

Translation as a career



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Introduction

This free course, *Translation as a career*, explores what being a professional translator is like. During the course you will meet professional translators discussing their work and reflect on what they say. You will assess your own language level and find out how translators maintain their language skills. You will also engage in a short translation activity.

The course is divided into four sections:

1. **Translation as a profession:** this section provides an overview of the skills and knowledge needed to be a translator and what is meant by translation competence
2. **A day in the life of a translator:** in this section you will meet some translators who tell you about their work, and about giving back. You will also find out about volunteering opportunities as a translator
3. **Your language skills:** explore what it takes to be a translator in terms of language skills, and find out what translators do to keep up their languages
4. **Translation theory and practice:** explore the notion of equivalence by undertaking a short translation activity (don't worry about your language skills, you can also translate from English into English!).

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [L801 Introduction to translation theory and practice](#), which is the first part of the OU's MA in Translation. You might also be interested in the second part: [L802 Translation in practice](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand the skills required to become a professional translator and what is meant by translation competence
- have an awareness of what it means to be a professional translator
- undertake an independent research activity
- evaluate personal language skills
- undertake a translation activity.

1 Translation as a profession

You will begin by looking at what we mean when we talk about ‘translation’. You will think about what translation is, and what skills are required to become a translator professionally. You will then start to reflect on your own skills and competencies.



1.1 What is translating?

Have a look at this brief introduction to translation provided by the UK’s National Network for Translation.

What is translating?

The process of transferring written text from one language into another. Anything that is written can be translated: advertisements, books, games software, legal documents, websites, film subtitles etc. Translators work either in-house (as employee of an organisation) or freelance. Usually, translators work from one or more languages into their mother tongue.

What skills do I need?

Excellent skills in your own languages and at least one other language as well as knowledge of and interest in other cultures and interpersonal and problem solving skills. For translators, the ability to write well in your own language, thoroughness and research skills are essential.

What languages should I learn?

You can become a translator with any language combination but some combinations may be more sought-after than others. At the moment, German to English is a highly sought-after combination, so if you are an English native speaker, German is a good language to have in your portfolio. If you are just beginning your language studies, you should aim to learn two languages, one of which might be a non-Western-European language. In order to work for the European Union institutions you need either French or German and one other EU language. In order to work for the UN as a translator into English you need two of the other official languages of the UN – Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and/or Spanish.

How much can I earn?

Salaries vary greatly. Typical starting salaries for in-house translators or interpreters are between £18,000 and £26,000. These can go up to £50,000 and £60,000 with experience. The European Union institutions and United Nations are the best paying employers of senior translators and both institutions have a severe shortage of native English language speaking language translators and interpreters.

Translation specialisation and careers

There are numerous careers offered in the translation field. As mentioned above, you can be a freelance translator or you can work in-house, for instance at the **United Nations** or the European Commission. You can also become a Project Manager whose task is to coordinate multilingual translation projects (this is a common pathway into the profession). You would also probably specialise in one or more specific types of translation. Some of the more lucrative areas include legal, medical, technical or financial translation but there are many, many possible areas of specialisation. Translation for the legal and health services and by local authorities is known as 'public service' translation. Other prominent forms of translation include localisation, videogame translation, subtitling, dubbing and audio description. Many aspiring translators are attracted by the idea of literary translation of fiction, theatre or poetry. This is an area in which it is difficult to make a living full-time, but many translators combine it with the translation of other published material such as academic books, non-fiction or trade publications and with copywriting.

Now that you have an overview of what translating is, let's consider what the skills and attributes to be a good translator are.

1.2 What makes a good translator?

In the activity below, you will look at the skills and competencies that make an effective translator.

Activity 1

What would you say are the main skills and attributes of a good translator? Here is a list of what are often considered the key skills required by translators. After you've read the text, select the three which you think are the most important, and the three which you think are the least important.

