

In order to make a success of your profession you have to know how to hold the violin, how to lift your elbow, how to hold your fingers and how to stroke the strings. *A little bit more*, says A Lou Vickery, and *if you are committed, you will find a way and not an excuse*.

Alet Kruger

From the Ivory Tower to the Market Place and Back: Completing the Circle

Highly competent translators are needed to meet the rapidly developing requirements of the professional environment. These requirements place a heavy responsibility on universities and tertiary institutions to train professionals in translation, interpreting and language practice. Neubert (1989: 5 in Ulrich 2005: 23-4), is quoted as saying that "the study of translation and, in particular, the academic institutions where the practice of translation is taught do not exist in an intellectual ivory tower. They serve social needs."

Are these broader social needs met? The answer is not always positive despite the fact that marrying theory and practice seems an obvious requirement in a subject such as Translation Studies. The various conferences that are held all over the world and the myriad publications that see the light every year clearly demonstrate that Translation Studies as a discipline is still very much divided into 'us' (the professionals working in the market place) and 'them' (the academics in the ivory tower).

After attending the 2005 FIT World Congress on the rights of language professionals in Finland, Jackie Naudé of the University of the Free State remarked that very few academics attended this particular conference (SATI 2005: 27). What struck him was the fact that professional translators accused academics of producing incompetent graduates and also that they "repeated problems already addressed and solved by academics". He does not elaborate further but this accusation seems all too familiar!

This controversy between theory and practice was one of the main reasons why Alet Kruger and Kim Wallmach established a translation and interpreting agency. Little did we realise how important the direct links to the profession and the market-place that this step afforded us would be in the future: we needed to practise what we preach and

to ensure that our teaching is relevant to practice. The agency also arose out of the need for a link between prospective clients and the many competent professional freelance language workers with whom we have close contact. Owing to the nature of the work accepted by the agency, at least 75% of the freelancers employed are from the previously disadvantaged language groups in South Africa. We knew that in the years prior to 1994 large-scale privatisation resulted in rationalisation and the reduction of staff translators at big government departments and parastatals, and newly qualified translators could not receive in-house training, and it was therefore also one of our aims to provide some in-service training and development. Enhancing our managerial and business skills was of course also on the list and our freelancers are aware that we add a small handling fee to the fees paid to themselves, and that this fee is used to cover marketing, administration and invoicing costs as well as procurement and tendering costs. Although mentioned last, collecting data for research purposes played an important role in our decision to form the agency because of the obvious possibility to do research.

The aim of this short presentation is to provide insight into the activities of this small translation and interpreting agency and its impact on academic research. Both owners are academics, trainers and examiners of translators, interpreters and editors themselves. As such, they may be regarded as subject specialists regarding language-related activities and have approximately 35 years of experience between them.

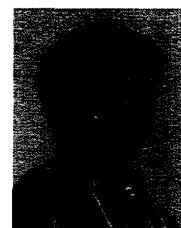
What services does the agency offer?

We offer translation, editing and interpreting services in the following languages:

- All the official South African languages and Swahili
- The major European languages (German, French, Spanish, Portuguese)
- South African Sign Language

Similarly, we work in domains such as the following, in which we have built up considerable expertise over the years:

- Scientific/technical: cell phone and website localisation, geology, mining
- Medical/health: HIV/AIDS material, medical questionnaires, patient consent forms
- Financial: annual reports, tax and balance sheets



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- Legal: bills, acts, bylaws, patents, court orders
- Literary: TV and radio scripts, children’s books, foundation phase educational material

Interpreting settings in which we coordinate and manage interpreters:

- Conferences, workshops, legislature, AGMs
- Disciplinary hearings, court cases, polygraph tests, training issues and pension fund road shows

Profile of freelance translators

The profile of professional translators is forever changing to meet the requirements of a demanding world in a constant state of flux. According to Ulrych (2005: 5), evidence shows that the range of competence required of translators is expanding to encompass diverse kinds of interlingual and intercultural mediation and rewriting, once considered as lying beyond the confines of translation proper, and includes such activities as large-scale multilingual project management, localisation, technical writing, editing and multimedia translation.

