



# THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

## TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS Translation Helping to Save and Improve Lives

This article was reprinted with permission from the author Jørgen Nielsen of Denmark and Rebecca Petras of Translators without Borders

### What is the story behind the organization?

Translators without Borders was created when the need for vital information in languages that those who need the information can understand was realized. After the Haiti earthquake in January, 2010, Translators without Borders became much more active than they were before.

### How and when was it created?

Our sister organization, “Traducteurs sans Frontières” was created in 1993 by Lexcelera (formerly Eurotexte). The first client was Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) which had approached Lexcelera about doing some translations. The agreement was made that the work would be done by volunteer professional translators, and MSF would put the savings back into their programming. With that agreement “Traducteurs sans Frontières” was born. Translators without Borders was established as a U.S.-based non-profit organization in

2010 after the Haiti earthquake greatly increased the interest among professionals in the language and localization industry.

### Who is behind, and how many are you?

Our organization is almost entirely run by volunteers. We have a board of directors, an executive committee made up of board members and officers, and a program director. Our president, Lori Thicke, is also the co-founder. The program director, Rebecca Petras, was

hired in August 2012, and is the only full-time paid employee. We also have a paid trainer in Kenya who works with our trainees. Most importantly, we have almost 2,000 volunteers translating and helping with other projects all over the world.

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## **How much translation work have you delivered until now?**

Most of our translation work is delivered through our managed crowdsourced community, the Translators without Borders Workspace (managed by ProZ.com). The workspace was established in early 2011, and since then we have translated over 7.2 million using it. The words are all translated by vetted, professional translators around the world who work directly with our approved non-profits. Most jobs are picked up by a translator in 15 minutes or less. Additionally, we have a number of projects, including our Swahili program in Nairobi, in which words are translated outside of the workspace.

## **In how many countries are you active?**

We translate into languages around the world, for non-profits around the world doing humanitarian translations, including some non-profits in Scandinavia that work in Africa.

## **How many translators work for you?**

We are assisted by more than 1,600 vetted, professional volunteer translators.

## **Which NGOs do you work with?**

We work with more than 90 non-profits based around the world—small to large non-profits focused on humanitarian work. Some examples are Médecins sans Frontières, the Make a Wish Foundation, Enfants du Monde, Solidarites International, Caring for the World Films, and many others.

## **This is the way TWB operates:**

The core values of Translators without Borders are excellence, integrity, empowerment, innovation, sustainability, and tolerance. These values help Translators without Borders construct their plans to help others. We tackle the need to increase knowledge in all languages in three ways: first through our crowdsourced community, the Translators

without Borders Workspace; second, by building language capacity where there currently is not a professional network of translators; and, third, by building awareness of the need for translation throughout the world.

## **Give examples of projects where you are active**

In India, we are helping the Mother and Child Health and Education Trust to subtitle videos containing vital health information. These videos are automatically updated to phones in India. This will make it possible for many people to have access to this information who didn't before.

Another project that we are active in is the Wikipedia 80X80 project. We are collaborating with Wikipedia to make the information in the 80 most important health articles on Wikipedia more available to those who need it. Wikipedia and its editors make sure that the Wikipedia articles in question are up to Wikipedia's

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standards. After that, our very supportive partner, Content Rules, translates the articles into Simple English. Finally, volunteer translators translate the article into many languages. Our initial language goal is 80 languages, but we want to eventually translate the articles into all of the 285 languages that Wikipedia exists in.

### **Give an example of a project where you have made a difference (e.g. cholera and water in Africa)**

One of the projects where we have made a direct impact is through our partner Zafèn Vincentian Family's work in Haiti. Zafèn helps small businesses in Haiti get funding from donors around the world to create their own sustainable businesses. In the words of Griselda Garibay, Zafèn Vincentian Family Administrator: "Translators Without Borders has helped Zafèn successfully promote 26 individual projects in Spanish and French with funds exceeding \$500,000 in just 7

months. While an additional 19 Haitian entities have enjoyed translations by your organizations, they were not funded. All the profiles are for loan projects except where specifically identified as a donation. There are 6 projects in progress as of January 1, 2012. Both Enrique and Luciano have provided consistent and excellent customer support, at times even anticipating a need."

