



# capital translator

Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association  
Vol. 21, No. 3 April 1999

## The Translator and the Cab Driver

### A Dialogue on the NCATA Job Fair

by Vittorio Felaco

I know! You think I am making this up! After all, so many writers and comedians have used this trick that one can hardly trust this kind of an approach. Is it just a feature article technique or is it the truth? Would I lie to you—in the NCATA newsletter? Never! It's shocking that you would even suspect such a thing.

Anyway... This really happened on my way to the Job Fair. The cab driver started the usual way.

Cab driver: "So, tell me, what you do?"

Passenger: "Well, yes! — I am so glad you asked. I am a translator."

Cab driver: "Oh, that's nice—so what does it take to be a translator?"

Passenger: "Well—it's quite complicated."

Cab driver: "Well, you know, I always wanted to be a translator. How do you get started?"

Passenger: "So you are looking for a translation job! You think you are ready? You have your brain, your memory, you are alert and raring to go? You speak the language that is spoken all around you and you are actually a 'word man,' have a passion for grammar syntax, a love for reading and writing? When others

were reading comic books were you reading the *Well-Tempered Sentence*? Did you prefer to hang around with fellows like Neil Inglis, or did you prefer riding your bicycle in the park? Do you speak the so-called 'target' language? Do you have expertise—anything at all—in carpentry, geophysics, medicine, computers, accounting, law, whatever—around which to build a professional translator profile? Do you speak, read, write, breathe, drive a cab, make love, and lie and cheat in another language? And, oh, yes! You need a computer, hardware and software. You need your glossaries... And you have to make a considerable investment in specialized dictionaries, in telephone lines, fax machines, marketing tools, reference lists, a small network of experts with whom to consult from time to time, a small list of editors to use when correcting or proofreading, informing, verifying, and otherwise fixing your work; people to call for other various needs and emergencies... And when there is no work, are you the type of person who can go to the movies and relax and not worry? Do you have your Internet connection? What about the e-mail? Got to have

a reliable e-mail service!"

Cab driver: "Yeah! Yeah! I've got all that! So what else do I need?"

Passenger: "I am so glad you asked! You have got to come to the NCATA Job Fair!"

That's exactly what happened to me on the way to the NCATA Job Fair 1999, or—if you don't believe me—the fictional version thereof. Have it your way!

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ISSN 1095-4821

## capital translator

The *Capital Translator* is a newsletter published by NCATA nine times a year from September through June with a combined issue for December and January. Letters to the Editor, short articles of interest, and information for the calendar and other sections are invited. Submissions become the property of the *Capital Translator* and are subject to editing unless otherwise agreed to in advance. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Chapter, or its Board.

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## President's Corner

by Scott Brennan



As April 15 approaches, keep in mind that Schedule C of your federal tax return now includes a separate heading for "Translation and Interpretation Services" (#541930). Through the efforts of ATA, data on our professions will now be gathered separately under the new North American Industry Classification System, to facilitate the administration of the Internal Revenue Code and give us all a better picture of the size of the translation and interpretation industry. This is an important step in raising our profile in the business world, and I encourage you to be a part of it.

This month's Capital Translator includes announcements for two NCATA-sponsored events: "The Business of Translation" on Saturday, May 1, and an informal

chapter meeting with a program on *National Geographic Magazine's* International Editions on Monday evening, May 24. I'd like to issue a special invitation to corporate/institutional members and their employees to attend the first informal chapter meeting since their membership category was established. I'm looking forward to seeing you there!

Finally, NCATA's annual luncheon with the Society of Federal Linguists is in its early planning stages. Those who attended last year will remember Jack Gurin's interesting talk on his experiences as a Japanese-English linguist during the Second World War. The organizers welcome recommendations of speakers for this year's event, to be held in mid-September. Please send me your suggestions at [sbrennan@csi.com](mailto:sbrennan@csi.com).

