



THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

INTERVIEW WITH THE CHAIR OF THE NYCT MENTORING COMMITTEE



Lana Rachkovskaya

The NYCT Mentoring Committee pairs freshly minted linguists with seasoned professionals who are willing to share their experience and give guidance. Lana Rachkovskaya is the mastermind behind the committee's efforts. The Gotham Translator decided to interview her to find out more

about her work and goals for the future.

The Gotham Translator: How did the idea of the Mentoring Committee within our Circle originate and how long has it been around?

Lana Rachkovskaya: I always look for ways to give back to the industry I love so much. Someone gave me a few great suggestions when I was starting out many years ago, and that input was very valuable to me. In fact, it helped me shape my career. I looked at the ATA Mentoring Committee model and thought our local organization could benefit from similar efforts. I proposed that we organize the committee and we did. We started the Mentoring Committee in 2007.

More on the Mentoring Experience
see page 5

The Gotham Translator: Are the mentees mostly students or professionals trying to break into the translation/interpreting business as a new career choice?

LR: Most of our mentees are either students or translators who obtained proper training and are looking for ways to start in the industry. There are also some professionals who worked in other industries and decided to change their career and move to the translations business.

The Gotham Translator: How many mentor/mentee teams per year are usually formed?

LR: Well, the challenge we are having is that it is not easy to find mentors who are willing to dedicate their time. Typically, we form a mentor-mentee relationship per language or area of expertise / interest (for example, marketing/sales, phone interpreting). Usually we get about 4-5 such mentees per year. Some of those people just want an immediate advice (for example, reviewing their resume) and some are looking for more of a long-term relationship. We do what we can to help. I wish we had more mentors in most popular languages, like Spanish.

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The Gotham Translator: Has there been an increase in demand in the past year or has it remained steady?

LR: I think it is pretty steady; however, we experienced a very slight increase last year. I would like to welcome members who could benefit from their resume being reviewed, even seasoned professionals. I always look at a resume as a recruiter, not as a translator, as I know what agencies are looking for.

The Gotham Translator: And what about the mentors? How do you find them and how do you pair them with mentees to ensure that they are a good match?

LR: We try implementing constant initiatives that allow us to reach out to more mentors. Sometimes I send out individual requests and ask if people are willing to participate. Any experienced professional who wants to dedicate the time and efforts with mentees is welcome. The mentor gets a sense of fulfillment by sharing the benefit of his or her experience and the mentee is the recipient of great knowledge and expertise by someone who has a longstanding presence in the translation or interpreting field. We have a list of mentors who specialize in certain languages and/or subjects. Most relationships are mentee-driven. The mentor and mentee negotiate how the relationship will play out, but the mentee sets the goals and the pace. When I pair someone with a mentor, I usually follow-up on the progress and make sure that both parties are ok with how things are going.

The Gotham Translator: Do you know how many hours the mentors are expected to invest in this effort?

LR: In my viewpoint, it is not about the hours but about the quality of advice. It

could be just one conversation, and you literally can change someone’s life or career by steering them in the right direction. Most mentees are looking for short-term solutions.

The Gotham Translator: What are the typical expectations that the mentees may have coming into this experience?

LR: This is a good question. You can certainly expect that we will do our best to address your questions. Provided that we have a mentor in your language pair, we will be happy to pair you with that mentor, and this is where you tell us your exceptions and what you would like to get out of

this experience. Most mentees are very happy with the help we are able to give them, we get a lot of positive feedback.

The Gotham Translator: Does most of the interaction between the mentees and mentors happen in person, on the phone or via email?

LR: Most of the interaction is virtual, that is via phone and/or e-mail. Luckily, we now have Skype available to us, so those mentees who have it installed on their computers can benefit from communicating with me and possibility other mentors through these means as well, free of charge.

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LIKELY BENEFITS OF A MENTORING PROGRAM

According to the ATA, a mentoring program is a “process where an experienced individual provides support, guidance and assistance to a less experienced individual.”

The benefits of participating in a mentoring program can be multiple, both for the mentees and the mentors. Mentoring can:

- help participants grow and develop professionally,
- provide mentees (especially novice and student translators/interpreters) with insight into the working environment and the realities of the job market,
- provide mentees with appropriate social skills and awareness to guide their career and ensure their success in the language industry environment,
- assist mentees in defining and accomplishing performance goals more efficiently,
- help prioritize and balance the demands of a career in the language services industry,
- facilitate the attainment of individual goals and help mentees on a career change path make a transition into the industry,
- increase job satisfaction and contribute to mentee morale and motivation,
- encourage mentees to build on own expectations and creativity,
- provide constructive feedback in order to help mentees understand the impact of their actions,
- provide mentors with the opportunity to “give back to their community”,
- establish a trusting, give-and-take relationship between mentor and mentee,
- create a culture that fosters a sense of community, helping build the profession and bolster the association.

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The Gotham Translator: And what has been the feedback? Do you have any interesting examples from mentees or mentors you can share with us?

LR: Certainly. We have been hearing things from our mentees like "It means a lot to get information one on one," "You've been a wonderful help," Thank you so much for being so kind to me and taking the time to look at my resume and for all the constructive feedback that you gave me," "Words cannot express how much it means to me to have you help me this much!" It is nice to know that you are really helping someone.

The Gotham Translator: What made you decide to take part in this effort and devote your time to it?

LR: You just have to find ways to give back to people. And mentoring is one of the things I am really good at.

The Gotham Translator: Do you have any specific plans for the committee's future? Do you see it evolving?

LR: Yes. My hope is that more potential mentors come forward and we are able to assist our mentees in a bigger way. In 2010 we will continue providing mentoring to translators who require it, and we will try to involve more volunteer mentors, especially for Spanish.