### **How do you ensure quality assurance?**

Quality is key and not an easy thing to ensure when working through a crowdsourced community. Our translators work directly with the non-profits, so it is critical that the volunteers are vetted and approved. For this reason, we insist that they have prior translation experience. They also need to take a short test, which is reviewed by professionals. However, if a translator is certified by the American Translators Association, or is a ProZ.com PRO, they get fast tracked into our system and do not need to take a test before working with our non-profits.

### **How do you succeed in furthering your message about the necessity of professional translators?**

One of our main goals is to build awareness of the importance of translating humanitarian content professionally. It is not acceptable for humanitarian knowledge to just be machine translated or translated by amateurs just because it is not commercial and does not hold a commercial value. The humanitarian words are just as important—usually more important—than anything that is translated commercially. In that way, we build awareness of the importance of professional translators and their role in transferring knowledge worldwide, commercially or non-commercially.

Another way that we spread the word is by working to establish professional translators in geographic areas where the profession has not yet taken hold. This is one of the main things we are doing in Kenya. We train our translators to be just as good and as professional as any European or North American translators. We

give them training in translation memories and give them the technology they need to be successful. By professionalizing translation around the world, we make it clear that translation is a viable profession for anyone in the world.

### **How do you succeed working with the NGOs?**

Our non-profits work directly with our volunteers through our crowdsourced community, the Translators without Borders Workspace. But before they get access they must be approved. We primarily work with non-profits focused in healthcare, education and disaster content. We do not work with political content, religious content or cultural groups (such as museums and zoos). Once approved, we ask our non-profits to sign a pledge that they will use the savings from our work to enhance their front line programs.

### **Do the NGOs recognize the need?**

That is a good question. Some definitely

do. The ones who are working with us certainly do-and the number of NGOs working with us keeps going up. However, we have a lot more work to do to get more NGOs aware of the need to provide their content in the language of the people who need it.

### **In which places would you like to be active?**

In Africa, we would like to build awareness and language capacity beyond the east Swahili-speaking area. We'd also like to do more with Indian languages.

In terms of non-profits, we would like to make more aware around the world and work with more regional non-profits, such as those based in Scandinavia who are working on African or Indian projects.

### **Do you work with written translation only or do you do interpreting too?**

Right now, we only do translation, not interpretation. We are actually helping a small group in France develop Interpret-

ers without Borders.

### **How is your organization financed?**

We are financed many ways. We have sponsors, donors and a small bit of grant money. We are working to get more grants for special projects. But we are also very lean-we don't spend much.

### **Do you have sponsors in Denmark?**

Yes we do, and we have in the past. Currently, Techniwrite from Denmark is a Fund-A-Translator Sponsor.

### **How can one get involved, if you so wish?**

We always welcome volunteers! You may fill out a form on the website.

### **If you want to translate?**

We have very qualified translators volunteering for Translators without Borders and we always love when more join our organization. Please fill out a form on the website. ■

NYCT Member Spotlight

# Javier Labrador

## Executive Quality Director at Transperfect Translations

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Interview by **Margarite Heintz Montez**

**Q** Thank you for agreeing to this interview. First let me inform our readers that you have worked in-house for many years. I'm certain our fellow member would like to know what it is like being a senior level long-time employee at one of the largest LSPs in the world?