## NCATA Chapter Meeting

**When** 6-8 p.m., Monday, May 24, 1999  
**Where** National Geographic Society Headquarters  
1145 17th Street NW, Washington DC 20036-4688

On May 24 the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association (NCATA) will host an informal chapter meeting at National Geographic Society headquarters.

The program will feature Bernard Ohanian, Editorial Director of International Editions for *National Geographic Magazine*. *National Geographic's* Italian, Japanese, Latin American, Spanish, Hebrew and Greek international editions are produced by licensees or partners of the National Geographic Society working in their home countries. All translations are reviewed before publication by teams of translation reviewers and editorial staff based in Washington, whose responsibility it is to ensure that the translated text is 100% factually accurate and captures the nuances of the English source text.

Following an overview of the editorial/translation process developed to maintain NGM's rigorous standards on a tight schedule, and relying chiefly on the Italian and Japanese editions for examples, the presenters will discuss the special translation problems encountered in bringing an American cultural icon to an international audience in one piece. Following the program, the floor will be opened for general discussion.

Due to security considerations, you must register in advance. If you plan to attend, please send an e-mail message to [sbrennan@csi.com](mailto:sbrennan@csi.com). You will receive confirmation within one week.

## Cab-driver ...continued from page 1

The potential translation job seeker versus the translator. Just like the aspiring comedian used to question the established comedian in the cabs of New York City.

The fact is that what makes this sound fictional is that no aspiring comedian does this anymore. And perhaps no one approaches the delicate field of translation with the same levity of the fictional cab driver. We may be “accidental businessmen and women,” says Scott Brennan, as he so wisely defines our tendency to be bent more toward professionalism and less toward the business end of things. But just like doctors and dentists have learned, so are translators learning fast that the future belongs to those who do their homework.

We agree with Mordecai Schreiber (of Schreiber Translations in Rockville) that only in the ‘word trade’ do we feel that we can perform major surgery on a text without being ‘word doctors.’ We need to do our homework!

Part of our homework is attending conferences, training sessions, and job fairs, and those who attended the February 20, 1999 version of our Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association Job Fair at the Ellipse Conference Center in Arlington, Virginia did not regret it. Free for members and at a mere \$10 for non-members, you cannot get a bargain like that anywhere else. And look at what you got! (Sorry—You know that even as I write, I am still talking to the cab driver—boy! What an impression he must have made!):

- 1 – A chance to interact with over 100 friends and colleagues (you know that something like that has to come first).
- 2 – Access to dozens of corporate entities that are at the forefront of our business, companies like ASET, Translingua, Language Innovations, ATG Language

Solutions, Geotext Translations, New World Linguists, the Frugal Linguist, Antiquariat Literary Services, Transperfect Translations International, Language Learning Enterprises, McNeil Technologies, Comprehensive Language Center, Inc. and others.

- 3 – A chance to interview with federal agencies that hire translation vendors: the FBI and the Foreign Broadcast Service, and through them access to other federal agencies and vendors.
- 4 – A first look at some support vendors that are so important to our work: TRADOS, and their fine products of translation and glossary management tools; Language Partners, distributors of ATRIL, TRADOS’ fine competitor; and i.b.d., Ltd., an important international book distributor.

There’s more. You got a chance to interact with Rick Rowland, a fellow who can get you a nice client management database package that is specifically designed for professional translators and interpreters, the only software I know that not only helps you keep data all together, including invoices, but actually allows for as many creative rate standards as we have internationally in our profession. Land Software will actually allow you to use the software for a month to try it out before buying.

So! You think you’ll come to the next Job Fair? You bet you will!

And come they did. From as far as Boston, MA, and so did the all important job providers some of whom came from as far as Chicago.

I know, some of you are still saying I can get all that on the net. Look at the kind of announcements I can have access to:

‘French/Italian Linguist at OCDE in Paris—OCDE—Organisation de coopération et développement économique—is looking for a Linguist. Perfect knowledge of French, Italian, English, and possibly German and Russian. University

or interpreting degree + 5 years experience. Forms must be submitted by Feb. 25, 1999.’

