A Career in Translation and Interpreting

1. Introduction

Many students who are keen to use their linguistic abilities as an integral part of their work are naturally drawn to careers in translation and interpreting. The aim of this leaflet is to explore in more detail the work which both of these occupations involve, the range of job roles which they encompass and to provide advice on training and career progression in these fields.

What is the difference between translation and interpreting?

Types of interpreting include in-house, conference, business, public service, telephone, court and community. Some interpreters may wish to work on a freelance basis, choosing to build their own client base. They can work in a variety of settings including solicitors, courts, NHS, Conferences and government organisations. They are essentially involved with turning a message from another language into their mother tongue orally:

- Working 'both ways'
- Working with other people
- Working without dictionaries or reference materials

This type of work appeals to graduates who have an enquiring mind, who are adaptable, have well developed interpersonal skills, self-confidence and the ability to work effectively under pressure. They should have an in-depth knowledge of a second or third language, but also their mother tongue. Their vocabulary should be wide and specific to the setting in which they are working.

Translators can work for translation agencies, private clients, government organisations and local councils may have their own in-house translation team Their work primarily involves the written conversion of texts such as non-fiction books, conference reports, technical guides, web content and promotional materials from one language to another, generally into their mother tongue.

- Working (mainly) alone at home or in an office
- Working with dictionaries and reference materials

Machine translation is being increasingly used to customise materials to a target audience in the 'voice' of the product. This can be done in a number of ways, such as Interlingual Sub-titling, Monolingual Sub-titling or Theatre Captioning.

2. What types of jobs are available in this field?

Below is a brief overview of some of the varied job roles in this sector. For more detailed information you might also find it useful to refer to the related occupational profiles on the Prospects website:

www.prospects.ac.uk/interpreter_job_description.htm

www.prospects.ac.uk/translator_job_description.htm

Freelance Interpreter - It is possible to work exclusively as a freelancer, or to combine this with a part-time in-house, working for clients as varied as non-governmental organisations, local and national government, the NHS, multinational companies, law firms, Police Forces, courts and professional sports clubs. The Institute of Translators and Interpreters (ITI) runs courses for its members e.g. 'Setting up as a Freelance Translator' and a programme of events and has various subject networks.

In-house Interpreter - This work can be undertaken on a full or part-time basis, generally within a large organisation. If working full-time additional tasks may be required which will include some translation, document drafting, minute taking or even editing work. Furthermore there could be opportunities to specialise in an area such as medicine, law.

Conference Interpreter - Can work interpreting 'simultaneously' i.e. as the speaker or signer is delivering, or 'consecutively', saying what has been signed or said when the speaker / signer pauses. Good notetaking skills are essential for consecutive interpreting. In certain situations 'whispering' will be undertaken i.e. without the use of a microphone.

Telephone Interpreter - In this role interpreters usually work from home either on an 'on call' basis, or to take pre-arranged calls using 'liaison' (consecutive interpreting) both in and out of their mother tongue. This can be in relation to international conference calls, doctor's surgeries.

Public Service Interpreter - This work takes place within a variety of settings including local authorities, Job Centres, hospitals, Courts Office or the Home Office, or order to ensure that UK residents can access any of the services which they are entitled to.

Documentary Researcher and Interpreter - Languages can be applied in many different contexts and some translators / interpreters try to use their language skills in settings which relate to their extracurricular activities / interests e.g. the film industry or television. For anybody interested in working within the film, TV and production industries, a useful resource to refer to is the Production Base website.

Interlingual Sub-titler - Translating from language A to language B, often using a tool called SWIFT. Captions often need to be shortened in translation, to accommodate variations in viewers' reading speeds in different languages. EU languages are on average $20 - 30\%$ longer than English, whereas Asian languages are shorter.

Monolingual (live) Sub-titler - This is often done by using speech recognition software, for highly customised systems. For the BBC for instance this has to be within 97% accuracy and there is always a $5 - 6$ second delay.