**A** When I decided to join TransPerfect Translations over 10 years ago, I was looking for a company headquartered in Manhattan. This company moved to Harborside, NJ and commuting to teach at night into the city was too time consuming and difficult to do. I was looking for a company that was not new to the market, a multicultural, multiethnic place, and where I could advance and learn. All these years at TPT have proved me that I was not wrong when I made

the decision to join. I came into TPT's life as a Quality Manager and then I was promoted to the position of Senior Quality Manager. At present I work as Executive Quality Director. Along these years I have seen the job I do has given me the opportunity to grow and move forward professionally. I like what I do which makes a big difference in my professional life, I feel useful and I keep learning every day. It has indeed been a great experience.

**Q** Do you miss being freelance or do you prefer being in-house? Why?

**A** Being freelance is very nice and challenging, but from a financial viewpoint it was not very stable. I wanted to get a job that could provide me with the challenge, but that at the same time would provide me with the financial stability that I

needed for my family. As a freelancer, I was very blessed because I counted with clients that were as loyal to me as I was to them and I had the privilege to work for people who appreciated what I did for them. I still hope to do some freelancing when I retire since I do not think I would ever stop working in the profession I like and love so much.

**Q** What brought you into the profession?

**A** This is a very interesting question, indeed. When the time came for me to get into college, I had many things that were appealing to me like Art History, Mathematics, Psychology, etc. It was a very long journey because I did not want to tie myself to do something for the rest of my life that was not interesting enough and would not motivate me to

get up in the mornings looking forward to my day, giving me the possibility of learning something new every single day of my life. As a child, I always liked languages and one day I was offered a job as a translator for the Fishing Industry, which I took and made me discover the fascinating world of translation. Later on, I went to the university to get my degree in English Language, majoring in Translation and Interpreting and have been in this profession for over 40 years to this day.

**Q** You also teach translation at a couple of universities, how has the training and teaching changed over the years?

**A** Yes, that is correct. I teach for a Translation and Interpreting program at Hunter College and for a Translation program online for Adelphi University for some years now. As you rightly know, the Translation and Interpreting market is very competitive. If you want to get into the market and need to be very compe-

tent and well trained. My job at TPT has given me a good insight as to the trends in the market and that has helped me tremendously to adapt the courses I teach to comply with these trends so that my students will get a better training and get more qualified to get into the market. It is very rewarding to see that the potential to learn the skills is there and that the number of students interested in learning about translation and interpreting is increasingly growing. All this makes me keep on the look for materials that will help them get a better training.

**Q** What is your personal favorite CAT tool? Which one does the agency you work at utilize and why?

**A** So far, I have worked with Trados, SDLX and WordFast. Of these three, WordFast is the one that I find user friendlier, not only because it is the one that we use at present in the agency I work for, but because it has a number of features that really contribute to achieve translations with a better quality, more

terminologically consistent and it helps translators, editor and proofreaders make a better use of their time. And with WordFast you can work in the Trados and SDLX formats. It is indeed a fabulous CAT tool to work with.

**Q** How do you manage everything, teaching, your workday your time off? Anything you've learned over the years you can pass on?

**A** I have been asked this same question many times. Though my days are indeed very long, the fact that I like what I do so much and having been in this profession for such a long time (over 40 fabulous years now!), I have a lot to give back and share my experiences and knowledge with my students and coworkers alike. It is indeed a pleasure to do so and I enjoy it. Over the years, I have learnt that in this professional field of translation there is always room to learn something new, interesting, and useful to be better prepared for the future. ■

# Tiny Tips for Reaching Direct Clients

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by Margarite Heintz Montez

**P**rior to entering the language services industry I worked in Sales and Marketing for an advertising agency and a major television network. Since going into the industry most of my clients were direct clients as opposed to agencies. During my years as Program Director at meetings and at conferences I was usually asked by fellow translators and interpreters how to get more direct clients.

Fortunately I came into the business with a specialty and I did have contacts from my previous com-

panies. These helped quite a bit in the beginning when I was accepting a wide variety of jobs to get my name known and hone my skills. It allowed me the luxury to reject jobs that paid extremely low rates or did not fit my schedule or interest.