I would also like to thank the following mentors and participants who are involved in the Mentoring Committee: Annette Vasquez (Administration), Sandra Niemann-Bird (Danish, Swedish, Norwegian<>English), Edna H.M. Ditaranto (English>Brazilian Portuguese), Kerri Modla (Sales, Marketing), Ludmila Lantsuta-Davis (English>Ukrainian Translation and Interpreting), Svetlana Ball (English>Ukrainian, English>Russian; Phone Interpreting), Richard Châteauevert (English>French (France) Translation, Legal, Financial), Guylaine Laperrière (English>French (Canada) Translation, Advertising, Marketing)

The Gotham Translator: Thank you Lana for this interview and for all the work you

have done as the Chair of the NYCT Mentoring Committee. ■

ABOUT LANA RACHKOVSKAYA

Ms. Lana Rachkovskaya has over 15 years of experience in the translations industry, providing translation and language services to the largest companies nationwide in the medical, healthcare, legal, marketing and financial sector. She had a successful career both in Russia and in the United States, and actively participates and lectures at translation seminars and workshops in both countries.

Ms. Rachkovskaya's extensive experience in the translations industry includes broad knowledge and expertise in project management and leading translations technologies. Over the years, Ms. Rachkovskaya provided consulting and training on management, analysis and understanding of the translations workflow, as well as on the usage of translation memory tools and glossarization. Ms. Rachkovskaya also designed translations databases for project management, took part in working on compilation and design of computer dictionaries and machine translation tools.

Besides her extensive experience in project management, Ms. Rachkovskaya is a professional translator and interpreter between the Russian and English languages. She currently services her clients in the United States and Europe.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

by Agnes Meilhac



I am very excited about this year's second issue of the Gotham Translator. The online survey on the impact of the recession on our members is the main reason. We had a great response rate and I think you will enjoy reading the report.

In addition, I received a number of spontaneous article submissions and a lot of help from our members! Thank you all for all your hard work!

I would simply like to draw your attention to the existence of a NYCT Group on LinkedIn. Although a big fan of business networking sites, I understand that this may not be everyone's cup of tea. But for those of you, who are part of LinkedIn, please join the NYCT Group! It would give us an opportunity to start discussions and exchange ideas, not only pertaining to the Gotham Translator, but to our Circle community as a whole!

Please do not hesitate to become involved in the Gotham! ■

THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE

What the Mentees Are Saying

And now for the other side of the story: two of the Committee's mentees, Veronica Mehno and Brooke Bates, have graciously accepted to share with the Gotham their end of the experience. Two different backgrounds, language combinations and career paths with one shared sentiment: appreciation!

Brooke is a student of French to English Translation at NYU's School of Continuing Professional Studies. After completing her spring coursework, she will have her certification in hand. In the meantime, she has been volunteering, for the past ten months, as translator and proofreader for the International Alliance for Inhabitants, a global network of associations and social movements working to secure housing rights. Having started out freelance in 2008, Veronica Mehno is both an interpreter and translator, with over 3 years of experience in corporate America as editor and proofreader.

Brooke heard about the mentoring program through a classmate in her French into English translation class at NYU. Veronica found out about it while registering with NYCT. Edna Ditaranto mentioned the program and explained how it could help her get started as a freelancer and provide pointers on making her resume more "marketable" to the freelance community.

Veronica says she knew that her resume needed an "URGENT makeover" so she

wasted no time in contacting the mentoring committee. Brooke also felt that she was in need of guidance that would help her take the next steps to find work. Facing a career change, she too needed assistance with her resume. "I also wanted to talk one on one with someone about where to start. I've read books and talked with friends and professors but thought I'd approach another professional who would have the time and means to mentor me."

Both women contacted the committee's Chair, Lana Rachkovskaya, who responded immediately. In fact, Lana's rapid response made a big impression. Lana asked for their resumes, made suggestions and the necessary changes, and then set up time to discuss them on the phone. She also looked up job opportunities and forwarded them to Brooke and suggested reading material to Veronica.

Veronica, who admitted to having "a lot of questions", touted Lana's patience in answering every single one. "She is so approachable that it is impossible not to count her in your close group of friends right away!" she gushed. Brooke said, "I am still in touch with her and know that I will most definitely have more questions for her on the way!"

So what could have been the biggest benefit to the mentees? Even though they did not share the same language pairs as their mentor, they admitted that Lana, who has 12 years of hands-on experience, was

"absolutely knowledgeable" in everything that concerns the translation process. What they were in fact getting was - in Veronica's words - "inside information". What to do, how to behave or handle yourself in certain situations... Their mentor was able to guide them, because chances were that she had been there before!

It was clear from everything they had to say that Brooke and Veronica were happy to have gone through the mentoring process. If anything, they both said they would like to see it take on greater proportions so that more mentee candidates, like themselves, could be paired up with mentors.

Veronica: "If there is something that I would suggest is maybe doing a little more marketing about the committee. I think that writing a piece like this one is a great idea. I do not think that everybody knows that this resource is available to them 'FREE OF CHARGE' and very few people take advantage of this wonderful opportunity."

Brooke: "I also think that having a workshop would be a great educational and networking event focusing on the needs of new translators/interpreters. Fortunately, the recent newsletter has announced that there are plans for such events." ■

Google Translate in the News

review by **Gigi Branch-Shaw**

Last month, Google Translate, Google's MT tool, made the news in the technology sections in the New York Times and LA Times. Both articles highlight the search engine's progress with its free translation application, which currently handles 52 languages and outperforms all similar existing systems, reaching millions of Web users weekly. Meanwhile, Google's MT team is adding languages regularly, with Haitian Creole being the newest addition, while improving upon the quality of the existing languages in its databases.