1. **Professionalism:** Ethics are very important in translation. You need to know when to preserve confidentiality, and when to refuse a job because you are not competent to do it.
2. **Networking skills:** People think translation is a solitary activity but in fact translators often work in virtual teams, revising each others' work or sharing big projects. Project managers have to manage big teams of translators. Freelancers have to meet and attract clients. People skills and playing well with others are a must! Marketing and advertising your work is also going to be very important when working as a freelancer.
3. **Attention to detail:** There's a bit of the pedant in all translators. If you've ever ground your teeth when you see a wrongly used apostrophe this profession might be for you! Translators need great revising and proofreading skills.
4. **Flexibility/adaptability:** Translation is a fast-changing profession and translators have to be prepared to pick up new skills and offer new services such as transcription, copywriting and post-editing.
5. **Organisational skills:** Translation is a very deadline-driven profession. You need to be able to meet deadlines and organise your time effectively. Initiative is important, too.
6. **Writing skills:** This is extremely important. Translators are professional writers. For this, you need to know your own language perfectly: grammar, vocabulary, style. Reading voraciously helps, and so will writing practice such as blogging, student journalism, creative writing. And spelling is really important for translators; bad spelling can give a bad impression to clients.
7. **General knowledge:** General knowledge is very important for translators. It can help you pick up mistakes in texts. Read the papers, watch the news, films and documentaries ... it's all part of your work!
8. **Analytical skills:** Translators are the best readers that a text will ever have. They need advanced analytical skills to understand how the source text works, so that they can reproduce this in their translation.
9. **Research skills:** Translators may get very different texts to translate from one day to the next and may have to pick up specialised vocabulary quickly. You learn where to find out about cereal and cylinder heads, fish and foot and mouth disease.
10. **Subject knowledge:** Any skills you have can be turned into specialised subject knowledge to help you. It might be law, medicine or mechanics, but it could also be a personal hobby, such as a sport. Think about subjects you know really well, and think about how you could get to know them in your other languages too.
11. **Curiosity:** Curiosity is one of the best attributes you can have as a translator. It will help you to learn new skills, research unfamiliar subjects, look up unfamiliar words you come across, spot potential problems with translation jobs and really get to the heart of what your clients want.

12. **Excellent knowledge of the foreign language:** You need to be able to read widely and easily in your foreign language and understand not only what it says, but what it really means – not always the same thing! Lots of practice reading, watching TV and films, listening to radio in your foreign language(s) will help.
13. **IT skills:** Translation is a very IT-driven profession these days; translators use many online communication systems and a wide range of general and specialised software for word processing, file formatting and translation memory retrieval. Tools for terminology management and machine translation are becoming increasingly embedded in the profession. Software develops fast, and translators need to be able to keep up.
14. **Good cultural awareness:** Language isn't just about language but also culture. There's a big difference between the 'banlieue [suburb] in France and 'suburbs' in the UK. In France the 'banlieue' are often associated with poverty, social housing and deprivation. Even though it's technically not the 'real' meaning, 'banlieue' might be better translated as 'inner city' in English.
15. **Love of reading:** Translators are professional writers who need to be able to write well. Wide reading is a must for developing a really good writing style. Read good novels, good-quality journalism (great for your general knowledge too), history, popular science – the more, the merrier. Some translators even get paid for reading books for publishers and commenting on whether they would be worth translating.

Adapted from: [National Network for Translation, 'What are the skills required?'](#)

Which three skills do you consider the most important for a translator?

Provide your answer...

Which three skills do you consider the least important for a translator?

Provide your answer...

Answer

We asked students on our [MA in Translation](#) to do this same activity, and they considered the most important skills and attributes to be a translator were:

1. Excellent knowledge of a foreign language (88%)
2. Writing skills (81%)
3. Attention to detail (79%)

Among the skills and attributes they considered the least important, they suggested general knowledge, love of reading, and curiosity.

Did you come up with a similar rating, or did you think other skills were more important?

1.3 Auditing your skills

You can use the list on the previous page to reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses. Maybe you have great language skills but are a bit worried about technology, or are a voracious reader, curious and knowledgeable about many topics, but given to procrastination. It is useful to spend some time thinking about what is required and which skills you need to focus on developing if you are thinking of a career in translation.

You may have struggled to identify five top skills and that's because all of them are really important; in fact they all form part of 'translation competence', which you will learn about in the next session.

1.4 The importance of reading and writing

Excellent writing skills are an essential requirement for translators. In fact, many famous authors in history put their skills to work as translators (Cesare Pavese, Jorge Luis Borges, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Vladimir Nabokov and many others). In non-literary contexts, translators can sometimes move into other professions such as technical writing or journalism, where the skills of efficiently organising and formulating information are highly valued.

Less obvious is the need to have highly developed reading skills. Reading a text as a translator is a very different experience from just reading. The translator needs to understand the text thoroughly, both the words and the cultural connotations of those words.