We give preference to translators and editors who fit the following profile:

- *Over 30 years old.* Experience has taught us that older and more experienced translators have a vast knowledge of the world around them (e.g. how the national budget or health system works).
- *Good English proficiency across a broad range of registers.*
- *Tertiary training with postgraduate training in languages and translation studies.*
- *Legal/financial qualifications* for legal/financial translation.
- *Accreditation* with the South African Translators’ Institute is recommended. Accreditation is a good indication of competence, but alone it is not necessarily an indication of sustained competence.
- *Computer literacy.*
- *Reliability.* We value someone who is reliable, who has professional pride, integrity and self-esteem.
- *Competency.* In line with Robinson (1997: 29), we value translators who check their work closely and carefully and, if there is any doubt, we have the translation checked by an expert before delivery to the client. In particular, we value translators who know their own abilities and working habits well enough

to make realistic promises to us regarding delivery dates and times. We appreciate it when a translator demonstrates that she is aware of her limitations and politely refuses to accept a job that she knows may be outside her field of expertise or to translate a text that she finds morally or politically loathsome.

- *Loyalty and strong sense of ethics.* We value translators who do not disclose confidential matters learned through the process of translation/interpreting or through working with the agency to third parties; and in particular, who do not try to undermine and undercut us by contacting our clients directly to secure contracts for themselves.

Profile of freelance interpreters

In many respects interpreters and other language professionals such as editors share the characteristics of the ideal translator. Interpreters too must have an in-depth knowledge of both languages and the two cultures, possess a comprehensive vocabulary, have a powerful memory, possess a comprehensive general knowledge; in addition, they should be calm but quick-witted and able to think on their feet (Mahmoodzadeh 1992: 233). We give preference to interpreters who fit the following profile:

- Over 30 years old
- Excellent proficiency in the mother tongue; preferably grew up in this particular linguistic community
- Good English proficiency across a broad range of registers; be able to understand different accents of users of South African English
- Excellent public speaking skills
- Tertiary education is preferable
- Postgraduate training in languages, translation/interpreting is highly recommended
- At least 80 hours of simultaneous interpreting experience; clearly demonstrate professionalism as regards booth etiquette
- At least 10 days of consecutive interpreting experience; clearly demonstrate familiarity with ethics involved in this mode of interpreting
- SATI accreditation is recommended

Overcoming various problems

A successful business depends not only on good managerial skills and business savvy but more often than not also on how one overcomes obstacles and problems. Some of the problems that we encounter time and

again are ignorant clients, quality control, project management, terminology development, professionalism and tax issues.

Educating the client

As Kim Wallmach (2004: 14) states in her article on good translation practice, clients usually do not know what is involved in the translation process. What often happens is that a client says something like: "I have this English text which needs to be translated into Afrikaans and two African languages, but I don't know which ones." Here the client needs to be carefully guided as regards the intended readership of his translated text and the national and regional use of our African languages. If the client wants to target as wide a readership as possible, it will probably be a good idea to advise him to have the text translated into Zulu as this is the most commonly spoken home language of the Nguni language group in the country. Choosing between Sepedi or Sesotho in order to target Sotho speakers will depend on whether the translation will be used north of Johannesburg or south of Johannesburg.

We often find that clients need to be more educated about interpreting issues than translation ones. They often do not know what the different modes involve and that they will also have to hire simultaneous interpreting equipment for a conference. When a client complains about the price of simultaneous interpreting services and equipment he can be persuaded to opt for four active working languages in Gauteng, namely English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sepedi. This would mean only eight interpreters and four booths instead of 20 interpreters and ten booths as the Zulu interpreters will be able to interpret speakers using any of the Nguni languages and the Sepedi interpreters will be able to interpret speakers using any of the Sotho languages. Extending the team with one Venda and one Tsonga interpreter means that these two interpreters can take turns and although they will be providing an interrupted service of 20 minutes of Venda followed by 20 minutes of Tsonga, it also means that they can interpret any speaker using these two languages. Two extra interpreters will mean one booth extra – ten interpreters and five booths will still be cheaper than 20 interpreters and ten booths. And in this manner all 11 languages can be accommodated passively in the interpreting service.

Part of this education process is also getting the client to accept a written quotation in writing by e-mail or signing the quotation

and faxing it back, supplying an appropriate order number and their VAT number which has to appear on a VAT invoice.

Writing clear translation briefs

Translation never occurs in a vacuum; there is always a reason why translation should take place, and the reasons for translation are usually independent of the reasons for the creation of a source text. It very seldom happens that translators (or agencies) decide on their own to translate a text 'for the love of it'. They are usually asked to do so by someone else, called the initiator by Christiane Nord (1992). The initiator (in most cases the client) starts the translation process because he has a specific purpose in mind for the translation. This purpose or function of the translation is usually encompassed in the translation brief which is basically a set of instructions on why the translation is needed and for whom, elicited from the client by the agency. However, even though the agency may have a pretty clear picture of the type of product that is required after personal contact with the client or by email, this information may not always be passed on to the translator.

