

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

By Shawn Six

The recently released fourth edition of ATA's *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 study is designed to allow an individual or company to compare easily their compensation levels to their peers'. In addition, the study serves as a practical tool for a broader audience. Companies involved in translation and interpreting will commonly refer to this report when evaluating independent contractors or in-house staff, and determining their competitiveness with respect to compensation. It is also a useful tool for companies that are looking to establish compensation or hourly rate ranges. Students who are considering

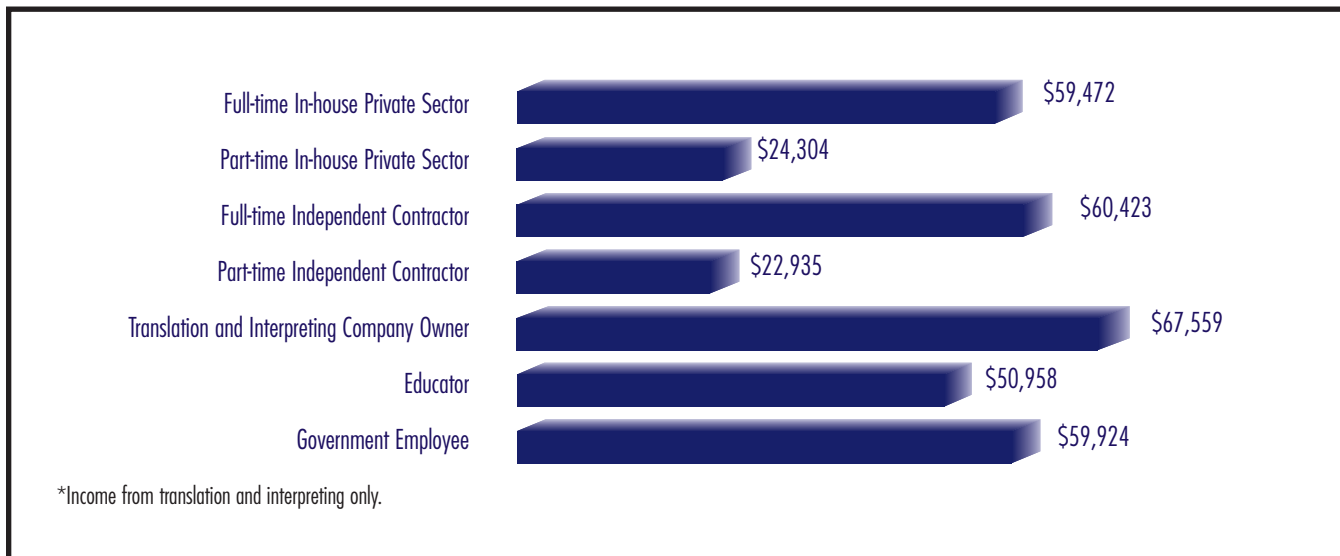
careers in the translation and interpreting profession can use this tool to steer their specific career decisions and to gain insight about the potential compensation they may earn.

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

**Figure 1: Respondent Demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Born in U.S.</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	31.4%	Yes	38.8%
Female	68.6%	No	61.2%
<b>Education Level</b>		<b>Years of Employment in Translation and Interpreting</b>	
High School	2.5%	0-5 years	15.4%
Associate Degree	4.6%	6-10 years	22.5%
Bachelor's Degree	32.9%	11-15 years	19.8%
Master's Degree	43.8%	16-20 years	13.8%
Doctorate	10.8%	21+ years	28.5%
Professional	5.4%		

**Figure 2: 2006 Average Gross Income\* by Employment Classification (U.S.-Based Respondents)**



**Figure 3: Full-time Independent Contractor 2006 Average Gross Income\* by U.S.- versus Non-U.S.-Based Respondents (U.S. Dollars)**



membership organizations, and professional trade 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 8,700 ATA members and nonmembers in August 2007 containing a link to an online questionnaire. In total, 979 completed and useable survey forms were submitted directly to Industry Insights,

Inc. This represents a response rate of 11%. 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 2007.

The seven employment classifica-

tions 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 government 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. This comprehensive data allows users to compare their own income, hourly

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

rates, and rates per word to individuals in similar situations. Some of the key findings of the report follow.