The topic of machine translation is obviously a sensitive one for those of us in the translation industry. It threatens our livelihood and the professional skills we have spent so much time developing and polishing. That said, I think it is safe to say that, even if only on occasion, most of us use it.

So, why is Google Translate in the news? The New York Times article "Google's Computing Power Refines Translation Tool," published on March 11th, draws attention to Google's development progress with the tool rather than the specifics of the application itself. It includes a brief history on the advancements made in machine translation technology as well as an explanation of why this MT project is so well aligned with Google's strategic global vision, despite the fact that the company's substantial investment of time, money and energy to develop the application will most likely not turn profit directly.

In the New York Times, there is an underlining focus on Google's business plan

article, which recognizes that Google Translate is one of those ambitious and daunting projects, the kind that Google seems to take on and somehow manages to tackle.

In my opinion, the most relevant material for a translator in this article is a link to an earlier article "Putting Google to the Test in Translation." Here five different texts in five different source languages (French, Spanish, Russian, German, and Arabic) have been translated into English, giving the reader a quick comparison of human translations versus computerized translations from Google Translate and two of its competitors, Yahoo Babel Fish and Microsoft Bing Translator.

The LA Times article "Franz Josef Och, Google's translation uber-scientist, talks about Google Translate," also published on March 11th, is actually an edited transcript of an interview with the head of Google's MT team. I found it to be extremely informative on the specifics of the application and certainly the more interesting and useful of the two articles from a translator's perspective in terms of addressing the application itself and the future of machine translation on the Web.

Och discusses the progress that has been made in recent years in machine translation, mostly due to the shift to statistical machine translation (SMT), which relies on a large amount of data to help train the computer to make more accurate translation choices, and the improvement in the algorithms. I found Och's brief description of STM clear and easy to understand.

The Google MT team has been adding new languages to the application since

2007, and within that time period has improved both the quality and scope of the MT languages as well as the translation technology itself.

As a language professional, it was reassuring to know that the data for Google Translate comes from credible sources such as the Linguistic Data Consortium, UN translations of its six official languages and EU translations of 23 languages. However, the application also has access to all data on the Web, and the MT team's challenge is to teach the (*machine*) translator to distinguish between the texts of higher and lesser quality.

The article ends with Och speaking about the very near future of MT on the Web. His team is working on the ability to carry out a global search whereby if you post a query in your browser and the answer appears in a Webpage that happens to be in a foreign language, you then turn to Google Translate to decipher your answer. The company is also perfecting a speech recognition program, which also works in unison with Google Translate. With this program, you simply speak a foreign language into your phone and your answer is translated for you and transcribed onto your screen.

I highly recommend Och's interview in the LA Times. It provides a good overview of the current machine translation technology for translators and Web users alike. ■

ABOUT GIGI BRANCH-SHAW

Gigi Branch-Shaw is a freelance Fr>En translator, who also manages Web and email-related projects. She lives in New York City.

History as Source of Professional Identity

by Mario Chávez

Fellow translator: Who is your hero? Martin Luther, Hunayn ibn Ishaq, St. Jerome, Yan Fu, Jacques Amyot, Gregory Rabassa? Having recently finished reading *Translators Through History*, by J. Delisle and J. Woodsworth, a sobering fascination with translators past began to grow in me. In a day where translators, freelance and in house alike, are beset by the downside of globalization, they need a strong sense of professional identity more than ever.

But, what do I mean by the *downside* or the *negative effects* of globalization? What is there to complain about? After all, translators can now reliably depend on the Web and the Internet for instant communications with customers and colleagues. The Internet Village has become our marketplace and we can compete with other translators and translation bureaus for the same customers. The benefits of the advance of software tools to help us be more productive and secure complex projects that were otherwise unattainable to us is undeniable. Then, what are the negative effects?

First of all, translation (output) is increasingly seen as a product, a commodity, and priced accordingly. Lawrence Venuti's lament about the translator's invisibility has become a stark reality, regardless of our years of experience and networking efforts. The downward pressure on service rates continues with little relief in sight. In the middle of this Great Recession throughout the world, are translators to blame if they resign themselves to their fate as *bilingual knowledge workers* and nothing more, stripped of their creative role and genius by the forces of the global economy?

A sense of identity, professional identity, needs to be reevaluated, reexamined and, in many cases, restored. It is time that we don't just look at St. Jerome for inspiration once a year. Hundreds of enterprising, excellent translators have preceded us throughout the dusty roads of history of cultures and nations. Should we not appeal to them for

courage, insight and stability?

If we look back at how some translators in History faced challenges similar to ours, we can take comfort and gain strength in knowing that translation quality is not a new concept or that the only difference between writers and translators is in name only. We can let our imagination soar when hearing that science is the offspring of translation and use Yan Fu's maxim of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" as the foundation of our personal standard of excellence.

The search for our history hero may begin by asking ourselves the question *Why did I become a translator?* Certainly, many of us arrived in this industry from another profession via a very personal journey. A sizable portion of our numbers comes from translation or language schools all over the world, where we study grammar, language, phonetics, terminology, text analysis and some translation theory. Some schools even include CAT and TEnT tools in their curricula. But where do we learn to be, to become a translator, truly?

To master the craft, the art and science of translation, being competent in languages and tools and cultures is not enough. Belonging to professional associations helps us establish a sense of community. To be part of such a community, we first have to be professionals in our own right, not merely as economic agents of a large market to churn out texts on demand but also view ourselves as creators, authors, terminologists, language shapers and wordsmiths. For that, we are well advised to contemplate the extraordinary achievements executed by our professional forebears.

How well you use Trados or consult a dictionary does not make you an excellent translator. What drives you? Love of languages? Please! Any bilingual worker can say that. What really drives you to straddle two or more cultures? What fuels your desire to find the right word, term, or

expression? What makes you excel in elegance when you write your translations? How do you represent your desire, your passion to translate, to endeavor to make your mark? Why aren't you making history as a translator?

