



# THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

## TRENDS IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: EXPERTS PLEAD THEIR CASE

by Agnes Meilhac

Organized by NYU SCPS, the Trends in Literary Translation event took place on Saturday, April 16, in New York's Woolworth Building on Barclay Street. The building houses, among other tenants, the New York University School of Continuing and Professional Studies' Center for Global Affairs.

The theme of the panel discussion, which attracted a diverse audience and filled the room to capacity, was "Bringing world literature to readers and recognition to literary translators." Featuring four eminent speakers, Esther Allen, Emmanuelle Ertel, Susan Harris and Barbara Harshav, it was moderated by Alison Dundy, NYU's Translation & Interpreting Coordinator.

Translator, author and Assistant Professor at Baruch College, CUNY, Esther Allen has gained recognition for her work in promoting a culture of translation in the United States. She has directed the PEN Translation Fund since 2003 and cofounded the PEN World Voices Festival: the New York Festival of International Literature. Emmanuelle Ertel is Assistant Professor of French literature and of translation at New York

University. She is also Director of the new M.A. program in Literary Translation: French to English at New York University. Susan Harris is Editorial Director of Words without Borders and Barbara Harshav is an eminent translator who teaches translation in the Comparative Literature department at Yale University.

The discussion started with the moderator asking three questions of the panelists. What are the origins of "the 3% problem" in literary translation, i.e. the traditional American aversion to translated literature? What has

already been done historically and what can be done to change this in the future? And, finally, what is the quality of literary translation today? Each of the panelists had fifteen minutes to address these issues before the floor was given to the audience for a round of questions.

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Speaking first, Esther Allen clarified that the widely debated 3% in fact includes all types of translations, not just literary. Actual literary translation in the US amounts to much less than 1%. According to Emmanuelle Ertel, the figures are declining further, even for French and German, the dominant languages translated today. In 1993, 510 books in the US and the UK were translated from French into English, but by 2004 that number had dwindled to 300. Emmanuelle Ertel also noted that French is at a comparative advantage given the country's generous government funding programs for translating French-language literature.

The abundance of help from European government agencies may come as no surprise. We tend to imagine a wealth of diversity within the EU, although, in reality, 2 out of 3 books published in Europe are translated from English. The data testify to the global dominance and export of English, the international lingua franca often acting as a "go-between," given that English translations, and not the original texts, are frequently used as the basis for adaptation into other less prevalent languages. Emmanuelle Ertel expressed concern that obscure authors are thus translated through the prism of English, perhaps falling victim to cultural distortion. Naturally, the flip side of the argument is that, without the English

translation, such books would never reach a wider audience.

Another important point was raised during the discussion regarding the shortage of translated books in the US. Publishers are the ones who believe that English-language readers dislike translations although there is absolutely no evidence to that effect. Esther Allen argued that this is an unsubstantiated myth. After all, she asked, how many American readers knowingly choose a given book specifically because the author writes in English? In her opinion, publishers simply use the alibi of a reading public that supposedly rejects translations to steer clear of "foreign" works out of expediency and in order to adhere to established financial practice. They prefer a tried-and-tested recipe for success—anything to keep the profits flowing. Emmanuelle Ertel noted that, as a result, many translated books are not identified as translations. And, of course, the irony is that the leading publishing groups worldwide—the "overlords," to quote Esther Allen—are actually French and German (Hachette, Bertelsmann).

So what is the future of translation? At one point the equivalent of 19th century "crocheting", translation is now studied by a greater percentage of male students, which can be interpreted as a sign of more widespread interest. Initiatives have been undertaken to bolster the concept of literary translation as a form of

scholarship. An example of one such effort was the 2009 Modern Language Association convention devoted to Translation. The theme was chosen by the MLA's president, Catherine Porter, a Professor in Humanities at Cornell University and translator of contemporary French philosophy, who attended the NYU event.

Unfortunately, many people still adhere to a strictly mechanical concept of the quality of language, and even publications such as *The New York Times* do nothing to dispel that notion. According to Esther Allen, we live in a culture that wants to "eliminate the human." We want to have "machines that do the playing, reading and writing for us." Today, there is a greater move towards an appreciation of translation, but at the same time translation is still seen as an automated process devoid of creativity and uniqueness. Emmanuelle Ertel has therefore made the practice and teaching of translation in the US her mission.

Words without Borders is another example of efforts made to encourage literary translation. Susan Harris gave a compelling presentation of this nonprofit organization dedicated to the translation, publication and promotion of contemporary international prose and poetry penned by authors not easily accessible to English-speaking readers.

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## Interview: Agnes Niemetz

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by Katie Spillane

**W**ith more than 20 years of experience in the industry, Hungarian translator and interpreter Agnes Niemetz has much to show and tell when it comes to translation and interpretation. *The Gotham Translator* recently carved a slice out of Agnes's busy schedule to ask her a few questions about her journey to becoming the language service provider she is today.

