

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE OFFICE OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

TRANSLATING DIVISION

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~ A Brief History ~

The Office of Language Services (LS) dates back to 1781, when the Continental Congress established a Department of Foreign Affairs and authorized the hiring of a translator. Educator John Tetard, Hebrew scholar Isaac Pinto, and merchant John Pintard all served as translators during the Department's earliest days. In 1789, President George Washington renamed the new nation's foreign ministry the "Department of State." His first Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, appointed journalist/poet Philip Freneau as translator. The Department grew slowly during the early 19th Century, and made due with one staff translator, sometimes doubling as a librarian. Writer Louis Tasistro and Polish revolutionary Adam Gurowski were two colorful figures who held the translator post during that era. As the nation's foreign policy interests grew, the Department and its translating staff grew apace. A formal Office of the Translator was established in 1867. An upgraded and expanded Translating Bureau was organized in 1928 with Emerson Christie as its first Chief. Guillermo Suro became the head of a reorganized Central Translating Division in 1944, renamed the Division of Language Services in 1947. Wilfred Stevens and Emil Fossan, both working with over a dozen languages, were two outstanding 20th-Century translators employed by LS. During the mid-1940s, America's new global responsibilities and the advent of simultaneous interpreting prompted the hiring of several interpreters, doubling LS's size. In 1985, the Division was re-elevated to Office status. Since the earliest days of its history, LS has relied on contractors to assist in its work.

PLEASE NOTE:

LS tests are designed only to meet the quality assurance needs of the State Department. Having passed our test does not constitute a credential, "certification," or "accreditation" for translation work in the general market. LS does not have any legal certification authority.

WAIVER:

Before the translation test begins, all candidates must sign a waiver form that includes the following statement: "...I **waive any right to challenge, appeal, or receive feedback about my application, this test, my qualifications, or the assessment criteria, policies, and procedures of the Office of Language Services.**"

Contract translating for the Department of State

The Translating Division of the Office of Language Services provides translation services to the Department of State, the White House, and other U.S. Government agencies. Much of this work is handled by permanent staff, but we also have an extensive roster of contract translators.

The Office of Language Services (LS) contracts for translation and related services in virtually every language used in international diplomacy. Contractors must demonstrate a high degree of translating proficiency as well as professionalism, reliability and versatility.

This pamphlet answers a number of frequently asked questions about expected qualifications and application procedures. If you have additional questions, please contact us. Persons desiring to offer their services should submit a complete application packet. **The application instructions and form can be found on this website under the “Employment” section.** You may submit your application packet to LS via e-mail, fax, or regular mail according to the guidance for submission found in the application instructions.

Who can become a contract translator?

The Office of Language Services will enter into basic ordering agreements (contracts) with individual translators only, not with translation teams, agencies, or companies.

To be considered, you must have the necessary professional qualifications, (see pg. 2) and pass the LS translation test for each language combination you offer.

If you are not a US citizen, appropriate visa status and a work permit (e.g. a “green card”) are required at the time of application. Holders of H-1B and H-4 visas are not eligible to contract with our office. LS cannot sponsor candidates for visas or work permits.

Applicants must be able to type and have access to a word processor and an e-mail account. They must also have a US bank account, as reimbursement for translation services is made electronically.

Professional Qualifications

Excellent reading comprehension in one or more source languages. In addition to knowing the language itself, an applicant must be well versed in the culture, government, society, economy, and daily life of source-language countries. Such knowledge may be acquired through a college education with studies covering a source-language country or region, lengthy residence in a source-language country, or other suitable experience.

Excellent target-language writing skills. An applicant must be able to write the target language well at an educated, native level with reasonable speed in a variety of styles. A successful college education or work experience are the best indicators of this qualification. LS generally tests applicants *only into their native language*. Applicants claiming an acquired target language must demonstrate lengthy residence in a target-language country or show other evidence of extensive experience writing the target language in a setting where writing on an educated native level is demanded on a frequent and regular basis.

Experience. LS cannot train contractors in the practice of translation or provide feedback on every assignment; applicants should thus have considerable recent *professional* experience translating written material comparable to the kind of work done by LS. Please note that bilingualism, interpreting experience, and spoken fluency in another language, though highly desirable, are not necessarily indicators of aptitude for translating written materials.

Broad understanding of U.S. and foreign politics, government, history, economics, and culture, as well as current events and international affairs.

