

The Price of Not Communicating



Leonard Morin

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Joseph R. Paraguas entered the operating room. The patient lay on the operating table, her body covered with drapes except for the face and right lower leg, which ostensibly was the infected area. Mr. Paraguas nervously glanced over at the instrument table. He identified the scalpel, forceps, sterilization tray, and syringe. There were a few other instruments he did not recognize, but he felt confident he would get it all after a little practice. He could tell from a cursory examination of the leg, and based on his autodidactic surgical studies that this was going to be a question of either removing the infection or amputating the entire lower leg. It was his first day on the job and his supervisor had given him no guidance as to the particulars of the procedure. The department was understaffed and his new boss himself had five other operations he had to attend to that morning. Although Mr. Paraguas was unsure how to proceed, he knew that, having passed the medical doctor certification exam shortly after graduating from high school, he was the most highly skilled individual in the operating room. Without raising his glance, he commanded the person he assumed to be his assistant: "Scalpel."

Before I go into the significance of the hypothetical scenario above, I note the following. This essay sets forth my observations of some of the problems that impede the ability of translators and interpreters to serve their clients and some possible solutions. I discuss both translation and interpreting in this article because, although they are two distinct and different professions, they coincide in the broader sense of converting one language into another, and share many of the same challenges. I also practice both, so I am intimately familiar with them and they are close to my heart. For the sake of clarity, I suggest a series of five steps to perfect our rendering of service: 1) identify that there is a problem; 2) envision a solution to the problem; 3) develop the momentum for change; 4) implement the solution; 5) evaluate outcome to adjust strategy and commence the five-step plan again. I finally propose a working group structure to continue to review and address these challenges.

Readers should have little trouble extrapolating the imaginary situation sketched above to translation or interpreting. Indeed, it could apply to the inadequacies of medical, legal, or diplomatic interpreting or translation, and to a lesser extent of commercial interpreting or translation, such as market research. In the latter case, any damage would more likely be financial and not a matter of life, liberty, and death, but who is to say what the outcome of inadequate translation will be? Errors and mishaps are, by definition, unpredictable and any faulty or lacking translation is a risk. Skills of a very high level are required for translating or interpreting: superior command of a native language, superior command of another language, experience and training in the process of translation, and subject-matter expertise. Translation requires excellent writing skill in the target language; interpreting skills include simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and sight translation. There are also many subsets of skills, and the process to achieve this demanding level of competencies is almost inevitably long and arduous.

Despite the inadequacies, our profession has come a long way, and its gradual evolution was probably inevitable. One should not forget that a couple of centuries ago, barbers were the ones performing surgery, along with haircuts. We can assume that this fact derived from a lack of development of the medical field and not from some type of moral depravity. One hundred years from now, people will probably look back on our age with disdain for the primitive medical treatments we now use.

1. Identify that there is a problem

I believe readers recognize that our industry faces serious challenges, but for good measure, I cite Eric Candle of the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), who has studied what happens when interpreting is deficient or lacking. He states that patients' limited proficiency in English results in "longer length of hospital stays and greater risk of complications...greater risk of surgical delays and *readmission* due to greater difficulty understanding instructions, including preparing for procedures, managing conditions, taking medications, as well as identifying symptoms for immediate return to care and follow up." Fifty-five million people in the United States speak a language other than English at home. Yet it is worth noting that in the medical sphere, miscommunication is the number-one cause of patient harm whether a foreign language is involved or not. (1) Every year 96,000 patients die in the US due to miscommunication with their healthcare providers. Fifty percent of all patients are unable to communicate adequately with their healthcare providers. (2) Even though poor communication is already a major issue even if a foreign language is not involved, the potential for miscommunication is greater for individuals with limited English proficiency. This implies an enormous responsibility for translators and interpreters. Since translation and interpreting are used beyond the medical sector and presumably in every sphere of human interaction, the potential benefit of competent translation is formidable.

2. Envision a solution to the problem

To a great extent, we can continue doing what we have been doing, but more can be done. We have to educate the public, government, and employers so they understand that translation and interpreting are professions that require specific skills and training. We have to raise their awareness about what is at stake when the job is not performed or is performed inadequately. We should probably advocate for government investment in translator and interpreter training and certification programs. There should obviously be some regulatory threshold beyond which pay and quality shift upward. Some jobs should be legally reserved for linguists with specific certification. Possibly, unionization as a medium for professionals to advocate for their profession would play a role, as it already does in certain sectors of our industry, for example, in some courts. The IMIA has recommended mentoring programs for medical interpreters once they begin their duties after certification. The ATA is sponsoring mentoring efforts as well. This is advisable and helpful in any branch of our industry, since many challenges cannot be anticipated during previous training. For this reason, the initial days, weeks, and months on the job also tend to be particularly stressful.