Like many language service providers, she began her career as a writer and journalist. Working first in Hungary and later in the U.S., Agnes gradually shifted from writing in her own language to translating. When asked about shifting the balance between journalism and translation early on in her career, she responded:

*When the political system changed in Hungary at the very end of the 80s, I felt it was time for me "to cover America." I pulled out my journalism degree from the bottom of a dusty drawer, and reconnected with old friends and experts in the field, offering the writing skills and journalistic experience I acquired in the U.S. Over a period of about ten years I covered many issues and events, and traveled extensively while simultaneously improving my translation skills. It was challenging to constantly keep in mind that Hungary had been isolated behind walls for two*

*generations. Freedom of press had been grotesquely inverted in Hungary; lacking tradition and funds for quality training, journalists tend to construe this concept to mean that they can write anything that "pops into their heads." Consequently, the Hungarian media is generally infused with poor journalism, especially with respect to political issues. I was frustrated: I slowly shifted towards translation. Even so, I never lost touch with journalism and keenly follow its progress in Hungary.*

Agnes is candid about the flexibility, creativity and tenacity that are so important to those starting out in the profession.

*Life experiences and interest intertwined to create the translator in me. I built things up step by step: I educated myself about the profession, developed relationships, joined organizations, and most importantly changed my reading habits. I have translated everything that has come along—from baby formula instructions to New York Times articles. I worked from home at first, and eventually registered Hungarian Translation Services as a small business. My advertisements in Hungarian-American papers were efficient in the beginning, and I figured out soon enough that being active with Hungarian communities in the U.S. at every level has benefits. The demand for Hungarian is weak, and therefore one needs to stand on many legs (language providers, govern-*

*ment agencies, Hungarian foreign representations, non-profits, etc.).*

Now an accomplished veteran of the industry, Agnes remains a woman on the move. Six years ago, determined to take her business to the next level, she decided to rent an office space in midtown Manhattan. Agnes is overwhelmingly positive about the experience and explains how this bold move helped her to take her career in new directions.

*Suddenly I gained a whole new perspective! New channels opened up: interpreting kicked in as the most challenging one. The State Department language services invited me to take their consecutive and then simultaneous courses; Homeland Security's language unit also tested my language proficiency level. Similar offers followed from the Immigration Court of the Justice Department. I now accept translations in four languages, and I also share editing jobs (like a poetry translation just last month) with some expert freelancer colleagues.*

The traits of independence and determination shine through when Agnes is asked why she chose to open her own agency rather than joining a large translation company.

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# A Review of IATE

The importance of consistence of terminology to the EU and generally speaking, the role that the IATE database plays to these translators.

**T**he Translation People understand that consistent use of terminology throughout a company's documents is paramount and we appreciate that it's essential to project a coherent message to clients and suppliers alike. Imagine for a moment, if you can, how difficult this must be in an institution the size and scale of the European Union! It was with this in mind that IATE ("Inter Active Terminology for Europe") was conceived.

IATE is the EU's inter-institutional terminology database. It was launched in 1999 to create a single web-based interface for all EU terminology resources, demystifying jargon for all users, making the information more easily available and ensuring its standardisation throughout the EU institutions. Prior to this date there were several different databases, including one for each of the three main EU institutions - the European Commission (EURODICAUTOM), the European Parliament (EUTERPE) and European Council (TIS). Although it has been used internally within EU institutions since 2004, the public interface was only officially opened on 29 June 2007 and since then its multilingual term base has been at the disposal of everyone in the EU. The overall development costs of the database from 1999 to 2003 were €1.41 million and the annual maintenance costs for 2007 were €627 000. These costs are covered by the budgets of all the participating institutions and bodies of the EU.

IATE plays a major role in assuring the quality of all written communication of EU institutions and bodies. By offering easy access to validated EU-related terminology, it aims to ensure the consistency and reliability of terminology which is crucial for producing the clear and unambiguous texts necessary to guarantee both the validity and transparency of the legislative process and effective communication with the citizens of the Union.

IATE is managed by the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union in Luxembourg and is a "live" and interactive database, meaning that anyone can contribute and the content is constantly being updated. Anyone accessing the database can make changes but, in order to ensure the quality of the individual contributions, a change in the database automatically launches a validation cycle, whereby terminologists in the translation departments validate new and modified information. The database covers all 23 official European languages although the content volume per language varies, depending primarily on the length of time each language has been an official EU language. In the long term, the aim is to have equal volume in all languages. According to latest figures on the IATE website (<http://iate.europa.eu>), the database, contains not only 8.7 million terms EU-specific terms, but also 500 000 abbreviations and 100 000 phrases from areas such as agriculture, law & IT.

The database was conceived as an answer to problems with consistency of terminology in EU documents, to provide a tool facilitating the drafting of multilingual EU texts on any given subject. However, there are still concerns over the quality of some translations, especially legacy data from previous lists. All translations are given a star rating from one star (Reliability not verified) to 4 (Very reliable) depending on the reliability of the source and whether the translation has been officially approved. The consensus seems to be that IATE is a useful source, but one that should be used in conjunction with other reference sources and not relied upon 100%. ■

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## ABOUT THE TRANSLATION PEOPLE

The Translation People ([www.thetranslationpeople.com/](http://www.thetranslationpeople.com/)) is a leading translation services provider with a global network of translation experts. The Translation People are headquartered in Manchester, UK, they also have offices in Birmingham, London, Glasgow, Paris and Bonn. They offer language translation services, localisation, multi-language desktop publishing and interpreting services to global organisations in a wide range of fields including mechanical engineering, healthcare, control and instrumentation, legal, financial, industrial and consumer electronics and process manufacturing.

# Webinar Question: Should I Incorporate?

by Corinne McKay

This is post #2 in my ongoing series of questions from the webinar on “Getting started as a freelance translator” that I presented for the American Translators Association earlier this month.

**A participant asks:** *As a self-employed freelance translator, should I operate as an LLC, an S-corp or a sole proprietorship?*

**Short answer:** If you freelance full-time, I think it’s worth incorporating. As long as you don’t mind the extra paperwork, incorporating has some significant tax and liability advantages.