Experience has taught us never to request a translation without giving an accompanying brief in the form of a contract letter, whether it is one word to be translated into all official languages or a text of 7 000 words to be translated into one language. Our translation brief to each translator therefore always contains (explicit or implicit) information about aspects such as the following:

- The (intended) function of the target text
- The target text readership (age, class, literacy level, etc.)
- The word count and fee that the agency will pay the translator for translation
- The word count and fee that the agency will pay the translator for proofreading, i.e. checking the page proofs before printing if this process is included in the job
- The date and time at which the translation is to be delivered to the agency. In most cases the agency specifies delivery on an 'internal' date a day or so before the agency in turn has to deliver the final translation(s) to the client
- The format in which the translation is to be delivered and how the file containing the translated text has to be renamed so that it is identifiable to the client.

Similarly, each interpreter receives in writing a clear brief as regards the setting, back-

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ground information, date, time, number of days/hours, fee, address, telephone numbers of contact person or representative of our client, etc. of each interpreting assignment.

Quality control

A major concern of clients is whether agencies do quality control of the work they deliver. As already mentioned, we choose our translators and interpreters carefully. We prefer using accredited SATI translators, but being accredited alone is no guarantee of consistent good work and superior translation competence. We personally evaluate the quality of Afrikaans, English, German and French translations and outsource the checking of translations done by translators in the other languages. Any feedback received is sent on to the translators. Doing back translations into English is another way to carry out quality control and we have found this useful in the past.

Project management

Unlike freelancers who usually work alone and can easily keep track of each job they receive, a translation company acts bidirectionally: it receives documents from clients and distributes them between freelance subcontractors. An agency therefore needs a strict and clear project management procedure to determine the exact work flow for all stages of a job. When we receive a translation job we enter details about the project such as the client's name, file name, date received, number of words or pages (whichever is applicable), the names of the languages and the translators who are involved, and the deadline on a spreadsheet. When a job is divided between more than one translator per language the number of words or pages sent to each translator is added to the spreadsheet. And when the translated material is received, the actual work performed by each translator is again recorded on the spreadsheet for future payments.

In the case of interpreting assignments the names of the various interpreters are also entered, the number of days or hours actually worked, as well as the travel allowance that will be paid to each interpreter.

Capturing data in an orderly manner such as this facilitates planning the workflow, invoicing to the client (and in due time, recording payment or follow-up requests for payment), as well as checking and processing the claims received from the freelancers.

Terminology development and standardisation

Government has explicitly acknowledged the important role played by translation in raising the status of a language and has put forward various policies to enhance the status of the African languages. As a result of these policies, as well as the desire from companies wishing to communicate with all South Africans, we have found that the demand for translation (and interpreting) services has increased exponentially and have been involved in translating texts ranging from legislation to HIV/AIDS brochures, banking to local government issues such as water, sanitation and electricity.

Translation and interpreting are therefore main mechanisms by means of which the technical registers of African languages (and Afrikaans) are being elaborated and standardised, but in the normal course of events translators and interpreters do not record the terms created and translation strategies used as part of a particular translation or interpreting job. This valuable data is therefore excluded from official corpus planning initiatives. However, because both members are academics and practising translators we are only too aware of the problems that languages of limited diffusion (LLDs) experience in the translation/interpreting process. We therefore allow translators working on a particular project access to our clients and their expertise in, for instance, mining safety standards or lexicography. We provide printed material in such a domain (parallel texts), arrange for the extraction of terms and hold workshops so that freelancers working in the Nguni languages and in the Sotho languages can discuss the use of equivalent terms. Even the Tsonga and Venda translators/interpreters benefit from such information/contact sessions as this helps them to decide which term formation processes to use to create appropriate terms.

Professionalism

No matter how competent the freelancers are that we employ, they are only human and invariably they all display non-professional behaviour in some or other form. Unprofessional behaviour is always a problem, for example:

- Delivering a translation in which a section to be translated was omitted; or of which the presentation as regards layout (e.g. in a spreadsheet) deviates from the original layout
- Missing translation deadlines and not

- informing the agency in advance
- Accepting a job but underestimating the speed and ability at which they can produce delivery
- Being late for an interpreting appointment
- Displaying inappropriate or unethical booth behaviour
- Overstepping the boundaries in a consecutive interpreting situation by rendering an advocacy service (but this is something that is almost expected of consecutive interpreters in South Africa)

Tax issues

The two most common problems as regards tax issues that we experience are the following:

- Freelancers who invoice us via VAT registered closed corporations and submit invoices that do not conform to legislative regulations.
- Our agency is registered as an employer with SARS. We are legally obliged to deduct 25% PAYE tax from the earnings of each of our subcontractors (except from the VAT-registered closed corporations). We experienced problems with freelancers who were very upset about the PAYE deduction and did not believe that PAYE tax “functions as credit that is set off against the final tax liability of an employee” (SARS, 2005); in most cases they could receive a tax rebate by submitting the IRP5 certificate together with their annual tax returns.

