

The Value Added to Modern Organisations by Professional Translators

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Abstract

This article focuses on how organisations can benefit from the knowledge and experience of their translators and editors in order to improve intercultural communication, enhance their reputation, widen their international customer base and increase profits. A number of case studies are cited to demonstrate how effective knowledge management enables an organisation to allow these professionals to contribute to its strategic development by providing challenge, support and guidance. The article draws on the extensive experience of a number of translators working in different fields and with various language combinations.

Introduction

Austrian business and financial translator Ingrid Haussteiner makes the following observation in her article ‘Translators: Adding Value as Knowledge Workers’:

As classical knowledge workers, translators add value, which becomes most evident in an organizational setting. Unfortunately, the added value translators bring to the workplace is typically underestimated. Even worse, translation services frequently struggle for recognition and appropriate funding.¹

¹ Haussteiner I., 2004: Translators: Adding Value as Knowledge Workers, *ATA Chronicle* March 2004, 28.

Also acting as consultants and/or advisors, translators and editors represent a valuable resource for any organisation beyond their actual professional roles. This article explores some ways in which organisations can make optimum use of their professional skills and experience and thus benefit from the resultant value added and lower costs. The multiple roles of translators, including that as knowledge workers, are also examined. The paper also focuses on the importance in modern organisations of successful communication between clients and translators, effective knowledge management and intercultural communication. Finally, it looks at how translators can help enhance a client's image, which may in turn broaden the client's customer base and thus increase profits, or at least spare the client embarrassing and potentially damaging mistakes.

The Multiple Roles of a Translator

Translators invariably have knowledge, skills and capacities that go beyond translation proper, and Roger Chriss gives some examples of the different roles of in-house translators:

One friend of mine who has graduate degrees in translation and accounting has found herself performing both tasks for companies she's worked for. Another translator I know developed such strong website design and management skills that half his day was spent working with HTML and other web technologies. And yet another translator, this time with strong project management skills, ended up becoming the lead translator of his team, dividing his time between translating, managing the team's translation projects, working with external

vendors to handle projects his team couldn't, and even hiring and training translators. So the in-house world can be quite varied.²

Freelancers, too, often perform a variety of tasks. At a workshop on freelance translators' remuneration, organised by the North West Translators' Network (NWTN) in February 2011, one of its founding members, Norbert Hermann, observed that since the majority of translators and interpreters are freelancers, they must possess skills beyond those required for actual translation or interpreting.

This means that, in order to run our business, we also need to adopt other roles which are not language-related: credit controller, marketing and sales manager, business manager, IT administrator, website designer, for example.³

Another example of possible multiple roles is that of a colleague who agreed to translate into English a film script based on a Czech satirical science fiction story. Since he has several years' experience in television in Ireland, he is able to advise the client on what to include or not to include, and also the political impact the film may have on a target audience with a different culture, thereby essentially assisting with script development.

² Chriss R., 2006: Translation as a Profession, 27.

³ Ferrero S., 2011: No peanuts please, *ITI Bulletin* March-April 2011, 39.

Case Study 1: 101 Pages over the Weekend

At times a translator may be asked to provide something more than a mere standard translation, for example, extracting and translating specific information from a document when time constraints do not permit complete full translation, as mentioned by Scandinavian translator Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown in his extremely useful book *A Practical Guide for Translators*. He relates how a client once sent him a 101-page document late on a Friday night to be processed by Monday morning:

The original information contained lots of marketing and sales information and the brief from the client was, 'Pick out what you think could be of interest to us and translate it!' The end result was 10 pages of information. Perhaps I should add that I had already done a lot of work on the same project so I had a good idea of what they were looking for. I delivered a draft translation on the following Monday morning. Since this translation was needed just for information and so urgently, the quality controls carried out were: spell checking, grammar checking and a check of all the figures. This was all done by the same translator, that is, me.⁴

⁴ Samuelsson-Brown G., 2011: *A Practical Guide for Translators*, 106.

Value Added

In the above scenario, the translator of course charged extra for working over the weekend in order to deliver on Monday morning, as well as for time spent reading the entire document. However, he still saved his client time and money and thus provided added value. In a chapter headed ‘The client’s viewpoint’, Samuelsson-Brown writes as follows:

One of the purposes of translation is to add value to an original document as well as facilitating communication and comprehension. Since a company’s documentation is often the only tangible evidence that it exists, any translation must be of the same high quality as the original. The quality of the original may not always be high and often the translation is of a better quality [...].⁵

As Durban and Aparicio note in their excellent booklet *Translation: Getting It Right – A Guide to Buying Translations*, some clients recognise and appreciate the value added by an inquisitive translator who reads their texts more closely than anyone else and can thus help improve the original. They cite the example of a European video-games specialist who said that their English translator, who asked many questions, supplied a version of their stock-options policy far clearer than the original, and of an economist who had the same experience:

“We try to wait for our texts to come back from the translators before going to press with the original French,” says the chief economist of a major bank in

⁵ Samuelsson-Brown, 35.

