



# capital translator

Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association  
Vol. 21, No. 8 November 1999

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## A Translator's Business Travels

# Marketing Yourself for Fun and Profit

by Alan Dages

People are always asking me how I manage to take so many extended business trips to Europe and Latin America. The reader may well conclude the answer resembles a travelogue more than anything. If it does, I have made my point.

I have been a translator of French and Spanish into English since 1993 with a strong emphasis on French. My clientele comprises over 40 customers in five countries. They are mainly translation agencies, with a growing number of direct clients as well. Many of us, particularly the interpreters, may picture freelance translators as homebodies tied to their computers. The profession certainly involves this aspect if you expect to get any work done, but it need not be only that. I decided pretty quickly that there had to be some perks in the deal if I were to succeed at translation.

My first step was to join the ATA and earn the French > English accreditation. The next challenge was to find some clients. *Glenn's Guide* proved to be of help, providing me with about 150 agencies that might be interested in my résumé. I mailed personally addressed letters

with my résumé and business card enclosed, and some work began coming in. However, the results were not spectacular, and I was only able to declare a net profit of \$13,500 at the end of my second year as a translator in 1994.

In the meantime, about five translators and interpreters in my locale had formed a group called the Delaware Translators' Network. We meet once a month for breakfast or lunch to swap stories and experiences. An experienced translator who attended one of our meetings offered what proved to be some excellent advice saying, "The clients who need you most are in Europe, not here." It gradually dawned on me there were far more end buyers of French > English translations (hence check writers) in Europe than in the United States. Soon thereafter, I read an article by Chris Durban in *The ATA Chronicle* extolling the advantages of specialization. This really kindled my interest because we happened to be involved in the same field. I sent a letter to Ms. Durban and eventually received an invitation to attend a one-day seminar on financial translation to be held in Paris. I decided to go.

It should be said that I was no stranger to Paris, having been to France three times from 1991 to 1993 to look for work following a downsizing in which I lost my job as

...continued on page 4

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## Inside

President's Corner	2
Annual meeting	3
Holiday Party	3
Book Review	6
From the Editor	7
Job Fair 2000	7
Online Directory	7
Mailing List	7
Meet us in St. Louis	7
New Members	7
Calendar	8



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Editor: Ruth Zimmer Boggs  
703-378-9305  
REZB@aol.com

Assistant Editor: Dimitra Hengen  
703-426-4938  
DimitraH@aol.com

Production: Karin Wuertz-Schaefer  
301-607-8036  
wuertz-schaefer@erols.com

Deadline: No later than 5th day of month before the issue

Membership: Alissa Martin  
301-718-0405  
martina2@gusun.georgetown.edu

### National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association (NCATA)

President: Scott Brennan  
703-393-0365  
sbrennan@csi.com

Vice President: Sangeeta Prasad  
703-369-2068

Secretary: Kriemhild Zerling  
202-543-7574

Treasurer: Therese Hathaway  
703-925-9087

Program Chair: John Vázquez  
202-487-7878

Accreditation: Bill Keasbey  
301-897-8318

The **Chapter Address** is P. O. Box 65200, Washington, DC 20035-5200, Tel: 703-255-9290 Web site: [www.ncata.org](http://www.ncata.org)

The **National HQ Address** is American Translators Association, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314-2840, Tel: 703-683-6100, Fax: 703-683-6122 Web site: [www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org)

For address changes, please write to the chapter at the above address, Attn: Membership

For advertising in the *Capital Translator*, please contact Angelika Spears, Advertising Coordinator, Tel: 301-464-8309, e-mail: [102502.3224@compuserve.com](mailto:102502.3224@compuserve.com)



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## President's Corner

by Scott Brennan



As one of the American Translators Association's strongest and most active chapters, NCATA will be well represented at ATA's upcoming annual conference in St. Louis. Speakers will include NCATA members Alicia Agnese, Camilla Bozzoli, Lillian Clementi, Alison Sondhaus Carroll, Ted Crump, Shuckran Kamal, Jessie Lu (also ATA English-to-Chinese language chair), Catherine Nisato, Susan Rials, Bill Skinner, Molly Stevens, Lydia Razran Stone (also editor of ATA's Slavic Languages Division's newsletter and a co-organizer of the Literary Division After Hours Café), Yukako Seltzer, Monique-Paule Tubb and me.