3. Develop the momentum for change

The fact that good translation saves lives and money is a compelling argument in favor of investing more resources in it. But actually raising this awareness among the public and decision makers is more challenging. The tragic case of Deisy Garcia here in New York City is a harrowing example of why translation should not be an afterthought. She, along with her two daughters, was murdered by her husband after a domestic incident report that she filed with the police was never translated from her native Spanish into English. In that report, she specifically stated that she feared her husband would kill her and her two daughters. (3) Besides cogently demonstrating that proper translation can be a matter of life and death, this case shows that translation that is inadequate or absent altogether incurs civil liability and, hence, loss of tax-payer dollars. Politicians lose face and are therefore not reelected, but costly lawsuits against government agencies are another likely consequence. Case studies of the effects of absent or deficient translation or interpreting abound, but further studies would surely be useful, since the use of language services has grown and proliferated throughout society. Which case studies one would cite depends on who needs to be convinced.

4. Implement the solution

Implementation will involve any stakeholders who want to play a role. It will be a lot of work and always hark back to the previous steps based on the insights gained from step 5. Once again, much has already been achieved. Various certification credentials exist, including the ATA translation certification for several language pairs, state- and Federal-court certification for Spanish and some other languages, and numerous medical-interpreter certification programs. Court certification and the right to an interpreter in court were codified by the Court Interpreters Act of 1978. (4) The progress in court interpreting has resulted in a colossal enhancement to the administration of justice in this country. The work of the IMIA to promote and standardize medical-interpreter certification has also been pivotal. But it would be a mistake to think no further work needs to be done. It is only sensible to build on the achievements of organizations and individuals that have already pioneered the advancement of our industry.

5. Evaluate outcome to adjust strategy and then commence the step plan again

Inevitably, trial and error will play a role. No grand solution will anticipate every eventuality. But what are some of the lessons we have learned already? How easy or difficult are the problems to fix?

Translators or interpreters must be intimately familiar with the specific subject matter of a given project. In the legal field, for example, terminology is so vast that the challenge of mastering it is herculean: what law? Texas law? New York law? New York criminal law? I am constantly talking to lawyers about terminology, and they often cannot answer my queries since they concentrate on a relatively circumscribed yet broad area of law. Once we start talking about the different types of legal documents and jurisdictions in our country, let alone in others, discourse becomes byzantine. My point here is that, although translators and interpreters have to be highly trained, getting to where they need to be is not necessarily straightforward. Demands go beyond linguistic knowledge and specific translation and interpreting skills that also require years of preparation. While perfect translation—and particularly perfect interpretation—are rare, translators and interpreters must be highly educated and continually seek further education.

Even though the aspiring linguist can look to a local training program for guidance and preparation, one should not assume that such programs are the magic bullet for success in the field. After all, they have to prepare their graduates for virtually everything under the sun that can be talked or written about. The trick seems to be to anticipate vocabulary, concepts, phenomena, situations, and pitfalls as much as possible in the training. Teaching reliable methods of acquiring new knowledge prepares students for the unexpected. No one can predict everything that will happen, and experience will have to teach its lessons accompanied by the risk (as minimal as possible) of learning on the job.

I believe that the rapid growth of translation and interpreting programs that has occurred in the last decade or so is generally a very positive development. Yet this boom could develop into a bubble if such programs do not channel their students into jobs that will justify the expense of the prior training. If the programs are too expensive and/or the salaries too low, they will not be sustainable, and by extension, employers will have difficulty finding qualified interpreters and translators to do the necessary work. This situation harks back to the need to educate companies and government, as well as individual customers. They will not be willing to pay substantial and fair remuneration to translators and interpreters if they do not understand what goes into the results they are seeking. We should take a lesson from the current status quo, which, though a major improvement from a couple of decades ago, leaves much to be desired.

It seems that the cost-effectiveness and moral imperative of investing resources in translation and interpreting are not conventional wisdom. But exactly how to educate is more complicated. In the case of the government, conflicting budgetary priorities will make it challenging to obtain more funds to pay translators and interpreters, especially in times of crisis such as our own. Swaying public opinion to valuing quality translation and interpreting is an endeavor that undoubtedly will extend beyond our lifetimes.

Certification exams seem indispensable even after training, but enthusiasm to enroll in training may wane if the candidate cannot necessarily count on passing the certification exam. Of course, if the exam is too easy, the linguists and society as a whole will be exposed to greater risk. And, while it may be cost-effective for the government to promote programs to train and certify translators and interpreters of Spanish, it may not be for languages of lesser diffusion such as Wolof, Tibetan, or Kaqchikel. Indeed, it would be a delusion to aspire to preparing linguists adequately for every possible language pair. What might be considered an unacceptable rendering for Spanish or Mandarin may have to be tolerated for Vietnamese or Tajik, under certain circumstances. But, once again, the lack of high-quality translation or interpreting in any language pair carries incalculable risks.