As translators and interpreters we cannot live without agencies, but there's no need to be a slave to them either. Below are some tips that I was given in my previous years working in Sales by persons wiser than I. These tips are not the only way to get direct clients. There are

as many ways as there are salespersons. However, these have come in very handy over the years. These tiny tips are for cold calling clients on the phone, which is something that most translators and interpreters I've spoken with dread.

**1 Call on Tuesday or Thursdays,** people are more receptive to speak on those days. On Mondays they are preparing for the week, on Friday they may already be mentally checked out and don't really pay attention to the topic for discussion.

**2 Keep it brief.** Be polite but get to the point. Decision makers do not like their time wasted by meandering around the main object of your call.

**3 It's preferable not to leave voicemail,** unless they called you previously or if you already have some type of business relationship. Even just speaking on the phone once is notable.

After all they spoke with you once so they are familiar with you and your brand. When you do leave a voicemail speak slowly and leave your phone number at the beginning of the

message and at the end. They will appreciate it.

**4 Treat assistants and underlings well.** They have the decision makers' ear. It can make or break your sale with your contact. In the language services industry it is often the paralegal or assistant who actually does the hiring of translation services.

**5 Do not become a pest.** Yes, persistence pays but if you are calling every week you become known as the "annoying one." Try to stay in contact in a variety of ways, phone, e-mail,

blog, LinkedIn, even old-fashioned postcard. If you have something pertinent to say then contact them. Congratulate them for being promoted or offer some insight into their industry. You need to be in their mind around decision time and by staying in relatively frequent contact you can be the first one on their list when they assign projects. ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margarite Heintz Montez has been working in the language services industry for 10 years first as a translator then as an interpreter. Currently she holds the position of Sales and Marketing Manager at Translingua in NYC, NY. She is an ATA member, an NYCT member and was the Program Director for the NYCT from 2008-2013. She also serves on the Human Rights Committee of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs. In her spare time she is an avid fútbol (soccer) fan cheering on her beloved team.

# RECAP: March Meeting

## Speaker: Laurie Trehaft: My Years at the United Nations

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by Margarite Heintz Montez

**T**he NYCT monthly meeting in March was very well attended. The room was filled to capacity to hear Laurie Trehaft discuss her career as an interpreter.

Laurie started with her education and her early experiences and then went on to discuss her experiences at the U.N. where she worked for over 25 years. She worked in Geneva, missions for Nicaragua, on Human Rights projects and in conferences in Costa Rica.

The United Nations has a particular diplomatic language and Laurie emphasized that the precedent of past documents always had to be respected. During her years the U.N. was a very gracious place in which to work, this has changed in the last couple of years. It seems to be the

end of an era.

Everything that is published in written form or on-line has to be in all the official languages of the U.N. which are French, English, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. All these documents are published or put on-line simultaneously. These documents are also used as sources for future speeches or books.

This makes for quite busy translation and interpretation departments. Translators often work on relay, meaning that if your source document of speech is in Spanish then your counterparts in Arabic or Russian are waiting for your translation in order to begin their work. Within the translation department there are various levels or grades of translators. A division of this is précis-writers.

These are the translators that attend every meeting and write a summarized translation of the meeting. This précis-writing can be one avenue for freelancers, although the majority of positions are full-time staff. There is no age requirements for freelancers, however there are age requirements for full-time staffers.

There was a great many questions from the floor such as:

### **Do you use tools or dictionaries?**

Yes, of course. The U.N. has a well staffed dictionary room and reference library. All documents are on the system at ODS. UN.ORG and the U.N. also has its' own term base at [unterm.un.org](http://unterm.un.org). Plus having

other translators and interpreters there makes research easier since one does not have to go on-line to search what a term or phrase means, one can go to the actual translator who wrote the source document.

One interesting fact is that the Russian translation team dictates everything and they have the highest productivity of all the language departments in the translation unit.

### **Any opportunity for non-official U.N. languages?**

Unfortunately no. There may be times when the department might outsource, but it is rare. Laurie's advice was to go the mission or consulate of the country whose language one works in.

