



Translation and
interpreting:

Languages in action

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Today, more than ever, we all need languages — for business and work, for studying abroad and for travelling. So there are sound arguments for encouraging everyone to learn foreign languages, starting as young as possible and continuing throughout life.

However, there are times when you don't have the language skills you need: either you do not know the language, or the stakes are too high for you to rely on your skills alone. This is when you need the help of professional specialists in multilingual communication: translators and interpreters.

What's the difference between interpreting and translating?

Are you interested in a career as an interpreter or translator?

Do you need to contact a professional translator or interpreter?

Read on ...



Common myths...

... on translation



false

“To translate, all you need is a good dictionary.”

Translation is a profession. If a good dictionary were enough, bad translations would not be so common. (Think of all those incomprehensible instruction manuals or amusing hotel notices!)

false

“Good translators don’t need dictionaries or reference documents. They just translate.”

Research is an essential part of translation. Translators need to analyse and take a critical look at sources of information and terms in glossaries.

“My trilingual secretary can do all my translations.”

false

“If you have a good knowledge of two languages, you can translate any text from one of them into the other.”

Even if someone can speak or write in a foreign language, they can’t necessarily produce a good translation.

false

“Translators will soon be replaced by computers.”

Although a few people can work into more than one target language, **as a rule translators specialise in one direction only.** Passive and active command of a language are not the same. Furthermore, a literary translator is not necessarily able to translate a legal contract, while a translator of management textbooks is not the obvious choice for medical literature.

false

Some machine translations are very good, but computers will never translate as well as humans because the nuances and subtlety of human language are still beyond the grasp of artificial intelligence. But the increasingly powerful computer applications on the market today are a great help to translators

Common myths...

... on interpretation

false

“Translation and interpreting are the same thing.”

Although translation and interpreting have a lot in common, they are separate professions requiring different skills and different types of training. You can be a good interpreter without being a good translator, and vice versa.

“To be an interpreter, you just need to know languages.”

false

“I know Portuguese and Finnish, so I can interpret into those languages.”

Interpreting is a profession.

If you want to interpret anything more challenging than routine conversations, you need to learn special techniques that cannot be improvised.

false

“Any interpreter will do. I don’t need a conference interpreter.”

false

You can only interpret into a language if you know it perfectly. Ideally, it should be your mother tongue. Interpreters must react and process information quickly and put it clearly, eloquently and without too many ums and ahs.

Conference interpreter is the title used for interpreters who are university graduates and have been trained to a very high level. They don’t only interpret at conferences. Not all interpreters have had this training.



What's the difference between translation and interpreting?

Translation and interpreting are often confused, but they are different jobs.

Translators work with the written word, interpreters with the spoken word.

Translators have to write texts that accurately convey the message and content of the original document, and are grammatical and readable in the target language.

A good translation should read like a document in its own right. In many cases, for example legislation, the translation is 'authentic', which means it has the same legal force as the original version.

Faithful translations and interpretation reflect both the intention of the author or speaker and the style and register of the language used.

Interpreters provide spoken versions that convey, in another language, the message and intentions of the original speaker.

Unlike translators, interpreters can usually be seen by their customers. They make face-to-face communication possible. Interpreters speak in the first person and become the voice of the speaker. They express the speaker's ideas and convictions with the same intensity and same shades of meaning, and without ever adding their own views or comments.

Both interpreters and translators must understand all the nuances of the source language, so that they can reproduce it as faithfully and naturally as possible in the target language. This also requires excellent drafting skills and the ability to think on your feet!

Skills needed

by professional translators and conference interpreters

The ability to understand is essential for both translation and interpreting. You can't express the content of a speech or text clearly unless you have understood it in the first place. So translators and interpreters must have a thorough knowledge of the source language, a well-developed ability to analyse and some knowledge of the subject matter.

But understanding is not enough. Interpreters and translators must be able to re-express this information accurately and eloquently so it can be used by their target audience.

They must know how to find the right register for a given situation, for a document (written) or speech (oral).



Translators' skills

Excellent **drafting skills**, in order to produce texts that don't 'sound like translations'.

Thoroughness and **accuracy**, so that the translation remains true to the spirit of the original and all the information it contains.

Specialised translation is impossible without terminology and document **research**, and liaison with specialists in the field.

Translators must have an enquiring mind, a desire to learn and a sense of initiative.