Conclusion

I think that permanent dialogue between the providers and users of language services is a crucial element to tackling the challenges our professions and their users face. There are numerous examples of such dialogue, such as the work of the NAJIT Bench and Bar Committee and the ATA PR Committee. As I indicated above, I acknowledge that this essay only scratches the surface of problems and possible solutions. By identifying some of the sore spots and suggesting some possible cures, however, I hope to contribute to this necessary debate. I propose the following structure to improve the rendering of services in our industries:

1. Establish a working group to discuss and research problems and recommend solutions, based on the five-step plan I propose, or a similar evaluation scheme.
2. Choose a specific area of our industry in which to begin this work, i.e., observation in a specific court or hospital system as well as library and media research.
3. Obtain funding to enable this ongoing work.

It bears reiteration that miscommunication (in the medical or legal services sectors, for instance) is a problem that extends beyond the intervention of translators and interpreters. Yet this does not absolve us from making sure that we are a strong link in the chain of communication. The potential for positive change in doing so is enormous.

References

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The Court Interpreters Act in turn was the culmination of a series of historical factors, such as Civil Rights Movement, decades of research and advocacy, and landmark case law such

as *Negron v. New York* (1970). Roseann Dueñas González, et al. *Fundamentals of Court Interpretation: Theory, Policy and Practice*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1991. Pg. 37-69.

[Leonard Morin is a staff Spanish interpreter at Manhattan Criminal Court. He also translates chiefly legal documents from Dutch, Spanish, and German into English. He formerly served as president of the New York Circle of Translators.]

Team Interpreting – Where’s Our Team?



By Linda Noble

Just when we come to believe that team interpreting is the accepted norm in our profession, we invariably find ourselves in arenas where it remains a novel and outlandish concept. We face looks of disbelief at the mere suggestion that we cannot effectively interpret simultaneously for hours on end.

I was recently asked by a local T&I agency to interpret for an administrative hearing scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In my experience, administrative hearings require primarily consecutive interpretation for the appellant or a witness; often the proceedings are recorded and preclude overlapping speech. That experience, coupled with the fact that the request came from a reputable agency familiar to me, led me to conclude that this would be an arduous but manageable assignment. It was only after the parties had all convened and the hearing was about to begin that I was told that the appealing party required simultaneous interpretation for the duration of the hearing, essentially eight hours. I was not provided with equipment or any materials about the case; I was seated in the back of the room beside the appellant, while the attorney questioning the witness sat with her back to me, blocking my view of the witness she would be questioning. I was horrified. “No,” I thought, “we don’t do this.”

I protested respectfully but firmly to the judge and explained that when expected to interpret simultaneously for lengthy proceedings we always work in pairs and are usually provided with appropriate equipment so that we can position ourselves to best see and hear the speaking parties. By the incredulous looks on the faces around me, one would have thought I’d demanded to be served tea and crumpets while working in the nude. Apparently no interpreter before me had ever batted an eye at such a request. After some back and forth, we agreed to begin the hearing, which had already been delayed due to traffic, and take the matter up during the first break in 45 minutes.

The first hour or so of any lengthy proceeding is generally challenging, whether it’s a trial, a deposition, or a conference. I am hearing names of people and companies for the first time and encountering terms used by those in a particular field or department that have become part of their linguistic culture, but rarely translate neatly into another language (e.g. “covered workers”). Now in addition to these factors I was physically impaired by the position of the speaker, required to lean toward the LEP so she could hear me, then away from her to see the soft-spoken witness. In addition, I was dreading the long day before me and feeling stressed about how to properly handle the situation. At the first break I phoned the agency and told them the situation. “Oh, so we need to get a second interpreter there.” “Yes. Excellent!” I thought, “Help is on its way.”

When I returned to the hearing room, the assistant attorney general on behalf of the Department of Labor and Industries whirled around in her chair and snarled at me: “I have *never* had a hearing with two interpreters, not for two hours or even 5 minutes.” When I tried to explain that two wouldn’t be necessary for five minutes, and that team interpreting is in fact the industry standard in court, she remarked caustically, “Well, maybe that’s the case at *that* level,” then resumed her back-to-me posture. “So,” I wondered, “is the person here less entitled to quality and accuracy simply because she is not facing criminal charges, but ‘only’ substantial fines that would most likely shut down her business?” Furthermore, how ironic that this attorney, so outraged at my allusion to workers’ rights and industry standards, was in fact representing the Department of Labor and Industries.