Our corporate members will be represented at the podium by Mary O'Neill of Translingua Inc.; and Istvan Gyenis, Kevin and Erika Hendzel, Randall Morgan and Kinsey Rawe of ASET Language Services Corp. Trados Corporation is a gold-level sponsor of the national conference, and its Regional Sales Director Christina Spies is hosting a pre-conference seminar.

ASET is also co-sponsoring "Translators and the Media," a public forum to discuss the image of translators and translation, featuring another prominent Washingtonian, former White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers, and a panel of activist translators that includes ASET's COO and Director of Language Services Kevin Hendzel.

Also from Washington, Dr. Richard Brecht, who spoke recently at our annual luncheon with the Society of Federal Linguists (SFL), will join Bill Rivers, his colleague at the National Foreign Language Center; SFL member and

chairman of the CIA's Foreign Language Committee Everette Jordan; NCATA member and NIH translator Ted Crump; and Ray Lane Aldrich of the U.S. Army Foreign Language Proponency Office for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence; for a panel discussion on national language needs and capacities.

Past NCATA presidents Mercedes Pellet (of NCATA corporate member M2 Ltd. and chair of the ATA Professional Development Committee) and Muriel Jérôme-O'Keefe (of NCATA corporate member JTG Ltd. and currently president of ATA), as well as ATA Special Projects Committee chair Anne Cordero and Accreditation Committee chair Shuckran Kamal, will attend in their official capacity. Steven Sachs is stepping down after nearly a decade as ATA's liaison to the International Federation of Translators (FIT), to be replaced by past ATA president Peter Krawutschke. In addition to her talk, Monique-Paule Tubb will be there both in her official capacity as ATA treasurer and as candidate for president-elect. Former ATA Honors & Awards Committee chair Eric McMillan will be running for Treasurer, and I am running for a seat on the board of directors.

Of course, many more NCATA members will attend, and a number of corporate/institutional members are hosting stands in the exhibit hall.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at what promises to be the best ATA conference ever! ✍

## National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association (NCATA)

### Notice of Annual Meeting

**P**LEASE TAKE NOTICE that the annual meeting of the members of NCATA will be held, pursuant to Article V(1) of the NCATA Bylaws, on Sunday, December 12, 1999 at 12:00 p.m. at The Old Ebbitt Grill, 675 15th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005 (Metro Center station; complimentary valet parking provided).

The business before the meeting will be:

- Announcement of results of elections for President, Treasurer and Accreditation Chair;
- Report to the members by the President, Treasurer, Accreditation Chair and Membership Chair.

Other business may be added to the agenda by contacting NCATA President Scott Brennan at (703) 393-0365 before December 1, 1999.

NCATA's annual Holiday Party will immediately follow the Annual Meeting. However, the two events are separate, and members may attend the Annual Meeting without attending the Holiday Party or paying the registration charge.

Date of this notice: October 15, 1999

## NCATA Holiday Party

- When** December 12, 1999  
12:30 to 3:00 p.m. (immediately following the Annual Meeting)
- Where** The Old Ebbitt Grill  
675 15th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
(Metro Center station; complimentary valet parking)
- How much** \$25 per person for the meal and soft drinks (gratuities included; several menu options, including vegetarian, will be available)

The end of the year is slowly creeping up on us, and it's time for NCATA's annual Holiday Party. You've worked hard and earned a chance to relax and chat about how good business has been! Plan to spend Sunday afternoon, December 12, enjoying the wonderful cuisine of The Old Ebbitt Grill with fellow translators and interpreters in one of Washington's most acclaimed restaurants. We hope to see our Corporate Members represented by their employees. Guests are welcome.

