



# THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

## A FEW WORDS ON THE INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

by Agnes Meilhac

There is a lot to be happy about. Recent accounts and research on the state of the language service industry have been quite uplifting.

The US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that employment for interpreters and translators over the 2008-2018 decade is expected to grow by 22%, much faster than the average employment growth for all occupations\*. Demand is projected to remain strong for translators of frequently translated languages (Portuguese, French, Italian, German and Spanish) and those working with Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages and the leading East Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean).

In the meantime, Inc. Magazine named translation and interpreting services as one of the best businesses for 2010, along with environmental consulting, home health care, mobile app design, teas and healthy beverages to quote only a few. According to the article "The Best Industries for Starting a Business Right Now", the translation market grew some 18% in 2009 (by comparison to an average of 22% a year since 2004).

Another news provider, the electronic version of Crain's New York Business, hailed our industry for having successfully weathered the recent financial crisis. The author of the article "Impervious industry: How translation business sailed through recession" gives a very positive view of how language service businesses were able to withstand market pressures from mid-2008 to the end of 2009.

She credits a manufacturing boom in Latin America, the rising number of immigrants in the US and the federal government's increased spending of \$1 billion on language

services last year for the industry's good overall shape. According to one of her four sources, a weaker dollar has also acted as an incentive to many European firms looking for translation and interpreting services in the US.

Even the suffering financial sector is said to have generated more translation work as companies rallied to reassure international clients of their hardiness through newsletters, fact sheets and other well-targeted documents. In the article, global demand for translation services is reported to have grown 15% to 20% since 2006, as estimated by the research firm Common Sense Advisory Inc.

So how does this information fit with the findings of our recent survey? Most of us have experienced a definite slump in earnings. Could it be that businesses were better at fending off the market's underlying forces than individual free-lance translators? What can we do to keep up? How can we protect ourselves and our livelihood? These are the sort of questions that we should explore together.

In the meantime, we should enjoy the relatively cheery outlook. Let's hope that the worst of the storm is over. ■

*\*Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition, Interpreters and Translators, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos175.htm>.*

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The Gotham Translator accepts and welcomes contributions of articles about all aspects of translation and translator-related issues. These may include, but are not limited to, **specific translation problems or approaches to translation, legal issues, and the business of translation.** We also welcome **dictionary and hardware/software reviews** as well as **reviews of books, conferences and workshops.** Any ideas or leads on interesting stories and articles for which we may try to obtain reprint permissions are also welcome.

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# 13 Ways to Resist Rates Erosion

by Alex Eames

**E**rosion is a gradual creeping process. In the UK we have had a steady erosion of civil liberty for quite a long time. Because it happens gradually, in small, digestible steps, “they get away with it”. It’s the same with rates erosion. It happens in small steps and is only hindered when people see it for what it is and resist. But just because one person resists, another may not. Then we find ourselves being undermined – just like in the BBC article about the Times. So resisting rates erosion is something which needs to be done collectively if it is to be effective.

In general, the only good reasons I can think of for working for low rates are:

- Working for a cause you believe in. In this case you might donate your work or work for a reduced rate. But don’t let them push you around – fit it in around your paid work.
- Long-standing direct clients who you can see are experiencing hardship.
- Gaining experience at the start of your career to get you out of the “we only work with people who have experience and references” catch-22

Pretty much any other reason just **allows someone else to collect the profits on your work**. So don’t do it!

*“But I am constantly bombarded with stories about low rates and translators without work on the internet.*

***How can I resist and stay strong?”***

Well firstly, you need to be a little bit careful about taking everything people write on internet forums too literally. Some people exaggerate, some people lie and others

are sociopathic. Talk is cheap in cyberspace. Try to filter what you read and only accept advice from people who have a record of giving good advice.

Here are a few pointers to help.

## 1. Can you live on it?

Do not accept work for a rate which is lower than you can comfortably make a living at. (Unless this is a charity or *pro bono* project). It is better to write off a working day and decide to relax and enjoy being FREE, than to work for a ludicrously low rate.

## 2. No fuzzy discounts.

Do not accept any reduction for fuzzy matches or for the use of any translation technology that you had to pay for yourself. **You should reap the reward from your investment. Don’t give it away!** I would make exceptions for the following reasonable scenarios...

- the client provided you with an expensive productivity-enhancing tool.
- a long-term ongoing project with 100% matches (like a product manual that is updated annually).
- where the client provides you with a significant translation memory which contains plenty of 100% matches.

...but observe the golden rule. **Anything I work on, I get paid for.**

## 3. Build up your client base...

...so you have too many clients. Then dump the ones who are fussy and resistant to decent rates (usually the

same people). This is an ongoing business development process. As you get busier, you can afford to dump the clients you prefer not to work for (for whatever reason).

## 4. Go after some direct clients...

...instead of always working for agencies. A healthy freelance business has a mix of both in the client portfolio. Clearly there is a lot more income potential in working for direct clients, but their expectations are different too.

## 5. Charge direct clients more.

With direct clients, make sure that you charge significantly more than your agency rates. Otherwise you are guilty of spoiling the market for agencies and, in-turn, other translators. Yes, you might find you are partly responsible for spoiling the market because you lack the confidence to ask for more.

