

# CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

SMALL BUSINESS

## There is no simple way to do their jobs

*Companies that translate materials to other languages cross 'boundaries'*



*Photo credit: SHARON SCHNALL*

**Mario Morelos is the co-founder of Localingua, a multi-language translation agency in Kent.**

the manual?"

"You have to help them understand translation is a human process that takes time," he said.

By SHARON SCHNALL  
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Mario Morelos smiles as he explains foreign language translation.

"You give me 500 words of English and you get back 600 words in Spanish," he said.

Mr. Morelos is the managing director of Localingua, a Kent multi-language translation agency that he co-founded in 2006.

Explaining word expansion is part of client education; addressing other aspects further helps clients understand linguistics and the complexities of translation.

When an unusually fast translation turnaround is requested, particularly for a large document, Mr. Morelos will ask, "How long did it take you to produce

Translating is an ancient profession, having served people, speaking different languages, who interact in life and trade, particularly in countries with several languages.

“There has always been a need to help people cross those linguistic boundaries,” said Dorothee Racette, president of the American Translators Association.

The American Translators Association, based in Alexandria, Va., was founded in 1959 and serves 10,500 members.

Although membership represents 90 foreign countries, Ms. Racette said the majority are U.S. members; 70% to 80% are independent contractors.

### **To own or not to own**

The Northeast Ohio chapter of the American Translators Association was founded in 1977 and has 115 members, said Jill R. Sommer, membership chair and four-term past president. Ms. Sommer has been a German-to-English translator since 1997. She is based in Cleveland Heights with clients primarily being translation agencies that are subcontracting services.

Mr. Morelos, who was born and raised in Mexico City, was a freelance translator, then an in-house sales manager for a Wisconsin translation agency. Ultimately, he said he wanted to own his own business, and did so using \$30,000 personal savings. A laptop computer and language software tools were acquired and attending industry conferences for education, trade shows and networking events followed.

Today, Localingua includes Anne-Clarence Roy, co-founder and production director; and two part-time employees. The firm annually draws from up to 20 subcontractors; the most common language pairings offered with English are Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, he said.

Client translation deliverables have included marketing materials, technical manuals and medical articles; local clients include Kent State University and the Cleveland Clinic. Mr. Morelos declined to discuss gross revenues.

By comparison, Ms. Sommer opted against agency ownership despite an opportunity to do so. With ownership, she said, she would be marketing not translating. Her passion is translating.

"When I was younger, I wanted to be a detective and I wanted to be a librarian," she said. "I see translation as the amalgam of the two professions. I'm a really good researcher. I've gotten good at finding the perfect term."

At a project's onset, Ms. Sommer confirms the to-be-translated document's purpose and target audience. Will the document be exclusively for internal use, she asks. Ms. Sommer's industry specializations include medical translation. Accordingly, she will confirm if the readership is comprised of physicians or lay people.

"If I see the term 'dispnoe' in a (German) text, I need to know the audience in order to use the proper term," she said. "I would use 'dyspnea' if the document were directed at medical personnel, but 'shortness of breath' if it is in a patient consent form for a clinical trial."

## **Specialty services**

Translating for the specific terminology of doctors or other professionals is referred to as higher register translation; translating for a magazine article, for example, is lower register translation. Being knowledgeable about an industry's unique "language," purpose and changing practices is why translators specialize.

Specialization represents one measure of quality when evaluating a firm or independent contractor.

In the U.S. industry, translating in one's native tongue is another preferred standard. But native speaking ability alone is not enough. That's why the neighbor born in the United States and seemingly gifted in Spanish should not be sought out to translate a Spanish technical article into English.

"English has been your language for life, but if I give you an article on limnology, you can't summarize it. ... It's (limnology) the study of fresh water," said Francoise Massardier-Kenney, director of the Institute for Applied Linguistics, a research and training unit affiliated with the Department of Modern and Classical Language Studies at Kent State University.

