

## **Do interpreters translate? Results of an e-mail survey of AIIC members to determine if interpreters also work as translators**

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### **Abstract**

To determine if interpreters translate, a survey of interpreters, members of AIIC, was carried out by means of a questionnaire sent by e-mail. Three hundred and seventy four answers (14.70% of the 2,544 AIIC members) were received and processed using an Excel spreadsheet. Of the interpreters who answered the survey, 68.45% also work as translators, 49.47% have a degree in translation, 24.06% employ other translators, 17.11% are members of translators' associations, 28.071% think translators should sit for an international accreditation exam or diploma. A sum total of 80.48% of the interpreters who answered the survey either: 1) work as translators; or 2) have a translation degree; or 3) employ translators.

### **Introduction**

Translators work with written texts and are first and foremost writers who translate from foreign languages into their native language, or from their native language into other languages – an ever more acceptable and widespread practice. They have time – if deadlines permit - to carefully analyze the source text, consult the author/s as to meaning, use dictionaries, ask experts to help them with technical words and expressions, write a draft and finally edit and correct till they have a final version they are satisfied with. They work alone - or as part of a team -, sometimes at home, in what could be said to be a relaxed familiar environment. They are invisible and even, on occasion, unknown, and have to struggle to get their names into print as the recognized translator of a text, though they are also the first to be blamed if a translation is not exactly what the author had in mind or does not achieve the expected effect (in the case of publicity, for example) on the target audience.

One of the main aims of translation courses - at any level - is to turn out skilful writers, word wizards who in a detailed and methodical manner will linguistically take a – sometimes badly written ambiguous and mistake riddled - source text apart, and reassemble it in a faultless target language style. During training, text analysis, the capacity to recognize and use different styles, and composition skills are greatly emphasized.

Interpreters work with oral language and they are first and foremost speakers who interpret from foreign languages into their “A” language or languages - it is an accepted fact that interpreters may be bilingual and have two “A” languages. They have only enough time to mentally process the source speech (at up to 150 or even more words per minute) and render it into the target speech, and must be able to give it the correct intonation and emphasis necessary to preserve its meaning. They cannot correct their mistakes, which are sometimes taken up and broadcast by the media. They work in all sorts of environments, from an operating theatre to a factory floor, to a booth in a luxury hotel auditorium during a world summit. They are sometimes glaringly under the public eye – consecutive or chuchotage interpreting at the side of well-known political, artistic or sports personalities – or completely invisible and anonymous in a dark booth.

One of the main aims of interpretation courses - at any level - is to turn out skilful speakers, word wizards who in a fraction of a minute will almost subconsciously render a – sometimes rather entangled – source speech into an intelligible and meaningful

target speech, preserving its message. During training elocution, correct intonation and loud, clear enunciation are greatly emphasized.

In both cases – translators and interpreters – their entire professional activity is based on subordination to the source author/speaker without forgetting for one instance the target text/speech reader/listener who must be provided with an easily understandable, meaningful, coherent target language rendering that is equivalent to - or causes the same effect - as the source text/speech. They must therefore be able to shed their own skins and become actors, stepping into the shoes of the author/speaker and adopting – as nearly as they can- the personality and discourse of the author/speaker. They must be interested in all and every topic under the sun and capable of long hours of research into the subject they are going to work with mining terminology. They must have an excellent knowledge of the languages they work with, be prepared to continually keep abreast of the changes their languages undergo, learn new words and expressions, and have extremely good memories.

The question is – given their differences and their similarities – do interpreters also translate and if they translate do they do so into their non-A languages, do interpreters employ translators, do interpreters train as translators, are interpreters members of translators' associations, do interpreters consider translators should sit for international accreditation exams? The answers to these questions could have important consequences for training programs.

In this rapidly changing global village where the marketplace makes the rules and competition is ever greater, academic institutions must have an ear to the ground and be prepared to speedily adapt if they hope to provide appropriate training programs for professionals. In the specific case of language professionals, if the written and oral rendering of discourse from one language into another are practiced by the same person; that is to say, if interpreting and translating are not two completely separate and distinct professions in the real world, they evidently should not be considered so in the academic world.

If translators ever more frequently translate into their non-A or non-native languages, this also must be taken into consideration by training programs. Some examining bodies do not currently allow candidates to sit for translation accreditation exams into two different native languages. But, to give just one example, with English rapidly becoming the modern global *lingua franca*, there are regions of the world where there is a demand for translation from the local language into English and local interpreters and translators try to provide this service, how they are trained may have a marked influence on the quality of their work and, therefore, their capacity to provide a competitive service.