**Longer answer:** First, I’m not an accountant or an attorney. Second, I have an S-corp so I’m more informed about S-corps than about LLCs and C-corps. Third, I can’t speak to tax issues in countries other than the U.S. That being said:

- Running your freelance business as a sole proprietor is really simple; just report your freelance income on IRS Schedule C, pay self-employment tax on it and you’re pretty much set. Running a corporation is a little more complicated: you may have to file monthly or quarterly payroll taxes and a separate end-of-year corporate tax return. You will have to pay to register your corporation every year and the IRS may be less lenient with you than with a sole proprietor if you mess up your taxes. If you don’t want to be bothered with any extra paperwork or filing requirements, stick with sole proprietorship.
- The hassle factor of incorporating depends on the state in which you live, since corporations are registered at the state level. Here in Colorado,

incorporating is very simple and cheap but you do have to renew your corporate registration every year. Check your state’s Secretary of State website for the requirements where you live.

- The tax advantages of incorporating can be significant. When you work as a sole proprietor, you pay self-employment tax (currently 15.30%) on everything you earn, minus your business expenses. This is *in addition to* the normal Federal rate that you would pay if you worked for an employer, so it’s a big hit. Some corporate structures allow you to take some of your earnings as “wages” which are subject to self-employment tax and some of your earnings as “profit” which is not subject to self-employment tax. My understanding is that this applies to S-corps and C-corps but not LLCs unless the LLC files taxes as an S-corp. So for example if you gross \$70,000 and take \$40,000 as wages and \$30,000 as profit, you have the potential to save \$4,590 in self-employment tax (15.3% x 30,000). Even if you do quarterly payroll taxes (mine take about an hour per quarter) and pay an accountant to file your corporate tax return, this is a big win.
- Liability: I have never heard of a lawsuit against a freelance translator, but the U.S. is the most litigious country in the world so it’s certainly not out of the question. Incorporating separates your business and personal assets; if you’re sued, the plaintiff can only go after your business’ assets and not your house, car or personal bank accounts. If you’re a sole proprietor, your personal assets are theoretically fair game if you are sued for a business issue.
- Incorporating seems to make you less

likely to be audited by the IRS. It’s a bit hard to pin down the exact statistics, but articles such as the one by respected tax professional Barbara Weltman suggest that audit rates for S-corps are dramatically lower than those for sole proprietors. Weltman states that the total S-corp audit rate is 0.4% and the audit rate for Schedule C filers earning between \$100,000 and \$200,000 per year is 3.9%. ■

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Corinne McKay, CT is an American Translators Association-certified French to English translator specializing in law, international development and corporate communications. From her office in Boulder, Colorado, she provides high-quality translation services to international development agencies and research institutes, law firms, international communications companies and quality-conscious translation agencies. She also provides on-site French interpreting services to clients in the Boulder/Denver metro areas.

Corinne’s clients benefit from her intense involvement in the translation industry as the (2008-2010) President of the Colorado Translators Association and the Chairperson (2009-2011) of the American Translators Association’s public relations committee. She has been selected as a presenter for the annual conference of the American Translators Association since 2004, speaking on topics ranging from freelance business practices to open source software to social networking tools for translators.

In 2006, Corinne published *How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator*, a career how-to guide for beginning and established translators alike. It has since sold over 3,000 copies and has become a widely-cited reference for the translation industry.

# Some Thoughts On Incorporating

by **Corinne McKay**

In the past few weeks I have received a number of questions about how, why and when to incorporate a freelance business. I'm not an accountant or an attorney, but I'll give an overview of the topic along with some of my own thoughts. After starting out as a sole proprietor (a self-employed freelancer who is not incorporated), I formed an S-Corporation about 4 years ago and have been very happy with it, although I know freelancers who are LLCs, C-Corporations and people who have been sole proprietors for 20+ years and have no desire to change!

It goes without saying that this information is a) not a substitute for advice from an accountant or attorney and b) depends a great deal on your individual situation and your geographic location. For the purposes of this post, we'll assume that the prospective corporation will consist only of you, and that you are not going to have shareholders, stock, holdings in other corporations, etc.

**Why incorporate:** Incorporating gives you some liability protection in that it separates your business' assets from your personal assets (i.e. your house, car, etc.), and any business-related lawsuits target only the business. Incorporating can save you a substantial amount on taxes, because some corporate structures allow you to avoid paying self-employment tax on all of your income. Corporations may also project a more professional image than a sole proprietorship, which can be an asset when marketing to direct clients. In addition, if you decide to expand your freelance business at some point, being incorporated

makes it easier to hire employees or subcontractors. A corporation may also allow you to contribute more pre-tax money to a retirement plan.

**Disadvantages of incorporating:** Incorporating requires additional paperwork, and the filing fees depend on your state. In some cases, corporations are required to file quarterly payroll taxes and there can be big penalties if you don't file them. A corporation must file its own end of year taxes, so that's another tax return on top of your personal tax return.

To me, tax savings are the biggest advantage of having an S-Corp. An S-Corp allows you to take part of your income as "wages" and part of your income as "profit," and the profit is not subject to self-employment tax. In my case, I took about \$35,000 of income as profit in 2007, resulting in a savings of over \$5,000 in self-employment tax (self-employment tax is an additional 15% on top of your regular federal rate). Although an S-Corp has to file quarterly payroll taxes (for me, these are federal income tax, state income tax and state unemployment contributions), I paid my accountant to teach my how to do the payroll taxes myself and they now take me under an hour per quarter. The way I look at it, I'm effectively earning \$1,250 an hour to do payroll taxes, which is much more of an incentive than I need to remain an S-Corp!