Make your reservations early; space is limited.

Reservations must be received by December 1, 1999. Mail your check for \$25 per person, made out to "NCATA Holiday Party," to:

NCATA Program Chair  
P.O. Box 65200  
Washington DC 20035-5200

Questions? Contact NCATA Program Chair John Vázquez at (703) 845-7765 or [JohnVazquez@msn.com](mailto:JohnVazquez@msn.com). 

**Marketing** ...continued from page 1

a bank loan officer. During these job-hunting trips, I developed some networking skills there and worked on my business French.

I began my prospecting with the 75 or so persons attending the Financial Translation seminar. A few referrals from Chris Durban resulted in some appointments as well. As a member of the Philadelphia Chapter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce, I had access to their Paris office to make telephone calls. I used the FACC membership list to make cold calls, which actually produced a couple of appointments.

One of these eventually led to what turned out to be my first "big break" in France's translation market. The FACC staff also arranged for me to attend two networking events, one of which was held at the Paris air show. There I made a fruitful contact as well. Strasbourg was my next destination where I visited friends and called on a couple of agencies. When I returned home, I was kept quite busy with a flow of work from France, which quickly grew to equal that coming in from the U.S. It made the difference between being a part-time translator and a full-time one. The numbers reflected the contrast, for my Quicken accounting program came up with \$29,500 of net income for 1995, after deducting travel and other expenses.

The new clients were also turning out to be an excellent source of training and experience. In general, the French are much more apt to provide meaningful criticism of your work than American agencies. This usually comes in the form of an edited text. Moreover, one customer in particular started providing me with texts to proofread and edit. They were almost always done by competent translators, often British. Knowledge of British English and British financial terminology is invaluable if you aim to write for an international audience. My experience gained from several years of

proofreading such translations has enabled me to truthfully advertise "Working knowledge of British English" on my résumé.

In 1996, I ventured farther afield in my travels, starting the year with a month's stay in Costa Rica where I attended an excellent Spanish language school in San José. Spanish has never provided more than 15% of my revenue, but I enjoy an occasional change of pace. Costa Rica in January proved to be just that, and I had a rich experience both in terms of linguistics and travel adventures. I

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**...the French are much more apt to provide meaningful criticism of your work than American agencies.**

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returned to Europe in October of the same year, starting with England where I spent ten days. There, I consulted the telephone directory and made cold calls to about ten agencies in the London area. A highlight of the trip was a day spent in Bath, a lovely 18th Century spa town where I had spent a summer 25 years before. I then boarded an Eurostar train to Paris, where I now had clients to call on. I resumed my networking where I had left off in 1995 and gained at least one new customer, a French brokerage firm. I continued on to Geneva to visit a client there and then went to Nice and Marseilles to visit friends and prospect a bit. Despite the additional

travel expenses and time off from work, I was able to declare a net income of \$35,000 for the year.

1997 began with another month-long trip to Latin America. Though a non-deductible vacation, the trip added to my knowledge of Spanish and of Mexican culture. A retired geography professor I know needed a driver for his last field trip to Mexico to study some pre-Columbian sites. We toured the country from Texas to the Guatemala border and visited or passed through 17 of 34 Mexican states. While there, I fell in love with the colonial town of Querétaro, so I located a Spanish language school there and vowed to return later that year.

Montreal, Canada was my next marketing call with a 5-day trip in June. There, I consulted the telephone directory to make cold calls. My technique was to arrive at the office in person rather than telephone first and risk hearing, "Just send us your CV by mail." I looked up an ATA member, Danièle Heinen, who provided some insight on the translation field in Canada and critiqued my résumé.