Do interpreters when they also work as translators feel the need to join translators' professional associations and obtain accreditation as translators? Or do they think of themselves as just talented people who are familiar with two or more languages who can therefore translate as well as interpret? All these matters undoubtedly are of interest to academic institutions and will influence not only their training programs, but the links they establish with professional associations and also the educational services they provide and their target population.

## **Materials and Methods**

AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, has 2,544 members in 239 cities in 80 countries (data from AIIC webpage [www.aiic.net](http://www.aiic.net)). Not all interpreters are members of AIIC, but it is the largest international association of interpreters. Not

all interpreters who are members of AIIC have an e-mail address. A survey of interpreters, members of AIIC, was carried out by means of a questionnaire sent to members who have an e-mail address in the 2001 Directory and 2001 Bulletins.

To carry out the survey, permission was obtained from AIIC. One thousand eight hundred and ninety (1,890) e-mails were sent. Three hundred and seventy four answers were received and processed using an Excel spreadsheet.

The questionnaire e-mailed was made up of seven questions:

- 1) Do you translate written texts?
  - 2) Do you translate from your A language to other languages?
  - 3) Do you employ other translators (written text)?
  - 4) Do you have a degree in translation?
  - 5) Are you accredited as a translator with any association (ATA, IOL, ITI, ITC)?
  - 6) Which association?
  - 7) Do you think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation or IOL Dip Trans?
  - 8) YOUR NAME, please:
- Acronyms:  
 ATA: American Translator's Association  
 ITI: Institute of Translation and Interpreting  
 IOL: Institute of Linguists  
 AITC: International Association of Conference Translators  
 Dip Trans: Diploma in Translation

**The distribution of the replies was as follows:**

Country	AIIC interpreters (AIIC data)*	Total number of interpreters who answered the survey	Percentage of interpreters who answered the survey	Region
Algeria	2	1	50.00%	AF
Argentina	25	4	16.00%	SA
Australia	19	4	21.50%	AUS
Austria	64	8	12.50%	EUR
Belgium	274	47	17.50%	EUR
Benin	3	0	0	AF
Bolivia	3	0	0	SA
Botswana	1	0	0	AF
Brazil	40	17	4.25%	SA
Bulgaria	1	0	0	EUR
Burkina Faso	1	0	0	AF
Cameroon	4	0	0	AF
Canada	106	16	15.09%	NA
Chile	9	1	11.11%	SA
China	11	4	36.36%	ASIA
Colombia	11	2	18.18%	SA
Cyprus	2	0	0	EUR
Czech Republic	4	1	25.00%	EUR
Côte d'Ivoire	12	1	8.33%	AF

Denmark	29	8	27.59%	EUR
Dominican Republic	5	3	60.00%	CAR
Ecuador	7	3	42.85%	CAR
Egypt	42	2	4.76%	AF
El Salvador	1	0	0	CAR
Ethiopia	3	1	33.33%	AF
Finland	13	3	23.07%	EUR
France	403	32	7.94%	EUR
Germany	242	28	11.57%	EUR
Ghana	3	1	33.33%	AF
Greece	35	1	2.85%	EUR
Guatemala	1	1	100%	CAR
Hong Kong	7	0	0	ASIA
Hungary	4	1	25.00%	EUR
India	3	0	0	ASIA
Ireland	8	0	0	EUR
Israel	24	2	8.33%	ASIA
Italy	172	27	15.69%	EUR
Japan	10	1	10.00%	ASIA
Jordan	2	0	0	ASIA
Kenya	9	1	11.11%	AF
Lebanon	4	0	0	ASIA
Luxembourg	33	6	18.18%	EUR
Mali	2	0	0	AF
Mauritius	2	0	0	AF
México	23	6	26.08%	NA
Mozambique	1	0	0	AF
Netherlands	56	2	3.57%	EUR
New Caledonia	2	0	0	AUS
New Zealand	2	0	0	AUS
Nicaragua	1	1	100.00%	SA
Nigeria	3	2	66.67%	AF
Norway	9	3	33.33%	EUR
Peru	3	2	66.67%	SA
Poland	3	1	33.33%	EUR
Portugal	30	7	23.33%	EUR
Russian Federation	3	2	66.67%	ASIA
Rwanda	2	0	0	AF
Saudi Arabia	5	0	0	ASIA
Senegal	16	6	37.50%	AF
Singapore	3	0	0	ASIA
Slovenia	1	0	0	EUR
South Africa	4	0	0	AF
South Korea	8	2	25.00%	ASIA
Spain	85	15	17.64%	EUR
Sweden	26	5	19.23%	EUR
Switzerland	275	28	10.18%	EUR