**Respondent Demographics:** Survey respondents had varying backgrounds and experience. As shown in Figure 1 on page 12, more than two-thirds were female, more than half were born outside the U.S., 77% had a bachelor's or master's degree, and nearly two-thirds had 11 years or more of employment in translation and interpreting.

**Income Varied by Employment Classification:** As shown in Figure 2 on page 13, translation and interpreting company owners reported the highest gross income at \$67,559, slightly ahead of full-time independent contractors (\$60,423), government employees (\$59,924), and the full-time in-house private sector (\$59,472). The lowest income was reported by part-time independent contractors, at \$22,935.

**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 2006 income from translation and interpreting of \$60,423, compared to only \$56,672 for those outside the U.S. (see Figure 3, page 13).

**ATA Certification Matters:** Respondents who were ATA-certified earned a higher gross income in 2006 than those who were not ATA-certified. Using the full-time in-house private sector as an example, Figure 4 shows the impact ATA certification had on gross income. Those with ATA certification earned 35% more than their noncertified counterparts (\$72,261 versus \$53,632).

**Rates Per Word and Hourly Rates:** At an average of \$0.19 per word, the language combinations commanding the highest rate per word were English into Arabic and English into Danish. At an average of \$0.12 per word, the language combinations commanding

the lowest rate were English into Italian and English into Portuguese.

The highest average hourly rates by language combination were English into Chinese (\$74.92) and Chinese into English (\$65.79).

**Trends:** More than half of the respondents reported that their 2006 gross income from translation and interpreting increased compared to 2005. One-quarter reported no change in income, while 17% reported a decline.

**Education and Experience:** Three out of four respondents had achieved either a master's degree (44%) or a bachelor's degree (32%). One-fifth reported having a degree in translation, while 12% reported having a degree in interpreting. One-third reported having a non-degree certificate in translation, while 27% reported having a non-degree certificate in interpreting. Other credentials reported include court certification (5%), passing the State Department exam (9%), and passing the UN exam (1%).

**Figure 4: Full-time In-house Private Sector 2006 Average Gross Income\* by Certification Status (U.S.-Based Respondents)**



**Areas of Specialization:** The most common areas of specialization reported were business/finance (57%), law (55%), medicine (47%), and industry and technology (38%). Uncommon areas of specialization included entertainment (18%), natural sciences (16%), and pure sciences (8%).

**Translation Speed:** The average respondent reported a translation speed in target words per hour at 540. Average translation speeds ranged from 324 to 660 depending on the employment classification.

**Technology Tools Used:** The most common technology tools used were word processing applications (98%), translation memory tools (47%), terminology management software (27%), and desktop publishing software (25%).

### Ordering Information

ATA's 48-page *Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey* presents the survey results in much greater detail than possible in this summary article. The complete report includes charts and tables that provide a detailed profile of each of the seven employment classifications men-

tioned in this article. It is important to remember that the statistics published by ATA should be regarded as guidelines rather than absolute standards. ATA intends the survey to reveal general tendencies in the industry, not exact amounts.

The full report is available to ATA members (\$45) and nonmembers (\$65). Order your copy today at [www.atanet.org/publications/form\\_publication\\_ataware.pdf](http://www.atanet.org/publications/form_publication_ataware.pdf).

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## Call for Papers

### American Translators Association 49th Annual Conference

Orlando, Florida • November 5-8, 2008

Hilton in the Walt Disney World Resort

Proposals are invited on topics in all areas of translation and interpreting, including the following: Financial Translation and Interpreting; Independent Contractors; Interpreting; Language Services Providers; Language-Specific Sessions; Language Technology; Legal Translation and Interpreting; Literary; Media; Medical Translation and Interpreting; Science and Technology; Terminology; and Training and Pedagogy. Suggestions for additional topics are welcome.

Proposals for sessions must be submitted on the Conference Presentation Proposal Form to: Conference Organizer, ATA Headquarters, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314 USA; Fax: +1-703-683-6122. All proposals for sessions must be in English.

### Submission deadline: March 14, 2008

There's no time like the present! Download a Conference Presentation Proposal Form at [www.atanet.org/conferencesandseminars/proposal.php](http://www.atanet.org/conferencesandseminars/proposal.php).