## 6. Know the “going rate”

Be aware of approximately what other translators working in your language combination charge for the sort of work you are quoting for. If you don’t know, find out. Ask people, read surveys, or ask for quotes from other translators. It needn’t be difficult to get the information you need.

## 7. Don’t expect to get every project you quote for.

If you get everything you quote for, you’re charging far too little. If you are charging what the market will bear, you should get somewhere between 30-60% of the work you quote for.

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**8. Don't feel like a failure when you don't get a project you quoted for.**

If they chose someone cheap, they probably got what they deserved and you avoided working for a client with poor judgment. That means you WON! You don't want a portfolio chock-full of cheapskate clients do you? I don't.

**9. Don't be afraid to talk about rates.**

It is neither unethical nor likely to result in anti-trust action – despite what some people in the US would have you believe. But be sure you don't breach client confidentiality. Some people say it is unprofessional to talk about rates.

That's easily disproved. What do you say when a potential client phones and asks you how much for 2000 words into your target language? Do you say...

*"Oh, I'm sorry, I can't tell you that, it's unprofessional", or*

*"\$150 / thousand words (\$0.15 / word) of source language."*

So it's OK to talk about rates with a complete stranger, who might have a job for you. So why would it be unprofessional to compare notes with others in your profession? Simple answer – **It's NOT!** If it were, why do so many professional translators' associations around the world produce rates surveys? Is it because they're unprofessional?

**10. Stop listening to lies...**

...propagated by people who really don't know what they're talking about. Talk is cheap. There are people out there who hang out on internet forums for the sole purpose of annoy-

ing, disturbing, disrupting and making others feel uncomfortable. They are the terrorists of the online community. If it weren't for them, there would be no need for moderators. They are the only reason that we embrace the self-imposed censorship that is moderation.

**11. Develop an abundance mentality.**

"There's plenty of work out there – I've just got to find it." Leave the low-paying jobs to those just starting out and those trying to scratch a living in developing countries. Spend your time more productively...

- Seeking out new clients.
- Learning about marketing and experimenting with new ways.
- Learning new skills to make you more productive.
- Learning new specialisations to give you an edge.

**12. Be a mentor to "younger" translators...**

...and encourage them to set their rates at acceptable levels. It takes a certain leap of faith to do something like this, but believe me, what goes around comes around. If you help people, you

will benefit from it.

**13. Educate clients and potential clients about translation.**

- What it is.
- How long it takes.
- How involved it is.
- How difficult it is.

Make them understand how dangerous it is to treat it lightly. Get hold of and distribute the excellent booklet "Translation – Getting it Right" ([http://www.atanet.org/docs/Getting\\_it\\_right.pdf](http://www.atanet.org/docs/Getting_it_right.pdf))

So that's the 13 ways to resist rates erosion that I thought of. Not all of them will apply to all people. I'm sure there are plenty more. If you've got one to add, or you'd like to discuss or comment on this article, feel free to check out the tranfree section of my personal blog at <http://alexeames.com/blog>. ■

**ABOUT ALEX EAMES**

Alex Eames is the founder of [www.translatorstips.com](http://www.translatorstips.com), editor of *tranfree* and author of several eBooks.

This article was reprinted from the May 2010 edition of *tranfree*. Subscribe FREE at <http://tranfree.com/tf70.html> or email [subscribe@tranfree.com](mailto:subscribe@tranfree.com)

**SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT**

The New York Circle of Translators in collaboration with New York University – School of Continuing and Professional Studies proudly present

**THE SECOND SUSANA GREISS ANNUAL WORKSHOP**

Saturday, October 02 and Sunday, October 03, 2010

Time: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Place: Woolworth Building – Room 430

15 Barclay St. at Broadway across from City Hall, Public Assembly Room  
New York City, New York

Confirmed speakers are: Agnes Meilhac, Jon Ritzdorf, Ellen Sowchek.

To be confirmed, Jonathan Hines.

More information to come.

# NYCT May Meeting

by Brooke Bates

**O**n May 19, members of NYCT attended an informative presentation given by the organization's President-Elect Lori Colman on the importance of cultivating good relationships with project managers.

Drawing from her own experiences as a project manager, Ms. Colman, now Assistant Director of Translation Services at the Rennert Translation Group, candidly discussed the dos and don'ts of working successfully with PMs. The presentation was not only pertinent to new translators but it also served as a reminder to those who are already well established in the field.

The overall message is that a translator's relationship with a project manager is just as important as one with a direct client. As the PM is the key player in putting a project together and creating the linguistic team, it is crucial to maintain clear communication, common courtesy, and attention to detail to ensure a positive working experience which could then lead to more work in the future. Ms. Colman provided real life examples that she encountered which strongly emphasized the importance of clear communication. For instance, it is essential to confirm that you have received a job and clearly indicate your rates and the terms involving rush fees. Since time is of the utmost importance, clear communication is vital

to avoiding confusion, delays, and errors.