Paris. “The reason is simple: our translators track our subjects closely. Their critical eye helps us identify weak spots in the original.”

Good translators strip down your sentences entirely before creating new ones in the target language. And they ask questions along the way.⁶

An experienced translator or copy-editor will use his or her knowledge to improve an original or translated text and, if it is intended for publication, enhance its product quality, thus adding value. This may involve changes that a customer could perceive as beyond the scope of translation or editing, for example, altering sentence order, deleting words, a whole sentence, or even an entire paragraph that constitutes unnecessary repetition.

Case Study 2: Editorial Licence

One of my customers is a Berlin publisher who produces architectural guides. I work with an American editor with over thirty years of experience, including working for newspapers in the United States. She does not check my translations against the German original, but is extremely adept at ensuring that the English text is very readable for the target audience, which I consider the primary objective for this text type.

A translator or editor often has to decide when to use explicitation to make something clearer to the translation’s target audience of the translation and when to do the opposite, i.e., use implicitation, essentially omit something from the translation that is present in

⁶ Durban C. and Aparicio A., 2008: Translation: Getting It Right – A Guide to Buying Translations, 18.

the original. The copy-editor of the architectural guides once wrote the following to justify the changes that she made to a translation:

But to back up a bit: one of the first laws of journalism I learned was “never assume” and the second was “never underestimate the reader’s intelligence; never overestimate his/her knowledge.”

And although I wholeheartedly agree with “never assume” it seems to me that German writers have a tendency to take that dictum to an extreme degree - to *over* explain, to reiterate, to repeat – in a way that seems superfluous (and irritating) to an English-speaking reader.⁷

She then adds that her relatively dramatic changes are an effort to make the translation more palatable to a native English-speaking readership without underestimating or overestimating their intelligence. The majority of this publisher’s clients have normally gladly accepted quite radical changes to their texts, while at least one insisted that every word be represented in the translation, although this in fact impaired the quality of the final product. The coordinator of these architectural guides trusts the judgement of the translator/editor team since we have all been working together successfully for around ten years, so she argues our case when dealing with somewhat difficult clients. However, if one of the publisher’s clients rejects any cuts to the text, as happened recently, we have to essentially undo our changes to the translation and re-insert words or sections we had

⁷ Sally Bixby Defty, e-mail of 11 April 2010.

decided to omit. Here, the remit of the translator and editor is to help keep the customers happy by following their instructions.

Another suggestion by the same editor was to put the Union Jack and/or the Stars and Stripes on English-language versions of the architectural guides to attract attention to these publications and improve sales in Berlin bookshops. The editor also uses her journalistic experience to prevent single words or short lines at the beginning or end of a paragraph, what are known as ‘widows and orphans’, in captions and tidy up the layout, which enhances product appearance and thus also aims to increase sales. We have also proposed other buildings as possible subjects of future projects to broaden the publisher’s customer base. Some, but not all, of these suggestions have been accepted, but they are all a means by which professional editorial and translation skills can be harnessed to facilitate changes within an organisation.

On occasions translators provide added value in glossary management. If clients send them a glossary, this not only assists them in producing a high-quality translation, but they can also add to it and possibly make corrections. Another form of added value comes from occasionally answering questions that require some research – but not to an excessive degree – and not invoicing a good customer for this service, for example, translating a specific job title for a business card free of charge, as I have done for a valued customer.

A further example is to refer clients to a translators' database for a more unusual language combination. For instance, one of my regular customers once consulted me about a German-Chinese translator. Although I did in fact know a suitable candidate, I was somewhat reluctant to recommend a German native speaker for this work. I therefore sent my client a link to the database of the German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V) (BDÜ)⁸ with the caveat that he should obtain references as a means of quality control.

Jenner and Jenner of Twin Translators advise colleagues to become 'customer concierges' and find ways to assist their clients as much as possible:

Has your client repeatedly mentioned that getting the documents ready for you to translate is a time-consuming and not very efficient process? Perhaps you can offer your project management skills or volunteer to start on the first part of the project while the rest is still being compiled.⁹

If a translator is generally helpful, the customer will normally appreciate this and use this translator again and/or recommend him or her to others. Overall, the right translator can add value to an organisation in various ways without a disproportionate increase in costs. The translation services company SH3 Inc. publishes an online newsletter called

⁸ <http://www.bdue.de/>

⁹ Jenner J. A. and Jenner D. V., 2010: The Entrepreneurial Linguist: The Business School Approach to Freelance Translation, 77.