Syria	1	0	0	ASIA
Taiwan	2	0	0	ASIA
Tanzania	9	0	0	AF
Thailand	4	3	75.00%	ASIA
Togo	2	1	50.00%	AF
Trinidad & Tobago	1	0	0	CAR
Tunisia	3	1	33.33%	AF
Turkey	7	1	14.28%	ASIA
United Arab Emirates	1	0	0	ASIA
United Kingdom	125	22	17.60%	EUR
Uruguay	8	2	25.00%	SA
USA	147	31	21.08%	NA
Venezuela	11	1	9.09%	SA
Zimbabwe	6	3	50.00%	AF
Total	2,544	374	14.70%	

*Table 1: Countries, number of AIIC interpreters, number and percentage of interpreters who answered the survey and grouping of countries in regions for the purposes of this study.*

\* Data from AIIC webpage (www.aiic.net), December 2001.

Countries were grouped into the following regions of the world for the purposes of this study.

EUR: Europe

AF: Africa

ASIA: Asia (Turkey and Russian Federation are included).

AUS: Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Pacific

NA: North America

CAR: Caribbean and Central America

SA: South America

Interpreters members of AIIC		Interpreters to whom the questionnaire was sent		Interpreters who answered the questionnaire	
#	%	#	%	#	%
2,544	100	1,890	74.29	374	14.70

*Table 2. Interpreters who answered the questionnaire*

Convention: For the purposes of this study, from hereon the word “Interpreters” will be used to refer to the three hundred and seventy four AIIC members who answered the questionnaire.

## Results

For the purposes of this study the interpreters' answers were processed according to the region they work in.

Question 6: There were so many different answers with all sorts of national or international associations mentioned that the answers were impossible to process.

Percentages: In each table the percentages are calculated taking the figure in the far right column as 100%. In some cases this is the total number of interpreters who answered the survey, in others it is the total number of interpreters who translate and in others it is the total number of interpreters who do not translate.

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> also work as translators		Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	159	64.90%	86	35.10%	245	100%
Africa	16	80.00%	4	20.00%	20	100%
Asia	11	84.62%	2	15.38%	13	100%
Australia	4	100.00%	0	0%	4	100%
North America	37	69.81%	16	30.19%	53	100%
Caribbean	2	66.67%	1	33.33%	3	100%
South America	27	75.00%	9	25.00%	36	100%
Total	256		118		374	100%
Percentage	68.45 %		31.55 %		100 %	

*Table 3: Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of interpreters who also work as translators*

Region	Interpreters who translate into their non-A languages		Interpreters who <u>only</u> translate into their A languages		Interpreters who also translate Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	68	42.77%	91	57.23%	159	100%
Africa	8	50.00%	8	50.00%	16	100%
Asia	7	63.64%	4	36.36%	11	100%
Australia	2	50.00%	2	50.00%	4	100%
North America	13	35.14%	24	64.86%	37	100%
Caribbean	2	100.00%	0	0%	2	100%
South America	17	62.96%	10	37.04%	27	100%
Total	117		139		256	100%
Percentage	45.70 %		54.29 %		100 %	

*Table 4. Of the total number of interpreters who also work as translators, number and percentage of those who translate into their non-A languages*

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators who also employ other translators		Interpreters who also work as translators who <u>do not</u> employ other translators		Interpreters who also work as translators Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	45	28.30%	114	71.70%	159	100%
Africa	9	56.25%	7	43.75%	16	100%
Asia	5	45.45%	6	54.55%	11	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	3	75.00%	4	100%
North America	15	40.54%	22	59.46%	37	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	2	100.00%	2	100%
South America	9	33.33%	18	66.67%	27	100%
Total	84		172		256	
Percentage	32.81%		67.18 %		100 %	

*Table 5. Of the total number of interpreters who also work as translators, number and percentage of those who also employ translators*

Region	Interpreters who work as translators and who also employ translators		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators but who employ translators		Interpreters who employ translators Total		Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	45	18.36%	5	2.04%	50	20.41%	245	100%
Africa	9	45.00%	0	0%	9	45.00%	20	100%
Asia	5	38.46%	0	0%	5	38.46%	13	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	0	0%	1	25.00%	4	100%
North America	15	28.30%	1	1.89%	16	30.19%	53	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	100%