You can also subscribe to job lists such as Radek Pletka’s distributed list, ‘hotwired,’ or Africa On Line, the ‘eGroup,’ or the American Web Directory, or you can list yourself in the Aquarius, or Pangaea ITC Directories, and you are only scratching the surface of what is available. You can even “bitch” about jobs at **Monkeywork @wired.com**. There are no limits to the possibilities.

But NCATA’s annual Job Fair is our local effort. Putting it together is the job of our fellow translators. It is both a public relations effort, and a marketing training opportunity for us. It is our guarantee that when the client calls, he or she knows who *you* are, what you are like (Yes, even the crooked nose on your face!) and that’s the way it ought to be. At least for us! And people will come from Boston, MA, Charleston, West Virginia as well as from Silver Spring, Kensington and Alexandria.

All of this prompted NCATA President Scott Brennan to say: “We were very pleased with the turnout this year, with a good mix of new and returning attendees and recruiters. There is just no substitute for ‘face time’ with the people you do business with (or want to).

“Special thanks are due to our new Program Chair, John Vázquez, for handling the logistics of the Job Fair, Membership Co-Chair Alissa Martin for running registration, and Vice President Sangeeta Prasad for her help in contacting prospective exhibitors and promoting the event. I’d also like to thank Accreditation Chair Bill Keasbey and Secretary Kriemhild Zerling for helping staff the registration table.

“I hope,” Scott went on, “that those who took part in the Fair strengthened their existing business relationships and came away with

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# Walk the dog, round the world, or sleep?

by Steve Vitek



“What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is a right way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain to take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we love to travel in the interior and ideal world; and sometimes we doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our mind.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (1817-1862).

Some people think that your run-of-the-mill business gurus, like Peter Drucker or Tom Peters, provide a great insight on how to and how not to run a business. I will listen with interest to what these management prophets have to say. But I think that I can learn at least as much, if not more, about the Zen of running a translation business from watching my two kids, a second grader and a fourth grader, playing with a cool yo-ho or throwing a neat, bouncy slinky.

There are three basic techniques for playing with a yo-yo. If you have forgotten or never really mastered the ancient art of throwing a cool yo-yo, they make up the title of my article. The trick is to make the yo-yo come back to you in defiance of the force of gravity. You kind of have to make it do something that it does not really want to do, just like you have to make your customers come back to you with their next translation, although they really hate spending good money on some-

thing as basic and overpriced as translation. Let's face it, they all hate spending their money on us, no matter how much or how little we ask for.

## Walk the dog

The walk-the-dog technique is your basic yo-yo throwing gig. As far as I can tell, you throw the yo-yo slowly and carefully and when it is all the way down a few inches above the ground, you apply your invisible pulling powers so that the yo-yo will obediently slowly make its way back into the waiting palm of your hand, just like a dog that comes back to its master. No sudden, flashy moves, no obvious drama. This is your basic translation job in a field that you have been doing for years, at moderate rates to ensure repeat business. All you have to do is concentrate on the subject, make sure that you don't skip a line, don't change a number (watch out for those subscripts!) and don't use too many Gallicisms, Germanisms, Czechisms, Nipponisms, or whatever -ism is applicable to your language. And for best results, always proofread even the simplest job the next morning after a good night's sleep unless it is a super-rush. If you do it right, the customer will come obediently back to you, which is the main purpose of the exercise, just like a yo-yo comes back right into the waiting hand of a youthful yo-yo master.

## Round the world

The round-the-world technique is more demanding and quite a bit more dramatic. The yo-yo seems to start flying, all of a sudden and without warning, pulled by sheer will power and absolute concentration so apparent on the faces of children when they switch from the