It is true that translation organizations such as ATA and ATA chapters have been bringing translators out of obscurity. But the fact that we realize the importance of a colleague's efforts and contributions mostly through the plaudits in an obituary leaves a taste of sadness, not just due to the human loss but because we arrived too late to that happy conclusion. How we escape anonymity, celebrate achievements from colleagues that are inspiring to us and why, and make our mark in history become a topic of sensible and focused meditation and action.

An elegantly translated text looks to us like a beautiful painting, regardless of the domain or specialization. Comparing translation as art to painting is a powerful analogy to me. It brings color, definition, variety of style, form and character to the otherwise empty and lifeless canvas of our computer monitors. Then our collective history could become a mosaic of fruitful panoramas, ponderings and plausible renderings of language enough to instill a renewed sense of identity, of destiny. ■

ABOUT MARIO E. CHÁVEZ

Mario E. Chávez, a professional Spanish technical translator since 1992, served in several positions in the translation industry as editor, reviewer, proofreader, technical writer, translator, software localizer, project manager and column writer for a Florida weekly. He has given presentations at ATA conferences since 1994, published articles in translation journals and taught translations classes in both classroom and online settings. He recently completed his Master's in Audiovisual Translation at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. He currently holds the position of Spanish Localization Specialist at Hyland Software in Cleveland, Ohio.

NYCT SURVEY REPORT

The Economic Downturn and Its Impact on Member Translators and Interpreters

by Agnes Meilhac

The recession has been in the headlines and on everyone's lips for quite some time now. We have all heard accounts of someone getting laid off, having a hard time finding employment or taking a cut in pay. And most of us language industry professionals have also been affected. But, exactly how? An organization like ours provides a fantastic resource for polling information. The idea of at least attempting to paint a broad picture of what each of us may know or assume individually seemed too tempting to resist. The NYCT therefore set out to ask you, our members, about your experience of the economic doldrums and their impact on your activity. Are we all experiencing "rainy days"? Some of the findings reported below could be of comfort... or come as a total surprise. You be the judges!

Main report: quantitative data

The purpose of this survey was to gather data on the impact of the recession on NYCT members over the course of the past year. The survey was developed as a tool to provide relevant information about Circle members' experience of and feelings about their specific job market (defined below). It was decided to conduct it online as a way of boosting response rate and improving respondent flexibility. After a short period of research on different web-based survey tools, the survey questions were published on surveygizmo.com and a link provided to all members via eblasts. A hardcopy version of the survey was also distributed to the attendees of NYCT's March meeting.

The survey elicited 59 responses online and 9 on hardcopy. The data gathered in writing was entered online in order to

allow surveygizmo to calculate the final results on all survey takers. On the whole, the response rate (68 members out of a total of about 300) was excellent at slightly over 22%.

The questions included in the survey were intentionally worded in view of providing a broad idea of our members' 2009 experience rather than focusing on rates or specific financial data. Requiring no input of identifying personal information, the survey was completely anonymous.

Outline of survey participants

The survey sample consisted of all members willing to participate in this data gathering effort, with no exclusions applied to the sample set (e.g. years of experience, area of specialty). The survey's first question concerned the respondents' line of business, which helped establish that most were translators (36 or 53%). Furthermore, five survey takers (7%) were interpreters and eighteen (26%) reported to be working as both translators and interpreters. The survey participant population also included one of each of the following occupational categories: administrative

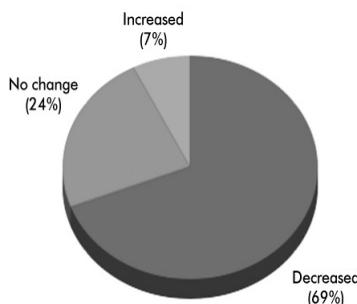
office work, adult education, bilingual customer support, editor, French professor, human resources assistant, project management, language teaching, voiceovers.

A vast majority of participants (56 or 84%) reported to be working freelance as opposed to only 3 working inhouse and 8 holding both freelance and inhouse positions. Thirty one respondents (46%) had 10 to 20 years, twenty-one (31%) 5 to 10 years, eight (12%) 0 to 5 years, and 7 (10%) over 30 years of experience.

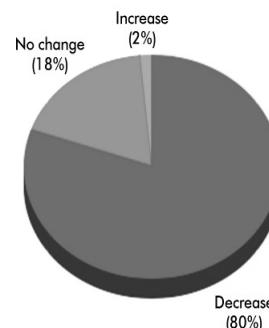
The leading areas of expertise, which were not restricted to one answer, were quoted as:

- Business/Finance/Management (40 respondents representing 60%)
- Law/Tax (29 respondents, 43%)
- Medical/Pharmaceuticals (20 respondents, 30%)
- Marketing/Advertising (16 respondents, 24%)
- Tourism and travel (13 respondents, 19%)

Nine respondents (13%) considered them-



Has the economic downturn caused the number of your customers to change over the past 12 months?



Has the economic downturn caused your income to fluctuate over the past 12 months?

selves experts in the fields of Computers and Insurance respectively. It should be stressed that this was a “Check all that apply” question.

Activity-related findings

Perhaps reflecting the rather bleak findings of the survey, as many as 11 respondents (16%) reported to have lost their jobs or been laid off due to the economic downturn in 2009.

When asked whether the economic downturn caused the number of their customers to change over the past 12 months, a striking 69% of survey takers said that they observed that number to decrease. Sixteen respondents (24%) had noticed no change and five (7%) enjoyed an increase in the number of their customers in 2009.

Similarly, 76% of respondents said that the economic downturn caused them to work less hours in 2009 by comparison to previous years. When asked about whether the recession had caused their income to fluctuate over the past 12 years, 80% reported that it had undergone a decrease, 18% had observed no change and a mere 2% enjoyed an increase in this area.