### **What did you have to retrain or learn?**

The elegance of the language, the style

has to be gorgeous. Research has to be time-efficient.

### **When did you have time to have a family?**

The U.N. is very understanding about family life. "I always put my children first and I was grateful I had a family and worked at the U.N. There were many opportunities to travel. There was 6 weeks of vacation. I can't guarantee it will always be that way.

### **What kind of assignments took you overseas?**

If it is short-term it is usually a conference. A regional commission is a sub-office and that is longer. Those are in Bangkok, Santiago, Chile and Lebanon.

### **Do you use CAT Tools?**

"Some do, I didn't"

### **How do you see translation at**

### **the U.N. changing in the next few years?**

I think there is going to be a reduction in staff. They are looking to save money and to outsource.

### **What does it take to become an official language at the U.N.?**

The Security Council must vote on it. They are looking at Japanese and German, but it is not decided yet.

There is an exam this coming June for translators. The exam consists of 2 passages. There are no dictionaries or electronic devices allowed. Anyone wishing to take the exam is encouraged to contact Anna Getzinger at [getzinger@un.org](mailto:getzinger@un.org). ■

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Margarite Heintz Montez, is a conference interpreter, the current editor of the NYCT Gotham and was Program Director for the NYCT from 2008-2013.

# RECAP: April Meeting

## Interpreting, Diplomacy and Neutrality

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by Gigi Branch-Shaw

The April Circle meeting focused on a glamorous and compelling side of the language service industry: diplomatic interpreting. Our speaker, Ellen Sowchek, a translator and interpreter herself, is interested in the role of interpreters while practicing their profession: "Interpreting is a skill and an art that is very much in and of the moment, with the most successful interpreters being those who are able to preserve their neutrality and their 'invisibility.'"

For her presentation, "Interpreters in Their Own Words: Stepping Out from the

Shadows of the Great and the Infamous," Ms. Sowchek singled out five individuals who interpreted for some of the most famous and powerful men of the twentieth century. Using their autobiographical resources and concentrating primarily on their work during the first and second World Wars and the periods in between and shortly afterwards, Ms Sowchek identified certain characteristics in their individual styles and shared information about their backgrounds, ambitions and careers, along with a few of their interpreting experiences.

She began with Dr. Paul Schmidt (1899-1970), a German interpreter and translator, whom she refers to as "the Career Civil Servant." Dr. Schmidt was educated as a diplomat and worked for the German Foreign Ministry as well as the League of Nations. Fluent in French, Russian and English, he became Hitler's interpreter and assisted him at key meetings and conferences with the likes of Neville Chamberlain and Clemenceau. He was arrested at the end of the war for his connection to the Nazi party, but was never charged. You can read more about

Dr. Schmidt in his autobiography *Hitler's Interpreter, The Secret History of German Diplomacy 1935-1945* (1951).

The next interpreter was Arthur H. Birse (1889-1967), whom Ms Sowchek has named "the Banker." Born into an English merchant family, Mr. Birse was raised and schooled in Russia and fluent in Polish, Italian and Russian. A banker by choice, he was called upon for his interpreting skills during WWI, and later served as Churchill's interpreter during WWII and accompanied him to the conferences in Teheran, Moscow and Yalta. After the war, Mr. Birse chose to return to banking, but recorded his professional interpreting experiences in *Memoirs of an*

*Interpreter* (1967). Charles E. Bohlen (1904-1974) was an American interpreter who is described as "the Diplomat." Harvard-educated and from a family of means, Mr. Bohlen took the diplomatic exam in 1929 and entered the Foreign Service. He was sent to Russia to study the language and later became an expert on Russian and Soviet affairs. During WWII, he was an interpreter for President Roosevelt, accompanying him to the Teheran and Yalta Conferences, and later interpreted for President Truman at Potsdam with Churchill and Stalin. He writes about his role as a diplomat and interpreter in his autobiography *Witness to History 1929-1969* (1973).