There must also always be mutual respect between the translator and PM. Ms. Colman touched upon certain behavior to avoid like using a harsh tone in emails, complain-

ing about jobs after accepting them, making irrational decisions that negatively affect the outcome of the project, and going against terms that were initially agreed upon. One helpful point that she raised was that there is nothing wrong with turning down jobs. If you know that you can't reach a given deadline or that you're not really familiar with the subject matter pertaining to a project, it is best to communicate this right away rather than risk putting a project in jeopardy. In fact, Ms. Colman said that a project manager will be more inclined to call you for future work. Knowing how to pick your battles was also discussed. For example, it is not a good idea to complain about not getting enough work, or that the PM did not confirm that they received your contact form. This will just make you look difficult to work with. In general, in order to work efficiently, it is best to cooperate



**From left:** Edna Ditaranto, Brooke Bates, Geoffrey Carlson, Giovana Boselli, Margarite Heintz Montez, Lori Colman, Eileen Hennessy, Susan Salms-Moss

and keep a united front. It is also necessary to be flexible when there are changes to the schedule or the job's content. Although the PM's job is to accommodate the client, it is also important to realize that the PM should also sympathize with the translator when there are impossible demands to meet. Another word of advice was to give an occasional discount to agencies where you have regular work. And finally, it is important to be thorough and pay close attention to the details. This includes remembering to attach your translation to an email and closely follow instructions. As mentioned earlier, to avoid any conflict, it is best to try to accommodate the PM due to the urgent nature of most projects. The more you maintain a professional and harmonious relationship with project manager, the more work you receive in the end.

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While this information may sound obvious and straight forward, errors and misunderstandings still occur and can determine what kind of an impression you make, and it is usually the first impression that counts and may be your only chance! Ms. Colman went on to stress that in the small world of this business, project man-



agers talk to one another and share this kind of information. As a PM's job can be chaotic at times, it is helpful to put yourself in their shoes to ensure a mutual understanding which will then lead to ongoing work.

As a new translator, I found this presentation particularly useful. It not only gave me an idea of what to expect in this profession but it also provided insight on project management as a career. One member asked Ms. Colman how she ended up working in project management when she had originally set out to become a translator. She explained that when a project management opportunity opened up during her job search, she decided to take it to get her foot in the door, learn more about the industry from the inside, and to make new contacts. Over time, she discovered that project management is a good niche for her because she enjoys working in a conventional office setting from 9 - 5, receiving benefits and a steady income, and

using her strong organizational skills to lead a project from start to finish. Overall, understanding a PM's role allows a translator to effectively meet their needs and maintain a good rapport.

Afterwards, the group headed over to Heartland Brewery to catch up over a tasty dinner. ■

#### **ABOUT BROOKE BATES**

I was born and raised in Richmond, Va. French was my favorite subject in school and after participating in a student exchange program in my mid teens, I was convinced that I wanted French to be a big part of my life. After high school, I lived in Grenoble for a year and majored in French Literature at the College of William and Mary. I then studied art history and business in New York and worked in that field for a few years. After working for almost four years at American Friends of the Louvre, a non-profit organization that raises money for the Louvre in the US, my love and desire to work with the language was rekindled so I decided to pursue a career in translation. I hope to be a freelance translator but would also love to work in-house for an agency doing translation and project management.

### **INSIDER TIPS FOR THE 2010 ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The Colorado Translators Association has launched a conference website for the ATA Annual Conference: Insider tips for the 2010 annual conference of the American Translators Association: <http://ataindenver.wordpress.com/>

From the website:

"This blog is run by members of the Colorado Translators Association to share 'insider' information about Denver and Colorado with attendees to the American Translators Association 51st Conference, to be held in Denver, CO, from Oct 27 - 30, 2010."

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# Litigation and the Cost of Translation

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review by **Gigi Branch-Shaw**

**E**rik Sherman's article *Don't Let Litigation Get Lost in Translation* expounds on the benefits as well as the complications of using translation software to tackle litigation cases with multilingual needs. While the writer certainly advocates the use of this technology, he doesn't shy away from its possible pitfalls.

In today's global marketplace, litigation frequently involves documentation written in a variety of languages. This scenario is obviously challenging for legal teams who need to work with documents written in a language other than their own, thus bringing up questions about the best way to tackle the language barrier in terms of a particular case. Is it actually necessary to translate documents, and if so, how much and what part of the material should be translated? Can computer-assisted technology be used or should human translators be called in? How much can be budgeted for this service, and what is the most efficient way to approach the translation?

Deciding whether or not to translate can be a tricky decision when the language isn't your own. First, there is the matter of translating a large quantity of documents, possibly in numerous languages. Translating this material can be a costly and timely endeavor that may not necessarily provide pertinent information that corresponds to the case.

As the partner of one firm discovered, machine translation can be extremely help-

ful in the initial stage, "Machine translations are not very good at idioms, not very good in context, but they can be useful in terms of getting a sense of the document to let you decide if you want to spend more money." Using translation software, even the current free tools available on the web, such as Babel Fish, FreeTranslation.com and Google Translate can provide at least a rough idea of the content for a legal team's understanding, enough for them to decide if it is worth spending more money for a better translation.

Mr. Sherman cites another case example where the aforementioned firm made a poor decision to have a random sampling of material for a case translated by human translators. This decision was problematic as there was no way to discern if the documents chosen at random provided a relevant portion of the total documents for the case. If no pertinent information showed up in the translations, the lawyers had no way to ascertain if they had picked out valid material or not. Furthermore, if relevant material were to be discovered, the lawyers would need to have everything translated to insure they had all the information available. The bottom line is that translation software would have been a cheaper way to initially locate and decipher the existence of critical material, which could then have been isolated and translated more thoroughly by human translators.