South America	9 25.00%	0 0%	9 25.00%	36 100%
Total	84	6	90	374 100%
Percentage	22.46%	1.60%	24.06%	100%

*Table 6. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who employ translators*

Region	Interpreters who work as translators who have a translation degree		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who have a translation degree		No answer	Interpreters who have a translation degree		Interpreters who answered the survey	
	#	%	#	%		Total #	%	Total #	%
Europe	93	37.96%	25	10.20%	29	118	48.16%	245	100%
Africa	11	55.00%	2	10.00%	3	13	65.00%	20	100%
Asia	10	76.92%	0	0%	1	11	84.62%	13	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	0	0%	1	1	25.00%	4	100%
North America	21	39.62%	8	15.09%	5	29	54.71%	53	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	1	33.33%	0	1	33.33%	3	100%
South America	10	27.78%	3	8.33%	5	13	36.11%	36	100%
Total	146		39		42	185		374	
Percentage		39.04%		10.43%	11.23%		49.47%		100%

*Table 7. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who have a translation degree*

Region	Interpreters who work as translators who have a translation degree		Interpreters who work as translators who <u>do not</u> have a translation degree		No answer	Interpreters who also work as translators	
	#	%	#	%		Total #	%
Europe	93	58.49%	60	37.74%	6	159	100%
Africa	11	68.75%	3	18.75%	2	16	100%
Asia	10	90.91%	1	9.09%	0	11	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	2	50.00%	1	4	100%
North America	21	56.76%	14	37.84%	2	37	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	2	100.00%	0	2	100%
South America	10	37.04%	17	62.96%	0	27	100%
Total	146		99		11	256	
Percentage		57.03%		38.67%	4.30%		100%

*Table 8. Of the total number of interpreters who also work as translators, number and percentage of those who have a translation degree*



Region	Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who have a translation degree		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who <u>do not</u> have a translation degree		No answer		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	25	29.07%	38	44.19%	23	26.74%	86	100%
Africa	2	50.00%	1	25.00%	1	25.00%	4	100%
Asia	0	0%	1	50.00%	1	50.00%	2	100%
Australia	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	100%
North America	8	50.00%	5	31.25%	3	18.75%	16	100%
Caribbean	1	100.00%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
South America	3	33.33%	3	33.33%	3	33.33%	9	100%
Total	39		48		31		118	100%
Percentage		33.05%		40.68%		26.27%		100%

Table 9. Of the total number of interpreters who do not also work as translators, number and percentage of those who have a translation degree

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators (1) #	Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators but who have a translation degree (2) #	Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators and <u>do not</u> have a translation degree but who employ translators (3) #	Sum of interpreters who either work as translators, have a translation degree or employ translators (1)+(2)+(3)	
				#	%
Europe	159	25	5	189	77.14%
Africa	16	2	0	18	90.00%
Asia	11	0	0	11	84.62%
Australia	4	0	0	4	100.00%
North America	37	8	1	46	86.79%
Caribbean	2	1	0	3	100.00%
South America	27	3	0	30	83.33%
Total	256	39	6	301	80.48%

Table 10. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who: 1) also work as translators; 2) do not work as translators but have a translation degree, 3) do not work as translators and do not have a translation degree but employ translators. (100% in this case would be the total number of interpreters who answered the survey)

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators who are members of a translators' association		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who are members of a translator's association		Interpreters who are members of a translators' association		No answer	Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%		#	%
Europe	31	12.65%	3	1.22%	34	13.88%	33	245	100%
Africa	4	20.00%	0	0%	4	20.00%	3	20	100%
Asia	1	7.69%	0	0%	1	7.69%	1	13	100%
Australia	2	50.00%	0	0%	2	50.00%	1	4	100%
North America	14	26.42%	1	1.89%	15	28.30%	6	53	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	3	100%
South America	8	22.22%	0	0%	8	22.22%	3	36	100%
Total	60		4		64		47	374	
Percentage	16.04%		1.07%		17.11%		12.57%	100%	

*Table 11. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who are members of a translators' association*