boring pedestrian-canine routine to enjoy the finer points of this exquisite game. In the game that freelance translators play, the round-the-world technique is usually announced by an unexpected call from a customer or an agency, often just before 5 PM or after normal business hours. The person on the other end of the phone line sounds excited and a little bit nervous and perhaps even desperate. They have a sizeable job which must be done in a couple of days, probably because somebody was sitting on it for two months, reluctant to waste money on a simple translation which, unlike legal advice, should be really free or no more expensive than making a Xerox copy. How do these translators dare to charge so much for “retyping” something in another language? That sort of thing should be made illegal! At this point, however, the company will be facing a serious problem unless the translation is finished by such and such time. Whenever I receive a call like this from an agency that is calling “round the world”, trying to find an available translator, or a thick envelope by Federal Express from a law firm with an urgent request to quote a price and turnaround time, I sit down, take a deep breath and try to concentrate on the job at hand at least as much as my children are concentrated on that little wooden or plastic yo-yo in the palm of their hand. One should not forget that the characters that are used for one of the words that mean crisis in Japanese are the same characters that are used for the word opportunity. Actually, the characters in the word “kiki”, one of the words for crisis in Japanese, can be literally translated as “dangerous opportunity.” Opportunity usually brings along also a danger. This is my and

your opportunity to take on a relatively large chunk of a job at a higher rate to finally pay off that credit card bill, tax bill, or save some money for a new computer or a vacation. You have to be careful not to ask for a rate that is too low or too high. You will make your customer happy if you do the work at your usual rate, but why should you work overtime without getting paid a little more? Often, you can take on as much work as you like for a few days, but make sure that you don't bite off more than you can chew. If

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## How do these translators dare to charge so much for "retyping" something in another language?

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you do that, your opportunity will turn into a crisis not only for your customer, but also for you. A crisis is an opportunity, but an opportunity that is fraught with danger. The kids who are parceling out the job to translators "round the world" don't really know what is in the original because they usually don't speak the language, so don't take their word for the subject of the job, or the estimated word count, or just about anything. They may be nice kids, but they don't really know what they're doing. They just work there. It is a good idea not to accept (except tentatively) any job and any deadline until they fax you the document.

## Sleep

The third technique, "sleep", comes in handy when business slows down and the phone all of a sudden stops ringing. This should be a restful period for translators, who now have some free time after all those impossible deadlines and illegible faxes. But the thing is, the bills still keep coming in when there is no work and one look at meager receivables will put quite a damper on what could be a peaceful day in your office. How can you "sleep" if you don't know where is the money going to come from? You have to make the checks stretch from one week to the next until the end of the month, just like my kids have to make the slinky slink itself from one step to the next until it reaches the bottom of the stairs. Ah, the victorious feeling that I can clearly see radiating from their faces when the slinky makes it all the way down the stairs! Ah, the satisfaction of having another job lined up and another check deposited before the balance in the bank shrinks to zero!

How much sleep I get during the "sleep" period depends on how much money is still coming in from old jobs and how long the hibernation period lasts. If it is just a few days, I can still enjoy myself. I go to bookstores, sit in a café and look at those cute girls who always hang around downtown cafés (I only look, OK?), read a mystery novel, or go for a walk, thinking deep thoughts as Henry David Thoreau did 150 years ago. But even with the lofty thoughts on my mind, now that the cute downtown girls are all but forgotten, I am always mindful of the fact that somebody has to mind the shop, nine to five, rain or shine, work or no work. That is why I almost always transfer my voice number to my cell phone when I go for a walk or to a café or bookstore during business hours. I have to be ready to spring into action at the first ring of my Ericsson, my trusty digital friend. It is also the only way

how I can make those girls in cafés notice me anyway, when the cell phone rings and I answer, especially if I start speaking Japanese. It is a kind of an ego booster for me, I guess (I mean, the fact that they notice me at all, even if only for a brief moment). After twelve years in the freelance business, the sleep period usually lasts only a few days before it is replaced by another onslaught of work and deadlines that come rushing in with a vengeance. I try to take it easy if the "sleep" takes only a week or so, even when other translators start calling me, complaining about lack of work and bills that pile up, with a familiar tinge of anxiety in their voice. I do my best to calm them down because as Bob, my tax accountant, says: "When you don't make any money, you don't owe any money to Uncle Sam." There is a good side to everything. I used to mail out packages of information that I call 'propaganda' to prospective customers during slow times, but I have not done so recently since it never really got slow for a long time for me recently. But it will again, I am sure, one of these days. And when it does, I know what to do to wake up my sleeping customers.