TransLetter, giving clients tips here and in its blogs on how to cut expenditure on translations without affecting quality:

When it comes to reducing translation costs, you are in the driver's seat. It's easy to find cheaper translators – they are everywhere on the internet. But is cheap usually the best? Not in the real world. What you want is the most value for your dollars, and that means analyzing ways to create your documents so that the translation cost will be less while the quality is high.¹⁰

One of the company's suggestions is to edit a text carefully before sending it to the translator, to cut the number of billable words. They advise minimising revisions to avoid translation costs for several versions of a text, as well as planning ahead to eliminate express surcharges. The authors conclude their blog on 'Doing More for Less in Technical Translation' as follows:

Professional translation adds value to your brand; going cheap is not the answer. Instead, look for ways to reduce cost through judicious editing and layout modifications.

¹⁰ <http://www.sh3.com/2011/04/doing-more-for-less-in-technical-translation/>

Translators as Knowledge Workers

SH3 also note that the client can learn about translation memory and take advantage of resultant discounts. Translation tools are not generally suitable for creative texts such as advertising, but for highly repetitious text types, particularly technical manuals. There are various benefits for the client if translation tools are used, for instance, translation memories such as Trados or terminology tools such as MultiTerm. One obvious advantage is that the use of terminology is completely consistent. Furthermore, previous translations are readily available for reference, as they are stored electronically in the translation memory and are thus easier to retrieve than a hard copy. Consequently, translators achieve a faster turnaround and the client can request a discount for repetitions or ‘matches’, although machine translation does not dispense with the need for human translators, as Samuelsson-Brown observes:

As the use of translation tools becomes more widespread, there will inevitably be the perception that the computer is doing the work and fees should be in relation to this. The strongest argument that we as translators must make is that the client is paying for the translator’s intellectual and professional skills as ‘knowledge workers’. The translator may use translation tools to facilitate translation production but the process still needs the translator to make the appropriate intelligent decisions and intellectual choice.¹¹

¹¹ Samuelsson-Brown, 113.

As mentioned earlier with regard to the architectural guides, translators have to make decisions such as when to use explicitation or implicitation, which cannot be done by a machine. As Pierre Cadieux writes in a newsletter from the former Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA),

[t]ranslators are knowledge workers. Each translation is a piece of knowledge, a decision made by the translator. A translation memory is a collection of translations, effectively a knowledge base.¹²

Translation decisions involve more than terminology research, which, however, is often a major part of the work. It is essentially a matter of text design, the creation of a new text in the target language. In their article on facilitating knowledge construction through information technology, Hanna Risku and Richard Pircher note that text design is a perfect example of an activity that involves processing both information and knowledge as raw materials:

The text design process involves all manner of tasks, including research, archiving, indexing, forwarding, versioning, updating and sharing information using a wide range of different formats and media.

¹² Cadieux P., 2001: Globalization Technology Will Prevail!, 3.

Thus, translators act as knowledge workers and information hubs. They have to be able to collect and filter information, adapt it to the needs of the target group and distribute it.¹³

Once again, this can only be done by a human being. Moreover, besides processing information, translators also need a thorough knowledge and understanding of their subject area to produce professional translations. In workshops aimed at helping translators find their competitive advantage, Jenner and Jenner discovered that some translators held a PhD in their subject area, while others had gained an in-depth knowledge of their specialisation from extensive practical professional experience in their field:

We heard from a participant who had worked in international finance for many years before making the switch to full-time financial translation. “15 years’ experience at top-notch financial institutions” or “Financial translator and 10 years’ working experience as a financial analyst for Deutsche Bank” would be good ways to advertise her services. This would clearly communicate that she understands the subject area very well. Having an insider’s understanding of the inner workings of the financial world sets this translator apart and constitutes her competitive advantage.¹⁴

¹³ Pircher R. and Risku H., no date: Facilitating Knowledge Construction through Information Technology: Beyond the Things that Make Us Dumb, 6

¹⁴ Jenner and Jenner, 78-79.

Knowledge Management and Communication Between Client and Translator

If properly managed, an in-depth knowledge of the specialist subject can also be invaluable to the client, as can a translator's ability to present information clearly to the target audience. It is essential for translators to be able to produce a text that makes sense to their readership and serves the intended purpose. Naturally, in order to do so, they need to be made aware of this purpose and understand the context fully. As Haussteiner notes,

[i]n line with the skopos theory as defined by Hans Vermeer/Katharina Reiss and the functionalist approach propagated by Christiane Nord (1997), for translators, context also refers to the translation brief (i.e., clear specifications about the target audience, etc.).¹⁵

The translation brief should tell translators the purpose of their text, and whether it is for publication or internal use. They should also receive as much background information as possible about the whole project, and the company or organisation, so that they have a good overview. Competent translators have highly developed research skills and are adept at finding information on the Internet, among other sources, but the client can assist them, for instance, by providing the relevant links. This should benefit the client, too, in the form of higher quality.