Region	Interpreters who are members of a translators' association		Interpreters who <u>are not</u> members of a translators' association		No Answer		Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	34	13.88%	176	71.83%	35	14.29%	245	100%
Africa	4	20.00%	13	65.00%	3	15.00%	20	100%
Asia	1	7.69%	11	84.62%	1	7.69%	13	100%
Australia	2	50.00%	1	25.00%	1	25.00%	4	100%
North America	15	28.30%	32	60.38%	6	11.32%	53	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	3	100.00%	0	0%	3	100%
South America	8	22.22%	25	69.44%	3	8.33%	36	100%
Total	64		261		49		374	
Percentage	17.11%		69.79%		13.10%		100%	

*Table 12. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who are members of a translator's association*

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators who are members of a translators' association		Interpreters who also work as translators who are <u>not</u> members of a translators' association		Interpreters who also work as translators Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	31	19.50%	128	80.53%	159	100%
Africa	4	25.00%	12	75.00%	16	100%
Asia	1	9.09%	10	90.91%	11	100%
Australia	2	50.00%	2	50.00%	4	100%
North America	14	37.84%	23	62.16%	37	100%
Caribbean	0	00.00%	2	100.00%	2	100%
South America	8	29.63%	19	70.37%	27	100%
Total	60		196		256	
Percentage	23.44%		76.56%		100%	

*Table 13. Of the total number of interpreters who also work as translators, number and percentage of those who are members of a translators' association*

Region	Interpreters who consider translators should sit for international accreditation exams		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> consider translators should sit for international accreditation exams		No answer		Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	58	23.67%	51	20.82%	136	55.51%	245	100%
Africa	11	55.00%	3	15.00%	6	30.00%	20	100%
Asia	5	38.46%	4	30.77%	4	30.77%	13	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	0	0%	3	75.00%	4	100%
North America	16	30.19%	13	24.53%	24	45.28%	53	100%
Caribbean	2	66.67%	0	0%	1	33.33%	3	100%
South America	12	33.33%	13	36.11%	11	30.56%	36	100%
Total	105		84		185		374	
Percentage	28.07%		22.46%		49.47%		100%	

*Table 14. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of those who consider translators should sit for international accreditation exams*

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators who think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation or IOL diploma (1)		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation or IOL diploma (2)		Total number of interpreters who think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation or IOL diploma + (2)		Interpreters who answered the survey Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	46	18.77%	12	4.90%	58	23.67%	245	100%
Africa	9	45.00%	2	10.00%	11	55.00%	20	100%
Asia	5	38.46%	0	0%	5	38.46%	13	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	0	0%	1	25.00%	4	100%
North America	14	26.42%	2	3.77%	16	30.19%	53	100%
Caribbean	2	66.67%	0	0%	2	66.67%	3	100%
South America	10	27.78%	2	5.56%	12	33.33%	36	100%
Total	87	23.26%	18		105		374	
Percentage	20.32%		4.815		28.07%		100%	

*Table 15. Of the total number of interpreters who answered this survey, number and percentage of interpreters who think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation exams or an IOL diploma*

Region	Interpreters who also work as translators who think translators should sit an international accreditation exam		Interpreters who work as translators who <u>do not</u> think translators should sit an international accreditation exam		No answer		Interpreters who also work as translators Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	46	28.93%	47	29.56%	66	41.51%	159	100%
Africa	9	56.25%	3	18.75%	4	25.00%	16	100%
Asia	5	45.45%	4	36.36%	2	18.18%	11	100%
Australia	1	25.00%	0	0%	3	75.00%	4	100%
North America	14	37.84%	8	21.62%	15	40.54%	37	100%
Caribbean	2	100.00%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%
South America	10	37.04%	11	40.74%	6	22.22%	27	100%
Total	87		73		96		256	
Percentage	33.98%		28.52%		37.50%		100%	

*Table 16. Of the total number of interpreters who also work as translators, number and percentage of those who think translators should sit an international accreditation exam*

Region	Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who think translators should sit for an international accreditation exam		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators who <u>do not</u> think translators should sit for an international accreditation exam		No answer		Interpreters who <u>do not</u> work as translators Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Europe	12	13.95%	4	4.65%	70	81.40%	86	100%
Africa	2	50.00%	0	0%	2	50.00%	4	100%
Asia	0	0%	0	0%	2	100.00%	2	100%
Australia	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	100%
North America	2	12.50%	5	31.25%	9	56.25%	16	100%
Caribbean	0	0%	0	0%	1	100.00%	1	100%
South America	2	22.22%	2	22.22%	5	55.56%	9	100%
Total	18		11		89		118	
Percentage	15.25%		9.32%		75.42%		100%	

*Table 17. Of the total number of interpreters who do not work as translators, number and percentage of those who think translators should sit an international accreditation exam*

## Discussion

### *1) Response to the survey*

The questionnaire was e-mailed to 1,890 interpreters, 74.29% of the 2,544 AIIC members, and 14.70% of them answered by means of 374 return e-mails (see Table 1 and Table 2).