So how does having an agency, i.e. having a foot in the market place so to speak, impact on our activities in the ivory tower?

Reaping the benefits

As stated above, both members of the agency are first and foremost academics. We know that any training programme for translators should ideally aim to develop, within the framework of continuing education, a series of skills and competences that are relevant to both their professional status and their future work. This entails not only an awareness of real professional conditions, but also devising flexible and multidimensional translator training courses which can be updated to keep abreast of changing requirements.

The first translation course taught on a distance basis, a postgraduate Diploma in Translation, was introduced in 1979 at the University of South Africa. Fourteen years later, in 1994, a more theoretically oriented

honours course was introduced for students who wished to continue with a master's and the Diploma was revised to cater for students who preferred a more specialised course that allowed them to enter the professional market as soon as possible. The two courses were taught alongside each other until 2005 when we discovered that the National Department of Education was subsidising all postgraduate diplomas at undergraduate level. It was just not worth our while to carry on teaching the diploma and it was subsequently discontinued.

The time was ripe for yet another revision of the existing honours course and to restructure its contents to form a profession-oriented, academic programme in translation that would meet the demands of industry. And this was where an intimate knowledge of the market place and the requirements of the profession proved to be invaluable.

The honours course offered at Unisa focuses on efficient translation and interpreting strategies in particular so as to reconcile theory and practice (cf. Chesterman 2000: 82-85). The object of the course is therefore twofold: on the one hand, to increase students' understanding of translation/interpreting theory and to pave the way for master's and doctoral studies in translation/interpreting; on the other hand, to provide students with a basis on which to continue enhancing their proficiency in translation/interpreting practice and to become competent professionals.

The curriculum for the honours comprises four papers. The first two papers involve both practical and theoretical assignments. Paper 3 and Paper 4 also require portfolio work. The minimum admission requirement for this qualification is a recognised Bachelor's degree (or equivalent) with 60% in one major. Students should have a high degree of proficiency in the two languages that they choose for this course. Students who do not have a language major are required to pass a translation aptitude test before their registration will be accepted. We offer translation training in the following languages, always in combination with either English or Afrikaans: Afrikaans, English to Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Portuguese, Russian, Southern Sotho, Spanish, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu.

Apart from the Honours in translation offered at post-graduate level, Unisa also

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offers an undergraduate BA (with specialisation in Court Interpreting). Detailed information about these courses can be obtained from krugea@unisa.ac.za.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons behind establishing the agency all those years ago was to collect ideas and data for research purposes.

Impact on our research outputs

Corpus-based translation and interpreting studies are a major research focus in our department. Kim Wallmach is currently compiling electronic corpora of interpreted sittings of the Gauteng Legislature into Afrikaans, Zulu and South African Sign Language (cf. Wallmach 2004). Alet Kruger has established an English/Afrikaans corpus of Shakespeare translations (cf. Kruger 2004). There are also master's and doctoral students interested in this methodology – some of whom are not only academics but also professional translators in their own right (e.g. Moropa 2004; 2006). We are in the process of building a multilingual health corpus of approximately 150 000 words in English, Afrikaans and Zulu and if we add the translations of the HIV/AIDS public information leaflets in all of the official languages of South Africa to which we have access as a result of the agency work, it will exceed a million words. We welcome prospective postgraduate students who would like to work in this particular domain.

Conclusion

Malmkjær (2004: 2) remarks that one of the ways in which a “split between a profession and its academic discipline” can be avoided is to ensure that the training programmes have face validity both for members of the profession and for students. How can academics who offer such programmes and who train prospective translators ensure that they bridge the divide between ivory tower and market place? Viaggio's (1992: 308) answer is as follows: Medicine is not developed merely by closely watching successful physicians any more than the boundaries of musicology are pushed by mere listening to successful instrumentalists. Now we do know enough about mediated interlingual communication to be unabashedly prescriptive. We can show our students how to be successful practitioners.

We believe that we have managed to show our students how to be successful practitioners, but only our students' success in the market place will bear testimony to this.

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