Translators and/or editors should also know who the target audience is and whether, for example, the target language is British or American English, or Standard German or Swiss

¹⁵ Haussteiner, 28.

Standard German. A client of a highly competent German colleague of mine recently informed him that his translation could not be used as it was in Standard German rather than Swiss Standard German. This should, of course, have been specified from the outset.

If an article is for publication, translators and editors should know which journal it is to be submitted to, and also the style guide to follow, such as the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) or that of the Modern Language Association (MLA), and in the case of a company text for internal use, the existence of any house style that must be adhered to. There should also be clarification whether the client or translator is responsible for editing and/or final proofreading of the translation, including payment for the costs involved. Finally, the translator should be informed whenever any assignment is subject to space constraints, for instance, if the translated exhibition text has to be the same length as the original (or shorter), as is normally the case.

Translators and editors are also responsible for asking questions when clarification is needed, but surprisingly few translators do so. There are a number of reasons for this; in some cases, this may be due to time constraints, while in others translators may be afraid of showing their ignorance. One translator (quoted as Science Translator) asked about the reasons behind this reluctance to ask questions, in the column written by Chris Durban and Eugene Seidel (also known as Fire Ant and Worker Bee) in the Translation Journal.¹⁶

¹⁶ <http://www.translationjournal.net/journal/> Now compiled in a book: Durban C., and Seidel E., 2010: The Prosperous Translator.

The science translator wrote that he personally always phones the customer to ask questions, or adds a translator's note, if something is unclear, or, in his view, should be adapted for an international target audience, although he has a PhD and twenty-two years of translation experience in his field of industrial chemistry. He invariably finds that his clients appreciate this, and becomes frustrated when he subcontracts work to experienced translators and encourages them to ask questions, but they fail to do so and subsequently deliver substandard work.

This seems to stem from insecurity on the part of some translators, misguidedly believing that asking questions might damage their credibility, when in fact it enhances it, as long as they conduct adequate research before consulting their client. Durban and Seidel conclude their response as follows:

Ultimately, we see no better way for translators to win recognition for their expertise, and secure proper remuneration and working conditions than by reminding customers just how complex language issues are. Questions are an ideal way to do just that.¹⁷

Samuelsson-Brown agrees with the above approach. With over thirty years' experience of translating Danish, Norwegian and Swedish into English, he often encounters, and queries, source text difficulties:

¹⁷ Durban and Seidel, 66.

Source text difficulties are many but the two most common are linguistic content and its layout.

As a translator you need to understand the source text – this is a fundamental requirement. But what happens if the source text is poorly written, ambiguous or contains words that are used inappropriately? It is becoming increasingly common that I receive files for translation that are written by a person who does not have the source language as his/her mother tongue. I nearly always query a text that I cannot successfully interpret. My attitude may appear arrogant but there are cases where I have sent back a source text and asked for it to be revised so that it makes sense – not because I do not understand the language I am translating from but because the way it is written makes it impossible to translate with confidence.

Rather than being undiplomatic I highlight the text that does not make sense and ask for its meaning to be explained so that a proper translation can be made. Inevitably there are the time constraints that all translators are familiar with, but that is the very nature of this profession and will be so unless radical changes take place.¹⁸

Samuelsson-Brown's approach makes sense; alternatively, translators can call the client or mail a list of questions. It is in the client's interest to reply promptly and provide as much clarification and information as possible to help the translator do a good job.

¹⁸ Samuelsson-Brown, 105.



Case Study 3: Ich Bin ein Berliner!

Since translation is the classic profession of lifelong learning, translators are used to conducting research. They may very well find factual errors in the text to be translated, sometimes in a field about which they may be better informed than their clients due to their (inter)cultural competence. For example, in a biography of US President John F. Kennedy for an exhibition for the Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin), I once corrected the date of his famous Berlin speech (26 June 1963, not 23 July) and his age when he assumed the Presidency (43, not 42). Translators often also discover and correct typos in original texts and most clients appreciate feedback on such matters.

Kennedy's Berlin speech is best remembered for his claim, "Ich bin ein Berliner!" (I am a Berliner/doughnut). Although there is a common misconception that the use of the indefinite article 'ein' was grammatically incorrect, this is not in fact the case since "Ich bin Berliner!" implies that the speaker is a permanent resident of Berlin, or originally from there. The source of amusement stems rather from the dual meaning of the word 'Berliner', which also denotes a doughnut. This faux pas could have been avoided by consulting a German native speaker, for example, Kennedy's interpreter, whom he jokingly thanked afterwards for translating his German phrase into German. However, such was the President's popularity in Berlin at the time, he got his message across and his image remained intact. Furthermore, as a German colleague of mine observed, if he had said, "Ich bin ein Amerikaner" (grammatically incorrect use of the article, as he was indeed a citizen of America), this would have meant that he was a 'black and white cookie'.