Before we close this section and move on to examining what we mean by 'translation competence', listen to Professor Susan Bassnett, from the University of Warwick, talking about the skills of reading and writing in translation.

Audio content is not available in this format.



Susan Bassnett

Had you thought before about having to read differently in order to translate? Did you view the job of translating as essentially (re)writing?

1.5 Translation competence

The PACTE research group at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, has been conducting research for nearly two decades on the acquisition of translation competence, defined as 'the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate' (PACTE, 2003, p. 16). They started by describing the characteristics that define the professional translator and then developed a model for their acquisition. The aim was to understand how best to teach these competences to would-be translators.

The following model presents the sub-competences that make up translation competence, which include both declarative (knowing that) and procedural (knowing how) knowledge. These sub-competences are looked at in more detail in the reading activity in the next section.

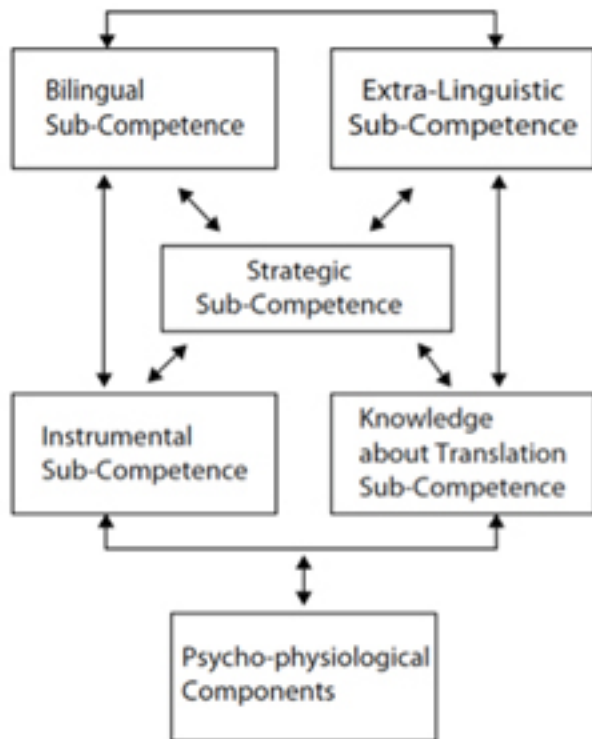


Figure 1 Model of translation competence revisited.

1.6 Reading activity

Read the following extract from [2003 PACTE paper](#) 'Building a Translation Competence Model' to find out more about what each sub-competence refers to, then answer the questions below to check your understanding.

Building a Translation Competence Model

Translation competence is the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate. It includes declarative and procedural knowledge, but the procedural knowledge is predominant. It consists of the ability to carry out the transfer process from the comprehension of the source text to the re-expression of the target text, taking into account the purpose of the translation and the characteristics of the target text readers. It is made up of five sub-competencies (bilingual, extra-linguistic, knowledge about translation, instrumental and strategic) and it activates a series of psycho-physiological mechanisms.

The bilingual sub-competence. Predominantly procedural knowledge needed to communicate in two languages. It includes the specific feature of interference control when alternating between the two languages. It is made up

of pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge in the two languages.

Pragmatic knowledge is knowledge of the pragmatic conventions needed to carry out language acts that are acceptable in a given context; they make it possible to use language to express and understand linguistic functions and speech acts. Socio-linguistic knowledge is knowledge of the socio-linguistic conventions needed to carry out language acts that are acceptable in a given context; this includes knowledge of language registers (variations according to field, mode and tenor) and of dialects (variations according to geographical, social and temporal dialects). Textual knowledge is knowledge of texture (coherence and cohesion mechanisms) and of different genres with their respective conventions (structure, language features, etc.). Grammatical-lexical knowledge is knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology/graphology.

Extra-linguistic sub-competence. Predominantly declarative knowledge, both implicit and explicit, about the world in general and special areas. It includes:

(1) bicultural knowledge (about the source and target cultures); (2) encyclopaedic knowledge (about the world in general); (3) subject knowledge (in special areas).

Knowledge about translation sub-competence. Predominantly declarative knowledge, both implicit and explicit, about what translation is and aspects of the profession. It includes: (1) knowledge about how translation functions: types of translation units, processes required, methods and procedures used (strategies and techniques), and types of problems; (2) knowledge related to professional translation practice: knowledge of the work market (different types of briefs, clients and audiences, etc.).