**Corporate structures and how to incorporate:** Incorporating is not hard; if you can run a successful freelance translation business, you can incorporate it yourself. It's a good idea to talk to an accountant about the best corporate structure for you. The three

main options are S-Corp, C-Corp and LLC. As stated above, I feel that the main advantage of an S-Corp for a freelance translator is tax relief, so it's worth investigating which structure will give you the most benefit in terms of avoiding self-employment tax. The S-Corp requires that you pay yourself a "reasonable salary" as defined by the IRS, but my impression is that there is not a hard and fast rule about what that amount is; I usually go for about 50% salary and 50% profit.

The first place to look for information on incorporating is your state's Secretary of State website. There you will find all of the information on the filing fees and requirements for your corporation. You will also need a Federal Employer Identification Number, which you can obtain for free from the IRS. Once you are incorporated, the EIN replaces your social security number as far as your clients are concerned.

Fees for incorporating can vary widely; in Colorado it costs \$20 or less to form and renew your corporation, but when I looked at the website of the Massachusetts Secretary of State, the minimum fee to form an LLC appears to be \$500. So, it's worth checking the fees and requirements for your location and balancing that with the potential savings. If you currently earn \$25,000 a year from translation and have to pay a \$500 filing fee plus the cost of an additional tax return, the ultimate savings may be minimal. However, I've heard various accountants say that anyone who is a sole proprietor and earning more than \$40,000-\$50,000 per year can benefit from incorporating. ■

# WA Interpreters Face Two National Healthcare Interpreter Certifications

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by Milena Calderari-Waldron

**N**CIHC, MMIA, IMIA, LLS, LLU, NBCMI, CCHI, CMI, QMI, HCI, AHI. It's enough of an alphabet soup for interpreters to be utterly confused. "We are testing in earnest; we have not begun testing yet." "We are currently only offering certification in Spanish; we are certifying in 5 other languages." There is a reason for your whiplash injury. Currently there are **TWO COMPETING NATIONAL EFFORTS** to create a healthcare interpreter certification program, which obviously don't acknowledge each other's existence.

Although far from perfect and ill managed, WA is the only state that offers a well established, legislated at the state level, non-vendor, and healthcare interpreter certification program. As a result of a consent decree stemming from a Title VI lawsuit, since 1995 the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has been offering two healthcare interpreter credentials: Certified Medical Interpreter (DSHS CMI) in 8 languages and Authorized Medical Interpreter (DSHS AMI) in all others. The entire DSHS Interpreter Certification Program is cur-

rently housed at DSHS LTC (Language Testing and Certification) and is legislated and governed by the Washington Administrative Code Chapter 388-03. The DSHS interpreters' code of ethics (WAC 388-03-050) is based on reviews of the Federal and WA Court interpreter codes of ethics, among others. Over the years, it has been amended to reflect DSHS's needs.

The rest of the nation is not as lucky. Healthcare providers, LEP patients and language companies have no objective, vendor-neutral means of determining who has the necessary interpreting skills, ethics and training to work as a healthcare interpreter. It is frankly the Wild West out there. Something had to be done and something was done.

Seattle 1994. During a conference organized jointly by the Cross Cultural Health Care Program (a WA nonprofit best known for its \$750 copyrighted 40-hour healthcare interpreter training, Bridging the Gap) and the Society of Medical Interpreters, SOMI (absorbed in 2005 by NOTIS) a schism occurred in the interpreting profession between those who believe interpreters should always be neutral and impartial, and those who would like interpreters to

become advocates and cultural brokers. The group believing in advocacy and cultural brokerage eventually went on to create the National Council on Interpreting in Healthcare (NCIHC) with funds from powerful healthcare providers and language companies (Language Line Services [formerly AT&T Language Line], CTS Language Link, and Pacific Interpreters, among others).

By 2005, NCIHC had published its National Standards of Practice and its National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Healthcare. Both documents seem to have been inspired by the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association's (currently International Medical Interpreters Association or IMIA) Standards of Practice in turn inspired by the RID American Sign Language Interpreters code of ethics created within the Americans with Disabilities Act framework. NCIHC espouses patient advocacy and cultural brokerage in frank contradiction with court interpreting codes of ethics, as well as the WA DSHS one. These requirements force interpreters to choose one or another field of action (advocate/cultural broker or impartial/neutral conveyor of the messages



between communicating parties) which is, for all times and purposes, impossible and impractical. Freelance interpreters, which constitute about 80% of working interpreters, need to work in all venues in order to make a living. We cannot ask interpreters to be advocates in the morning at the hospital and neutral in the afternoon at court. Moreover, patient advocacy and cultural brokerage are behaviors that can lead to widespread interpreter misconduct and fraud. Currently, some healthcare providers are so put off by meddling interpreters that they are switching to Video Remote or Over-the-Phone Interpretation so as to minimize interpreters' unwelcomed input. This is a trend remote interpreting language companies view with great enthusiasm.