Ideally, knowledge exchange should be a two-way process, the principal common objective being the production of a translation of the highest possible quality. Translators should feel free to point out source text errors (tactfully, of course) and, by the same token, customers should be able to offer constructive criticism or make alternative suggestions. A competent professional translator or editor will normally inform the client upon delivery that they are happy to answer any questions about and/or make any desired changes to the text.

In their reply to a letter about an excellent translator who was, however, difficult to work with because he refused to accept any criticism of his translations, Durban and Seidel advised the translation department to stop sending him work, since it was in both parties' interest to cooperate and pool their knowledge. They astutely concluded their response as follows:

Your letter is a reminder to all translators that being a provider of choice doesn't stop with the ability to craft an outstanding text. It entails a willingness and ability to interact with clients in a professional and service-oriented way. An author who questions a translation is not an enemy but an ally-in-waiting: the translator's job is to explain an initial choice and work towards an alternative, if necessary.¹⁹

¹⁹ Durban and Seidel, 88.

As noted earlier, there are many ways for translators to make themselves useful to their clients and provide added value. In her practical guide *How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator*, French-English translator Corinne McKay also emphasises that translators should make an effort to be helpful to their clients, thus essentially providing a high level of customer care. McKay even recommends translators to seek constructive criticism,²⁰ and to periodically ask regular clients what they can do to better meet their needs and then to implement these changes. She also stresses the importance of effective communication between client and translator:

Communicating. People do business with people they like, so while you don't want to grovel, it's important to hone your communications skills where your freelance business is concerned. First, you have to actually *do* the communicating; answer all business-related phone calls and e-mails as soon as possible, always within an hour, and change your voice mail message or e-mail auto-responder if you'll be out of the office for more than one business day. Be honest about your availability and don't promise miracles that you can't deliver. Second, you need to communicate in a way that is positive and professional.²¹

Much of this advice also applies equally to clients. Furthermore, as Samuelsson-Brown mentions,²² most communication is by email nowadays but it is also beneficial to establish a more personal level of contact to improve cooperation.

²⁰ McKay C., 2006: *How to Succeed as a Freelance Translator*, 122-123.

²¹ McKay, 61-62.

²² Samuelsson-Brown, 42.

Russian and Hungarian translator Eyvor Fogarty emphasises the importance of effective communication between the client and translator in her review of Samuelsson-Brown's book *A Practical Guide for Translators* in the Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI)'s journal *Bulletin*. Discussing his chapter entitled 'Quality control and accountability', Fogarty quotes a comment by a representative of a company that provides professional indemnity insurance for translators:

Problems, he said, do not arise because we are bad at our jobs (indeed, most of us are very good at our jobs) but because there are shortcomings in communicating mainly at the initial stage – defining the terms and conditions of the order.²³

These shortcomings can have serious consequences for the client and the translator alike, but can also be avoided relatively easily through effective communication on both sides.

The Importance of Intercultural Communication

The importance of effective communication between the client and translator also extends to intercultural communication.

²³ Fogarty E., 2005: Guiding Force, *ITI Bulletin* May-June 2005, 32.

Case Study 4: Letters of Reference

One organisation I work for is a company that writes *Arbeitszeugnisse* or German letters of reference, some of whose clients also require these in English. This involves more than standard translation because the conventions for writing a British or American letter of reference differ greatly from those in Germany.

German employers are legally required to write a reference for an employee who is leaving, or when there is a change of manager, and, as in the German education system, there is a system of grades for these from 1 to 5, with 1 being the best. There is also a system of codes whereby if an employee is not to be recommended, his or her employer – who cannot state this directly in the reference but is obliged to write one in any case – will put this in code. For example, if an employee is described as ‘sociable’, this means that the person has an alcohol problem, while the comment ‘always punctual’ essentially means that he or she was no good at his or her job. In Germany, which has a reputation for punctuality, this is seen as given and the absolute minimum any employee can do.

In the US or the UK, on the other hand, a letter of reference is always very positive, while in the US it is generally even more gushing. An employee leaving an organisation is not entitled to a letter of reference by law and has to request one, but an employer will always be pleased to write a glowing letter of reference if satisfied with the person’s work and if relations were good. If the superior is not satisfied, or the employee is leaving

because of a breach of conduct, there is virtually no point in requesting a letter of reference since a poor reference is worthless.

The role of the translators in this company – myself and an American colleague – is essentially to rewrite German *Arbeitszeugnisse* or references to produce British or American letters of reference.²⁴ The ‘translation’ work often involves rewording to make the reference sound sufficiently positive with superlative adjectives such as ‘excellent’, ‘outstanding’, ‘exceptional’ to replace the frequently used German ‘sehr gut’ (very good) which would be too weak, or even sound negative, in the English-language letter of reference. Of course, care has to be taken not to go too far here, particularly if the translation has been commissioned by the employer rather than the employee.