The last two interpreters were Russian, and both worked for Stalin. Valentin Berzhkov (1916-1998), whom Ms Sowchek calls "the Appartichik," and Vladimir Pavlov (1915-1953), "the Other." Mr. Berzhkov was from a middle-class family and a member of the Communist party. He spoke German and English and accompanied Stalin to both the Teheran Conference with Roosevelt and Churchill and the Potsdam Conference with Truman and Churchill. He later taught Russian-American relations in the US. He writes of his experiences in *At Stalin's Side: His Interpreter's Memoirs from the October Revolution to the Fall of the Dictator's Empire* (1994). Mr. Pavlov was also

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# NCIHC Membership Meeting

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**N**ational Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) will hold the 7th Annual NCIHC Membership Meeting on Friday and Saturday, June 7th and 8th, 2013 in Seattle, Washington. The event marks the return of NCIHC to Seattle – the location of the first national gathering of language access advocates which eventually led to the founding of the NCIHC.

The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care is a multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to promote and enhance language access in health care in the United States. After the first national gathering in Seattle in 1994, followed by other meetings throughout the country, leaders came together again in Seattle

in 1998 to establish a formal “Working Group.” The NCIHC was later incorporated in 2001. Since then, NCIHC has organized an annual gathering of interpreters, interpreter educators, language services administrators, policymakers, researchers, healthcare providers and language access advocates, around the country. “Moving our meeting to different locations allows the Council to better understand, first hand and in person, the unique needs and challenges faced in different parts of the country,” said Joy Connell, NCIHC President. “Based on areas of need, and with input from our membership, we have gone from the Northeast to the South, to the Mid-West and West Coast, Our goal is to bring to-

gether the industry’s leading experts and link them with local communities – this is not about a one-time event, but about creating a lasting impact to improve language access in health care.”

For decades, Seattle language access advocates have been hard at work implementing strategies, at a grassroots level, to address the needs of people with limited English proficiency in King County. From volunteer language banks in the late sixties to the development of some of the first specialized healthcare interpreter training programs in the eighties, Seattle has been one of the communities that have led the charge toward equal access to healthcare for all. Most recently, Seattle has been in the news as the home

of the first and only union for healthcare interpreters in the United States.

INTERPRETAMERICA is holding its 4th annual summit in June. This year it is being held in Virginia, fairly close to Washington, D.C. Please check their website for information on the location and the program.

FIT will be holding its international conference in Berlin, Germany in August 2014. It was held in San Francisco in August 2011. Details are not set in stone; however, the website does provide location, transportation and hotel details. It is updated periodically. Those interested can plan ahead.

Please send information on exciting translation, interpretation and language events to the editor. Thank you. ■

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a personal English interpreter for Stalin, accompanying him to the Yalta Conference with Roosevelt and Churchill.

Undoubtedly, these five men were actively involved in some of the most pivotal discussions in modern history. As interpreters, they were expected to relay high-level information accurately, while maintaining a sense of neutrality, confidentiality and trustworthiness. After giving us a glimpse of this heightened political world, Ms. Sowchek touched briefly upon other diplomatic interpreters, such as Eugen Dollmann and Harry Obst. For those interested in learning more about this field, she recommends *Interpreters as Diplo-*

*mats* (1999) by Ruth Roland.

All in all, this presentation was entertaining and informative and prompted numerous questions and comments from members on a variety of topics from the interpreting industry, both of yesterday and today: the position of female interpreters and the role of gender in the field, the evolution of the profession, interpreters as communicators and record keepers, etc. All discussions to be continued.... ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gigi Branch-Shaw is a Freelance French Translator who specializes in marketing and editorial translations. She also works as a Web Project/Content Manager and is the Secretary of the NYCT.



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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 meetings, summer picnic and holiday party
- Professional development workshops and seminars
- Subscription to our newsletter, The Gotham Translator
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