Typical translation assignments

Translations assigned to contractors cover a wide range of styles and subjects. Typical examples would include laws; treaties and international agreements on technical, scientific, military, economic, and cultural subjects; training manuals; court documents; political speeches and position papers; slide presentations; and official correspondence between government leaders. Hence, suitability of style and fidelity to nuance must accompany a high degree of factual and

conceptual accuracy in the target language rendition. High quality word-processed output is usually required.

Other work assigned to contractors includes on-site support for meetings or conferences, summarizing documents, reviewing translations, and ascertaining the substantive conformity of texts written in two or more languages (comparisons).

Contractors receive and return their work by e-mail, fax, mail, courier, or in person. All work must be done by the contractor who holds the basic ordering agreement with LS. None of the work, in whole or in part, may be subcontracted.

Frequency of work and remuneration

As work requests for different language combinations peak and ebb in unpredictable patterns, LS contractors may go for long periods without being offered any work. Like all nonpersonal services contractors, you will need to have other clients and other sources of income. By the same token, LS does not expect you to be available every time that we offer you work, because you may already have other commitments.

Conversely, contractors with language combinations and specializations suddenly in great demand may occasionally enjoy some very busy periods. A good deal of the work will have to be accomplished against short deadlines.

As a contractor, you are not an employee of the Department of State. You will be responsible for paying all applicable taxes on your earnings directly to the tax authorities and you will not be eligible for employee benefits such as leave and insurance coverage.

You will be paid at the rates per one thousand English words set by the Department's contractor rate board for each fiscal year. Those rates form part of your basic ordering agreement. They vary according to the difficulty of the material and are usually higher for work into foreign languages than for work into English. Remuneration is always based on the English word count, whether English is the source or target language of your assignment. If you are assigned to a conference or special meeting where you have to work at a meeting site away from your home, you will be paid a daily professional fee regardless of the word count. Travel expenses to and from the site and per diem will be furnished by the government.

Payment is made after satisfactory completion of the work against a voucher (invoice) prepared by the contractor as prescribed by the Federal Acquisitions Regulations. LS can furnish you with proper forms and instructions. Payment is electronically transferred to an account designated by you after all paperwork has been processed, usually about thirty days after receipt of your invoice.

There are a number of intangible rewards associated with State Department contract work. On some assignments you will be assisting with the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, and some translations will become part of history. Since much of the work done by LS is topical, LS translators are often at the cutting edge of new concepts and terminology. Much of the experience gained will later be helpful in other environments. Finally, there is the opportunity to interact with knowledgeable colleagues and foreign affairs specialists who can provide you with background and helpful explanations.

Steps in the Application Process

1. Submit a complete application packet

A complete application packet consists of the application form, a résumé, and a translation sample if applying for written translation work. Résumés should include the following: source language(s) and target language(s), translation experience, former and current clients, education, certification, professional memberships, areas of translation expertise, and three

references with telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Translation samples must be submitted for each language direction for which you are applying, and must meet the guidelines in the application instructions. Your application packet may be submitted via e-mail, fax, or postal mail according to the guidance in the application instructions.

2. LS reviews your application packet and contacts you with a response

LS receives many inquiries, so this may take several weeks. We may telephone you for further information.

3. Invitation to take a translating test

If our review of your application packet shows that you have not yet reached the level of qualification that would make you a promising test candidate, we will so notify you. Should you acquire more experience and skills in later years, please send in an update application packet at that time. If our review concludes that you should be given the opportunity to test, and you offer a language combination for which we have a current need, we will invite you to take the written test, set up an appointment, and explain procedures.

4. Take the translating test

Tests are given at the LS office in Washington, D.C., Monday through Friday, with standard dictionaries and word processors furnished by us. Four hours are allowed for each language combination. You must bear any travel, lodging, or incidental expenses associated with the test. For tests involving less common languages, it would be wise to bring your own dictionaries. If a font is not available on our computer for your target language, you must write your test by hand; if such is the case, LS will provide paper and pens. You must sign a waiver before you begin your test.

5. LS evaluates your test and notifies you of the results

Test evaluations may take several weeks to complete. Be assured that your identity will be kept anonymous to all rating officers during the entire evaluation process. If you fail the test, LS **may** extend the offer to retest if we feel that acquiring additional experience during the interim might increase your chances of passing. LS regrets that it cannot provide feedback on tests or disclose evaluators' comments.

6. Security check

All successful candidates will undergo some type of a security check, which may take a few months to complete.

7. LS issues a basic ordering agreement (contract)

When your clearance is received from the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, you will be issued a basic ordering agreement, signed by you and the LS contracting officer. This allows us to offer you work when it becomes available and allows you to accept or decline that work when it is offered.