In December, 1997 I returned to Querétaro, Mexico for four weeks of Spanish instruction, this time with a serious effort aimed at translation issues. As in Costa Rica, I took room and board in a resident's home. My wife and daughter joined me for ten days over the Christmas-New Year holiday for a week of Spanish instruction followed by a tour of Mexico City where we stayed with friends. Our visits to Tenochtitlán, Chapultepec Castle, Frida Kahlo's studio and other sites only a resident could take us to were memorable experiences. Meanwhile, business continued to expand moderately, and my ever-reliable Quicken program informed me I had netted over \$40,000 that year, not bad for over 10 weeks away from the computer.

In 1998, I pulled in my reins a bit and ventured forth only to Toronto for a week in May and the ATA

national conference at Hilton Head, SC. I enjoyed both experiences, but the Hilton Head conference proved to be the more enlightening. There I met with two colleagues, Rhoda Miller and Bob Killingsworth, with whom I had worked on translations for agencies, but whom I had never met in person. Rhoda and I attended Bob's presentation on translating equity research for European clients. He had successfully taken the next step, and marketed his service to French brokerage firms. Inspired by Bob's example, Rhoda and I realized that we would have to charge higher rates if we ever expected to raise our incomes significantly. As if in confirmation, my Quicken told me the bad news at year-end; my net income had reached a plateau.

This brings us to 1999. For family financial planning reasons it I wanted to reduce my income for the year. Hence, I planned my longest business/pleasure trip ever, with ten weeks off from translation. It took a week to prepare, seven weeks of travel through nine European countries and two weeks of rest and follow-up. My goal was to gain appointments with both direct clients and agencies and obtain higher rates. Moreover, I would attend two translation conferences and expand my prospecting to include Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium. I also had another agenda, which was to enjoy myself. This included visiting friends and relatives in England, France, Sweden and Belgium. A major goal was to view the total eclipse of the sun on August 11th.

The trip turned out to be a success on all fronts. The preparation consisted of having my résumé professionally translated into French, preparing a detailed itinerary and telephoning the British translation agencies that already had me on their databases. I also downloaded a list of 40 French brokerage firms from the Internet.

I spent two pleasant weeks making cold telephone calls in Paris, tak-

ing people out to lunch and being taken out to lunch. I renewed friendships and acquaintances and attended a one-day financial translation seminar. In Stockholm I left my résumé at four locations and had two meaningful business discussions. It proved to be the beginning of some truly exceptional summer weather in northern Europe, and I was able to pass the next five days hiking and biking in Sweden's Småland region. From there I traveled to Amsterdam where I met with a colleague and contacted a few agencies. In Brussels I used a similar approach.

From Brussels, I journeyed to London where I spent two intensive days running from one appointment to the other and having some good discussions. Following still another appointment in Bracknell, a London suburb, I shifted into tourist mode and drove to the Cotswolds region, then on to Bath. My stay ended with four splendid days in Dorset under perfect weather.

I returned to Paris for two days where I had two very good appointments and visited Vaux Le Vicompte chateau. I then took the train to the French Alps to spend a week with cousins. One day, we drove to Annecy, a lovely town near Switzerland. There, I spotted an Orcanta boutique. I mention this only to emphasize another translation-related benefit of going out into the "field." Orcanta sells women's lingerie, and I had translated some rather cryptic descriptions of their retailing strategy and concepts for a corporate newsletter. This marketing language proved to be difficult, as I could not see what they were referring to. When I introduced myself to the manager and told her about this, she gave me a twenty-minute tour of the shop, explaining the various terms that had given me problems. Need I say this was fun as well? It is just one example of numerous little revelations I've had concerning previous translation jobs, either by seeking them out,

stumbling across them or in discussions with native speakers.

The next destination was Mons, Belgium where I attended the 4-day World Congress of the International Federation of Translators. The conference exceeded my expectations, and it was a good chance to meet other translators from all over the world.