Translators often have to work under pressure (to short deadlines), so they must be adaptable and able to prioritise and organise their work.

Freelancers must also have the ability to market and manage their business.

Increasingly, translators must be **computer-literate** and able to use a range of software applications to optimise their work.



Interpreters' skills

Conference interpreters must be **effective communicators**, at least as spellbinding as the speakers.

Conference interpreters must keep rigorously up to date with world affairs and the areas in which they work.

Increasingly, interpreters must be **computer-literate** and able to use a wide range of research tools. When the microphone is on, there is no time to look things up in dictionaries and encyclopaedias: the interpreter has to be on the ball.

Interpreters work without a safety net and must possess the gifts of **intuition** and **flexibility**, coupled with rapid reactions that enable them to tackle any subject by any speaker without being thrown.

Interpreters must possess diplomatic skills, and be sensitive to the context and the situation in which they're speaking if they are to convey the speaker's intention correctly.

How to become an interpreter or translator?

There are many ways to get into translation and interpreting.

In many countries there is no standard route to the job of translator or interpreter, although in some countries certain university-level qualifications or a national certificate must be obtained.

However, both professions require specific skills. The basic requirements are **perfect mastery of the language**

into which you work and a thorough knowledge of one or more foreign languages. It could also be useful to have **specialised knowledge of a scientific or technical field**, or of law or economics, depending on the area in which you want to work.

Periods spent living — either studying or working — abroad are a big advantage for translators, and essential for interpreters.

Qualifications

Most employers require translators and interpreters to have a university degree and to pass tests to demonstrate their ability (many translators' and interpreters' associations impose the same requirements).

Translation and interpreting can be studied at both graduate and post-graduate level, and a large number

of universities teach interpreting and/or translation to a professional level. Many translators and interpreters have a first degree in languages and a post-graduate qualification in translation and/or interpreting.

► See also DG Interpretation's website: <http://bit.ly/q64qcN>.

The **European Master's in Conference Interpreting (EMCI)** is based on a core curriculum for interpreter training at post-graduate level which is offered by a number of European universities. Since 2001, they have been applying a common policy on student recruitment and assessment, and are committed to quality assurance and regular reviews to adapt the programme to changing needs. The curriculum was developed in 1997 in consultation with the European institutions, and continuation of this cooperation is an integral part of the programme.

► For more information, see <http://bit.ly/PL03JP>

The **European Master's in Translation (EMT)** is a registered trademark for translation programmes at master's level. Central to the EMT is a set of professional competences, drawn up by a group of prominent European experts in translation, that graduates of EMT programmes acquire. All EU universities that run master's translation programmes and have successfully undergone the EMT selection process can become part of the EMT network. Calls for applications are normally scheduled every four years. Graduates of EMT programmes are equipped to compete successfully for jobs on the translation market, including with the European institutions.

► For more information, see <http://ec.europa.eu/emt>

Degrees in other subjects — economics, law or technical subjects — can also be useful for a career in interpreting or translation, as long as you also have the necessary language skills. For example, scientists or engineers who have worked abroad for several years could take up technical translation, as long as they have the necessary language knowledge and

writing skills. Technical experts who have acquired language skills can make good translators or interpreters, since they are experts in their field and are familiar with the terminology. However, some specialised training in translation and interpretation methods and techniques is recommended.

Equal opportunities

The interpreting and translation professions are open to people with disabilities. Several international organisations, including the European

Union institutions, employ, for example, blind interpreters and visually impaired or deaf translators.

Where do translators and interpreters work?

Translators and interpreters can work in the **public** sector (as national, European or international civil servants), in the **private** sector (as employees of commercial companies, translation agencies, etc.) and in **community groups** and **voluntary organisations**.

Translators and interpreters work either in-house as **salaried employees** or as self-employed **freelancers**. It is also possible to work as both a translator and an interpreter.

There are many types of translation:

- general
- financial
- legal
- technical (medical, scientific, computing, etc.)
- literary
- marketing
- media.

Translation does not always mean writing out the full text. Translators

are often asked to produce **written summaries** of long documents or to give a quick **verbal translation**, so that the client can identify which passages in a lengthy document need translating word for word, or just to get the general gist of the text.

Web translation is increasingly important in today's multimedia society. Texts for the web must be short, easy to read and drafted in a web-friendly style. Web translation often involves editing the original text.

