The ATA Board of Directors recently approved the establishment of English-to-Swedish certification testing. Exams and practice tests are now available for this language combination (see www.atanet.org/certification/aboutpractice_test.php). Here’s a look at how ATA volunteers made this happen.

A Volunteer Effort

The process for adding a new language combination to ATA’s Certification Program normally takes four years. Evidence must be presented to the Board and the Certification Committee to demonstrate that offering certification in a new language combination will attract a sufficient and sustained flow of candidates and an adequate pool of graders.

Much time and effort is required to establish a new language combination. The majority of this work is done by a group of volunteers who desire testing in a particular language combination. The workgroup must include at least four members, and each member must be an individual member of ATA and be approved by the Certification Committee.

Once the Certification Committee has approved the application for starting a new language certification, a language chair is appointed for the workgroup. Grader training, passage selection, and preparation of grading guidelines can then begin. Progress through the various steps required to establish testing must be made each year; otherwise, the workgroup may be placed on probation. The four members of the workgroup must also commit to a minimum of two years as graders to ensure that other candidates pass the exam and can become graders.

The process of establishing English-to-Swedish certification began in mid-2007, when Thor Truelsson started collecting evidence of interest for testing in the language pair to present to the Certification Committee. When asked if I would be interested in joining this effort toward the end of 2007, I gladly accepted the challenge.

The first step was to find three other people to form a workgroup. This took an entire year. It was not until the next Annual Conference in Orlando that I finally found three qualified and committed translators with whom to work.

For our workgroup, the second year was the most challenging. We needed to learn all the grading rules, tools, and procedures involved in the testing process, including how to select passages for exams and create grading guidelines. This is a challenging but invaluable learning process for graders to go through. It took a year for us to find the first set of three passages and to create passage-specific and language-specific guidelines for grading them.

The certification exam is divided into three passages of about 225-275 words each. Two of these passages must be translated. Passage A (a general text) must be translated, and then the candidate must choose either Passage B (a technical, scientific, or medical text) or Passage C (a financial or legal text). Each type of passage is chosen in part based on its lack of highly specialized terminology. Every term appearing in a passage should be found in a general dictionary or a general specialty dictionary. Each passage should also have translation instructions specifying the context within which the translation should be performed (purpose, audience, and medium) and provide specific instructions so that the translation reflects a real client’s expectations.

Once the first set of passages and guidelines we worked on had been approved, each member of our workgroup took the practice tests, graded each other’s translations according to the grading guidelines, and discussed our decisions. What a learning process! It was very interesting to see different translation styles and grading decisions, and it was definitely a challenge to arrive at grading decisions upon which we all agreed.

After we had completed the first set of three passages, we needed to find four more sets. This was a daunting task, but we had learned a lot during our work on the first set. Our liaison to the Certification Committee, David Stephenson, was appointed to help us, and his assistance proved invaluable. He was our mentor and “teacher” during the entire process and gave useful advice for all passage suggestions. We completed the four other passage sets, including writing passage-specific guidelines, during the following year and submitted them to the Certification Committee.

Challenges and Learning Experience

I think that all of us in the workgroup had no idea how much work was involved when we agreed to become graders and establish certification for a new language pair. Fortunately, we all saw this as a challenge and a valuable...
professional training exercise. The most difficult part was making time in our busy careers for unpaid work and learning the entire certification process. The Certification Committee eased the workload by providing plenty of valuable training material.

Furthermore, we all agree that the benefits of the experience far outweigh any challenges we may have encountered along the way. We have learned a lot about grading, certification, and most of all, about the Swedish language and translation in general. We all have different translation styles, and we need to find translation rules that can accept and accommodate all of these styles and provide high-quality translations. As an added bonus, I have had the privilege of getting to know three other professional and highly qualified English-to-Swedish translators, and we all want to develop our cooperation further in the future.

There are very few certification programs for translators available in the U.S. on a national level. I am happy to now be a contributing part of being able to offer English-to-Swedish certification to members.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the entire Certification Committee for all their help, materials, and training, and David Stephenson in particular. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the three other members of the language certification workgroup: Lisa Dahlander, Gunilla Medina, and Ingrid Olsson.

References and Further Reading

Introduction to ATA’s Certification Examination, Version 2009
www.atanet.org/certification/aboutexams_overview.php

Procedure for Recruiting New Graders, Version 2010
www.atanet.org/certification/aboutcert_new_language.php


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