Instrumental sub-competence. Predominantly procedural knowledge related to the use of documentation sources and information and communication technologies applied to translation: dictionaries of all kinds, encyclopaedias, grammars, style books, parallel texts, electronic corpora, searchers, etc.

Strategic sub-competence. Procedural knowledge to guarantee the efficiency of the translation process and solve the problems encountered. This is an essential sub-competence that affects all the others and causes inter-relations amongst them because it controls the translation process. Its functions are: (1) to plan the process and carry out the translation project (choice of the most adequate method); (2) to evaluate the process and the partial results obtained in relation to the final purpose; (3) to activate the different sub-competencies and compensate for deficiencies in them; (4) to identify translation problems and apply procedures to solve them.

Psycho-physiological components. Different types of cognitive and attitudinal components and psycho-motor mechanisms. They include: (1) cognitive components such as memory, perception, attention and emotion; (2) attitudinal aspects such as intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigour, critical spirit, knowledge of and confidence in one's own abilities, the ability to measure one's own abilities, motivation, etc.; (3) abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis, etc.

(PACTE, 2003, pp. 16–17)

Activity 2

Answer the following questions.

The bilingual sub-competence...

- is mainly declarative and relates to a good command of grammar and vocabulary in the foreign language.
- is mainly procedural and relates to the ability to speak languages other than one's mother tongue.
- is mainly procedural and relates to the ability to communicate in two languages without interference.

The extra-linguistic sub-competence...

- is mainly declarative and relates to knowledge of the cultures of the source and target language.
- is mainly declarative and relates to knowledge of the world, of specific domains of knowledge and of the cultures of the source and target languages.
- is mainly procedural and relates to the ability to research information on various domains of knowledge.

The knowledge about translation sub-competence...

- is mainly declarative and relates to knowledge of the theory and research into the field of translation studies.
- is mainly declarative and includes both knowledge about how to translate and aspects of professional practice.
- is mainly procedural and relates to methods and procedures used when translating.

The instrumental sub-competence...

- is mainly declarative and relates to the use of specific translation tools.
- is mainly procedural and includes the ability to find information using electronic tools.
- is mainly procedural and relates to the use of technology applied to translation and the skills for finding and evaluating information.

The strategic sub-competence...

- is mainly procedural and relates to translators' problem-solving and evaluation skills.
- is mainly procedural and relates to translators' ability to reflect on their own performance.
- is mainly procedural and relates to analytical, organisational and problem-solving skills.

Now that you have an understanding of the skills required to become a professional translator and what is meant by translation competence, let's find out what it's like to work as a translator. In the next section you will meet some translators and find out the varied work they undertake.

2 A day in the life of a translator

In this section, you are going to find out about the sort of work that translators undertake. We have focused mainly on freelance translators, as many professional translators work freelance.



2.1 Meet some translators

Translators can end up doing a wide range of tasks, from translating poetry to bulk jobs post-editing technical manuals, to give two extreme examples. The roles are also varied, and many translation graduates start in the industry as project managers, before moving on to working as translators either in-house or freelance. There are also roles in terminology and quality management, which translators can take on alongside translation or in addition to it.

To give you a flavour of what it's like to be a translator, we've assembled some accounts from a range of professionals. As you read through them, make a note of the sorts of tasks

they do, and look out for any common elements that they mention in their accounts of their professional practice.

Gill Holmes



Figure 2 Gill Holmes

Multitasking, keeping healthy and maintaining work-life balance are important to Gill, who is a freelance translator based in the UK:

When I sit down in the morning, generally it almost never happens that I don't have a job on, but the first thing I do is check through my emails, and if I'm looking for work, then I'll go straight to that, see what's coming up, if there's anything I can bid for, or answer any queries.

Then I will get down to whatever it is I'm doing that day, and work steadily. As I'm working I can see emails coming in. I will always check my emails coming in, unless I'm doing a proofreading job, which I'm doing on a timed basis, in which case I won't check emails because it's not fair to the client. If something interesting comes up, then I'll stop working and I'll go after that job and put in a bid, or write to the project manager saying that I can do the job and negotiate the rate. That's where you're multitasking, because you are doing a translation, but you keep switching over to set up your next jobs.