Another of our roles is to delete information that would not be included in a British or American letter of reference, such as the employee’s date of birth. We also add the conventional form of address, “To whom it may concern,” and standard phrases such as “We are pleased to write this letter of reference for Ms X” at the beginning or “If you would like any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me on (telephone number)” at the end. It is also fairly standard practice to add an explicit recommendation in the last paragraph, but much less so in German.

Sometimes my colleague and I also write a British or American letter of reference on the basis of information in a form completed by the client in either English or German, or

²⁴ Of course, there are other versions of English, too, and if the reference is required to apply for a job in Ireland or Canada, for instance, we would use the appropriate forms of English.

frequently a mixture of both. Again, this may involve some translation work, but it may also mean producing new text, which normally requires intercultural competence to decide on what it is appropriate to include or omit, etc.

As translators, we are also able to advise customers on the documentation that actually needs to be translated, including, for instance, curricula vitae or examination certificates. We have also been involved in devising the company's pricing system for English-language letters of reference, for example, by introducing flat rates based on an agreed range of characters for translation.

An integral part of our work is to explain to German, Swiss or Austrian customers the differences between the conventions applying to letters of reference in the various cultures, as outlined in German and English on the company website:

Applying for a job internationally is a particular challenge. Not only do you need to demonstrate top-notch English language skills and present yourself convincingly, but you also have to adapt your application appropriately to a culture which differs from the German in its focal points, expectations and communicative strategies. Your application materials need to be not only translated but adjusted to the specific culture and professional context.²⁵

²⁵ <http://www.arbeitszeugnis.de/translation.php>

We have to provide quite extensive after-service in some cases, in response to customer queries. Some of these are based on a very limited knowledge of English-language conventions such as the reaction of one client who wrote, “No English native speaker use [sic] this wording” with regard to the opening sentence of his text. In such cases, it is easy to point out that this is our standard phrase for beginning a letter of reference in English and that it is indeed used by native speakers.

A customer might ask a specific question not directly related to language, for instance, whether it is acceptable to have a letter of reference signed by the Purchasing Manager rather than the CEO if the latter was reassigned during the applicant’s term of employment. Here, a knowledge of the conventions on what may be included in a letter of reference enables us to incorporate a very brief explanation of the situation into the introduction in response to the client’s question. This client also gave instructions for the letter of reference to correspond to a certain grade (grade 1-2), i.e., very good but not perfect. While the grading system does not apply to the English-speaking world, a knowledge of the German system and intercultural competence on the part of the translator are necessary to follow the customer’s instructions here.

A client in Switzerland once commissioned us to write a professional letter of reference for her on the basis of information supplied in the form provided by our employer. Her bosses subsequently rewrote the document in non-native English, re-inserting the date of birth, inter alia. The client consulted me about the revised version and I was able to advise her about the changes (in some cases undoing those by her bosses) that she should

attempt to implement. I am not sure how successful she was, but in any case, she appreciated my recommendations.

Enhancing the Client's Image

In the above case of non-professionals tampering with a letter of reference, there was clearly a risk of this poorly written document damaging the client's image. This is a frequent hazard, and consultation with translators or native speakers can prevent embarrassment to an organisation and/or even harm to its reputation.

Case Study 5: Forum Global Issues

A German ministry organises an initiative called *Forum Globale Fragen* (literally 'Forum Global Issues'), which is what it used to be called in English. One in-house translator consulted with all the other English native speakers in the Language Services Division and we all agreed that this name did not work in English and that it should be rendered as 'Global Issues Forum' or 'Forum on Global Issues'.

After a lengthy discussion, the person who commissioned the translation responded that it had always been called 'Forum Global Issues' and there was no desire to change this official name. Several years later, however, there are now entries on the ministry's website referring to the 'Forum on Global Issues' so they evidently did eventually listen to advice and stopped using a name that did nothing to enhance their reputation or help them be taken seriously internationally.

This type of scenario is all too common, even with important ministries or large multinationals, although not all the rumours that abound are entirely true, as in the well-known case of Coca Cola.