Machine translation also offers a quick and easy way to cull vast amounts of material

for specific data through a keyword search. Translation software has the capacity to locate specific terms much faster than humans. That said, while the computer program can quickly determine if a specific term is used in a document, what happens if a synonymous term is used instead? The computer only does what it is programmed to do. According to Sherman, the most reliable way to perform a keyword search with translation software it is to engage the services of a native speaker who is knowledgeable in the relevant subject matter and who can help craft the terms needed for a thorough search.

Finally Sherman addresses the more complicated issue of using machine translation software between languages that have different alphabets, such as the Cyrillic and Roman or Latin alphabets. These two alphabets contain some different characters, which can result in character recognition problems when translating from one language to the other. Likewise, machine software also has complications when translating between character-based Asian languages and the letter-based Western ones. Certain Asian characters have a multitude of meanings that are not easily translated into a compatible western term. For this reason, plus the fact that the technology behind the two language types is so different, Sherman suggests avoiding free translation software and to opt instead for an experienced and reputable vendor to handle the translation.

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# The Pantomime Problem

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by Meir Turner

**T**hose of you just starting out in the field may be wondering how to find your niche. You may have been advised to specialize in an area of interest: perhaps you majored in chemistry, or have a secret passion for patents. But what about those of us who were, for example, theatre majors? Clearly we need to find another route.

I have always viewed the neutrality required of interpreters as a boon, not a burden. But there is one recurring situation in which the neutrality I am sworn to maintain places me in a moral quandary. It occurs in the rare Examination-Before-Trial (perhaps one in twenty) in civil cases during which a lawyer for, or some family member of, the party being deposed sits across the table from me and signals answers to the deponent seated beside me.

The signals the lawyer gives his client are often simple head or hand motions indicating “no,” “yes,” or “don’t know.” Sometimes a lawyer mouths words and sometimes it’s a whole pantomime. The lawyers who cue their clients are not all equally brazen in their signaling and the deponents are not all equally adept at unobtrusively following those signals. To avoid arousing the suspicion of the inquiring attorney, the deponent sometimes looks away from his own attorney and misses a critical cue. Then there are times when I recognize the word being mouthed, but the deponent at my side, for whom it is intended, does not.

Last year one man was so frustrated that his message was not getting across to his

wife, his face actually turned red and became contorted. I began wondering how strong his heart was and whether we would end up with a medical emergency. He finally released some of his frustration by looking at his wife with disgust and mouthing the Hebrew word for “stupid.”

With some, the cueing is subtle and intermittent; with others, it is very blatant and frequent. Should I do nothing when faced with the former but scream bloody murder when the latter occurs? Should I use tact and hint to the cheats that they better stop or I will expose them?

Almost always, the deposing attorney remains unaware of the silent drama being played under his nose. He is not, however, entirely at fault for failing to pick up the deception, since the prompter is often out of his sightlines. Although use of peripheral vision could sometimes uncover the deceit, the deposing attorney cannot be expected to guard against it while he is concentrating on the questions and answers, perusing papers and busily taking notes in long hand.

I suspect that sometimes the attorney’s obliviousness is actually denial. He gets an inkling of what is going on and either dreads a confrontation with his out-of-control colleague or else finds it too shocking to be true.

I have often wished to counter the deceit with irony: “The interpreter requests that the deponent’s attorney stop signaling answers to his client because the interpreter finds it distracting.” Whenever I have discussed these goings-on with the court reporter, who usually has an excellent view of these theatrics, she says it’s none of her business.

Often the first opportunity to tell the deposing attorney, in private, about the problem is when the deposition is over.

But by then I am thoroughly disgusted and I make a bee-line for the door.

During one deposition I pleaded for an emergency run to the bathroom, intending to phone the deceived attorney from the outer

office while he was still sitting in the conference room. But the deponent decided to stroll out of the room as well, and so I could not carry out my plan undetected.

Pointing out the irregularity can be problematic. The following are some possible scenarios:

If it causes a cancellation of the deposition, the agency that sent me would blame me for it, saying I should have minded my own business. It may also never rehire me. The interpreting agency’s primary interest is the bottom line. It cares about lawyers’ integrity only insofar as it relates to their

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**The lawyers who cue their clients are not all equally brazen in their signaling and the deponents are not all equally adept at unobtrusively following those signals.**

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prompt payment of the agency's invoices.

If I expose the problem the moment it first occurs, in front of everyone, the deposing lawyer may well complain that I should have told him in private. He might say I caused an uproar which he, using his diplomatic skills, would have avoided.

Once I point out the deceit, the dishonest lawyer will deny it and, not inconceivably, may sue me. If that happens, I think it unlikely that either the attorney I alerted or the agency that sent me will foot my legal bills.

I could be attacked by both attorneys for pointing out the deceit. I do not want to malign the legion of hard working, conscientious lawyers out there, but among those attorneys hired to conduct depositions there is a small minority of hacks who care more about getting through the deposition (or, when they are paid by the hour, stretching it out), than about its integrity. Such an attorney might actually rebuke me, saying that I am imagining things and that, in any case, it is not my role to raise the issue of unethical conduct.

