials reported include court certification (5%), passing the State Department exam (8%), and passing the UN exam (1%).

**Areas of Specialization.** The most common areas of specialization reported were Law (50%), Business/Finance (49%), Medicine (47%), and Industry and Technology (36%). Non-common areas of specialization included Pure Sciences (9%), Natural Sciences (14%), and Entertainment (17%).

**Translation Speed.** The average respondent reported a translation speed of 506 target words per hour. Average translation speeds ranged from 443 to 569, depending on the employment classification.

**Technology Tools Used.** The most common technology tools used were word processing applications (90%), translation memory tools (36%), desktop publishing software (29%), and terminology management software (26%).

**Ordering Information.** ATA's 48-page *Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey* presents the survey results in much greater detail than is possible in this summary article. The complete report includes charts

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friends, and family—or students in your classes—a video representation of what freelance translator life entails, now is your chance! I hope that many ATA members will be pleased with this product and will value the opportunity to help spread the word about our little-understood but essential career. We all have a role to play in helping to develop a society in which not only German, but every language in use today is honored and valued.

*ata*

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## How to Order

Go to [www.speakyourlanguages.com](http://www.speakyourlanguages.com) and use discount code 4CFJG2Y6 to obtain the Freelance Translator video for \$20, nearly 60% off the regular price. This is a special discount for ATA members only. Proceeds from video sales are used to fund programs for the benefit of bilingual students.

- The website includes streaming video to give an excerpt on each of the seven topics:
- Court interpreter (Spanish)
- Freelance translator (Hebrew)
- In-house translator for game-card company Wizards of the Coast (Japanese & German)
- International baseball scout (Japanese)
- Nonprofit promoter of international trade (Russian)
- Counselor aiding refugees and immigrants (Tagalog and Khmer)
- Police officer who became city mayor (Chinese)

Members of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) may obtain the **court interpreter video** for a similar discount using a different code available from NAJIT, which sponsored that video.

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and tables that provide a detailed profile of each of the seven employment classifications mentioned in this article.

The full report is available to ATA members for \$45 and non-members for \$60. Please call or write ATA to order your copy: ATA, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314; (703) 683-6100; fax (703) 683-6122, e-mail: [ata@atanet.org](mailto:ata@atanet.org).

*Note: This information does not constitute legal advice or opinion. ATA encourages all translators to make*

*their own independent business decisions and avoid all activities that might be considered anticompetitive or in violation of the antitrust laws, such as agreements on prices or fees or agreements to refuse to do business with any company. The compilation and reporting of survey data by ATA was conducted in compliance with all applicable laws, including antitrust laws.*

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## Attention Korean Language Translators and Interpreters!

A special interest group has been formed to explore the possibility of establishing a **Korean Language Division** within the American Translators Association. If you are interested, please subscribe to the discussion list-serv by sending an e-mail to [ata-korean-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:ata-korean-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

*Note: You must be an ATA member to belong to any of its divisions.*