The judge, while respectful and genuinely concerned about the quality of interpretation, also failed to comprehend that the issue here was not about *me* and whether *I* felt *I* had the stamina to interpret continuously for hours. I attempted to cite studies showing that the error rate increases long before interpreters even sense their own fatigue. (1) She instructed me to let her know if I felt tired. She asked me repeatedly whether I felt my interpretation was accurate. She asked the appellant if she understood me. While I very much appreciated her efforts to make my job more manageable, I was still left feeling like an anomaly and, well, a wimp, rather than a champion for my profession. In the meantime, I learned that no relief would be coming. This office had booked an interpreter for the day through an agency and they expected to pay for one and only one interpreter. I was on my own here, feeling misunderstood, belittled, stressed and deemed “inferior” in my capacity as an interpreter.

Industry standards are created to protect workers, as well as the clients they serve. Limits on the number of hours one can work, safety protocols, and quality assurance measures are put in place in many fields and they cannot be arbitrarily waived, even when the one performing the service *feels* capable. Standards are usually introduced or changed after the shortcuts have tangible consequences—accidents, injuries, or, in the legal world, appeals. When we interpret proceedings for a party, there are very few checks and balances. The other parties usually have no idea what we are saying. As long as our lips are moving and sound is coming out we seem to be doing our job. And, as long as what we say makes some sense, the LEP has no way of knowing whether we are accurately interpreting what the other parties are saying. We have to rely on studies and industry standards to ensure that we are providing *meaningful* interpretation, not merely fulfilling a perfunctory mandate and paying “lip service” to our duties. The situation is even riper for potential error when we work solo; we have no partner to ask for help or rely on to correct us when we’ve erred.

However, what struck me the most is that apparently I was the only interpreter in this venue who had ever suggested that there be two of us, working together throughout the day. Even the agency, I later learned, was proposing to replace me for the second half of the day, not to provide me with a partner. So instead of working under reasonable conditions for a full day’s pay, I would be expected to work twice as hard and less effectively for half the pay. Given the choices, is it any surprise that “all” the other interpreters agree to interpret simultaneously for eight hours without complaint? They know that insisting upon compliance with industry standards such as a partner and appropriate equipment will likely result in losing not only that assignment, but all future assignments with the hiring agency and/or their client. In our profession upholding standards, rather than winning us accolades for due diligence, often results in blacklisting.

Who are these super-human interpreters who claim they can simultaneously interpret accurately for hours on end? Why is it universally accepted that ASL interpreters work in teams, while spoken language interpreters are held to completely different standards? Is there in fact an element of discrimination at play here, whereby the spoken language LEP is deserving of lower quality? Are there cultural or other factors at play among language interpreters that we should be considering and addressing? While I understand the reluctance to insist on appropriate conditions precisely for the reasons stated above, we are doing a grave disservice to the profession and to our colleagues whenever we agree to work under sub-standard conditions. When we find ourselves with no other option, at the very least we need to make a record that the interpreter is unable to comply with industry standards and cannot guarantee the accuracy of the interpretation. Agencies, for their part, should be first in line to uphold industry standards and educate their clients so that that burden does not fall on us. We can only hope that once our colleagues and the agencies utilizing our services begin to back us up, we will no longer be treated as the “handicapped” or “fragile,” to be passed over when the next assignment comes along.

http://www.najit.org/membersonly/library/Proteus/HTML%20Versions/back_issues/vidal2.htm

Please read the entire article, published in 1997. Here is an excerpt:

“The increase in the number of meaning errors combined with the interpreters’ lack of awareness of this drastic decrease in quality shed some light on the validity of interpreters’ judgement of their own output quality [...] This lack of judgement appears to be the result of cognitive overload: a situation in which the interpreter tries to economize on processing capacity and allocate resources only to those parts of the interpreting process that will ensure continuous output (irrespective of the quality provided) [...] We can conclude from this that shorter turns do indeed preserve a high level of quality, but that interpreters cannot necessarily be trusted to make the right decision with regard to optimum time on task.

“This is an important insight, since many interpreters, fearful of not getting work or of exposing what is erroneously perceived as a weakness, will insist that they can work for extended periods of time without any adverse consequences to accuracy.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: “Team Interpreting”

http://www.rid.org/userfiles/File/pdfs/Standard_Practice_Papers/Team_Interpreting_SPP.pdf

The California Federation of Interpreting: “Requesting Team Interpreting” <http://www.calinterpreters.org/requesting-team/>

Oregon, Chapter 19 of the Judges’ Criminal Benchbook on interpreting, page 1027, provides that interpreters should work in teams to cover any proceeding that is more than two hours. This is to accommodate interpreter fatigue.