Theatre Captioner (or Subtitler) - This role concerns providing translations both for the script of a film or video and also for the sound effects, primarily for the deaf and hearing impaired. In addition a theatre captioner may also be involved in dubbing and doing voice overs, through using various sub-titling tools e.g. www.ted.com

Translator Games Localisation Industry - This is a fast growing multi-million pound industry and 'localisation' is the adaptation of a product to meet language, cultural and other requirements to a specific market. Translators would work on the game as well as associated websites, marketing materials voice overs and technical manuals, often on massive scale projects which can last from $6 - 9$ months. Due to worries over 'theft' of the game idea, translators are often required to work on a product which they haven't been allowed to view and with limited context and reference materials to work with.

Lawyer / Linguist This role is open to qualified lawyers who also have strong language skills. Their role involves the translation, drafting, editing legal documents, primarily for the EU.

Literary Translator - This specialist area of translation involves the re-creation of literary work, endeavouring to evoke the same emotions and to retain the visual imagery of the original text as closely as possible, through a sensitive handling of the material, without altering the mood or the writing style.

Proof-readers and Editors - Proof-readers (or copy preparers) work to ensure a high standard of finished text, removing typographical errors and maintaining consistency to the original document. They are managed by an editor who reviews the work and takes responsibility for the finished product.

Language Analyst - Usually employed by the security and intelligence services, the role of a language analyst involves scanning, translating / transcribing, analysing, reporting the content of electronic communications (to military personnel, governments, the police, MOD). The intelligence gained is then used to scan new data, which will ultimately have an impact on government policy and decision making. Analysts will need to develop their language and cultural specialist knowledge to be able to cope with regional accents, bad grammar, local references, place names etc.

Project Manager – Translation Company - The role is primarily customer facing e.g. government agencies, private organisations. It involves providing quotes for the translation work which they require; negotiating with the client or with freelancers about the rate for the job; placing translations; quality assurance (proofreading work); invoicing clients and a small amount of translation work. It also includes overseeing a number of translation projects, as well as recruiting linguists, database management; translation memory management; marketing / networking for new business; customer service e.g. dealing with complaints; desktop publishing.

Digital Careers - For any linguists who are also interested in IT, there are likely to be a growing number of opportunities where linguistic ability can be an important aspect of the work. This could be in a variety of roles related to the customer interface in the digital industry e.g. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). The Bubble Jobs website www.bubble-jobs.co.uk includes a career guides which outline some of the new and developing roles.

3. What are the typical entry requirements?

To start a career in interpreting it is necessary to have a degree in a language and/or interpreting itself. A post-graduate diploma or Masters in Interpreting is generally required and relevant experience will improve your employment prospects, as competition for jobs in this sector is fierce, especially for work relating to European languages. Rates of pay are also higher for those who are professionally qualified. Public Service Interpreters should also be resilient, able to face sensitive issues such as child abuse, domestic violence and ethical dilemmas such as the termination of pregnancies, informing a patient that they have HIV. They should also have good interpersonal skills and stamina, as the work is physically and mentally taxing. This is also a fairly solitary profession, in which the ability to maintain confidentiality is crucial.

To work as a translator, fluency and two or more languages is usually required and although not essential, a modern languages degree, or a joint honours degree in business / science / law with a language will enhance your prospects. Furthermore, especially if looking for employment with an international organisation, a postgraduate qualification in translation or translation studies is advantageous. In addition, previous work experience in a business, legal or administrative setting would be useful. The skills which translators require include linguistic ability, excellent communication skills, a curious and open mind, organisational skills, flexibility, attention to detail, punctuality, self-awareness, the ability to work independently, as well as part of a team. It is also important to be aware of your own capabilities and limitations.

Some Masters courses cover both translation and interpreting to train postgraduates in both sets of skills, but most individual will work predominately as either a translator or interpreter.