## Mess up

There is also a fourth yo-yo technique, called "mess-up", I am told. Mess-up is when you try one technique, but since you do it the wrong way it ends up being a different thing than you meant it to be. As Thoreau would put it, the problem is that the idea of what you wanted to do did not exist distinctly in your mind before you started doing it. What you have to do when you mess up, of course, is start over and do it right the next time without losing too much sleep over it. We all mess up sometimes. Well, maybe you never mess up anything, especially things having to do with

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your business and livelihood, but I sometimes do. On the other hand, given that this newsletter has only a limited amount of space for contributors, perhaps I should not launch into a detailed description of my mess-ups. Maybe some other time.

\* \* \*

I never told my children that the games they play are a constant source of inspiration for the games that I play when I try to manage a one-man business in this dog-eat-dog world. If I did, they would prob-

ably laugh anyway. You know, kids these days. They take nothing seriously. Like the other day when I tried to impress them with my military career in the old country and Casey, my older son, stopped playing with his yo-yo and said to me with a mischievous glint in his eye: "Hey, tata, ('tata' is Czech for 'dad'), you had to 'surf' in the Czech army for two years? That's great! That must be one cool army, tata!"

I get no respect in my own house. All they do is make fun of my accent. Oh, and by the way, Casey, it was a cool army. You have no idea. ✍

*Steve Vlasta Vitek, M.A., a new member of NCATA as of this year, is a translator from Czech, German, and Japanese who emigrated to the United States in 1982 and lives in Northern California. He opened his translation service in California in 1987. He is grateful for big lawsuits with boxes of documents in Czech, German and Japanese for translation, although contrary to rumors, he does not actually create or incite such lawsuits. He just translates the stuff. He lives with a wife, two kids, a dog, a bird, two guinea pigs, five computers (four PCs and one Mac), and two Hewlett Packard printers in Santa Rosa, California, 50 miles north of San Francisco. His e-mail address is [stevevitek@compuserve.com](mailto:stevevitek@compuserve.com).*

## Microsoft Word for Windows Shortcuts

Here are some useful shortcuts for Microsoft Word for Windows 95/98 (Mac users, substitute the *Command* for the *Control* key):

[Ctrl] + W	Close document
[F7]	Start spell check
[Ctrl] + C	Copy selection
[Ctrl] + X	Cut selection
[Ctrl] + V	Paste clipboard
[Ctrl] + Z	Undo last action
[F4]	Repeat last action
[Ctrl] + [Enter]	Insert page break
[F5]	Go to
[Ctrl] + F	Find
[Ctrl] + H	Replace
[Ctrl] + B	Bold
[Ctrl] + I	Italics

[Ctrl] + U	Underline
[Ctrl] + E	Center
[Ctrl] + J	Justify
[Ctrl] + L	Align left
[Ctrl] + R	Align right
[Ctrl] + 2	Double space
[Ctrl] + 1.5	1.5 spacing
[Ctrl] + M	Indent
[Ctrl] + [Home]	Move to beginning of document
[Ctrl] + [End]	Move to end of document
[Ctrl] + [F6]	Switch between documents

Thank you to *Rattles*, the New Mexico Translators & Interpreters Association newsletter, for these tips! ✍

**Cab-driver** ...continued from page 3

interesting new prospects to explore in the coming year."

Well, Scott, that is exactly what happened. As of this writing, Jill Orenstein (617-731-5580), a Spanish translator/interpreter, could not be reached because she is flying to an assignment she got at the Job Fair. Her mother, to whom I spoke instead, said: "I know that if she were here to speak with you she would have some great things to say about the Fair." That's terrific! A mother might exaggerate about her daughter's beauty and the size of her diamond ring, but no mother is going to inflate her daughter's reaction to an experience at a Job Fair!