The response to the survey was really very good when it is remembered that the recipients of the e-mail questionnaire are very busy people who receive a great number of e-mails daily.

Many interpreters wished the researcher good luck and success in the project and expressed interest in the results. In general there was a lot of support.

Example:

*Dear Colleague,*

*I will absolutely answer your questionnaire. If us AIIC members do not help each other, who will?*

Many interpreters who answered the questionnaire considered their answer was not relevant because they did not translate. This was a common mistake.

Example:

*Dear Ms Brown,*

*I work only as a simultaneous interpreter from English/Spanish into French. I regret that I cannot be of much help in your research.*

*Best regards,*

Undoubtedly many interpreters did not answer the e-mail fearing a virus. Some interpreters expressed their very understandable concern as to answering an e-mail from an unknown sender:

Example:

*Dear Sara,  
since one virus pursues the next, I won't open any E-mails where I don't know the 'sender'. Please call me or write a fax. Thank's a lot and best regards,*

The survey seems to have awoken a certain amount of enthusiasm and some interpreters answered the questionnaire when they had no need to and were not part of the target population of the study. Unfortunately I was not able to include them in the statistics, but their answer was very welcome and of great interest.

Example:

*I am an AIIC applicant, not a member yet (my review is in January), but a colleague shared the survey and I thought I would respond anyway.  
Regards*

- 1) Do you translate written texts? YES*
- 2) Do you translate from your A language to other languages? YES*
- 3) Do you employ other translators (written text)? YES*
- 4) Do you have a degree in translation? YES*
- 5) Are you accredited as a translator with any association (ATA, IOL, ITI, AITC)? Not anymore.*
- 6) Which association? Used to be a member of ATA when I lived in the U.S.*
- 7) Do you think translators should sit for international exams such as ATA or ITI accreditation or IOL Dip Trans? YES..*

## **2) Interpreters who translate**

The majority of the interpreters in the study also translate: 68.75%, that is to say 256 of them (see Table 3).

Some of them obtain most of their income from written translation.

Example:

*To question 1: I make, in fact most of my income by translating written texts*

Some interpreters work very little as translators and most of their income comes from interpreting.

Example:

*Dear Colleague,  
thank you for your questionnaire. As I provide only 5000 words of translations per year (interpreting +/- 150 days) and only to one particular client for whom I have been*

*working as an interpreter during the last 15 years, I do not think that your questionnaire applies to me.*

It is unclear in many cases whether the interpreters who translate first started to work as translators or as interpreters.

Example:

*Hi Sara,*

*Nothing like receiving such a request in the middle of a HUGE translation - most urgent, of course!*

*I'm happy to answer your questionnaire and wish you the best of luck in your research. I hope you don't mind if I go on too long, beyond a simple YES and NO. You may have gathered that I am no newbie to translating although it is a chicken/egg situation as to which came first - interpreting or translating. At the time I began I was the Director of the American Language Institute in Porto with more than 4000 hours as a TOEFL teacher as well.*

*I have built a substantial name for myself as a specialist translator (medicine, wine, legal) and as such I have never bothered to sit any special courses. I do recommend them, however. When I began, every Tom, Dick and Harry, even porters at Consulates, were into translating - it's not changed all that much.*

Some interpreters have worked as translators but no longer translate.

Example:

*Dear colleague,*

*Happy to answer your questionnaire. However, I would like to point out that I am a PERMANENT interpreter, on a position of Interpreter/translator P4).*

*Before, as a free-lance I did both translation and interpretation, in Canada (93-97) then in Rome (97-99). Therefore, I give you in brackets answers that apply to this prior period.*

*Best regards*

Some interpreters, though they no longer translate, consider that written translation improves interpreting skills.