For that matter, while it may seem convenient, hold off on using the Russian-born co-worker to translate a vendor's Russian correspondence into English.

"The competencies associated with (professional) translation are complex and multiple," Dr. Massardier-Kenney said.

Cynthia Hazelton, co-owner of TransConnect Translation, specializes in legal and commercial translation. Translation from French to English is done by Ms. Hazelton; English to French translation by her business partner Marianne Reiner, who was born and raised in France.

Their 2009 business start was funded from personal finances totaling \$20,000; Ms. Hazelton would not disclose gross revenues.

The two attorneys, one working in Pepper Pike, the other in San Diego, formed the business following careers as independent contractors. Previously, Ms. Hazelton taught high school French for 30 years, the last 20 in the Beachwood City School District.

TransConnect's website promotes "translation for lawyers by lawyers."

### **Going with the flow**

Ms. Hazelton has translated court rulings, criminal depositions and articles of incorporation. Her clients include law firms and international corporations.

Accordingly, she became an expert on cattle feed while translating contracts for a French additives company, and in the know regarding hair-cutting scissors associated with a Paris-based company's contract translation needs.

"Every day is completely different and every job is different," she said. "You have to go with the flow. You can't panic and say, 'I've never done this before.' "

# The 'art and science' of translation

According to experts, foreign language proficiency and translation are two different pursuits -- two different acumens.

By SHARON SCHNALL

Cynthia Hazelton taught high school French for 30 years. She had graduate degrees in French literature and law and an undergraduate degree in education with a French major and Spanish minor.

In 2004, close to her retiring from teaching and becoming a French-to-English translator, she earned yet another graduate degree — this time, in French translation from the Institute for Applied Linguistics at Kent State University.

Today, she is the co-owner of TransConnect Translation and an adjunct instructor at the institute.

With a French connection, four decades and counting, what more could translation studies offer?

“There's really an art and a science to translation,” Ms. Hazelton said. “The first thing I learned was research techniques. That's what people don't understand: you don't just take a dictionary and start looking up words.”

Foreign language proficiency and translation are two different pursuits, two different acumens.

“All you've had experience with (as a foreign language student) is typical texts in the humanities. It's very unlikely that this is the typical text you will translate (as a translator),” said Francoise Massardier-Kenney, the institute's director.

“The curriculum overlap between a traditional language degree and a translation degree is minimal, maybe 10 percent,” she said. “The translation students will have to become familiar with databases that have nothing to do with the literature of the humanities.”

Founded in 1988, Kent State's translation program is among the oldest in the country, said Dorothee Racette, president of the American Translators Association. It is the only dedicated translation program in Ohio. About 100 students are enrolled in the undergraduate language program that offers French, German, Russian and Spanish translation.

At the master's and doctorate levels, in the United States, just under 15 institutions offer translation degrees of which Kent State is one, Dr. Massardier-Kenney said. This year's 27-student doctorate population represents the following countries: Bosnia, China, France, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the United States.

The master of arts translation program, with more than 50 students, includes studies in French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish; a separate three-year combination graduate translation/MBA degree also is offered. Earlier this school year, the institute announced a master of arts in Arabic translation will be offered beginning August 2014. This will be the first full master of arts in Arabic translation offered in the

United States, Dr. Massardier-Kenney said.

Citing website resources, including a CIA fact book, she said Arabic is spoken by 293 million to 452 million people worldwide. "Arabic is a strategic language," she said. "There are more Arabic speakers in the world than English speakers. There is a great need for trained Arabic translators."

And, will there be more language-specific changes, to follow Arabic's debut, adding Chinese to the institute's language portfolio, perhaps? Better to wait and concentrate on making the latest change a success, Dr. Massardier-Kenney said.

"We add a language; we see how it works," she said. "We give it four or five years. It's not good to over-expand. We want to be the best; sometimes being the best means being smaller."