Not to mention ...

- film subtitles
- adverts
- patents
- software and computer games
- cartoon strips.

The translator's job often involves other skills too, such as revision and editing, project management, prospecting for business and the ability to manage a company.





*
‘Conference interpreter’ is a job title indicating a high level of skill. Conference interpreters don’t just work at conferences — they’re trained to work in all kinds of situations.

Conference interpreters (*) are trained for three main types of work:

Consecutive interpreting: the interpreter sits with the delegates, listens to the speech and renders it at the end, in a different language, generally with the aid of notes. Although nowadays consecutive interpreting has been largely replaced by simultaneous, it is still useful for certain kinds of meetings (working lunches, field trips, etc.).

Simultaneous interpreting: the interpreter works in a sound-proofed booth with at least one colleague. The speaker in the meeting room talks into a microphone, and the interpreter listens in through a headset and repeats the message into a microphone almost simultaneously. The delegates in the meeting room select the channel offering the language of their choice.

Whispering: this is a form of simultaneous interpreting in which the interpreter sits (or stands) between the delegates and interprets directly into the listener’s ear, in most cases without using any form of interpreting equipment.

Conference interpreters have to work in all kinds of situations:

- committees and conferences,
- discussions between heads of state, prime ministers, etc.,
- business meetings and trade negotiations.

Interpreters are often called into courts, hospitals, police stations, immigration offices, etc. This is known as ‘**public service interpreting**’. In many countries it requires special qualifications because of the highly sensitive nature of the work. The Interpretation DG is currently looking at training needs for legal interpreters.

Sign-language interpreting:

At conferences and meetings, interpreting **between spoken languages and the different sign languages**, used by the hearing-impaired community all over the world, is usually provided in simultaneous mode.

Not to mention ...

- TV and radio interviews
- Internet chats
- videoconferences.

Clients' guide to translation and interpreting

Call in the professionals: your image depends on high-quality translation and interpreting

How to find a professional translator

The best way to contact a professional translator is via a **national or international translators' association**. They may be able to provide lists of accredited professional translators who have the language skills and specialist knowledge you require.

The same associations often also have lists of reputable agencies. Alternatively, a large number of translation agencies are listed in paper and online **business directories**.

In recent years steps have been taken to develop **international translation**

quality standards. In May 2006, following close collaboration with the European Union of Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC), the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) published standard **EN 15038**, which certifies high-quality translation services. This standard is gaining recognition worldwide and is reflected in the European Commission's freelance tender specifications. It regulates not only the translation process itself, but also all other stages, from the initial specification to delivery of the product.

How to get the best out of translators

- ✓ Find somebody who **specialises** in translating the kind of text you have from the source language into the language you need. Translation skills cannot easily be 'reversed' to translate the other way round, nor can they be automatically transferred from one field to another.
- ✓ It helps if you give translators all the **reference documents** they might need (such as similar documents translated earlier, technical documentation and glossaries). This will make for a better result and ensure consistency.
- ✓ Always specify the **purpose** and **target audience** of the translation. (Is it just for information or will it be published? Will it be used for advertising?) If a translation is going to be published, your quality requirements will obviously be higher and the translator will have to check the translation more carefully. If a rough translation has been provided just for information, always consult the translator before using it for any other purpose.

- ✓ Allow enough **time** for translation. Remember that good translators have many clients — you are not the only one. If time really is of the essence, don't expect the translation to come cheap: urgent documents cost more. The technicality of the document and the difficulty of the original language will affect the time required to translate it.
- ✓ Give **feedback** on the translation. Then the next job the translator does for you will be even better.

How to find a professional interpreter

The best place to start is by looking on the website of a **national or international association** of conference interpreters. They often list professional interpreters who have the skills you require.

You can also contact an interpreting agency. They are often listed in **business directories**. You will have to negotiate the terms and conditions directly with the interpreter(s).