From Mons, I went to Metz, which is situated near the center of the eclipse's line of totality. The weather on "e-day" did not look at all promising, so we drove about 10 miles out of the city to higher ground where we ended up right on the center of the eclipse band—the area where totality lasts the longest. A rather large break in the clouds just as totality began allowed us to view the sun's corona, some red flares and Venus peeking through another break. My travels ended with a few restful days in Strasbourg, one of my favorite French cities.

When I returned home in mid-August, I followed up on promises I had made to send résumés or provide sample translations. In the following month, I received jobs from three new direct clients in Paris, and two agencies in London and Amsterdam. I was able to charge higher rates to these new European clients as well as to some new ones at home, making September a record month. Perhaps Rhoda and I will meet our new goals next year after all. ✍



*Alan Dages is a freelance translator residing in Wilmington, Delaware. Prior to this he was a bank lending officer and directed several historic sites. He currently serves on the DVTA board and is an NCATA member. His interests include bicycling, woodworking, cross-country skiing and travel. He is married and has a teenage daughter.*

## A Book Review

# *Do's and Taboos of Humor Around the World* by Roger E. Axtell

by Eve Lindemuth Bodeux

**D***o's and Taboos of Humor Around the World* by Roger E. Axtell, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. in 1999 is Mr. Axtell's newest book in the *Do's and Taboos* series. Mr. Axtell was formerly the Vice President of Worldwide Marketing for an international company and lived and traveled abroad for thirty years.

The book's theme is humor in an intercultural setting: how to use it, when not to use it, and anecdotes about the funny incidents that occur when people of different cultures interact. I decided to write a review on this book after I read the same list of "funny" mistranslations on the Internet for the zillionth time. I laughed aloud while reading the book in bed instead of falling asleep soundly as I normally do. Although the anecdotes it contains are not only about mistranslations, but also other misunderstandings in a multi-cultural world, it injects some new blood into the body of tired (and true?) language and international communication jokes that we all know.

The author divides the book into thirteen sections (all related to international humor) including Words, Sex, Food and Dining, Exporting American Humor, and everyone's favorite, Business Bloopers. He discusses verbal and behavioral misunderstandings as well as issues that arise when specific gestures are used. The book, like other collections of this type, reads rapidly. The reader can choose to read it from beginning to end or just pick a topic in the middle and start laughing.

Mr. Axtell collected anecdotes from his many contacts worldwide,

and also tells about incidents that happened directly to him, providing the reader with a wide range of views. The perspectives of internationals are included as well, so that the viewpoints presented are not only American (though the stories and punch lines, even if they originally occurred in a different culture, are in English except for a few words here and there). However, the second half of the book is geared more specifically toward *Do's and Taboos* for Americans traveling abroad.

Though funny overall, sometimes the stories seem a little random. For example, one about an American couple living in London was amusing, but the humor in it had nothing to do with cross-cultural miscommunication. The only international aspect was that they were living in the UK.

Some of the information conveyed about inter-cultural relations through the recounting of humorous and embarrassing incidents will be old hat to those of us who are well-traveled and active in the international arena. It's pretty common knowledge that it is a bad idea to make the American OK sign in Brazil. On the other hand, it may not be as well known that in Japan it means "money." In any case, it is always good to be reminded of what makes us different and that we shouldn't take ourselves too seriously.

Ironically, the author also quotes some of those mistranslations making the rounds on the Internet. Some were familiar and some weren't. To close, here are two anecdotes from the book:



An American manufacturer of shoes once filmed a tribesman from Kenya for one of its commercials. The mas was filmed looking into the camera and saying something in his native language about his hiking shoes. The English subtitle that appeared stated the company's ad slogan. It was later learned that the actual translation of the man's words were, "I don't want these. Give me big shoes."

Page 58

A talk show host was once interviewing the author on her show and said, "The gesture in your book that I liked most was this one"—tapping her two forefinger on a tabletop. "You said that in Egypt it means, 'I want to go to bed with you.'" The author corrected her, saying, "No, no. You go like this," and held his forefingers outward and tapped them against each other. The talk show host replied, "Well, no wonder I didn't have any fun there!!"