<http://courts.oregon.gov/OJD/reference/Pages/criminalbenchbook.aspx>

Oregon, Oregon Judicial Department: “Team Interpreting”

[/INTERPRETERFATIGUE.pdf](http://courts.oregon.gov/OJD/docs/OSCA/cpsd/InterpreterServices/INTERPRETERFATIGUE.pdf)

<http://courts.oregon.gov/OJD/docs/OSCA/cpsd/InterpreterServices>

National Association of Judiciary Translators and Interpreters: “Team Interpreting in the Courtroom”

http://www.najit.org/publications/Team%20Interpreting_052007.pdf

Paper by Patricia Brück: “Austrian Perspectives of Team Interpreting”

http://www.dolmetschserviceplus.at/sites/default/files/PatriciaBrueck_MA_Teaminterpreting%20complete.pdf

[Linda Noble is certified in the state of Washington for court interpreting (Russian, 1996), by DSHS for medical, and by ATA for translation (Russian > English). She received a BA in Russian Studies from UC Santa Cruz, then lived and worked in the Soviet Union for a number of years. Linda is currently serving her first term as the Interpreter Representative to the AOC Interpreter Commission as well as on the NOTIS Board. Her specific interests are in promoting higher professional standards for court interpreters and achieving the commensurate recognition. Outside of her profession she is passionate about spending time in the mountains, cycling and swimming.]

Everyone's Watching



By Allison Klein

[Reprinted with permission from Allison Klein at RBK Translations <http://abktranslations.com/wordpress/everyones-watching-a-few-thoughts-on-online-professional-behavior/?lang=en>]

'Everyone's watching.' This was the closing line in an **article** I read recently, written by a physician about his approach to and attitudes towards his online behavior. Though there are definitely certain aspects that are specific to professionals in the medical field, and a great deal of it is subjective as he says, I feel there are also many universal truths in statements made about what is 'professional' or 'unprofessional' online behavior, no matter what field you are in. With the rise of Facebook and other social media platforms, many of which are used as a means of connecting with other professionals in certain sectors, also comes an exposure to potential clients, customers or business associates. In fact, this is for many of us the goal in expanding our online presence. Getting our name out there, making people aware of our existence. However, as the good doctor says, 'We just need to be smarter than we were before. Everyone's watching.' I have seen a lot of heated arguments, the careless tossing about of insults, and have watched emotionally charged battles being waged on translation forums, be they on Facebook or LinkedIn (and I'm sure many other online platforms), in the last couple of years. I have witnessed contests of will, conscious attempts to create, develop and uphold a specific online persona, posts often designed to shock and awe, and others designed to intimidate others into submission. I've observed countless bragfests where one-upmanship is the rule rather than the exception. Hurt feelings and bruised egos abound. People inevitably start siding with one another, sometimes resulting in them leaving groups en masse, and forming others. I suppose clique formation and behavior is something that we never really leave behind on the playground, or in the halls of our high schools, it is something that we continue to exhibit throughout our lives; obviously it's just human nature.

What I can't wrap my head around is that a lot of these people, those 'shouting the loudest' and protesting too much on these forums don't seem to realize first of all, that their 'victims' are human beings, just like them, not just a photo with some words trailing behind it. Many of whom are also just starting out in the business, just like they once did, perhaps at a time where there was no public, instantly accessible place to moan, vent and share experiences. And learn from those who have been at it longer. How soon we forget. How easy it is to judge someone's abilities, skills and personality by a couple lines they may have posted when they weren't at their best, hadn't had enough coffee, had just (who knows?) lost someone they loved, or a pet. Or been through a nasty break-up. The judgments are easy to sling, because you can just chuckle to yourself, step back from your computer, and go have another coffee, choosing to ignore any blowback, or simply leave a group because someone has pushed you too far. Or perhaps you do as I often do, 'avert your eyes' and stop reading posts on certain forums because they are too negative, pessimistic and just downright unproductive.

Secondly, the way we treat other people online aside (or maybe not?), I can't help but wonder if everyone realizes what kind of a reflection this behavior is on their professional reputation, how they come across to potential customers, or others they may end up working with in some capacity? I personally wouldn't hire half of the people I regularly see on these forums, based on their online behavior alone. Sure, they may be the absolute BEST in their field, in their language combination, in their area of specialization, but what about communicating with or dealing with them regarding aspects of the business that don't involve their professional skills? How will they take criticism, if warranted? How volatile will they be in a dispute? How 'human' are they capable of being? Because after all, it's not just our skills that matter to our freelance businesses, it's also our ability to be professional, communicate effectively, be diligent about deadlines, capable of taking constructive criticism (if it's justified, and refute it with substantiated arguments if it's not), and, well, just plain being HUMAN.