How to get the best out of interpreters

- ✓ Describe your **needs** as accurately as possible.
- ✓ Provide **background documents** in advance and any relevant information on the **topics** to be discussed. It is particularly helpful to send the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting. Badly informed interpreters can't produce high-quality work.
- ✓ Organisers of meetings should be aware of the special constraints of interpreting, whatever type is chosen. The basic **prerequisites** are good **acoustics** and **visibility** in the meeting room, plus equipment which meets ISO standards 2603 and 4043.
- ✓ Experience has shown that the **communication skills** of the participants are paramount when working in a multilingual meeting. The more languages used and the more complex the interpretation arrangements, the more this is true.
- ✓ When you are chairing or speaking in a multilingual meeting, it is useful to think about how to **get your message across** through interpretation. The interpreters are there to help the meeting proceed as if everyone were speaking the same language. For **tips** on how to get the best possible quality of communication in your meeting and detailed advice on organising a meeting, speaking and using new conference facilities, see the web page <http://bit.ly/vE9kqS>.
- ✓ **Guidelines** for speakers in webcast events are given on the web page <http://bit.ly/MYFFm5>.

Translation and interpreting: jobs with a future

Today, almost all translators use computers. The growth of new technology has generated all sorts of invaluable translation aids. Computer applications, such as translation memories and **speech recognition** software, have made translators more efficient, thereby speeding up and improving the quality of translation.

Computers have also made for easier teamwork, coordination and networking, all of which are essential to translation today.

It has even been argued that computers and machine translation will

make human translators redundant. But this is unrealistic. Language is such a complex and subtle human activity that it is highly unlikely that computers will be able to take over from humans.

In fact, translation is a growing industry. More and more companies are harnessing the potential of foreign languages to create new business opportunities. As a result, the language sector is expanding and this increased output is generating more jobs for linguists.

Key translation tools

Internet: Although not designed as a translation aid, the Internet provides unparalleled opportunities for document and terminology searches.

Translation memories: These are systems that automatically search for text segments that have been translated before and stored in the memory. These translated segments are then inserted in the new translation and the translator can decide whether to keep, amend or discard them. This is particularly useful for repetitive or highly standardised documents.

Terminology banks: IATE (InterActive Terminology for Europe) is one example of an online terminology database. It contains around 8.7 million terms and was built up by the terminologists

working in all the European institutions. Since 2007 it has been freely available on the Internet (<http://iate.europa.eu>).

Machine translation: provides 'raw' translations of documents for certain language pairs, based on a system of bilingual dictionaries and linguistic analysis. It can help to save time, but requires great care; the output usually has to be corrected ('post-edited') and should always be carefully checked.

And what about dictionaries?

Dictionaries are still used by translators as language and terminology aids. Increasingly, the printed versions are being replaced by electronic and online tools.

Interpreters and technology

Like translators, interpreters constantly use the Internet and databases for research and background documentation to prepare for meetings. They keep abreast of new technology in order to get the best out of it for their work.

The European Commission is working at the **leading edge of conference**

technology with solutions for videoconferences with interpretation and webcasts with interactive chatlines. Information about conference facility design is also available at: http://scic.ec.europa.eu/europa/jcms/c_5413/conference-facility-design.

Useful links

- ▶ EUR-Lex (Community law online): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>
- ▶ IATE terminology database: <http://iate.europa.eu>
- ▶ Directorate-General for Translation, European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation>
- ▶ European Master's in Translation (EMT): <http://ec.europa.eu/emt>
- ▶ Directorate General for Interpretation, European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic>
- ▶ How to become an interpreter?: <http://bit.ly/q64qcN>
- ▶ European Master's in Conference Interpreting (EMCI): <http://www.emcinterpreting.org>

Associations of translators, terminologists and translation companies

International

- ▶ Globalisation and Localisation Association (GALA) <http://www.gala-global.org>
- ▶ International Association of Conference Translators <http://www.aitc.ch>
- ▶ International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies <http://www.iatis.org>
- ▶ International Federation of Translators (FIT) <http://www.fit-ift.org>
- ▶ International Permanent Conference of University Institutes of Translators and Interpreters (CIUTI) <http://www.ciuti.org>
- ▶ Unesco Clearing House for Literary Translation <http://www.unesco.org/culture/lit>

EU-wide

- ▶ European Association for Machine Translation (EAMT) <http://www.eamt.org>
- ▶ European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL) <http://www.ceatl.org>
- ▶ European Society for Translation Studies (EST) <http://www.est-translationstudies.org>
- ▶ European Union of Associations of Translation Companies <http://www.euatc.org>

European linguists near you

Get in touch with the nearest local office of the Directorate-General for Translation:
<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/getintouch/localoffices>

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