Regarding adjustments to their per word / hourly rate over the past 12 months, 67% of respondents reported no change, 28% had said to have decreased said rate and a mere 4% were able to increase it.

The next question attempted to probe whether there had been a specific time of

the year in 2009, when demand for language services had begun to change. The findings of the survey showed that the experienced decline in demand for their services was relatively different for most participants (see pie chart below).

To the next question in the survey, 65% admitted to have been compelled to look for new sources of work or prospect for new clients, while 35% did not state that need. A whopping 67% of participants reported that the economic downturn caused them to seek a secondary means of employment not related to translation or interpreting.

A majority (65%) admitted to having cut back on business related expenses because of the economic situation. The following question, which intended to more closely examine the types of business expense cuts, revealed that in 2009 :

- 47% spent less on computer equipment;
- 41% spent less on business travel;
- 38% spent less on conferences and seminars;
- 38% spent less on dictionaries, journals and computer programs;
- 31% spent less on continuing education;
- 20% spent less on professional association memberships; and
- 16% spent less on mobile phone and internet expenses.

Once again, this was a “check all that

apply” question and it should be mentioned that 18 survey takers (30%) checked off “none of the above”.

Client relationships

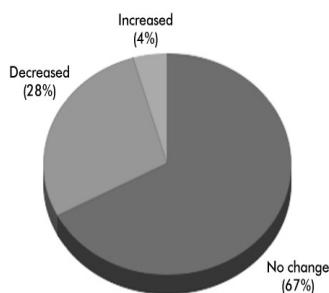
The following four questions of the survey attempted to gain some insight into the respondents’ relationship with their clients and the possible changes in their business interactions, which may have been caused by the recession. The first question in this part of the survey revealed that 58% of respondents work for agencies, 15% for direct clients and 26% for both.

As a broad indication of their state of affairs, 53% of survey takers said that their relationship with their clients had not been impacted by the current economic situation. However, 20% reported that their client relationship was “somewhat strained”, 16% that it had “become a concern” and 11% that it had “caused [them] stress”.

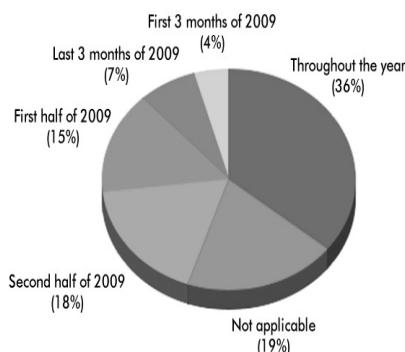
The next two questions in this part of the survey provided more detailed information and were quite indicative of how participants dealt with their evolving client relations.

Because of the economic downturn...

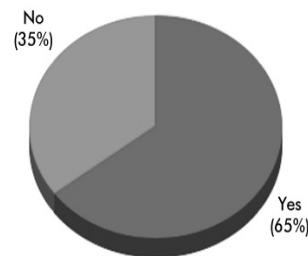
- 60% said the volume of translations they usually received from their clients had decreased;
- 54% said their clients demanded a lower rate;



Have you adjusted your per word or hourly rate over the past 12 months?



At anytime in 2009, have you noticed a decline in the demand for your services?



Have you been compelled to look for new sources of work or prospect for new clients?

- 46% said their clients tried to cut corners by expecting more services for the same price;
- 22% said their clients discontinued their urgency or weekend rates (surcharges);
- 22% said their clients imposed tighter deadlines; and
- 12% said none of the above applied to them.

The recession caused you to be less comfortable with...

- 43% said refusing urgent projects that will require overnight or weekend work;
- 25% said refusing projects in a subject area you are not comfortable with;
- 23% said refusing projects from clients who are not reliable payers;
- 40% said taking a vacation;
- 26% said none of the above applied to them.

Open-ended questions

The first in a series of three optional open-ended questions failed to yield any significant results: "Since the beginning of 2009, in which areas of translation has the recession most affected your business?" The goal of the question was to ascertain whether any given areas of specialty, such as perhaps marketing/advertising or literary translation, had been more impacted by the slowdown in economic activity than others. Since the question was optional, only 17 participants chose to respond to it and their responses did not reveal any significant trend.

However, the remaining two open-ended survey questions yielded some very interesting comments that merit to be reported on separately. Since this was an anonymous survey, the following Comments Report consists of partial and complete verbatim transcriptions of survey takers'

responses, further reviewed to ensure that they would in no way reveal their identity.

Survey Comment Report

This part of the survey report most likely reflects one of the most interesting aspects of the survey findings. It concerns two open-ended questions (or essay questions): "What is your outlook for the future? How do you feel about the next 6 months" and "Would you like to leave any comments".

As it turned out, the survey takers were very forthcoming with information gleaned from their experience. Thirty four out of a total of 65 respondents (52%) took the time to write about their outlook and fifteen (23%) left general comments.

Unfortunately, the responses could not be sorted by any given demographic. The free version of the chosen online survey tool does not provide the functionality of analyzing the results of 'essay questions'. We therefore have no demographic information regarding the respondents who chose to answer the optional questions.

We do, however, have an impressive display of personal wisdom that our survey participants were kind enough to share within the framework of this survey.

Looking to the future

Feelings about the future seemed to run the entire gamut from grim and gloomy to optimistic. Interestingly enough, opinions were nearly evenly split between negative and positive.

Among the hopeful statements, one respondent said: "I still feel a little uneasy as jobs are harder to get, but I feel like I have survived a rough area and feel more confident about my job skills and work experience."

Other examples included:

"I feel optimistic and hopeful about the translation industry. Some economic areas are already showing positive signs of recovery and this will hopefully open up opportunities for

translation related jobs."

