



## TRANSLATORS – AN ENDANGERED LIFESTYLE

Today is [International Translation Day](#). Although the job of a translator is not necessarily more important than that of a lumberjack or a manager, it is certainly a good thing to wait for a moment and consider the value of our work. Especially now the job of a translator is threatened from many sides – even from inside the industry.

### **A unique job**

There is much to be said about the importance of translators and translators, their specialisms and the pressure that is put on wages and deadlines by the ever increasing technological advancements. There is, however, one part of the translation job that is often overlooked: being a translator is not merely a job, but is part of something bigger. Being a translator is a lifestyle. Think of standing with both feet in different cultures, facing different time zones, working with clients from almost every country. Who else has such a diverse job, working day and night and over the weekend to satisfy customers with so many cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds? In which other industry will you find dedicated people travelling all over the globe, settling now here and then there, combining an eagerness to taste cultures, learn about them, and the nuances of particular languages, and still work hard to meet deadlines and client's demands?

There are hardly other professionals working this way.

## **A lifestyle for compensation**

Yet the job of a translator seems of little value to too many people. I often meet people on all kind of occasions, asking me whether I can outsource translation work to them. Their motivation is often – I am looking for some work to earn some extra income or because I have some spare time. Or even – I can speak English and Dutch, so I can be of value to you. Getting them on board is asking for trouble: erroneous translations, missed deadlines, complaints about being underpaid, etc. While a job as a translator might seem exciting and glamorous, many outsiders will lose interest once they have seen how challenging it actually is. Only adapting to translation as a lifestyle can compensate for that. (And that is something not everybody will put the effort into.)

The life of a translator can thus be hard, but that is not a problem for those that love different cultures, are eager to learn and can resist the pressure of outsiders. Instead they are more guided by the rewards, the satisfaction and the joy of their work.

## **Disruptive business**

There is a pressure however that is more challenging to translators than the pressure of outsiders. It's the pressure of companies and people inside the industry. Although disruptive technologies, such as [machine translation technologies](#) like [NMT](#), are still in their early days and do not form a major threat, the implications of technological advancements are already felt. The [price pressure](#) is increasing and companies are looking for ways to maintain their margins at all costs. That is part of the business and it requires translators to take on a more commercial and business-oriented approach rather than a passive 'wait and see' attitude.

There is, however, one thing that translation agencies should stop, namely, undermining their (and our) business by preaching that everybody can be a translator and setting up online systems that enable people from various backgrounds to compete with professional translators.

In the past few years a couple of translation agencies have anticipated tougher times by creating portals where their normal clients can benefit from cheaper translations by translators interested in fads. In The Netherlands it was the translation agency Perfect that outplayed itself by not using a couple of professional translators and instead promoting their online system [FairLingo](#), (which had much lower rates), as a way for travelers to earn some extra income. The company ran a [promotional post](#) at a travel website in which they claimed 'Want to earn money while travelling? Become a translator!' Perfect is certainly not the only company with such a safety net for earning income by reducing word rates to as low as €0.04 per word: it enables them to win and maintain clients by offering wanna-be translators (and professional translators) competitive and low-waged jobs that would normally be done by translators.

There is another side as well: professional translators who sign up for such systems contribute to the ongoing downturn and devaluation of the translation profession. If they started to respect themselves and their colleagues, they would, for sure, be able to resist everybody who is threatening the lives of the other 640,000 translators.

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