It is also not unknown for lawyers on opposite sides to be in collusion. I have good reason to believe that in one case I worked on, the plaintiff's attorney promised the opposing, insurance company's attorney a kickback. In such a case I would be attacked by both attorneys since I would be jeopardizing their scheme.

Just imagine my position once the agency that hired me hears both sides claim that I made baseless accusations.

I have been told that my distress is an over-reaction, especially since the witness and his attorney can concoct and rehearse

falsehoods prior to the deposition. Deponents have also been known to take bathroom breaks during a deposition in order to ask their lawyers how to answer a question. If the deponent sits next to his own lawyer, the latter can even, conceivably, give "yes" and "no" foot signals, if the signals are coordinated beforehand.

I can try to console myself that the deposing lawyer might be a bigger rogue than his adversary, and that the deposing lawyer's client will lie even more blatantly when it is his turn to testify.

I can try to blame the victimized attorney for not exercising caution by keeping the deponent's lawyers within his line of vision.

I can blame the deceived lawyer for not barring from the deposition those who are not a party to the action. Their presence rarely benefits him and constitutes a needless additional risk. Surely it is not the interpreter's moral obligation to advise an attorney how he should conduct the deposition.

But all these arguments do not extricate me from my quandary. While I cannot imagine keeping silent when a lawyer

hires me directly, it would be an unthinkable betrayal of trust. What shall I do when, as is normally the case, I am sent to a deposition by an agency? To whom do I owe my loyalty? To the agency that hired me, to the lawyer who hired the agency that hired me, or to my conscience, which is not for hire?

Let me preempt a possible attack from any self-righteous reader who feels I should be reproached for my past silence. I have interpreted at more than 400 depositions in the last decade and have encountered the "pantomime problem" on perhaps twenty occasions. Extrapolate this to the number of depositions being held every year and it becomes clear that countless interpreters and court reporters are aware of this offense, as are numerous attorneys who have witnessed their co-counsels perpetrating it. To my knowledge no one has ever raised this issue in public. ■

#### **ABOUT MEIR TURNER**

Meir Turner is a simultaneous Hebrew-English interpreter who lives in New York City.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

The New York Circle of Translators is proud to announce that we have our own group on LinkedIn. All NYCT members who also use LinkedIn are welcome to join.

Make virtual connections with other members of the Circle to start building relationships for networking within our community. Share your ideas, concerns and opinions. LinkedIn Groups are powerful ways to get noticed and enrich your professional network in these difficult economic times.

Join by clicking on the "Join Group" button on the Group's home page. See you there!

## INTERVIEW

# Celine Imbaud, ITC Global Translations

**D**id you ever wonder what it's like to start your own translation company? Or what the differences between the US and the European language service markets might be?

The Gotham Translator interviewed Celine Imbaud, the founder of ITC Global Translations Inc., who agreed to give us a glimpse of her fast-paced world at the head of a successful translation agency. She also talked about her cross-cultural experiences working in the language industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

Celine graduated from The University of Lyon and, thanks to an exchange program, received an MBA in international business from the UNCC of Charlotte, NC. After various jobs in the US and France, she decided to set up her own translation company in France in January 1999. Having worked first in the food industry and then in business real estate, her husband is now helping grow ITC's client portfolio here in the US.

**The Gotham Translator:** What year did you get your MBA and what gave you the idea to work for a translation agency? Did you already have prior experience with translation and interpreting?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I graduated in 1996. I then moved to Florida to follow my husband who opened a restaurant there. I first worked as an international assistant for a scientific instrument manufacturer and then met an American woman who

owned a translation company. She was looking for a marketing/sales manager and offered me the job. I worked there for a couple of years and when I returned to France in November 1998, I decided to start a translation company. It is the love of languages, strong relationships with various translators and this experience in Florida that motivated me to work in this field.

**The Gotham Translator:** Did you know right away that you wanted to start your own translation agency / company? Why did you do it in France and not in the US? From what I understand, you got your MBA in the US and started your first agency in France?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** For personal reasons, we wanted to move back to France and have our children there. I did not know anything about the translation market in France but since I enjoyed this business so much in the US, I decided it was worth trying to offer the same kind of services to French companies. It turned out to be quite challenging but the company has grown since then!

**The Gotham Translator:** What was your mission statement or your personal goal in starting a translation company?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** First, I wanted to offer the best quality and best service pos-



Celine Imbaud, founder of ITC Global Translations Inc.

sible. This is why my first goal was to get in touch with freelancers who had the same view of this business. As for the personal aspect, being able to make my own decisions (and mistakes!) as well as running my business my way was very valuable for me. I am quite an independent person!

**The Gotham Translator:** How would you describe your experience starting up a business in France from the legal and fiscal point of view? Was it tough, challenging, a mere formality?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** Very challenging! Although things have changed a bit because the government is really trying to motivate people to set up their business and make it easier for them, back then, you had to go through a lot of trouble to start a company. Nothing could be done online so you had to go from one office to another, filling in all kinds of documents and if one was missing, you had to stay in line all over again! All offices were independent from one another instead of having one common place where you could do all the required registrations. A little bit of a headache but I finally did it!

**The Gotham Translator:** Was your American MBA an asset in starting a business in France and, if so, why?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** Yes it was, as I learned how to use various financial,

accounting and marketing tools to manage my business. One thing that the MBA and the people I worked with taught me is how much emphasis US companies put on customer service compared to France. Even though you still get good service in France, I have to say that here, in the US, clients' needs are really taken into account and everything is done to please them.