I generally work from about 8:45 am until midday. By a quarter past twelve I'm ravenously hungry. Quite often I just have half an hour for lunch and then get back to work. Work-life balance is very important so on Tuesdays and Fridays I walk to the leisure centre and I swim for half an hour. On Thursdays I walk with Casterbridge Ramblers, so I'll do a seven or eight miles walk on a Thursday. And then I've got my personal trainer. She pops up on my computer screen every hour and gives me three simple exercises. As well as keeping my metabolic rate up, if I've been concentrating very hard, I can move around, do the exercises, it just takes three minutes, and it refreshes me.

I generally stop around five to cook supper, and then if I'm not up against a deadline, I'll just do other stuff in the evening. If I'm up against a deadline, I'll get

back to work after supper. I never work weekends, unless it's doing voluntary things like for the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, if they've sent me something I'll do it but that's not work... I try to save weekends for family time. I do my invoicing generally on a Friday after I've stopped working. It makes you feel good, thinking 'I've earned all this money!' even though it's such a tedious task.

(Gillian Holmes, BA (Hons), MA, MITI, translator, Spanish and French to English)

Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown

Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown, author of the book *A Practical Guide for Translators*, describes a typical day and how as a freelance translator he might divide up his time over the month:

Each day is different since a translator, particularly a freelance, needs to deal with a number of tasks and there is no typical day. I usually get up at around 7 in the morning, shower, have breakfast and get to my desk at around 8 just as my wife is leaving to drive to her office. Like most freelancers I have my office at home.

I work in spells of 50 minutes and take a break even if it is just to walk around the house. I try and take at least half an hour for lunch and try to finish at around 5 unless there is urgent work and then I will perhaps work in the evening for an hour or so. But I do the latter only if a premium payment is offered and I wish to accept the work. If I were to analyse an average working month of 22 possible working days, I would get the following:

Task or item to which time is accounted	Time spent on the task
Translation including project management, research, draft translation, proofreading and editing, resolving queries and administration	Fifteen and a half days
Office administration including invoicing, purchasing and correspondence (tax issues and bookkeeping are dealt with by my accountant)	Two days
External activities such as networking and marketing	One day
Continuous personal development including – and this is not a joke – watching relevant TV programmes or reading articles on subjects in which you have or wish to improve your expertise.	One day
Public or other holidays (say 21 days leave and 7 days public holidays)	Two and a half days

My average monthly output for these fifteen and a half effective days is around 28,000 words. If this is spread out over effective working days of six working hours (8 x 50 minutes in reality), my effective hourly production rate is 300 words an hour. This may not seem a lot but it may be worth considering that to expect to work undisturbed on translation eight hours a day, five days a week, is

unrealistic. There may also be times when you are physically or mentally unable to work – how do you take account of such eventualities as a freelance?

(Samuelsson-Brown, 2010, pp. 3–4)

Vicky Sharvill



Figure 3 Vicky Sharvill

As a project manager for a language service provider that specialises in medical, pharmaceutical and patents translation, Vicky talks about her work and the increasing role that technology plays in the translation industry. You can find out more about what Vicky's project management role entails by visiting [her company's recruitment page](#).

My typical day consists of assessing and quoting translation projects for our clients, as well as editing and proofreading projects before they are returned to the client. We get a variety of different types of documents to deal with, so while the basic format of my day stays the same, each project usually brings its own unique complications with it.

Technology plays a significant role in my work, both professional and voluntary. Particularly in managing projects, we're continually looking for ways we can incorporate technology into our work to assist and improve on the quality of our service. In particular, the translator database, where we can quickly select the most appropriate translator for a particular type of project and language combination, is immensely useful and we are aiming to expand this system across the whole of our management process. Personally I think the recent emphasis on learning to use translation technologies, understanding the

translation industry as a whole, as opposed to focusing solely on translation skills, is really important.

(Vicky Sharvill, BA (Hons), MA, Spanish and Japanese, project manager)

Charis Ainslie



Figure 4 Charis Ainslie

A freelance translator, Charis talks about variety in the translator's work, CPD and drawing on peers for support with her business:

A normal day for me starts at nine after dropping the children off at school. I'll already have checked my emails earlier in the morning so I usually know if anything urgent is waiting for me. My deadlines are often quite short – 24 or 48 hours. If possible I translate, sleep on it and review the next day, so I'll start by reviewing anything I've done the day before and send off any assignments that are due. If I'm busy, I translate until three with a short break for lunch, and if necessary I'll work in the evenings as well – it's not ideal, but a deadline is a deadline!