Case Study 6: Bite the Wax Tadpole

Rumour has it that when Coca Cola was first launched in China, it was given a name that could mean ‘bite the wax tadpole’ or ‘female horse stuffed with wax’, depending on the dialect. However, as Adam Wooten notes in his article ‘Preserving Brand Strength in Foreign Markets’, what in fact happened was that before Coca Cola’s official entry into China, some shopkeepers independently created signs with Chinese characters that sounded like the original name Coca Cola but had nonsensical meanings. Wooten also observes:

Coca-Cola understood the importance of preserving its brand value in international markets. Before entering China in 1928, the beverage icon took great pains to ensure its brand would not be proverbially “lost in translation.” Ultimately, the company chose the characters pronounced “K’o K’ou K’o Lê,” which literally mean, “let the mouth rejoice” or “happiness in the mouth.” This more thoughtful translation definitely helps to preserve the Coca-Cola brand, especially in light of the company’s more contemporary “Open Happiness” campaign.²⁶

²⁶ Wooten A., Lost in Translation: Preserving Brand Strength in Foreign Markets

One can surmise that a multinational the size of Coca Cola must have some employees who are Chinese speakers of various dialects, so the company would be well aware of the need to get things right. The same applies to the famous story about the unsuccessful Coca Cola advert in the Middle East. It allegedly showed three pictures: on the left, a man lying in the hot desert sand dehydrated and exhausted; in the centre, the man drinking Coca Cola; and on the right, the man now completely refreshed. However, it failed to convey the intended message about Coca Cola having refreshed the man. Instead, it had exactly the opposite effect because it failed to take into account that Arabic is written and thus reads from right to left.

A well-known drug company marketing a new remedy in the United Arab Emirates reportedly fell into the same trap. They first showed a picture of a sick person, then one of him taking the medication, and a final picture of complete recovery. Once again the company forgot about the above-mentioned feature of Arabic,²⁷ giving the impression that the product had a detrimental effect on the consumer.

Adverts or any promotional material in particular should, at the very least, be tested on native speakers of the language and culture of the target audience. As Samuelsson-Brown rightly observes,

[p]roducing advertising copy is an art in itself and should really be kept apart from translation. Ideally, the translator should produce the most faithful

²⁷ <http://www.learnenglish.de/mistakes/HorrorMistakes.htm>

rendering of the text possible, while being allowed due editorial licence, and then hand over the copy to a copywriter or an editor. The end result may be perfectly correct but may be ‘the wrong colour’. Notes will probably be needed to explain why a certain concept will not work in its translated form. This is something you need to discuss with the client before accepting an assignment.²⁸

One of my clients, a German air broker, does as Samuelsson-Brown advises. I translate their promotional brochures, after which the translation goes to a copywriter in Ireland. The final version is then sent back to me for proofreading. This level of quality control with advertising texts is certainly most advisable, if not essential.

Case Study 7: The WC

An amusing example of how consultation with a translator can save an organisation embarrassment was when a colleague delivered a translation about the World Cup where she had rendered ‘FIFA WM 2006’ (FIFA Weltmeisterschaft 2006) as ‘2006 FIFA World Cup’. The woman who commissioned the translation responded that she wanted ‘FIFA WM’ translated rather than ‘FIFA Weltmeisterschaft’, i.e., that it should be abbreviated in English, too. This works in some other languages (e.g., the French, Spanish and Italians would be able to call it the ‘FIFA CM’), but in English that would give you ‘FIFA WC’, which my colleague quite rightly wanted to avoid. She did google it and found that it was apparently done (172,000 times, in fact) but the vast majority of the sites were German.

²⁸ Samuelsson-Brown, 108.

One interesting observation by the translator is that while WM [ve: ɛm] (two syllables) is easier to say in German than ‘Weltmeisterschaft’ (four syllables), the English abbreviation WC (four syllables) is more cumbersome than World Cup (two syllables), although it is easier to write.

This colleague double-checked with a group of other native speaker translators and the unanimous verdict was that the correct name is the World Cup, which is never abbreviated to WC for obvious reasons. One member of the group also pointed out that this might end up in one of the tabloid newspapers as an example of how ridiculous the organisation is, thus seriously tarnishing its image.

Commenting that no-one calls it the FIFA World Cup except FIFA itself [International Federation of Association Football (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*)], another colleague agreed that it is only known as the World Cup. She also wrote that when she read the heading of the email enquiry ‘FIFA WC’, she genuinely thought it referred to portable toilets for the World Cup.

Eventually, the translator had enough arguments to convince her client that World Cup cannot be abbreviated to WC in English under any circumstances. The happy ending to that story was somewhat spoilt a few months later, however. Our colleague informed us that she had managed to convince them to go with World Cup, but without asking her, they had changed the capitalization of the slogan from “A time to make friends” to “A Time to make Friends”, capitalising the nouns as in German, and then put it not only on the

postcards but on a massive poster covering Berlin's City Hall bell tower. Interestingly, they did not tamper with any of the other languages, only with the English text.

As our colleague rightly observed, this clearly shows that translators should always insist on proofreading the typeset text of any translation prior to printing. This is yet another example of experienced translators' or editors' ability to transfer their knowledge to a client in order to change procedures and improve the finished product, since not all clients are aware of this. This is especially important with advertising materials as above, which should, of course, also be produced by professional copywriters.