The second schism happened in 2007. Both IMIA and Language Line University (the testing branch of Language Line Services) had developed healthcare interpreting testing tools. Language Line Services decided to press on with the creation of the certification program largely based on the existing testing tools. This is a classic example of a conflict of interest if ever there was one. NCIHC balked at the heavy vendor influence and hurried aspects of this enterprise and splintered from the, until then, "national" movement. Thus the two national healthcare interpreter certification programs came into existence that

we see today: 1) the NBCMI National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters spearheaded by IMIA and LLS with its CMI, or Certified Medical Interpreter credential and QMI, or Qualified Medical Interpreter, credential and 2) the CCHI Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreting spearheaded by NCIHC with its CHI, or Certified Healthcare Interpreter credential and AHI, or Associate Healthcare Interpreter, credential. Unlike the court interpreting exam, these national certifications are managed by their two national entities. This makes legislating and disciplining interpreters very difficult. Also, having two competing national credentials will probably give rise to some interesting marketing maneuvering.

In the end, interpreters now face two expensive competing national healthcare interpreter certifications (about \$1300 between exam fees and prerequisites) espousing a code of ethics that precludes them from working anywhere else but the healthcare field, even though it allows them to work nationwide, provided they join one of the remote interpreting language companies. Should WA interpreters get these credentials? Do they have to? For the moment, WA interpreters can still get their healthcare interpreter credential for the extremely affordable price of \$75, allowing them to work pretty much any-

where within WA State. They must also be extremely careful, since DSHS Certified/Authorized Medical interpreters indulging in patient advocacy and/or cultural brokerage face decertification proceedings pursuant to WAC 388-03-170/6. If we all prevail in forcing DSHS to improve and enhance its existing interpreter certification program, we here in WA can still rightfully claim to be the national pioneers in language access and may never need these two expensive competing national credentials. ■

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Milena Calderari-Waldron, Spanish Interpreter, WA Court and DSHS Medical & Social Services Certified. Born and raised in Argentina to an Italian father and a French-speaking Argentine mother. She attended an Anglo-Argentine school becoming fluent in four languages at an early age. At 18 moved to Paris, France where she graduated in Archeology from the Sorbonne University. Returned to Argentina where she was awarded a doctoral fellowship for seven years from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research. Met her American husband at a dig and moved to the USA in 1992 where she worked as a bilingual legal assistant in a personal injury law firm. For nine years devoted herself to raising a family and caring for her ailing parents. She has been working as a freelance part-time interpreter since 2004. Currently WITS Vice-president.

# The Origin of Language

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by Gigi Branch-Shaw

**A**s it just so happened, the day I was asked to review the New York Times article, *Phonetic Clues Hint Language is Africa-Born*, was also the day I was planning to see Werner's Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. The simple fact that both movie and article focused on the prehistoric era (circa 30,000+ years ago) with both touching on prehistoric man's expression, one visual, the other communicative conveyed an almost synchronistic message to me. Understandably I was more than pleased with the opportunity. How often do we get to consider a period in our history that dates so far back?

The film takes us through a newly discovered ancient cave site, which holds the earliest known drawings by man. We see hard anthropological evidence\_ the actual drawings, tools, animal skeletons, etc.\_all studied extensively by a team of scientists. The article, on the other hand, highlights the claim by Dr. Quentin Atkinson that modern language in all its diversity shares one origin that can be traced to an area of southern Africa at least 50,000 years ago. Not surprisingly, this theory has been met with much controversy among many linguists, who don't think that languages can be traced

back that far in time. To date, the oldest noted language tree is the Indo-European family going back approximately 9,000 years.

Interestingly, the Times refers to Dr. Atkinson as a biologist from the University of Auckland in New Zealand. With some additional Google research, I discovered that until very recently he had been a Research Fellow at the University of Oxford at the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology: information that reveals a little more about his academic interest in linguistic and anthropological fields.

Dr. Atkinson's theory is based on the presence of phonemes, which make up the simplest units of language: the consonants, vowels and tones. He applied sophisticated statistical methods normally used for genetic patterning of DNA sequencing to historical linguistics and found simple but basic patterns in 500 of the languages spoken worldwide. He discovered that areas closer to Africa use more phonemes, while the farther areas use less. For example, the click languages in Africa use over 100 phonemes, English has about 45 and Hawaii, which is far from Africa, has only 13.

Atkinson has caused quite a stir in linguistic circles and furthermore his findings fit with other evidence about the origin of language. For example, it was discovered that the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert belong to one of the oldest branches of the genetic tree. This information is based on their human mitochondrial DNA. Their language includes a good number of click sounds, which have been proven to be an ancient feature of language. Furthermore, they live in southern Africa, the area Dr. Atkinson's points to as the origin of language.

Despite the fact that not all linguists are convinced of the validity of using statistical applications to historical linguistics, there is no doubt that Dr. Atkinson has linguistics talking. As one linguist, Donald A. Ringe from the University of Pennsylvania said, "It's too early to see if Atkinson's idea is correct, but if so, it's one of the most interesting articles in historical linguistics that I've seen in a decade." ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gigi Branch-Shaw is a freelance Fr>En translator who specializes in marketing and editorial translations. She also works as a project/content manager for online projects and is a regular contributing writer for *The Gotham Translator*, as well as a member of NYCT's Editorial Committee.