Most of my work comes from two agencies in Italy. One of them sends me work almost every day. It is usually for the same client, and I translate their marketing materials. There is a regular blog, but I have also done presentations and speeches and more technical pieces. The other agency sends bigger jobs that keep me busy for a couple of weeks at a time. Once a quarter I work on a bilingual magazine, and I have recently translated a wine guide. That was the ultimate project for me! In addition, I translate for three UK agencies, and this work is more business and medical. Although I specialise in marketing and medical texts, within those subjects there is huge variety – one day I'll be working on a French pharmaceuticals text, the next I'll be discovering the world of Italian chandeliers!

I'll normally have some sort of email conversation with one or more of the project managers I work with in the day – although I like working from home, it's

still nice to have that contact. Two of the UK agencies are local to me and I know the contacts personally – it's great to get to know the people you work with. I am also looking into approaching private clients – mainly because I would like to be able to smooth out my workflow, which isn't always predictable. That's why I keep an action list for quieter days, to keep myself focused, and that's when I fit in other aspects of the job – marketing, accounting, researching subject matter and terminology and so on. I was quite nervous about the accounting side of things, but have actually found it easy to get to grips with. Although I employ an accountant, I send out my own invoices at the end of each month, and chase any late payments. There have been a couple, but they have always been paid following a polite reminder! I keep a spreadsheet of my income and expenses, and try to keep everything up to date.

I do a fair amount of CPD. I try to read or watch TV in my source languages every day. This last year I have attended workshops through the ITI (Institute of Translators and Interpreters) on terminology, memoQ, corpora and transcreation. Developing my skills and learning new aspects of the job always gives me a boost – and it's great to meet other translators.

Another great way to keep up with other translators is through the ITI's regional and professional networks. There's a real community out there, and hardly a day goes by when I'm not in touch with another translator. Every couple of weeks I Skype a colleague who started her business at the same time as me. We have collaborated on a big project, and hope to work again together soon, but mainly we bounce ideas off each other and share what's happening in our week. It's a good way to encourage each other. I also have another translator friend who has been like a mentor to me. We are in touch less frequently now, but she is always on hand to answer any questions I have. I would definitely recommend finding someone who is happy to give you advice, guidance and encouragement.

(Charis Ainslie, MA, MSc, freelance translator (Italian and French into English) and editor)

As you read through the accounts of the translators' practice, we asked you to make a note of the sorts of tasks they do, and to look out for any common elements that they mention. Here is a model answer.

The translators mentioned a wide range of tasks. Some are the sorts of things that you probably associate more closely with translating itself, such as translating, researching subject matter and terminology, proofreading and editing and resolving queries from clients.

However, there are also a whole range of other tasks that are also essential to managing a business as a translator. These include: bidding for work, quoting and giving estimates, bookkeeping and invoicing, dealing with clients or project managers, project managing and marketing your business.

Some of the aspects of the work mentioned by several translators related to the importance of time management, especially the ability to work to tight deadlines, but also to organise yourself and multitask when necessary or, at other times, to concentrate on a specific translation task without letting yourself be distracted. Several translators mentioned the importance of taking breaks and maintaining a healthy work/life balance, which is particularly important if you work as a freelancer.

Several translators also mentioned that it is important to take time to engage in CPD (continuous professional development), including keeping up your language skills. We will focus on this aspect in Section 3.

Finally, because translating as a freelancer can be a fairly lonely profession, it is also important to have contact with other professionals, through networking opportunities, but also by keeping in touch with colleagues or mentors to seek advice, guidance and encouragement.

Did anything surprise you in these accounts? Were you familiar with all the tasks that translators might carry out? Every translator's day is different, depending on their area and level of experience, specialism and the context in which they work, and that is one of the attractive aspects of the job.

2.2 Giving back

Many translators are involved in *pro bono* work, contributing their skills and time to supporting others in the profession or to various causes. This is sometimes referred to as 'giving back' or 'professional contribution', and the Institute of Translators and Interpreters in the UK regards it as part of their members' Continuous Professional Development (CPD).



Figure 5 Keith Baddeley

Now read the account below, where translator and OU graduate Keith Baddeley talks about his experience of volunteering.