There are of course people who don't care how they come across to others online, don't mind who they insult, insisting that this is who they are, take it or leave it, at least they're honest. Unfortunately, many will choose to leave it, and if you have plenty who don't, people who accept it and even embrace it, well, more power to you I say. And good luck. Sure, I've been guilty of using Facebook as Ventbook now and then. But I have been careful, while posting, to consider who could be seeing it, and whether or not it will negatively impact my professional life, my business, my livelihood. I still make 'rookie mistakes', posting bits about frustration with certain customers, or certain jobs I have agreed to take on and later regret, and later wish I hadn't posted. Let's just say I'm working on it.

I try to instill in my sons the knowledge that whatever you post online is there forever, one way or another. It's your 'digital footprint' and unfortunately, an indelible one, in theory. Sure, maybe not everyone will be able to access it, but you never know who might be seeing it, now or five years down the road, such as a potential employer, for example. I try to live by the motto, 'Don't post it if it's not something you wouldn't say to everyone.' I admit, sometimes it's hard to follow this advice myself, but I am making more and more of a concerted effort to live by the words I preach in the sermon to my kids. It's easy to sling mud or kick over someone else's sand castle in cyber space. Just try to think who might be watching next time you do. Your professional reputation is at stake.

<http://abktranslations.com/wordpress/everyones-watching-a-few-thoughts-on-online-professional-behavior/?lang=en>

[Born and raised in the U.S., Allison's fascination with foreign languages and cultures began at a young age. Growing up in Miami, learning Spanish was indispensable, and she later studied French and Italian at college and graduate school. Obtaining her MBA in International Marketing at the Monterey Institute, she worked in international business for 12 years. Moving to the Netherlands in 1992, she added Dutch to this list. Fate tossed her the opportunity to change course and do what she really loved, so she set up her own freelance translating business in 2001, and has been translating Dutch to English full-time ever since. Allison specializes in legal, business and marketing texts, as well as culinary, literary and human rights translations.]

Message From The Chair



What is it that we seek in this great profession of ours? Some seek to transfer meaning from one language to another, some seek financial security, some seek recognition, others a creative outlet, while still others seek to help society, or a combination of all-of-the-above at any given time. However, as a group of communicators, one of the most sought-after benefits of our profession is the presence of other communicators. When colleagues are asked what the best part of any conference or continuing education workshop is for them, their answer is unequivocal: networking.

In May of this year, I will arrive at the 30-year mark as a professional interpreter, so I've been lucky enough to experience a few different forms of networking within this great association. For those of you who remember, the NAJIT Listserv became a part of our day way back when Facebook and Twitter did not exist. I used to receive NAJIT emails every day, full of cheerful banter, terminology consults and, yes, even not-so-cheerful disagreements among colleagues. Whether we communicated with each other to dissent or to join forces, it was obvious that there was no going back to the days of plain e-mail. Then, with the advent of social media and blogging, we moved into a different phase of networking. All throughout, though, the underlying value has been *to stay in touch*.

Why is it, then, that even with the desire to come together, and with so many options for engagement at our disposal, we sometimes seem to be so far removed from each other? I am sure our translation projects or interpreting assignments account for a big part of that. Our own personal lives probably take care of the rest (huge kudos to my colleagues who are also parents, by the way). How can we stay in touch with our profession, and with each other, in spite of our full lives? How can we come closer together to work on the issues that matter, or simply to enjoy each other's company and chat about our day-to-day experiences? The answer for me, aside from more traditional forms of communication, has been a combination of electronic/social media and face-to-face meetings.

Regarding the latter: Last month, your fearless Board met in an all-day session at Headquarters in Washington, DC. The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss the role of SSTI at length and come up with some short-term objectives and some long-term goals. The Society for the Study of Translation and Interpretation is a 501(c)(3) educational organization incorporated by NAJIT "for the purpose of conducting research and undertaking projects aimed at advancing the art and science of oral interpretation of proceedings and written translation of documents and other materials." SSTI is in the process of undergoing some major changes. Its new Board of Directors will be in place by May and will meet at our conference in Atlanta to move forward with some new and exciting projects. We have a long list of impressive candidates, so stay tuned for news on the newly-reconstituted SSTI Board and its future contributions to our profession. We also wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to the former SSTI Board of Directors for their dedication and commitment to this organization's mission. Their caring and love for our profession is greatly appreciated.

Also on the in-person front: While in DC, I met with important members of the ASL interpreting community both at Gallaudet University's Department of Interpretation and at the Headquarters of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in Virginia. Our members and associations have much to learn from each other when it comes to language access, best practices, and advocacy issues. Closer collaboration with our ASL colleagues in the near future is another exciting prospect.

We could communicate via e-mail or the social media only, of course; but as our recent meetings in DC proved, there is nothing like face-to-face encounters. Strong bonds are formed and the possibility of working together is even more enjoyable when the human connection is so strong.