# Translation Journal

by Gabe Bakor

The *Translation Journal* (<http://translationjournal.net>) celebrates its 14th anniversary this year. Fourteen years may not be an impressive age for a printed periodical, but it's an eternity on the Internet, where sites are born and die every day. Even more remarkable is the regularity with which the *Translation Journal*, or *TJ* for short, has been published. Each and every one of its 56 issues appeared on the Web before the end of month previous to the dateline month (January, April, July, and October) with 10 to 15 feature articles submitted by authors from all over the world. The articles of the *TJ* are classified into 47 categories from Localization to Genealogical Translation. Some columns have appeared regularly since the *TJ*'s early days, such as Chris Durban's translators' advice column "The Bottom Line," formerly co-authored by Eugene Seidel, and Cathy Flick's "Web Surfing for Fun and Profit," featuring thousands of links to useful and/or fun sites.

In addition to the many articles submitted spontaneously by their authors, each issue

of the *TJ* features a "Translator Profile," written, at the editor's request, by an experienced translator who shares his or her views of the profession with novice translators and those considering translation as a career.

Currently the *TJ* is receiving dozens of submissions from throughout the world

every week, so that the criteria for accepting an article had to be tightened. While we do not discriminate against authors based on nationality or mother tongue, we've had to refuse articles written in English so poor that many sentences are impossible to understand and edit. The international and eclectic character of the *TJ* has remained unaffected. It is probably the only publication of the world where articles from authors from Iran, Israel, and an Arab country appear side by side. Translators from the Far East, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe share their specific experiences and unique problems on the pages of the *TJ*.

The main criterion for acceptance for publication has remained unchanged since the first issue: The article submitted should contain useful information for the greatest possible number of translators.

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**Fourteen years may not be an impressive age for a printed periodical, but it's an eternity on the Internet.**

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Since the first issue, the *TJ* has been available for reading and download free of charge. No registration is required

for access, and no personal data are requested or captured. Since the *TJ* is published only on the Web, its production costs are low. Its revenues come from a few paid ads and voluntary donations.

The first page of the *TJ* features a Google search box, where all articles published so far can be searched by keyword, author, or subject matter. The Table of Contents also lists, by subject matter, all the articles published in the past 14 years. ■

## ABOUT TRANSLATION JOURNAL BLOG

The *Translation Journal Blog* (<http://translationjournal.blogspot.com/>) is a companion publication of the *TJ*, dealing with specific translator issues. It allows comments by readers to be posted and answered by other readers. One article in the *TJ Blog* elicited 53 comments in a lively on-line discussion.

# April Monthly Meeting

by Gosia Darwin

**T**he MMIA, IMIA, LLS, LLU, NBCMI, CCHI, CMI, QMI, HCI, AHI. It's enough of an alphabet soup for interpreters to be utterly confused. "We are testing in earnest; we have not begun testing yet." "We are currently only offering certification in Spanish; we are certifying in 5 other languages." There is a reason for your whiplash injury. Currently there are TWO COMPETING NATIONAL EFFORTS to create a health-care interpreter certification program, which obviously don't acknowledge each other's existence.

The April meeting was dedicated to medical interpreting. We invited a language service supervisor from one of the NYC hospitals to speak about policies, procedures and opportunities in that growing field.

The monthly meeting on April 6th featured guest speaker Bella Elogoodin, Assistant Director in charge of interpreting services at the Manhattan-based Hospital for Special Surgery (HSS), which specializes in orthopedics and rheumatology.

Those of us who have already worked as medical interpreters had a chance to get inside facts and statistics. Members who haven't yet ventured into the field had an opportunity to find out more – both from the speaker and from their colleagues.

Like all local hospitals, HSS complies with federal and state regulations that ensure proper patient-provider communication in our linguistically diverse area. New York Department of Health requires healthcare facilities to provide interpreters free-of-charge for Limited English Proficiency

(LEP) patients.

Elogoodin pointed out that language access at HSS is a part of a broader, modern "health equity" approach, which also takes into account cultural sensitivity and minority health concerns. On a more pragmatic level, seamless communication helps prevent medical errors and possible liability that can result from misunderstandings or omissions. In short, access to medical interpreters works in everyone's best interest.

In a multi-cultural city like New York, there is clearly a demand for this kind of service. HSS receives about 55 interpreting requests each day. About 40 of those are for Spanish. Other commonly requested languages are Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Turkish, but patients represent a multitude of linguistic backgrounds from around the globe. Some LEP patients come from abroad to receive treatment. In these cases, the presence of an interpreter can be especially valuable for bridging not only the linguistic, but also the cultural gap.

NYCT members might have felt disappointed to find out that currently HSS does not contract freelancers. The hospital relies on trained volunteers and staff of 78 in-house interpreters, including Elogoodin, who is a native Russian speaker. Additional requests are covered through local interpretation agencies (such as CP Language Institute), who send their independent contractors to specific assignments.

"We do our best to provide live interpreters, but if it is not possible, there is always an option to use the phone service," said

Elogoodin. Telephonic interpreters are available instantly, around the clock. Recently the hospital has been also looking into video conferencing technology called Martti, provided by Language Access Network, which streams live audiovisual interpreting sessions on demand.

Hospitals make efforts to establish the need for language access in advance, but last-minute requests are not uncommon. Waiting rooms and registration areas post multi-lingual signs with brief information about the availability of medical interpreting services, and LEP patients can point to the language they speak. "We always encourage patients to make use of hospital-provided interpreters by phone or in person, and we inform them that the service is free-of-charge," said Elogoodin.

Some patients refuse the service and prefer the help of a family member or a friend, and hospitals must respect their decision. HSS requires such patients to sign a Language Assistance Waiver (with the assistance of a telephonic interpreter, if necessary), and the relative must be at least 16 years old. Elogoodin also pointed out that "HSS reserves the right to use hospital-provided interpretation if staff believes that the health or safety of the patient is at risk."