"There has been a huge increase in business for me since the beginning of 2010 so I am optimistic that a recovery is underway."

"I am expecting to have the same volume of work because courts and hospitals continue their business regardless of the recession"

However, there were also quite a few less optimistic, albeit equally quite interesting comments, which seemed to address viable issues concerning the future of our profession:

"Since most professionals in Germany have learned English for 8-10 years in school, end clients can use staff, rather than professional translators, for the English version of their texts. This trend is likely to increase, as is the trend towards outsourcing work to low-cost countries, such as India, China and Russia, for all language combinations (not just those involving Hindi, Chinese or Russian). How do we stem the tide towards low-quality, but cheap, translations? And how do we form alliances across the globe for minimum standards to stop this movement towards ever lower prices?"

"Not very optimistic. Translation as a writing profession may be replaced by CAT workers and language engineers."

"Gloomy. Unless the government AND translator's associations do something about outsourcing and pricing, our business has a dire future."

"My outlook is that the future is bleak for both the next 6 months and after. I am of the opinion that the computers and their fancy software are doing and will do to translators what they did to typists, draftsmen and, although to a lesser extent, to engineers."

"Next six months look questionable. I am not certain cloudsourcing and other dubious methods of translation will not impact our livelihoods very strongly, with "reputable" major organizations using them."

General comments

It was uplifting to see that many survey participants had truly opened up and made an effort to share their experience and knowledge in the general comments section. Some of the input was very specific, clearly showing an intention to provide an accurate reflection of the respondent's situation.

"Last year I cut back on advertising because it was too expensive. My income for 2009 was one third lower than it was in 2008"

"Since October 2009, I have done approximately 80% less work than usually. Some potential customers ask for estimates from several translators and choose the one with the lowest cost. Others ask several translators if they are interested in doing a particular (usually small) job and give the job to the first responder. Many require that the translation be proof-read by a third party free of charge to them. Many specify the use of a particular set of translation memory software. At least one agency has contacted me offering their help with any translation that I am doing."

"I have one client who a) is deferring payment on outstanding invoices for 8 months and b) demands lower rates for future projects. Another client who used to provide 10+ projects a month now offers 2-3."

"Our field has become increasingly difficult to sustain full time independent/freelance T or Interpreters in 'common' languages such as Spanish. Alternate full time sources of income are necessary to secure 'basics' such as insurance and retirement benefits."

Other comments reflected – as was also the case in some responses to the question on future prospects (above) – on the impact that advances in CAT and TM technology have had on our profession and the resulting changes.

"In order to get a truer and more realistic picture of the effects of the recession (which technically began in September 2008), the factors of globalization and CAT and MT would have to be taken into very careful consideration"

"The ever-increasing pressure to use TM and MT tools and demand for "consistency" where it may not even be appropriate is leading the commoditization of translation. Instead of setting their own rates, more and more translators are accepting whatever anyone wants to pay them."

There were also a few references to the respondents' feelings about the role of translation associations and the need for establishing rate guidelines as a way to prevent exploitation.

"The recession (and the Internet and the global economy) have affected our source of work, and translation associations in the US are not doing anything about it, quite the contrary, they side with translation agencies and translators who live abroad by encouraging outsourcing."

"I am very thankful that freelance translation is not my only source of revenue. I would like to see NYCT become more of an agent in the establishment of solid rate guidelines, for example, and find ways to protect linguists from unfair labor practices. For me, it is not even clear what achieving "competitive rates" would even entail. There is a lot of room for substandard pay and practices in the field."

One survey taker said that he/she would welcome a similar survey targeting agencies, which would provide another perspective on the questions raised: "It would be nice to hear from the Clients/Agencies their side of stories on the impact of the recession, in order for the translators to learn of the possible shifting or be more creative."

Based on the response rate to the current survey, which has actually proved quite high, the NYCT may in fact consider conducting an adapted version of the survey addressing the agencies. Since the feasibility of such a project requires further study, more details will follow.

Conclusion

On the whole, the survey has shown a predominant downward trend in activity,

which is consistent with the current economic climate. A majority of the sample group having completed the survey pointed to a decline in the number of their customers and a decrease in their income, which had logically lead to a peaked interest in finding new sources of work and new clients. However, a large percentage of respondents also reported to have resisted slashing their rates.

The survey was not able to pinpoint a specific period over the course of 2009, which would have been more likely to bring on a decline in activity for the survey takers. However, it did show that many respondents felt under pressure to accept projects they may not have been inclined to accept in the past and obliged to cut back on their expenses, experiencing a certain measure of strain in satisfying the economically motivated changes in the demands of their clients (both direct and indirect).

These conclusions may be reassuring to some of us – either because they allow to draw parallels with our own experience or because they make us secure in our ability to have so far avoided the unpleasant repercussions of economic strife.

Yet, all clouds have a silver lining, as they say. Perhaps the words of encouragement that seem appropriate at this point would be best expressed by the following quote from one of our survey takers who summed up the recession as follows:

"It has caused me to be more assertive in approaching clients, more creative in trying to get clients and thinking of other ways I could use my skills."

Many thanks to all our participants and heartfelt wishes of many prosperous years to come. ■

TRANSLATION TO THE RESCUE

Eriksen Translations and the Haitian Relief Effort

by Alexandra Farkas, Director of Communications, Eriksen Translations Inc.

When the news of the earthquake in Haiti first broke on January 12, there was a lot of understandable confusion. How bad was it really? How reliable were the numbers of casualties being reported? At Eriksen Translations we tried to understand what was happening just like everyone else, but our first thoughts were of the family of one of our staff members and the families of our Haitian-Creole linguists.

