



Navigating the path towards becoming a **FREELANCE TRANSLATOR**

**TIPS AND ADVICE FOR LINGUISTS
ENTERING THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY**

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About the author

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I am a Chartered Linguist with the Chartered Institute of Linguists. I have a degree in Applied Linguistics, a PG Dip in Business Administration and an MA in Online-Education. I trained as a Translator at EADS-CASA in Madrid. Since I moved to England in the 1990s I have worked in publishing, finance and as a translator and translator manager. In 2001, I established myself as a freelancer and since then I have done work for translation companies, in-company language training and adult language teaching for colleges.





Navigating the path towards becoming a freelance translator

TIPS AND ADVICE FOR LINGUISTS ENTERING THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY

Becoming a freelance translator is not only about translating. It is also about building your own business. Working as a freelance translator has two sides to it that you need to develop together. One is the actual translation work, and the other is the business side of the translator's job.

There are two main paths into the freelance translator's career: literary or commercial translator. This guide focuses mostly on the commercial side, but does include some insights into the literary path.

Literary translation takes place within the publishing industry; it is commissioned for longer working periods, and your relationship with the author is usually closer in order to respect the voice and vision of the author. In contrast, commercial translations are mostly commissioned for shorter working periods. A proof-reader rather than an editor will review your work and it is most likely that you won't interact with the original writer of the text. In commercial translations

"sellable" and "speed" will be the client's two main priorities, without forgetting the need to deliver quality and professionalism.

For more information about literary translation you can search the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) in the UK. They offer an "emerging translators' network" (ETN) forum for new literary translators. It is also worth checking the European platform Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) and PEN America Translation. Some literary translators have opted for Babelcube, a platform which claims to team up authors and freelance translators, and could be an option for a translator who is just starting out with literary translations. However, I would first start the venture with a short story rather than take the risk with a full novel. Finally, I would recommend having the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* handy, as it gives you lots of ideas and inspiration to approach international publishers. You can find it in many public libraries.



Working as a freelance translator

RESEARCH IN THE TARGET MARKET

Check if the client has previously done translations into the language you are doing. Ask the client, but carry out a search yourself as well. The starting point of research is obviously the client's website. Take care with the product name: for example, if you have to translate a particular shoe cleaner, check the trade name of the product on other websites and online shops (even Amazon is sometimes a good source). Check that your sources are reliable. If you do not find anything about the specific trade name then try searching the shoe cleaner market for your target language, and compare the translation of similar products; here YouTube can be an all-round source of information as you can also visualise the product. Don't forget to do the search in your target language. It will be a good idea to keep references of online searches (e.g. websites) that you have carried out in case you have a query from the client about the use of certain terms.

TERMINOLOGY, TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

Once you are familiar with the target market of the product/service you are translating, you need to collect a list of main terminology that you are going to use with your translation. You might want to just take notes or open an Excel file. To build your list further you might


want to check terms and terminology in Proz.com (just create a free account so you can carry out searches in a specific language pair as well as by industry). Proz.com is also useful to ask questions about specific terminology, terms or expressions. When you are not sure if it is the right expression or term in your target language you can also use Linguee or Reverso, where you can find "words in context" to give you an idea that the translation you are choosing is right for the context it is going to be used in.

Don't forget to take the results of your searches as "suggestions" – at the end of the day you are the one deciding and the responsibility lies with you.

CAT TOOLS

You are probably familiar with the use of Translation Memory software. If not, I suggest that you study and do some research on it as nowadays it is an essential tool for translators.

Usually there are two versions of CAT tools: desktop and web-based. For the desktop version you will need to pay for a licence, and you will be able to download it onto your computer and work offline. With web-based CAT tools you will work online and you will be able



to open an account free of charge. Don't forget that CAT tools use Machine Translation by default and if you don't want Google or Microsoft or other MT engines to offer you matches you will have to de-active this in your CAT tool.

There are many CAT tools to choose from: SDL Trados, Wordfast, MemoQ, Déjà Vu, Omega T, etc. If you are starting out in the translation business, I would just use a free web-based version. Some translation companies might insist on the use of a particular one, e.g. Trados, but be sceptical of this as these companies might want to offer you an already produced Translation Memory alongside the translation so that you can give them a discount on the words already translated in the memory. On the other hand, it may be the case that a translation agency is using a team of translators for a client's product, and they just want everybody to share the same Translation Memory.


PROOFREADING PROCESS

Once you have written your translation, the proofreading process starts. First, it's the use of Spell Check. Make sure you remember to apply Spell Check. It is also recommended using software like Grammarly in your target language. Grammarly not only corrects spelling but also offers help with the style. There are other similar software products that you might use like Ginger, Hemingway, ProwritingAid, etc.

You will also need to get familiar with the track changes feature in Microsoft Word, not only for your own use but also in case you are offered a proofreading job of any translation.

There are three phases in the proofreading process. First, make sure that there are no translation mistakes. So you will compare the source and target languages in this phase. (This work is best done with two screens, one for the source and other for the target language). If you change terminology here you might want to update your translation memory in your CAT tool with the new changes.

For the second phase you will need to look at the target language only. Make sure the language flows naturally and make appropriate changes for that. Here is the time to apply at best your linguistic knowledge of the target language, like punctuation, grammar, etc. When you have a clean and final copy of your translation, you might want to have a final and quick check contrasting both languages, just in case, before delivering to your client.



Doing business as a freelance translator

PREPARE YOUR PROFILE OR BIO

You will need to work on your profile, cover letter and CV in the languages you are going to be working with so that you can increase your options in different countries. In the profile you might want to highlight your best features as a translator, highest qualifications and memberships, and something unique about yourself. You can check other people's profiles easily on social media platforms like LinkedIn or Instagram, check the staff pages on translation company websites, or go to translator online-platforms. In your cover letter you should introduce yourself, say why you are writing to them and why you want to work for them, offer more details about yourself or direct them to your website, blog etc. Finish your cover letter with what do you want them to do, e.g. to include you in their database etc.