On the electronic communications front:

We have some great news for you! The current Board has decided to set up a listserv for NAJIT members again. Headquarters is hard at work finalizing all details and will make an announcement in the coming weeks. Wish us luck with this new endeavor. Many of our members have asked for it, so we are trying to make it happen.

Whether in electronic format or in person, networking is alive and well at NAJIT. We now can use the following communication options:

1. NAJIT's Facebook Page
2. NAJIT's Facebook Group
3. NAJIT's LinkedIn Group
4. *Proteus*
5. The NAJIT Blog
6. NAJIT Cybernews
7. The upcoming NAJIT Listserv
8. NAJIT's direct outreach through the Board, via meetings with stakeholders, sister associations and participation at their regional events
9. And, last but not least, our terrific annual conference, on May 15-17, in Atlanta, GA. It is being put together as we speak!

Even if you only have a few minutes as you get ready to start your day, or while you sip your morning coffee on Saturday after a long week of interpreting or translating, please don't forget to reach out to your fellow colleagues and network with your professional communities. Your association welcomes your comments and involvement...and your colleagues would love to hear from you. I know I would.

All the best,

Esther Navarro-Hall

NAJIT at the CATI Conference

NAJIT was present and showing its support to The Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters, an ATA chapter for both North and South Carolina, during its 2015 conference in Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina on Saturday, March 14. Our very own Tony Rosado delivered the keynote address starting with a historical recount of the earliest manifestations of interpretation and translation. Rosado spoke of the importance of these professions and the dangers of utilizing unqualified individuals to carry out the duties of trained and experienced interpreters and translators. Another NAJIT member, Emily Ortiz Alfonso from South Carolina, presented on the "Recognition and Treatment of Interpreter Trauma." Karen Bahr and Kelly Varguez gave "A New Spin to Simultaneous Practice, Reimagined." Other presenters were Mike Collins, Garrett Fisher, Dr. Monica Rodriguez-Castro, Ron Garcia-Fogarty and others. Kudos, CATI, keep up the good work!



NAJIT Board Member, Claudia Villalba, with Keynote Speaker and NAJIT member, Tony Rosado, standing by the NAJIT exhibitor table



CATI President, John Milan



Keynote Speaker, Tony Rosado



CATI Board of Director and NAJIT member, Emily Ortiz Alfonso

The Susan E. Castellanos-Bilodeau Conference Scholarship

In March 2010, NAJIT established a scholarship in memory of Susan E. Castellanos-Bilodeau, a devoted member.

Susan worked as a freelance Spanish interpreter supporting the New Hampshire Court system, and served as an interpreter for humanitarian mission works in the Dominican Republic. Susan was the Nominations Committee Chair for several years. She was a member of the ATA, NETA, NHITO and a member of the Red Cross Disaster Services.

The Susan E. Castellanos-Bilodeau Conference Scholarship was created for those NAJIT members who would otherwise be unable to attend the NAJIT conference due to financial difficulties. This yearly scholarship will allow one Active NAJIT Member to attend the conference without paying the registration fee. The scholarship is valued at \$395.

Candidates interested in applying for the scholarship must send a resume or CV and a letter of 700 words or less outlining their interest in the scholarship. Candidates may discuss their commitment to NAJIT, dedication to the profession, and reasons for attending the conference. Only Active NAJIT members are eligible to apply. The application is due by April 15, 2015. Please send completed applications to tanni@najit.org.

The selected candidate will be notified by April 30, 2015.

2015 NAJIT Scholars

NAJIT is pleased to announce the selection of the Conference Scholars for our Annual Meeting and Educational Conference in Atlanta, GA, May 15-17, 2015. Congratulations to Myhanh Che, Melina Coria, Veronica Escobar, Liz Essary and David Garcia!

We look forward to meeting and working with you.

Tips for Conference Presenters and Attendees Alike

Flow chart for conference questions:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2014/08/guide-to-conference-questions.html>

Mind your manners:

<http://aiic.net/page/6924/speakers-mind-your-microphone-manners/lang/1>

How I Handled It

By Kathleen Shelly

Some years back I found myself in a courtroom situation in which I had to decide whether to step in or not in order to resolve an impasse. A young man from Guatemala had been charged with what is known in my state as “criminal impersonation”—a felony charge of giving a false name to a police officer. Actually he was entirely innocent of the charges, but because of a general lack of knowledge of how names work in many Spanish-speaking countries, coupled with a real problem dealing with illiteracy, the case had actually gotten to the preliminary hearing stage.

We’ll call the young man Juan Carlos Niz Juárez. He had had a number of traffic tickets, and had always signed his entire name. Every time his name was entered in the system, however, it was rendered as Juan Juárez, which the officers saw as the first and last names. One fine day, an officer pulled Juan Carlos over and noticed that he signed with his whole name, but in the computer he was listed as only Juan Juárez. Bam! Criminal impersonation!