I am done conversing with cab drivers. If you feel that you were eavesdropping, you can be glad it's over. But Scott wants the last word. He reminds us all that it is not over, there is more to be done and in fact "plans for the third annual Job Fair are already underway. I'm looking forward to seeing you there!" ✍

*Dr. Vittorio Felaco is an English <> Italian translator and interpreter who lives in Kensington, Maryland. He can be reached at [vfelaco@sprynet.com](mailto:vfelaco@sprynet.com).*

## Join the NCATA Mailing List

E-mail broadcasts based on addresses in the membership database have been discontinued. Instead, NCATA has set up a mailing list for distribution of messages and reminders. You can join from the Mailing List option on the NCATA Web site (<http://www.ncata.org>). ✍

# Information Exchange

## Using Internet Mailing Lists

by Frank Dietz

While many of you who are on the Internet will have encountered **newsgroups** where people post messages and others answer them, you might not be aware of another medium of interest to translators and interpreters: electronic mailing lists. No, this has nothing to do with the hated “spam,” junk e-mail.

A **mailing list** is similar to a newsgroup, but the postings show up in your e-mail inbox, i.e. they come to you without your having to get on the Net to view them. This can be a great plus for people who don't find the time to surf the Internet, or who still feel somewhat hesitant about doing it. The main disadvantage is that you might be swamped with dozens of messages every day. For a list of newsgroups and mailing lists of interest to translators, see <http://www.rahul.net/lai/newslist.txt>. Another list of lists (in Spanish, though the mailing lists discussed cover many languages) is at <http://www.uvigo.es/utilidades/traductor/agora.htm>.

Here is an example of how to subscribe to a mailing list the traditional way. The following announcement was posted on a website:

“If you want to subscribe to TOLK (the interpreters' mailing list), send a message to: [listserv@listserv.mantis.de](mailto:listserv@listserv.mantis.de) with the following message in the body of your text: subscribe tolk.

“Do not put anything under subject! You will then receive a welcome message from TOLK with more info on how to post to the list.”

Details may vary, but essentially you always have to send a specific message to a so-called listserver in order to be included among the subscribers of the mailing list. You then receive a welcoming message which also tells you how to unsubscribe from the list. Always keep this message for further reference!

Fortunately, LANTRA-L, the linguistic and translation mailing list, has a more user-friendly subscription interface at <http://segate.sunet.se/htbin/wa?SUBED1=lantra-l&A=1>. If you want to see what LANTRA-L is like, you can always view their archives at <http://segate.sunet.se/archives/lantra-l.html>.

Finally, here are a few points of mailing list “netiquette”:

Distinguish between the listserver address and the address used to post messages to the list. It happens all too often that every member of a mailing list receives a message stating “Please add me to the mailing list” that should have been sent only to the listserver.

Restrict your messages to relevant topics. Some mailing lists (such as LANTA-L) create a large amount of traffic. You do not want to inflate it further.

If the e-mail traffic becomes too high, try to find out whether your mailing list has a so-called digest function, which lets you receive one large compilation of messages a day instead of many individual ones. If that is still too much to read, you can always unsubscribe.

Mailing lists are definitely worth a try. At worst, you can always cancel them. At best, you gain access to a large number of helpful colleagues in cyberspace. ✍

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# Calendar

Date	Time	Event	Location
April 24, 1999	1:30 p.m.	Accreditation Exam	Graduate Education Center of The George Washington University, 1775B Duke Street, Alexandria, VA, near the King Street Metro Station Contact ATA at 703-683-6100
May 1, 1999		NCATA Seminar: The Business of Translation	Ellipse Conference Center National Rural Electric Cooperative Assn., 4301 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA Contact Scott Brennan at <a href="mailto:sbrennan@csi.com">sbrennan@csi.com</a>
May 24, 1999	6 – 8 p.m.	NCATA Chapter Meeting	National Geographic Headquarters, 1145 17th St., NW, Washington, DC Pre-registration required Contact Scott Brennan at 703-393-0365 or by e-mail at <a href="mailto:sbrennan@csi.com">sbrennan@csi.com</a>

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