Example:

*Dear colleague,*

*Just a quick note to inform you that I do not translate...if I can avoid it.*

*I graduated as an interpreter and worked as a translator for 6 years. I learned a lot and it helped me considerably later on, as translation forces you to be precise and helps you remember vocabulary more easily as you see it printed black on white, but as soon as I had the opportunity, I became a "real" interpreter as this is what I had wanted to be all along. I occasionally translated minutes of meetings where I interpreted, to help a client. I did it both in French and English but always had my translations revised by a native English speaker. I am aware that my answers do not fit into your questionnaire, but I wish you good luck.*

*Dear Sara*

*There is no point in answering your questionnaire as I don't do any written translations. I used to every once in a very rare while -- and then only for my best customers -- and I think it's excellent practice for a conference interpreter.*

Some interpreters have never worked as translators, do not have a degree in translation and even consider they are probably incapable of translating.

Examples:

*Dear Miss Brown, I wish you good luck in your course. Personally I have worked exclusively with simultaneous translation in the 32 years since I graduated as interprète parlementaire, from Geneva University. I can therefore only be helpful to you in my field. Best regards,*

*I have a degree as Conference Interpreter (1972), have been working as conference interpreter since 1975, free lance until 1988 and permanent at The Court of Justice of the EC since then. Member of AIIC since 1978. I never did written translation ... (I'm probably unable to do that ...).*  
*Yours truly*

*Dear Sara,*

*Thank you for your questionnaire. however, I do not do any translating. I am a staff interpreter at OECD and our work consists solely of interpreting.*

*Regards,*

### **3) Interpreters who translate into their non-A language**

A large percentage (45.70%) of interpreters who translate do so into their non-A language. This percentage is lowest in North America, 35.14%, and Europe, 42.77%; in all other regions it is above 50% (see Table 4).

Example:

*2) Yes, from A into my other (B) languages as well*

Some interpreters translate into their non-A language but make sure their translation is appropriately revised.

Example:

*2) Do you translate from your A language to other languages?*

*I have done so occasionally, but only in collaboration with a professional target-language reviser and/or editor.*

Most of the interpreters who answered the survey (54.29%) only translate into their A language. It must be remembered that AIIC admits that interpreters may have two A languages. Therefore some interpreters translate into both of their A-languages, but not into their non-A language.



Example:

*2) Do you translate from your A language to other languages?  
Both my languages are A and I translate into both.*

*2. I have two A languages, I translate in both directions, I also translate from my C language into my As  
(English and Spanish are As. French is C.)*

### *3) Interpreters who employ translators*

Almost a quarter (24.06%) of the interpreters who answered the survey employ translators; 32.81% of interpreters who translate employ other translators; but only very few of the interpreters who do not translate employ translators (see Table 5 and Table 6).

Some of the interpreters who employ translators currently have translation agencies or have had one in the past.

Example:

*To question 3: I was for thirty years the manager-owner of a translating agency in Peru and a translating agency in Italy (in different periods of time, of course!). I am now retired in that capacity, but I certainly know how to handle large translation projects involving different levels of revision.*

Some interpreters only employ other translators occasionally.

Example:

*3) Do you employ other translators (written text)?  
I have done so, for larger projects, like books.*

### ***4) Interpreters who have a translation degree***

Almost half (49.47%) of the interpreters who answered the questionnaire have a degree in translation. More than half (57.03%) of the interpreters who translate have a translation degree and about a third (33.05) of the interpreters who do not translate also have a translation degree (see Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9).

Examples:

*Dear colleague ,  
I have a degree in translation , but I work exclusively as a conference interpreter for the European Union.  
Regards ,*

Some interpreters have a degree in translation and a degree in interpretation, or have graduated from academic institutions with a degree both in translating and interpreting.

Examples:

4) *Do you have a degree in translation?*

*I have an MA in translation studies and a professional diploma in conference interpretation.*

4) *I have a degree as translator and interpreter (Ecole d'Interprètes, Geneva, and Holborn College, London).*

4) *BA (Hons.) in Interpreting and Translating from Heriot-Watt University.*

#### **5) Interpreters who are members of translators' associations**

A fair number of the interpreters surveyed (17.11%) are members of translators' associations. This is almost a quarter of the interpreters who translate (23.44%), but a negligible number of those who do *not* translate are members of translators' associations. It must be remembered that all those surveyed are members of a professional interpreters' association, AIIC, with all this entails as far as professional support and up to date news on events in the interpreting and translating world (see Table 11, Table 12 and Table 13).

Some interpreters are members of translators' associations.

Example:

6) *Which Association? BDÜ German translators' association.*

Some interpreters are members of associations such as TAALS or translators' and interpreters' associations.