**The Gotham Translator:** Do you know many other translation agency owners/founders with an MBA?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** No, not really. As a matter of fact, most translation agency owners I know are in France and they mostly have a business background and some others are translators. Since we are fairly new in the US market, I did not get a chance to meet many translation agency owners here yet.

**The Gotham Translator:** How big was your company in the beginning? How many inhouse employees and how many freelancers did you end up employing over the years?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I started by myself, in a small room! Then, as I got more and more projects, I hired a translator as a project manager. Then, as we got even more work, I hired another translator and that went on and on until today. I now have 5 translators/project managers in house, 1 sales person in France and 2 in the US, and 1 administrative assistant in France and one in the US. As well as close to 100 freelancers whom we work with on a very regular basis.

**The Gotham Translator:** How does your French agency stand out from other translation agencies in France? Do you think you had a different approach to the busi-

ness coming with an American MBA?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I think our main strength is the quality of our services and the fact that we respond very quickly to our clients' requests. And this is what I brought back from the American way of doing business when I went back to France.

**The Gotham Translator:** How fast did you grow? Did your location have any strategic importance in the success of your company?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** It is always hard to grow...you don't want to grow too fast but at the same time, you have to adapt your size to your clients' expectations. As for the location, I don't think it played a role as all is done by e-mail. In Lyon, thanks to the TGV, we are only 2 hours away from Paris so we can visit clients in Paris very easily.

However, having offices in both Europe and the US is a real asset as we can 'use' the time difference to be even quicker to respond.

**The Gotham Translator:** Where did you look for your subcontractor base? What were your standards in choosing your translators/interpreters?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I first started with translators I knew. Then, little by little, I guess they started to talk about us and as you know, the translation world is a small world so translators heard about us and began to submit their resumes. We do test all translators who submit their resume. Their tests are proofed either in-house or by senior translators and, based upon the test, we accept their application or not. After, since we do proof all translations in-

house, we give them a regular feedback on their work. And I think they really enjoy that. As a matter of fact, we did a survey among our translators earlier this year (120 translators were surveyed and 92 of them responded ie a 76.6% response rate) and 90% of them said they really enjoyed working with ITC because we were very quick to respond to their questions and help them in completing their translation assignments. 100% of them would recommend other translators to work with us. We were very happy to see those results as we always try to be as helpful as possible...

**The Gotham Translator:** How did you go about advertising your services in France? Are French companies (your clients - the project donors) used to employing language professionals or are most still convinced that they can get it all done inhouse, by the "bilingual" secretary?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** Well, as part of the EUATC and CNET (The French National Chamber of Translation Agencies), one of our main goals is to "educate" our clients so they understand that translation services represent an investment and not a cost for the company. So we really emphasize the fact that we want to work on a long term with a company, helping them to build dedicated glossaries and translation memories. But of course, as everybody knows, we always encounter companies for which the price is the main factor...

**The Gotham Translator:** How is translation / interpreting perceived in France as a profession (not just by other industries but by the society at large)? What about other European countries?

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**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** In France, a translator is still somewhat considered as a “secretary”. People have a hard time understanding that translating requires a high level of education and it is a full time job. This reasoning is, in my opinion, even stronger in the Southern European countries like Spain and Italy. On the contrary, the translators in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Finland seem to be able to better value their services...

**The Gotham Translator:** What made you come back to the US and start an offshoot of your company here?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** First, we know the US market is so big, we thought there would be some opportunities for us...Also, I wanted my two children to learn another language and get exposed to other cultures...

**The Gotham Translator:** Are the legalities of starting a company in the US easier? Or is that just an misconception?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I have to say it is much easier as almost everything can be done in one place and via internet. The only difficult part is when you try to set up a company as foreigners but we had some help there.

**The Gotham Translator:** How would you compare your French/European clients to US clients? Are they more or less equal in terms of what they expect from your services? Or do they have different demands?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I would say they are pretty much the same, with always very tight deadlines! Also, they target obviously more South America than our European clients. I also find that our US clients feel reassured by the fact that they

know that their translations intended for the European market are done in Europe.

**The Gotham Translator:** What are, in your opinion, the most obvious cultural differences between the language services industry in Europe and here in the United States?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** It appears to me that in the US, the market is a little bit more “structured” than in Europe. Also, you find here very large translation companies whereas, there are only a few in France. On the other hand, it is the much smaller number of players on the French market that allows us to meet on a regular basis and agree on several aspects of the translation services. And I really enjoy meeting with “competitors” as we all learn from one another and it gives us a sense of “belonging” to a true business sector. In France, we are currently working on developing a translation-dedicated standard.

**The Gotham Translator:** How easy is it to penetrate the market and establish yourself here as opposed to in France?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** It is a bit more complicated here as nobody answers their phone! It is much harder to get to talk to someone here and thus, marketing is tougher. On the other hand, since we already have a strong reputation in Europe, we can show US leads our experience and previous projects.

**The Gotham Translator:** How would you compare your working relationship with your French/British subcontractor translators and their American equivalents? What about other nationalities? Any differences you can think of?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** I don't find a real

difference between European and American translators. Of course, it is always a challenge to adapt to every translator's culture and habits but overall, I find that professional translators are very reliable and helpful, no matter where they are in the world.