As information came out, we did the same thing that lots of people did: we talked, we collected supplies, we donated money, and we wondered how else we could help. But within a week, our president and CEO Vigdis Eriksen was contacted by Jeff Allen at SAP about an opportunity for us to use our profession to save lives. She didn't think twice – this was an opportunity we couldn't refuse.

Over a decade ago, Jeff led a team at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) that created the only fully functional speech-to-speech Haitian-Creole system in existence. The proj-

ect was a part of the NESPOLE! translation project, which was jointly funded by the US National Science Foundation and the European Commission fifth research framework. In the days following the earthquake, Jeff got in touch with the researchers at CMU and suggested they go back to his work and see if it couldn't be used with the current technologies being developed.

CMU's Language Technologies Institute (LTI) of the School of Computer Science (CMU SCS) asked Eriksen to augment the previously documented material and provide the translation of 1,600 medical treatment and triage phrases. We immediately contacted our Haitian-Creole linguists who work on the projects we do for healthcare and government organizations here in New York, and several of them were thrilled to be able to help their community in such a meaningful way.

Patrick Paul, Nathalie Coupet, and Martine Dougé worked together with Eriksen's production team to turn around a fully edited list of terms in two days. We donated our time

and resources and our linguists either worked pro bono or at a significant discount. LTI then released the complete set of speech and text data with minimal restrictions in order to allow others to develop language technology for Haiti, in parallel with their own efforts to help with this crisis.

As Vigdis Eriksen said at the time, "It's exciting to be able to use what we do to save lives, while also contributing to a machine translation database that will be utilized for language technology applications that are being developed." Within days of completing the project, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières was using the terms on the ground in Haiti, and Microsoft and Google had incorporated the data into their publicly available machine translation engines.

In the face of such incredible tragedy, it always feels like there is more to be done. But for us and our translators, being able to use our profession to make a difference was a big step. ■

VIRTUAL POSTCARDS WANTED!

While we are nearing the summer months, are YOU gearing up for a vacation?

Whether planning on going to an exotic location or simply another state, send us a "virtual postcard"! We will publish your picture and location in the summer issues of the Gotham! One condition please: you need to be in the picture and smiling! Optional: wear a NYCT T-shirt if you have one!

Send all content to: agnes@beautyterm.com

OBITUARY

VAN HAAGEN – Ernst, March 20, 2010. We mourn the loss of our friend, mentor, colleague, a giant in the translation field, president of Bertrand Languages. Not only a multi-linguist, Ernst was also a mathematician, inventor, professor, translator of art books, poet and humanist. Condolences to his family. We all miss him.

Karyn Tasens and Staff, Translation Aces, Inc.
Helen Hasselriis, Maurice Robine,
Bertrand Languages, Inc.

NYCT MARCH MEETING

Working for the State Department

Review by **Gigi Branch-Shaw**

At the March meeting, Gabrielle Garcia, a FR>EN and SP>EN translator for the US Department of State Office of Language Services, gave a lively and informative presentation about translating and interpreting for this U.S. institution.

She began her talk with a brief history of the Office of Language Services, which actually dates back before the Revolutionary War. The Department of Foreign Affairs authorized the first hiring of a translator in 1781, and a formal Office of Translator was established in 1867 and expanded to a Bureau of Translation services in 1928. As result of the United States' growing global presence and responsibilities in the mid-1940s including the need for simultaneous interpreting the Bureau's staff doubled in size and eventually became the Office of Language Services (LS) in 1985.

Ms. Garcia has been a full-time LS employee for just over a year and served as a private contractor for five years prior to that period. She provided an informative overview for the Circle's translators and interpreters on LS contract and full-time positions, outlining language duties, professional requirements, testing stipulations, and various employment options for each profession, as well a brief explanation of the security check carried out for all employees.

The Translating Division

In its Translation Division, the LS employs 18 full-time translators, covering Spanish,

French, Portuguese to English, German, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Ukrainian and Polish, along with some 400 private contractors, including temporary in-house contractors, in every language used in international diplomacy. This Division services the Department of State, the White House, and other U.S. Government agencies.

In-house translators deal with laws and legal documents (i.e. U.S. Trade relations, foreign laws, and fisheries), treaty comparisons, translation reviews, high level speeches, as well as other confidential and politically sensitive documents.

Typical translation work for contractors includes laws; treaties and international agreements on technical, scientific, military, economic, cultural and humanitarian subjects; training manuals; court documents; political speeches and position papers; embassy websites; and official correspondence between government leaders.

Ms. Garcia addressed the requirements for the translation positions. A full-time translator must be a U.S. citizen with five years of professional experience and preferably have a native fluency in the working language. Contract translators are only required to hold permanent residency and must pass the LS translation test in their language combination(s) after their professional dossier has been approved.

The Interpreting Division

In addition to her translation contract work,

Ms. Garcia also spoke of her work as an escort and seminar interpreter for LS. These are two areas in the Interpreting Division's 3-tier structure of interpreting positions: liaison (or escort) interpreters, seminar, and conference interpreters. Staff interpreters accompany high-level U.S. officials overseas on diplomatic events.

Liaison or escort interpreters travel with foreign individuals and delegations around the country for short-term assignments (approximately 2-25 days) interpreting professional exchanges through consecutive interpretation on variety of subjects as well as in less formal situations. Seminar interpreters can accompany these same individuals or delegations on the trips, but provide simultaneous interpretation in a needed professional field or specialty. Conference interpreters are a third tier, and they do not tend to travel as often or have assignments that are as long. Conferences are often held in Washington, D.C. Finally, LS maintains a fulltime staff of approximately 15 professionals who interpret regularly for the President, Vice-President, Secretary of State, Cabinet Members and other senior officials and delegations on their trips abroad.