If you are going to send CVs, take into account the new technology in Human Resources for scanning CVs such as ATS (application tracking system). You might need to get familiar with keywords and SEO to make sure the software selects your CV among hundreds if the company is using this type of software in their platform. When building your CV for translation work, remember that there will be skills from other jobs you have done that you will be able to transfer to the translation industry.

Don't forget to add your endorsement and/or memberships with any email or covering letter you send.


VOLUNTEER WORK

If you want to get more experience on board quickly there are organisations you can volunteer for translation work like AMARA, Translators without Borders, Translation Commons, Global Voices, Khan Academy, etc. You can also volunteer to translate a website of a private company or organisation. Make sure they credit and value your free contributions.

All volunteer work can be added to your CV or your CPD record to help you build your work portfolio.

PROMOTING YOUR WORK: IMAGE, WEBSITE AND BLOGS

Ideally you want to have a website where you can put information about yourself and what you do. A website is like an online business card that you can upgrade and update when necessary in just a few minutes. Your website is also the image you want to portray to the world, especially to potential clients. You may prefer to start writing a blog instead to let people know what you do or you can do, offering valuable information that companies and individuals will appreciate.



If you can afford it, you can order some printed marketing material such as business cards, flyers, bookmarks and leaflets that you can send to companies as freebies instead or together with the usual emailed CV or application. There are some printing companies with reasonable prices, such as Vistaprint, BannerBuzz, Helloprint, etc. If you are thinking of registering your own company in the future, you might want to start thinking about creating your own logo now so that people can recognise you when you start trading as a company.

If you want to be more adventurous you could also add your own flipbook to your website or blog which can act like a digital newsletter or magazine which you can use to promote your work. Check flipbook software like flippingbook, blipbookstudio, issuu.com, etc. Presentation videos or cartoon videos like Powtoon are also very eye-catching.


NETWORKING: SOCIAL MEDIA, EVENTS, SEMINARS, LANGUAGE FAIRS, ETC.

Like in any business, networking is also important for any successful freelance translator. Networking can come in many different sizes, either at a local or an international level. Clearly, at a national or international event you might get to know more people but don't disregard the learning potential a local event can give you. Above all, you need to be a good listener first and a fine speaker second. Don't go to networking events expecting to talk about yourself or

your services. Go there to be curious about other people's services first, and wait until people are curious about you before you start promoting your work. In the same way, you might open an account on a social media platform just to learn the pros and cons of trying different things, but stay focussed on your professionalism.

PROSPECTING AND CRM SYSTEMS

You will need to learn about prospecting, i.e. searching for potential agencies or clients. Find lists of translation companies (e.g. the directory of translation companies in Proz.com or directory of language companies from the American Translators Association) or build your own list by looking for websites which advertise freelance translation work, finding companies and contact names in LinkedIn or Facebook business pages for example, searching for lists of exporters in your language in trade magazines or journals. You also need to build a database of agencies or companies to whom you have sent your details. Make notes of contact names, emails sent, CV or forms that you have filled in. This will help you to keep a better track of your prospecting work. When you get busier, or if you set up your own company, you can then use or buy a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool to make things easier. You can use a CRM system to store things like customer interaction, company information, marketing tools, job orders, frequency of jobs and more.



Make sure you articulate your ideas properly in your email, cover letter, telephone or video interaction. At the end of the day, you are doing a pitch and it pays to research and learn how to do it properly.

RATES AND INVOICING

Make sure you have researched about how much you can charge according to your qualifications, experience and the country you are operating from. You need to provide a rate per hour, per word (or per 1000 words), and also a minimum that you will charge whatever the size of the translation (it could be just the price of one hour). Also you might want to give your rates for proofreading and any other services like transcription or interpreting, if you are able to offer those services.

If you receive the go ahead in a translation job you should have a job order and number with the specifics of the job, and the delivery date. You can use this job number later to fill your invoice accordingly. Usually when you deliver your translation you should send your invoice. Invoices are usually payable within 30 to 60 days or in advance if it is a private individual. You also need to know how you are going to be paid. If it is international, you can be paid by PayPal for instance, or if it is within the UK or European Union you might receive payment by BACS. You should provide the client with your payment details but be sceptical of those clients who ask for your bank details before they

even send you a job. Check some invoice templates on the internet and adapt them to the translation industry specifying language pair and description of the job in question.

Don't forget to register with HMRC as self-employed (if you pay taxes in the UK), once you start to receive any income from your translation work.

CPD AND EPORTFOLIO

It is important to keep records of your continuing professional development (CPD) and also evidence of the jobs you have done. You could start an ePortfolio, or electronic portfolio, where you store electronic copies of your translations and any volunteer work you have done, as well as keeping a personal journal/database of all your professional learning. An ePortfolio will be useful to demonstrate your experience, capability, skills and creativity to future employers, clients or certifying organisations.

STORING YOUR WORK

Dropbox is a very useful cloud storage service to store all of your files. You can create different folders and share them if you need to collaborate with others. You can have Dropbox synchronized on your laptop, mobile and tablet. Other examples include iCloud, Google Drive, Mediafire and Microsoft Skydrive.



About CIOL

CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) is the leading professional body for people using foreign language skills at work, setting the standard for linguists worldwide. Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership, recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, publicly understood as a badge of quality and competence. We offer many benefits and services, such as mentoring and access to networks. Our awarding organisation, CIOL Qualifications, delivers fully regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, business, universities and schools.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit ciol.org.uk

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