Before the case went before the judge for the preliminary hearing, I explained the name problem to the public defender during the client interview. She understood, but neither of us was prepared for the first question of the prosecuting attorney: “Will you please spell your name for the court?” I interpreted the question to Juan Carlos, who looked at the prosecutor blankly and repeated his first, middle and last names. “No, I’m asking you to spell your name!”

In the first place, spelling one’s name in Spanish-speaking countries is rarely necessary since Spanish is a language that is spelled phonetically. You might ask, “Is that with an “s” or a “z?” as in *Valdez* or *Valdés*?” or “Is that with a “b” or a “v,” as in *Balderrama* or *Valderrama*?, since these names could be spelled either way. I soon realized, however, that that was not Juan Carlos’ problem, but rather that he was illiterate. He had learned to write his name very clearly and neatly, but had no idea what the letters meant.

The prosecutor, the judge, the public defender—everybody seemed to want to know, “Why doesn’t he just spell his name, already?” Here was this smart-looking, clean-cut, polite kid. What was his problem? I realized I would have to do something. Just as I was about to request to approach the bench, I decided to see if I could just give the judge a meaningful look to convey the problem telepathically. The next time the prosecutor insisted, “Spell your name, please,” I threw the judge a glance.

Now, I was very fortunate in that the judge on the bench was one I had worked with for many years, and still do. He is kindly and fair and savvy and very interested in equal justice for all. Still, I didn’t know if what I did was going to work. Believe it or not, it did! The judge raised his eyebrows and asked the defendant gently, “Sir, can you read or write?” Juan Carlos looked up at the judge and said humbly, “*No, Señor.*”

From there on, everything went fine. The public defender was able to show that the charge was bogus and the case was dismissed.

This would never work with a judge who was not as receptive and alert as this one. If my ploy hadn’t been successful, I would have had to ask for a sidebar, which I hate to do. As it was, things worked out okay. Sometimes we need to use a little imagination to resolve the delicate situations in which we interpreters find ourselves!

[Links of Interest](#)

DICTIONARIES

[Cuban Spanish-English dictionary](#)

[Multilingual Sign Language dictionary](#)

[New dictionary of terms used by Colombian youth \(Spanish\)](#)

IN THE COURTS

[Court finds against agency for illegal polygraph testing of contract interpreters](#)

[Interpreter acquitted of "leaking secrets"](#)

[Well-dressed interpreter mistaken for attorney](#)

[Vermont courts embrace interpreter training](#)

[Language barrier in Pennsylvania District Courts](#)

LANGUAGE

[Idioms in many languages](#)

[ASL and internet slang](#)

[Blog about legal vocabulary](#)

[Colloquial expressions English-Spanish](#)

[French québécoise - brief history](#)

[Year of the Goat/ Lamb/ Ram](#)

BUSINESS

[Taking stock of your business](#)

TRANSLATION

[Certifying translations](#)

TECHNIQUE

[Chuchotage video and escort interpreter tips](#)

SCIENCE

[My brain while interpreting German/English](#)

[Interpreters' amazing brains](#)

[Proofreading: Why it's so hard to catch your own typos](#)

GENERAL INTEREST

[Courtroom Security Manual for Interpreters](#)

[PBS Program - "Language Matters"](#)

[Interpreter podcasts](#)

[Evaluation of Skype translation program](#)

[Growing need for police interpreters](#)

Notable Quotables

Every language is a world. Without translation, we would inhabit parishes bordering on silence.

--George Steiner

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

--Nelson Mandela

Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.

--Noam Chomsky



For Better or Verse

[An Ode to the NAJIT Forum] — Ed.

najit.org/forum

It was certainly felt that a forum had potential.
After all, for interpreters it's nearly existential
For us to expound thoughts we deem essential
On subjects and topics and deeds experiential,
Or meaning of words in realm jurisprudential.

Yet, the NAJIT forum with prospects influential
Of imbuing exchanges with ideas quintessential,
Although some writings may well be tangential
And perhaps those who read not too deferential,
Is devoid of all growth; it should be exponential.

So, why is it that posts don't flow there torrential
Into conversation that ought to be consequential?
Must we surmise that members are so prudential
We are loath to express our notions confidential?
Perhaps we believe that naught said's inferential.

With P.C., phone or Mac, be not too reverential.
Contribute some posts and responses sequential.
Write of courts or of speech or of the credential.
Have no fear that your views display differential,
As we are none endowed with truth providential.

-Douglas Hal Sillers 10-27-13

[Hal Sillers is a MN State and federally certified interpreter of Spanish and frequent contributor to this column. Hal is also the Staff Interpreter for the MN 8th Judicial District.]

The Last Laugh

Interpreter reactions to common situations

<http://site.interpretereducationonline.com/interpreter-reactions/>

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