Summarized from Page 91 ✍

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Eve Lindemuth Bodeux is the owner of Bodeux International and offers technical French to English translation services and web localization consulting for all languages. She can be reached at [global@bodeuxinternational.com](mailto:global@bodeuxinternational.com) or <http://www.bodeuxinternational.com>.

# From the Editor

by Ruth Boggs

## Meet us in St. Louis

**W**ill you be attending the American Translators Association Annual Conference in St. Louis this year? If so, consider volunteering an hour to help staff NCATA's table and talk to colleagues and prospective members about our chapter. This is a great way to meet new people and let them know what and how we are doing. Contact Chapter Vice President Sangeeta Prasad at (703) 369-2068 or [SSPrasad@aol.com](mailto:SSPrasad@aol.com).

Write a short article on a seminar you find interesting for the *Capital Translator*, or perhaps a longer one if you want to share your impression on other aspects of the Conference. Your colleagues who cannot attend this year will appreciate it. Photos are also welcome. Feel free to contact me with any questions about length, deadlines, etc. at (703) 378-9305 or [REZB@aol.com](mailto:REZB@aol.com).

And even if you can't attend, you can support NCATA members at the ballot box by proxy voting. In addition to the many members contributing their expertise to the lineup of workshops and lectures (see this month's President's Corner on page 2), three are running for national office: Monique-Paule Tubb for President-Elect, Eric McMillan for Treasurer and Scott Brennan for Director.

A personal note: I feel that Scott has done a superb job in guiding our chapter during the past two years. It would be great to see him elected as a Director on the ATA Board, where he could contribute to shaping the policies that have an impact on every ATA member.

That said, I am wishing everyone safe travels, great networking opportunities, and an all-around successful conference! ✍



## Mark Your Calendars: NCATA Job Fair 2000

**N**CATA's third annual Job Fair will be held Saturday afternoon, February 19, 2000, at its usual location, the Ellipse Conference Center in Arlington (across from the Ballston Common shopping mall). The Job Fair brings Washington-area translators and interpreters face to face with area translation companies and other buyers of our services. New and returning corporate members are entitled to a booth, where freelancers, job-seekers and others will have the opportunity to present their résumés to recruiters and be interviewed. For more information, contact this year's Job Fair Coordinator, Chapter Vice President Sangeeta Prasad, at (703) 369-2068 or [SSPrasad@aol.com](mailto:SSPrasad@aol.com). ✍

## Join NCATA's Electronic Mailing list

**S**ign up with NCATA's electronic mailing list to receive announcements on job leads, seminars, conferences and NCATA events. The list is opt-in: Go to <http://www.ncata.org> and subscribe under the "Mailing List" option. You can cancel your subscription or register a new e-mail address at any time.

## A warm welcome to new and returning members:

Elisabetta Pedersini  
Marshall McCormick  
Carolina Restrepo  
Virginia L.G. Rinaldi  
Elizabeth Rojas

## NCATA's Online Directory: Spread the Word

**W**hen clients ask you for referrals, remember to mention NCATA's online *Professional Services Directory* at [www.ncata.org](http://www.ncata.org). Your listing in the online directory and the hard copy distributed to hundreds of buyers of translation and interpreting services is a benefit of membership in NCATA.

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# Calendar

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
November 3-6, 1999		40th Annual ATA Conference	St. Louis, Missouri Contact ATA at 703-683-6100
December 12, 1999	12 noon	NCATA Annual Meeting and Holiday Party	Old Ebbitt Grill, Washington, DC Contact John Vázquez at 202-487-7878
February 19, 2000		Job Fair 2000	Ellipse Conference Center, Arlington, VA Contact Sangeeta Prasaad at 703-369-2068 or <b>SSPrasad@aol.com</b>

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NCATA  
P. O. Box 65200  
Washington, DC 20035-5200