This also applies in particular to chapter headings in a book, and to the blurb or text on the back cover, which is often written at the last minute, when the author may be under extreme deadline pressure, and there is either not enough time, or the author or other person responsible for the book thinks there is no need to have it checked, although this is in fact what people normally read first when contemplating a book purchase. Here, too, a translator or editor can save the client embarrassment by insisting on a check prior to printing. Hopefully, this might save a well-written book from languishing on the shelves because of errors in the blurb.

Case Study 8: Stick up for Europe!

Another example of the translator being consulted by this same organisation was when it wanted to promote links to the EU within Berlin by using the above slogan on flash drives,

known as ‘USB-Sticks’ in German. The translator, again not impressed with the slogan herself, consulted with a small group of colleagues, and received an immediate response from one member who wrote that she thought it sounded indecent and that she could imagine the office jokers altering the letters to make it read “Stick it up your Europe”. Others wrote that “Stick up for Europe!” sounded like highway robbery or that it could perhaps be adopted by the anti-EU movement in the UK.

As another colleague commented, the intended word play on ‘stick’ did not work in English because the term ‘USB-Stick’ common in German, or variations on this in some other European languages such as ‘le stick USB’ in French, is not used in English. This device is normally called a ‘flash drive’ (or ‘flash disk’) by native speakers, although it may also be referred to as a ‘memory stick’. Furthermore, it was rightly noted that if the campaign was aimed at people speaking international English, those behind it might be on the right track. Other translators suggest “The EU: driving Europe” or, moving away from word play, “Europe – Always on the go”, both certainly improvements on the original slogan. Another suggestion was to put a small EU flag and a Berlin bear on the flash drive to promote links between that city and the European Union.

The final decision was not to adopt any new English slogan but merely to use the established German slogan “Europa ist hier!” (“Europe is here!”). In this instance, the organisation responsible for the campaign listened to the translators and fortunately did not waste money on merchandise carrying a slogan that might have made them into a laughing

stock. This is a cautionary tale where the translator was able to influence the outcome of a potentially damaging campaign.

International communication regarding promotional texts is just as important for small businesses. Some Polish visitors to Prague were perplexed by signs in bakers' advertising 'čerstvý chléb'. This is Czech for 'fresh bread', not to be confused with 'czerstwy chleb' in Polish, a false friend meaning 'stale bread', not a very attractive product except for feeding the ducks on the Vltava. Perhaps some of these bakers would display signs in Polish or other languages if this were pointed out to them. Similarly, the claim by a Warsaw restaurant, "You may find our wine prices exuberant", quoted in Croker's *Still Lost in Translation*,²⁹ is hardly an attractive proposition for international customers.

It is not just the Europeans who sometimes need their publications to be proofread or edited with greater care. With respect to the earlier discussion on 'FIFA WC 2010', interested readers can go online and view the following headline of an Indian net publication called *Freaky Gossip*, "FIFA WC 2010 Netherlands Vs Spain (NED Vs ESP): The Dream Finale!!"³⁰

Although some of these examples may be amusing, they do nothing to enhance the reputation of an organisation or business, yet they are easily avoided through consultation with a native speaker of the target language. The above case studies illustrate how the

²⁹ Croker C., 2007: *Still Lost in Translation*, 130.

³⁰ <http://www.freakygossip.com/2010/07/fifa-wc-2010-netherlands-spain-ned-esp-dream-finale/>

translator at the interface between those commissioning a translation and the end customer can help improve product quality, facilitate better intercultural communication, and enhance the reputation of the organisation or at least save it embarrassment. The translator may prevent a company from losing face or potential customers, or assist it in broadening its international customer base, thus increasing profits.

Conclusion

Translators can and do perform multiple roles within an organisation and so add value, help improve the quality of the organisation's product and enhance its image. This requires effective knowledge management and communication between the client and translator or editor. Intercultural communication is also of crucial importance.

Haussteiner proposes that translators should design metrics for measuring the value that they add:

To convince management, it certainly helps to show that one's work improves the organization's return on investment. Therefore, it is worthwhile for translators to collect anecdotal evidence, (e.g., how many serious mistakes they identified in source texts during translation). Translators could also conduct a survey, asking about the time and money they help the organization save by supporting, for example, subject matter experts and office staff by translating, editing, and providing terminology and style guide information. Translators

could also ask management to think about how much time and effort can be saved by having translators on a project team from the beginning.³¹

Haussteiner also proposes other questions that might serve to show the value translators add to an organisation. For example, a translator could ask how many presentations and publications reach how many people per quarter or year thanks to the translator's work, or how many hours a month the language services unit saves a client. This may prove to be a fascinating topic for future research, or at least a good starting point for future communication about the value added to modern organisations by professional translators.

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³¹ Haussteiner, 33.

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