During the Q & A session members brought up additional topics and shared their experiences. Much of the discussion revolved around the role of interpreters, who often find themselves – intentionally or not – going beyond mere linguistic service and acting as patient advocates and cultural

mediators. The NYCT members were also curious about screening, evaluation, training and quality control issues. Since medical interpreting is still a relatively new and unregulated profession, hospitals such as HSS must rely on internal training programs, trust the selection process conducted at interpreting agencies and gather feedback from patients and staff.

**MEDICAL INTERPRETING: FACTS AND NEWS**

**LANGUAGE ACCESS IN HEALTHCARE – IT’S THE LAW!**

That’s good news – not only for patients, but also for interpreters. The importance of our services has been recognized, and language access is now mandatory for most hospitals and clinics in New York and many other states. On the federal level, the requirement stems from the broader civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color and nationality.

Access to interpreters is guaranteed by the NY State Patients’ Bill of Rights. On September 1, 2006, NY Department of Health adopted regulations, which require all public and private hospitals to develop language service programs that ensure availability of medical interpreters and provide written materials explaining how to access free language assistance.

The State requires hospitals to offer live interpreters whenever possible and to limit the use of phone interpreting. The use of family members or friends is not permitted, unless the patient refuses hospital-provided interpreter services.

**ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR MEDICAL INTERPRETERS**

While legal interpreters have long been able to gain credentials by passing state and fed-

eral court interpreting exams available in many languages, the medical field – despite government mandates – has remained unregulated. But it’s about to change.

The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters has been developing an exam intended to set standards and evaluation criteria across the country. The Board was founded in 2009, but the effort to establish guidelines and boost professional recognition in the medical interpreting field started back in 1986,

with the launch of the US-based International Medical Interpreters Association.

The exam consists of a written part (English only) and a language-specific oral part, currently only given in Spanish. The Board has recently announced that the oral test will soon be available in Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian, with future plans for Japanese, Arabic, Haitian Creole, French and Portuguese versions. ■

**OUR PATH TO PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS  
THE 9TH ANNUAL CFI CONTINUING EDUCATION CONFERENCE**

October 21-23, 2011 at the Marriott Marquis in San Francisco, CA

For info visit [www.calinterpreters.org](http://www.calinterpreters.org)  
Call for proposals: deadline June 1, 2011  
For instructions on submitting a proposal to present:  
<http://www.calinterpreters.org/conference/2011-call-proposals/>

**Our Path to Professional Success**

What makes you feel proud to be an interpreter?  
What inspires you?

The CFI conference provides a unique opportunity for court interpreters and translators to come together from all over California and the country. Last year in Santa Monica over 300 professional interpreters broadened their knowledge on interpreting skills, terminology, criminal and civil topics from nationally-recognized speakers. Sessions last two and a half days in up to four breakouts, including specialized workshops on translation software, language specific topics, and more. Registration includes breakfasts and lunches, so you can take full advantage of the weekend to network and catch up with colleagues.

Come to San Francisco and help shape the path of your profession.

The California Federation of Interpreters (CFI) is a professional association and labor union for court interpreters throughout California. The CFI conference offers 15 hours of continuing education seminars, with breakfasts and lunches included for you to take full advantage of the weekend to network and enjoy yourself. NAJIT has cosponsored the CFI conference for the past 4 years, and in 2010 over 300 interpreters learned with top trainers from around the country in up to 4 breakouts. See the program online [www.calinterpreters.org](http://www.calinterpreters.org) and consider submitting a proposal to present.

# Audit-Proofing Your Schedule C

by Barbara Weltman

**S**ole proprietors, independent contractors, and limited liability companies owned by a single individual file Schedule C, along with their personal Form 1040, to report the income and expenses of their business. Most business owners use tax professionals to prepare their returns, but many use home computers and software to do it themselves. With the April 15 filing deadline approaching for most Schedule C filers, now is a good time to think about ways to keep the IRS at bay.

## Report all your income

Income may be reported to you on a Form 1099-MISC. Whether or not you receive one, you are required to report all business income unless a special tax rule on tax-free treatment applies. Tips:

**Report the income exactly as it appears on the 1099.** IRS computers match their information reported to them on the 1099 to your return. If you use the cash method of accounting and receive payment after December 31, 2010, which has been included on a Form 1099 for 2010, you aren't taxed on this payment until 2011. But for reporting purposes, enter the full payment, followed by a subtraction of the full payment to zero it out. Attach a statement to your return saying that you are a cash method taxpayer who did not receive this payment in 2010. Remember to report the income in 2011, even though no 1099 will be issued.

**Report "invisible" income.** If you barter for goods and services, you are taxed on the value of what you received in the trade. The IRS gives this example: A plumber doing repair work for a dentist in exchange for dental services reports the fair market value of goods and services received in exchange for goods or services provided. If you barter through an exchange, you'll receive a Form

1099-B reporting your bartering transactions for the year.

**Report cash.** Tips and other cash payments may seem to be under the IRS's radar, but the government is getting better at detecting this type of revenue. In various audit guides, agents are told what to look for so that actual income can be determined. Look over the guide for the retail industry, which includes gas stations, direct sellers, liquor stores, and pizzerias, to see how agents are taught to detect unreported income.