Submitting An Application

Ms. Garcia outlined the protocol for translators and interpreters who are interested in applying to the LS for contract positions. Information is available on the LS website

continued on next page

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<http://languageservices.state.gov> under the Employment Opportunities link, which includes comprehensive questions and answers for applicants, along with links to download application forms and instructions for both professions. She also provided an information sheet about choosing the best time to take the LS translation test.

Behind the Scenes

Throughout her presentation, Ms. Garcia shared thoughts and stories about working at the LS. She spoke of her enjoyment of feeling like a cultural attaché for the U.S. while serving as a escort and seminar interpreter, accompanying foreigners on trips across the country as well as the awkwardness of addressing personal questions during her security check.

She spoke highly of the professional atmosphere in her office and of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's reputation of being warm and personable with the staff. She recounted last year's translation blooper that occurred when Hillary Clinton presented the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov with a supposed "reset" button that had been mistranslated as "overload." Garcia clarified that the LS was not responsible IN ANY WAY for this mistranslation and that the mishap highlighted the importance of the professional services the LS provides. She also brought to light our current White House' push to disseminate translations of President Obama's speeches to the public. All in all, it was an informative and entertaining meeting for translators and interpreters with the language professions presented in all their glory. ■

Call For Contributions!

Special Commemorative 30th Anniversary Issue of the Gotham Translator

Year 2010 is set to be an important year for the Gotham Translator and the NYCT. It is, of course, our 30th anniversary – cause enough for celebration. We want to mark this milestone in a symbolic way: looking back at our past to rejoice in the future.

As part of the celebration, the Circle is planning a special issue of the Gotham Translator. We invite you to be a part of this commemorative issue by sending us memories of your experience.

We want to hear about the people, times, and events that made a real impression on you.

Please email agnes@beautyterm.com with your favorite memories and recollections, highlights of special events, clippings, funny stories and photos of the past 30 years!

Be a part of our history — be a part of the celebration!

CIRCLE NEWS

NYC MEETINGS

All meetings start at 6 :30 PM and end at 8:00 PM with dinner at a nearby restaurant. Check website for details. Please e-mail the Program Director at NYCTProgramDirector@gmail.com if you plan to attend a meeting.

Future meetings:

March 9th, 2010 - Expected speaker from the CIA.

More information on summer events to be posted on the website.

ATA CERTIFICATION

The New York Circle of Translators will be holding its Annual ATA Certification Exam as follows:

When: May 8, 2010 - 10:00AM - 1:00AM

Where: New York University
Woolworth Building
Room 230
15 Barclay Street
New York, NY

The room is being provided by New York University, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Dr. Milena Savova.

Candidates must contact the ATA directly to register.

Please arrive at least 1/2 hour before beginning of exam.

2010 ANNUAL NETA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION! SATURDAY, MAY 22, ALL DAY - BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S GEORGE SHERMAN UNION

Thanks to Hanne Rask Sonderborg from NETA, we were able to obtain more detailed information on the 2010 Annual NETA Conference, which will take place on May 22nd in Boston. There is still plenty of time for our members to jump on the proverbial bandwagon!

The 14th annual edition of the NETA conference will feature:

- The return of the immensely popular "Getting started as a translator" panel. Experienced professionals will be revealing secrets of their success, providing attendees with a chance to ask questions.
- Warren Smith will talk about how to increase your annual output to a 7-figure amount (that's words, not dollars!): by maximizing your throughput
- Doris Sommer on the role of bilinguals in a democratic society
- Haidar M. Al-Sara on interpreting in Iraq
- Update on certification for medical interpreters
- A financial translation panel: get to the bottom line of this highly specialized field
- Industry trends, translation tools, terminology management, and much more.

Last but not least, the conference will host exhibitors including Freek Lankhof's IntransBooks, one of the prime sources of specialized language dictionaries, reference manuals and study books for professional interpreters and translators. For more information on Intrans Book Service please go to: [HYPERLINK "http://intransbooks.com/"http://intransbooks.com/](http://intransbooks.com/)

For more information on registering for the NETA conference and the final schedule, please visit: www.netaweb.org.

APRIL MIXER at ANDREA'S

Brooke Bates (French into English)

As a new member, the mixer is a great opportunity for me to meet other members and to find out more about the organization and the programs offered. I look forward to take full advantage of NYCT's benefits and to attend more events as I enter the field.

Katie Spillane (Chinese into English)

I recently joined the NYCT on the recommendation of a fellow translator. As someone new to the profession, I am eager to meet other New Yorkers working in translation. I have been lucky enough to meet with NYCT translators who have generously given me their time and input, and I am excited to become a member of this community.



Front row, left to right: Katie Spillane; Renée Borio-Román; Edna Ditaranto; Brooke Bates

Back row, left to right: Malgorzata (Gosia) Darwin; Leonard Morin; Margarite Heintz Montez



THE **GOTHAM** **TRANSLATOR**



The New York Circle of Translators (NYCT) is a New York State not-for-profit corporation grouping independent translators and interpreters as well as companies and organizations. It is a chapter of the American Translators Association (ATA) which is, in turn, an affiliate of the International Federation of Translators (FIT).

NYCT members work in a variety of languages and specialties. Our members are committed to the exchange of ideas and mutual support. One of our goals is to educate the general public about the professional nature of interpreting and translating.

NYCT members enjoy the following benefits:

- Free monthly meetings featuring speakers on all aspects of the translation profession
- Networking opportunities at monthly dinners and annual holiday party
- Professional development workshops and seminars
- Subscription to our newsletter, The Gotham Translator
- Listings in the NYCT Online Membership Directory and the annual NYCT printed Membership Directory
- Referrals (if you indicate that you accept them, existing members may direct work requests to you or clients may contact you directly)

Visit us at www.nyctranslators.org and join online!



THE **GOTHAM** **TRANSLATOR**

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