**The Gotham Translator:** Do you have any advice to give to those planning on starting up their own business?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** You have to be patient and not give up even when it becomes really challenging! Also, the key I think is to be able to build strong relationships with translators and the clients so we can all work as a team to achieve quality translations.

**The Gotham Translator:** What about freelancers who might be interested in working for you?

**Celine Imbaud - ITC:** We are always looking to work with reliable and quality translators and proofreaders. Also, we are always looking for specialized translators in the medical and technical fields. Translators who have strong writing skills are also more than welcome! They can contact us through our e-mail address found on our websites [www.itcfrance.com](http://www.itcfrance.com) and [www.itcglobaltranslations.com](http://www.itcglobaltranslations.com). ■

#### ABOUT ITC

ITC is a translation company able to provide highly specialized technical, scientific, and communication translation services for over 25 languages.

With our 11 years of experience working for international companies and our offices in Europe and the United States, we have built a solid reputation as well as a client list including such well-known organizations as the World Health Organization (WHO), Sanofi, l'Oreal, Publicis, Reebok and Toyota, to name a few.

## ARTICLE REVIEW

## A New Great Wall

by Veronica Mehno

A few weeks ago I was approached by the Editor of The Gotham newsletter to write a review of an article that was published by Edith Grossman in the Foreign Policy magazine in May/June 2010. As a translator I found this article fascinating because I was not aware that there was such a huge gap between English speaking countries like the USA and the UK and Latin American countries when it came to translating published books.

I would like to highlight two very important questions that Ms. Grossman raises in her article:

- Why English speaking countries translate into English 2 to 3% of the books that have been published in other parts of the world in contrast to regions like Latin America that translate over 35% of the books published?
- Is the low translation rate due to the fact that the English speaking population is not interested in reading “translated books” or that readership is limited because of a lack of published translations and therefore the profitability is not what the big publishing houses would expect?

I am an English into Spanish translator living in the USA and having translated contracts, employee handbooks, medical records, etc. I never realized that large publishing houses would consider it a “burden” to translate books from another language into English. As the article states;

*“For a book written in Spanish to enter the enormous potential market of China, for example, it*

*must often be translated into English first. By limiting English translation, we're turning off a spigot that flows not just to us but to the rest of the world as well”*

Personally this statement baffles me, because I cannot comprehend that there are great Latin American authors like Alfonsina Storni (Argentine) or Isabel Allende (Chilean) that have written classics that many English speaking people are unaware of simply because their books have never been published into English. This is only considering the Western Hemisphere and I wonder how many Eastern Hemisphere authors that we are not aware of. Translating books should be viewed as a way to understand different cultures including how people think, live and operate. We live in a global society, where there is always something happening 24/7 somewhere. However, often we are quick to jump to conclusions and judge different cultures or attitudes because we do not understand how things are done in another part of the world. Translating more books, in my opinion, could help to narrow this cultural gap. Reading books written by non-English speaking authors may help us get a glimpse of the lives of other people in other countries and a window into their culture. This would encourage people to be more sensitive towards each other and perhaps change any judgmental tendencies one may have acquired just because in our culture things would not have been done in that way.

Ms. Grossman states another interesting point regarding why big publishing corporations do

not want to do book translations. The article states:

*“English-language readers are, for some reason, put off by translations. This is nothing but a publishing shibboleth that leads to a chicken-and-egg conundrum: Is a limited readership for translations the reason so few are published in the Anglophone world? Or is that readership limited because English-language publishers provide their readers with so few translations?”*

In my opinion the English speaking population would be interested in reading translated books and countries like the USA or the UK have a population wealthy enough to buy books. My husband is American and whenever we go to Argentina he finds it fascinating to be able to read books that originally were written in Spanish and now are translated into English regarding issues such as politics, economics and other social matters in the country. Who could be better than somebody who has lived in the culture and knows the idiosyncrasy of the community to write about these issues? I do believe that it might take some time for the trend to fully develop and profitability might not be as good as expected for a few years. Which brings me to a very interesting point; I believe that large publishing houses are in the business to make money and the faster the better. Therefore, there is no quick (or even easy) money to be made if a community needs to be taught or trained in reading translated books. Huge amounts of money might be needed for marketing campaigns and no results are guaranteed.

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Therefore, it is safer to go with what is already known to everybody than to walk down a new path not knowing what the results might be.

As Ms. Grossman states there have been several books that have been translated such as *The Name of the Rose* (author Umberto Eco, Italian) or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (author, Stieg Larson, Swedish), but unfortunately only a selected few have enjoyed commercial success. This does not mean that other translated books would not have the same success as the ones mentioned above, but extensive marketing campaigns might be needed.