Examples:

*I am a member of AIIC ( Association Internationale d'Interprètes de Conférence ) and of TAALS (The American Association of Language Specialists).*

*I am a longstanding member of AIIC of course and also of OTIAQ, the local, i.e. Quebec Order of Certified Translators and Interpreters which is part of the International Association of Translators.*

6) *Which association? Translators' and Interpreters' Association, P.O.B. CH-8035 Zurich.*

#### **6) Translators' associations of which interpreters are members**

The translators' associations of which different interpreters are members are so many and so varied, many of them being national or regional associations, that this subject has not been gone into in this study.

### **7) Interpreters who consider translators should sit for international accreditation exams**

Almost half of the interpreters surveyed (49.47%) did not answer this question. Those who did answer, were almost fairly divided into those who were in favour of translators sitting international accreditation exams, 28.07%, a bit over a quarter of those surveyed, and those who were not, 22.46% (see Table 14).

More than a third (33.98%) of the interpreters who also work as translators, but only 15.25% of those interpreters who do not work as translators, consider that translators should sit for international accreditation exams (see Table 15, Table 16 and Table 17).

The comments on accreditation exams were very interesting, going from those who had never heard of them, or dismissed them, to those who, though they were not familiar with them, considered that some sort of validated exam or test for translators was necessary.

Examples:

*7) I strongly believe that test-based accreditation for translators is conducive to raising the status of the profession and to improving quality. It is my impression that test-based accreditation is under-researched and under-developed in most countries. In particular, I believe that test-based accreditation should be offered at different levels of expertise, beginning from "junior professional", and that testing should include both an invigilated examination and an "in-office/at-home" component (under time constraints - say 5 days) for which candidates are allowed and encouraged to make use of any and all outside resources they can marshal - the internet, libraries, etc., and even outside resource persons like subject experts, revisers, editors, etc. The second component models the real world, and recognizes that professional translation involves research, outside resources, and quality control procedures; the first, more traditional component ensures that candidates do possess basic translational expertise themselves and are not relying unfairly on outside resources to pass part ii.*

*In my experience as an examiner for professional institutions training translators, I have observed that evaluation criteria and marking schemes vary widely. More valid and useful evaluation tools should be developed based on research, and should take into account "skopos". A major failure of most tests I have seen is the non-provision of basic operational information to candidates - who is commissioning the translation, what it will be used for, who the target audience is, etc. - and the lack of any consideration of these functional aspects in evaluation.*

*7) All people doing professional work should have some form of validation. The problem is the legitimacy and worth of such validation.*

*7) I do not know what these exams are but I believe that exams would do no harm. The profession of translators is one of those professions where lots of people can pretend that they translate because they think they know two languages. If we want our profession to be recognised as such and not to be practised by amateurs, we need to be strict about who is a translator. Although exams are probably not the only way to go about it, it might be one way.*

Some interpreters considered that exams were not necessary to translators.

Example:

*I don't believe that it should be mandatory to sit for exams. Though I believe that all forms of education and ongoing education are good, I strongly believe that in some cases (my own) my lifelong exposure and experience suffices. I think the work done speaks for itself; customers can tell between a good translator without a "degree" and a bad one with. A professional translator is the one willing to go the extra mile, do the research, and not be satisfied until the document is perfect.*

## **Conclusion**

Our original question was whether interpreters translate. On the basis of this survey it can be concluded that, yes, most of them do, or have done so at some time in the course of their careers.

A sum total of 80.48% of the interpreters surveyed either work as translators, or do not work as translators but have a translation degree, or do not work as translators or have a translation degree but employ translators.

It can of course be argued, quite legitimately, that those interpreters who did not answer the survey are those who do not translate and therefore have no interest in translation or in surveys concerning translation. But this is hypothetical, and the facts and figures which formed the basis of this study were necessarily taken from the questionnaires that were answered.

In consequence, therefore, the academic institutions that deal with languages and applied linguistics when preparing training programs for interpreters and translators should take into account that, though there are, of course, translators who will never interpret and interpreters who will never translate, many interpreters will wish to translate and many translators will wish to interpret. Curricula should therefore be adapted to cover the needs of these language professionals who work with both written and spoken discourse.

Academic institutions would also do well to consider the convenience of encouraging their students to sit for international accreditation exams.

It would also be very positive if academic institutions collaborated with associations that offer accreditation exams so that the latter may be an effective and internationally accepted instrument for determining competence in the translating profession.

## **Acknowledgment**

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