## Claim all your deductions

Before you take any write-off, understand the rules to make sure you're eligible for a deduction. For example, if you claim an entertainment expense, be sure you have all the required records to back up your deduction. Don't overlook:

**A home office deduction.** Many are afraid that this is an automatic red flag. If you're entitled to the deduction, you should claim it.

**Business bad debts.** If you have not been paid for goods and collection appears to be impossible, then take the write-off. However, if you're in on the cash method and aren't paid for services rendered, you can't claim a bad debt deduction.

## Keep the paperwork

Books and records are the key to proving your entitlement to deductions and credits if the IRS questions your return. You may not be able to prevent a random audit but you will be able to survive it if paperwork is on your side. Types of records:

Receipts, invoices, and canceled checks for expenses paid.

Expense account worksheets, and diaries and log books for travel and entertainment costs, including car usage.

## Work with a good tax pro

The IRS is cracking down on tax preparers who violate the law by underreporting income or claiming false or inflated deductions for clients. When preparers are under review, their clients' returns are also examined. Don't work with a tax pro who has been sanctioned by the IRS. You can find out whether a preparer has been sanctioned by contacting the IRS Office of Professional Responsibility (include the preparer's name and address in your inquiry).

## Looking ahead

To minimize your risk of audit, consider taking more dramatic steps, such as changing your entity. You can, for example, incorporate and use S corporation status. The audit rates on S corporations, even if they are one-owner entities, are dramatically lower than the rates on sole proprietorships. For example, in the government's fiscal year 2008 (ending September 30), a sole proprietor with gross receipts of between \$100,000 and \$200,000 had an audit rate of 3.9%. The audit rate on all S corporations was only 0.4%.

Find more tips for avoiding audits in my book, J.K. Lasser's *Small Business Taxes 2010*. ■

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Weltman is an attorney, prolific author with such titles as J.K. Lasser's *Small Business Taxes* and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Starting a Home-Based Business*, and trusted professional advocate for small businesses and entrepreneurs. She is also the publisher of *Idea of the Day* and monthly e-newsletter *Big Ideas for Small Business* at <http://www.barbaraweltman.com> and host of *Build Your Business* radio. Follow her on Twitter at [BarbaraWeltman](http://BarbaraWeltman).

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*Other than a few years of teaching and being an editor in Hungary, I have never worked for anyone in my life! I never even considered it as an option. To leave communist Hungary was the most liberating experience in my life. The last thing I wanted was a boss telling me what to do. The free spirit of this country drove me to discover my creativity, and break out of the pitiful category we call "average."*

This independence seems to be something she expects and respects, from others. When I asked whether she was interested in changing her business model to include other employees she responded.

*I do not have employees, and I am not planning to radically change my business enterprise; I think it would kill my interest. The market has indeed changed. The demand for interpreting is growing faster than for translating. As a result of strict regulations (for example, in the area of interpreting for healthcare providers) the need for quality language services has witnessed tremendous growth in the U.S.*

Agnes has a deep and unmistakable commitment to the Hungarian language.

*As a linguist my main goal is to provide "quality translation with no compromise," to protect the beauty of my mother tongue. I appreciate that this is challenging in the constantly changing political and economic environment, but consistency and persistence precede success.*

She further explained how her mission to guarantee quality helps to position her as a guardian of her language and our profes-

sion as a whole.

*"Translators are modest and underpaid," said Günter Grass in a recent NPR broadcast. He is right. There are two reasons for low pay: the quality of the final product is dreadful, or the translator cannot negotiate well enough to receive a competitive price for his work. What damage does the first do? Cheap work yields cheap results: the quality of the Hungarian language is declining and poor translations play a significant part in this unfortunate process. Hungary is a new democracy with no commercialized language culture. The influx of avoidable foreign phrases and false expressions floods the media, product instructions, and everyday life. I hold large language providers responsible for this! (When a major bank sends out a letter to thousands of pensioners with the descriptor "haszonhúzó," that is, "beneficiary" incorrectly translated from the English, causing diplomatic turbulence, you know there's a problem.) The other reason for low pay is that some (mostly novice) freelance translators have difficulties negotiating and the corporate world takes advantage of them. It is also important that we translators and interpreters educate the public about the nature and technicalities of our work. ■*

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Spillane is a Chinese to English translator and cultural consultant. Like Agnes, Katie is deeply committed to building bridges between cultures and has enjoyed working with the Chinese community in New York. Her recent assignments have taken her further afield providing cultural awareness training for heli-skiing guides in British Columbia and editorial services to the People's Medical Publishing House.

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WWB's mission is to "open doors for readers of English around the world to the multiplicity of viewpoints, richness of experience, and literary perspective on world events offered by writers in other languages." WWB publishes *Words without Borders: The Online Magazine of International Literature*, a monthly publication of the world's best writing. It also works with publishing houses to produce anthologies and develops materials intended to help educators bring contemporary international literature into the classroom. Past anthologies include *Literature from the "Axis of Evil" Writing from Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Other Enemy Nations*, and *Words Without Borders: The World Through the Eyes of Writers*. WWB is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Lannan Foundation.

Last but not least, the final speaker, Barbara Harshav, gave a rousing talk on the importance of quality in translation, including many striking examples cited from her vast experience as a translator of literary and scholarly works from French, German, Hebrew and Yiddish.

The panel ended with a long Q&A session, which elicited further discussion and advice from the panelists on a wide variety of issues ranging from resources and grants to how to deal with authors and publishers. On the whole, the event was well worth attending. The panelists showed deep knowledge, great commitment to the subject and a willingness to share their experience with the audience. ■



**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)

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