4. Which languages are most in demand?

The languages which are most in demand depends primarily upon the employment sector which you are aiming for. To work for the **EU** as an interpreter or a translator you must be fluent in one European Language and a comprehensive knowledge of at least two others, one of which must be English, French or German. To work for the **UN** your main language should be one of the six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian or Spanish and you should also know two others from this list sufficiently to translate this back to your mother tongue. **GCHQ** particularly needs the languages of Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Somali, Hindi, African languages, Korea, Urdu and Persian. Although it recruits the majority of its linguists to use their existing languages immediately in the workplace, they also take on graduates to language retraining courses e.g. 17 month Arabic training.

5. How to get relevant work experience

Getting involved as a volunteer translator is a good way to gain experience and also to make contacts. Start by making speculative approaches to charities and not for profit organisations to offer your services as a volunteer translators / interpreters, whilst undertaking your degree course. Babels is an international network of volunteer interpreters and translators and provides good networking opportunities. Another useful website for volunteering is Translators without Borders. The Open Translation Project http://www.ted.com/about/programs-initiatives/ted-open-translation-project was launched in 2009, with 300 translations in 40 languages, created by 200 volunteer translators. Other resources which you might find useful include Aquarius, an online marketplace for translation and localization projects, Translator Café and Proz.

It is also a good idea to set up a LinkedIn profile www.linkedin.com and use this to network and make contacts in the appropriate sector, as well as joining LinkedIn groups. You might also like to download a copy of the Careers Service hand-out 'Finding Work Experience and Placement Opportunities for Linguists' http://www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/careersdegree/lang_placements.pdf

6. Who are the typical employers?

Translators and Interpreters can work in a variety of settings including in local authorities, local and international companies with in-house translation teams, translation agencies, Civil Service, European Union, or on a freelance basis. They can also be involved in teaching, training (preparing for translation and interpreting exams), running workshops and seminars.

7. Further resources

General Information

Aquarius www.aquarius.net/

Babels http://www.babels.org/

Bubble Jobs www.bubble-jobs.co.uk

European Job Mobility Portal https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/hints-and-tips-js

North West Translators Network www.nwtn.org.uk/

Open Translation Project http://www.ted.com/about/programs-initiatives/ted-open-translation-project

Production Base http://www.productionbase.co.uk/film-tv-jobs

Translations in Progress http://www.translationsforprogress.org/index.php

Professional Associations

Association Internationale des Interpretetes de Conference http://aiic.net/

Association of Sign Language Interpreters www.asli.org.uk/

Association of Translation Companies www.atc.org.uk/en/

Association of Police and Court Interpreters www.apciinterpreters.org.uk/

Chartered Institute of Linguists www.ciol.org.uk

Institute of Translators and Interpreters www.iti.org.uk/

International Federation of Translators www.fit-ift.org/

National Network for Translating www.nationalnetworkfortranslation.ac.uk/

National Network for Interpreting www.nationalnetworkforinterpreting.ac.uk/

National Register of Public Service Interpreters www.nrpsi.org.uk/

Translators Association for the Society of Authors www.societyofauthors.org/translators-association

Translators without Borders http://translatorswithoutborders.org/

Translation Companies and organisations

Capita Translating and Interpreting Company www.capitatranslationinterpreting.com/

Career Opportunities in EU Institutions www.gov.uk/government/publications/career-opportunities-in-the-eu-institutions/eu-careers-job-opportunities-in-the-eu-institutionsLanguage Line www.languageline.co.uk/

Directorate General for Interpretation http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/scic/index_en.htm

GCHQ www.gchq.gov.uk/Pages/homepage.aspx

Lingo 24 www.lingo24.com/

Proz (Freelance Translators and Translation Companies) www.proz.com/

SDL www.sdl.com/aboutus/careers/careers.html

Security Service MI5 - Using Your Language www.mi5.gov.uk/careers/use-your-language.aspxTranslators café www.translatorscafe.com/cafe/default.asp

The Big Word, Leeds www.thebigword.com/

United Nations https://careers.un.org/lbw/Home.aspx