In conclusion I would like to state that I find Ms. Grossman article right on the money. I do believe that English speaking countries are isolating themselves. Horace Engdahl, the then secretary of the Swedish Academy says "*They don't translate enough and don't really participate in the big dialogue of literature*". I find this extremely unfortunate because the only people that have something to lose are the members of the English speaking community. The English speaking communities could enrich themselves in a drastic way just by increasing the translated books from 2% to 10%. Even if these books do not sell at the rate that the big publishing houses expect it is a way to start the education process and get exposure to different authors and hence different cultures. Being a foreigner myself, and now living in the USA I have always cherished the fact that I can get the **BEST** of both worlds and I am a strong believer that this only enriches me as a person as it makes me more open minded and tolerant to other cultures and train of thoughts. ■

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I had some mixed feelings about Sherman's article. He gives solid, practical and technical information and backs it up with professional examples, but his overall message was unclear to me. Is machine translation the best option for legal teams dealing with multi-lingual documents? Should language professionals be called upon as well? Certainly Sherman is not offering "a one size fits all" solution for tackling litigation involving multi-lingual documentation. With litigation, as is often the case with translation, each project comes with its own set of challenges. Maybe it was the article's subtitle that felt misaligned with the wealth of information actually provided: *Can language conversion software cut cross-border litigation bills?*

I wonder how many legal firms have access to information Sherman touches on and how many can actually take the time to consider the best solutions for tackling their litigation cases before they start working on them? The article provides valid and practical advice of "dos and don'ts" that seem extremely informative for legal teams working with multi-lingual documents, especially those who may not have regular experience with translation. The best preparation for dealing with the challenges of such projects seems to be experience and knowledge of translation software, source language and subject material. In my eyes a more appropriate subtitle for the article would be "*How language conversion software can be used effectively and efficiently with multilingual documents.*" ■

#### **ABOUT GIGI BRANCH-SHAW**

Gigi Branch-Shaw is a freelance Fr>En translator who specializes in marketing and editorial translations. She also works as a contributing writer and content manager for online projects. She lives in New York City.

## **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](mailto:NYCTProgramDirector@gmail.com) if you plan to attend a meeting.

Future meetings:

#### **Summer Picnic 2010 @ Edna Ditaranto's**

Sunday, August 29, 2010, 2:00 PM

Address: 298 Wedgewood Drive  
Paramus, NJ 07652

Phone: 201-637-4087

Charge: \$15.00 per person - Children under 10 free.

Please RSVP to Edna by August 15 at the following email address  
[edna@port-trans-specialists.com](mailto:edna@port-trans-specialists.com)

# From (Off-Off) Broadway to a Home on the Street: If I Can Do It, Anyone Can!

by Judy Bard

**T**hose of you just starting out in the field may be wondering how to find your niche. You may have been advised to specialize in an area of interest: perhaps you majored in chemistry, or have a secret passion for patents. But what about those of us who were, for example, theatre majors? Clearly we need to find another route.

After living in France for about two years, I came to New York with dreams of becoming an actress. Once I realized Broadway was not in my future, I turned to my only other marketable skill and enrolled in some translation classes. A bilingual temp agency sent me on an assignment to the equity research department of a French bank. Let me be perfectly clear: when I arrived on my first day I had absolutely no idea what equity research was and had never even picked up a copy of *The Wall Street Journal*.

My task there was to proofread research written by US analysts. They patiently answered all my questions and over time I came to understand the basics. Eventually, I was hired as a permanent editor. I was working exclusively in English, which I believe gave me an excellent background in the field and in the terminology before making the transition to translation.

I am now a translator/editor for a different equity research department and have been in the field for more than 10 years. It never ceases to amaze me how specific terminology can be to every discipline. We are often asked to

do translations for other departments (HR, Compliance, IT, marketing, our in-house economists, etc.), and while I feel a certain degree of comfort when faced with a “typical” equity research note, when handed a translation on the sovereign debt crisis I go running for my glossary. Of course, that’s what makes translation interesting to me—there’s something new in every document.

The job has changed somewhat over the years. The majority of my work now involves editing research written in English by non-native English speakers. This requires a somewhat different skill set as we often have to “back translate” to figure out what is being said. Adaptability is key in translation, and a willingness to take on tasks other than pure translation, such as French-to-English editing, proofreading, English-language editing, etc., will be appreciated by current and prospective employers alike.

As is true in all fields, we need to continually update our skills. While getting an MBA is more of a commitment than I’m willing to make, taking classes in financial analysis and

economics is a great idea. If I had unlimited time on my hands, I would read the *Journal* and the *Financial Times* on a daily basis to glean the latest terminology and keep current on events in the financial world. Listening to the financial news on the radio or on TV is also very helpful. I am constantly updating my glossaries with new terms that come into vogue in the industry. And perhaps most importantly, I am not shy about asking questions when there is an idea in a report that I just don’t understand.

So a chance assignment from a temp agency has turned into a career. And if anyone had asked me years ago if I could imagine myself working on Wall Street, the answer would have been a resounding no! Then again, most of my colleagues also learned on the job. My story is therefore not unique, but merely one example of how we may find ourselves in the most unexpected places. ■

## ABOUT JUDY BARD

Judy Bard is a part-time translator/editor at Exane, Inc. and a freelance French-to-English translator.

## FUNNY-BONE TICKLER

According to the New York Times, World Cup referees were required to brush up on curses in 17 languages spoken by the 32 participating countries.

Among the 7 cautionable offenses drawn up by FIFA, the international governing body for soccer, number 6 reads: “Using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures.” Yet, during many games, emotions fly high and outbursts from frustrated players are not uncommon. So the referees are required to keep their ears pricked for swear words and insults that may not be pronounced in their own tongue.



## 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](http://www.nyctranslators.org) and join online!



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