During my MA in Specialised Translation, a guest speaker talked about the benefit of volunteering in relation to gaining practical experience – many agencies require one, two, three or more years' translation experience before they will allow you to register with them. She mentioned a Spanish magazine concerned with social inclusion, cooperation and support, and care for the environment. They were planning to launch an English-language version and were looking for new ES>EN translators to help them out.

I worked with the magazine's editor-in-chief and a team of volunteer translators for several months, and I translated a number of articles including one on sustainable architecture and an interview with the linguist and political activist, Noam Chomsky. I also proofread texts translated by others working on the project. This was invaluable experience for a newly trained translator whose aim was to go straight into freelancing, particularly in terms of understanding the process (translation, self-checking/editing, revision by another translator – the 'four-eyes' principle), working to deadlines, having something to put on my CV and gaining a worthwhile referee in the editor-in-chief, who certainly helped me win my first few agency clients.

I have also translated on a voluntary basis for [The Rosetta Foundation](#), an organisation that connects language volunteers with non-profit organisations that work with under-served communities, providing access to language services that would otherwise be unavailable to them. For them, I have translated details of IT courses, training programmes and project proposals, from Spanish and French into English.

There are many other organisations that need volunteer translators as well as those that act as a network, such as [Translators Without Borders](#) – although they require a minimum of two years' translation experience. I intend to do more in the future – it feels good to be doing something positive, to use my skills for the good of others.

(Keith Baddeley, freelance IT, business and financial translator, Spanish/French/Romanian to English, [Veracitrاد](#))

2.3 Independent research activity

Keith mentioned Translators Without Borders, one of the leading non-profit translation organisations working in humanitarian crisis response, health and education. Founded in 1993, its aim is to support critical humanitarian efforts across the world through translation. With more than 3,800 translators working in over 190 language pairs, TWB have translated over 40 million words.

Another interesting volunteer translation project is the TED Translation programme, where volunteers subtitle TED Talks so they are available in different languages. More than 25,000 volunteer TED translators currently operate in 114 languages and have produced more than 100,000 translations between them.

Finally, you might be interested to know that Wikipedia also relies on volunteer translators to translate its content.

Have you ever considered of volunteering as a translator? You might want to give it a go! Spend 15 to 20 minutes finding out about one of these volunteer translation projects:

Translators without borders

See the [Translators without borders website](#).

In particular, have a look at the following sections:

[Our work](#)

[Volunteer profiles](#)

TED Open Translation Project

See the [TED Open Translation Project website](#).

In particular, have a look at the sections:

[How to participate](#)

[Volunteer profiles](#)

Translating Wikipedia

See the [Translating Wikipedia website](#).

Or look for volunteer translation opportunities in another area you are interested in.

3 Your language skills

When we looked at the profile of different translators, you may remember that some of them mentioned that they spend some time reading, or watching TV or films in their second language. In spite of working daily with their languages, translators usually devote some time during their week to keeping up their language skills. In this section, you are going to look at the language skills needed to be a translator, and find out more about what translators do to keep up their language skills.



3.1 Your language proficiency

In order to be a translator, you have to be highly proficient in two languages: the language you translate from, and the language you translate to. Usually, translators translate into their main language, and the language they translate from is their foreign language. But what sort of level of language proficiency do you need in order to be a translator? For The Open University MA in Translation, we recommend that students have a level C1 in one of their languages, and C2 in the other.

These levels are mapped out in the CERF, the Common European Framework for Reference, a document that was produced by language experts at the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe to provide a 'transparent, coherent and comprehensive' framework for those working in language teaching and learning, and to also provide a common way to describe language proficiency. Although it was originally developed for

the European context, versions of the framework have been created in 40 languages, including, for instance, non-European languages such as Chinese and Arabic.

So what do levels C1 and C2 mean?

In the language proficiency scales, the CEFR describes six levels of language proficiency: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. The A levels indicate basic proficiency, the B levels describe independent users, and the C levels correspond to a proficient user.

The six proficiency levels can be summarised as follows:

Table 1 Common Reference Levels, Global scale

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(CEFR, 2002, p. 5)

You will notice that at the lower levels, the learner has to be able to communicate in familiar, everyday settings and routine context. As a learner moves up the scale and becomes more proficient, they also become more able to communicate in a variety of

contexts, so that at level C they can communicate in a wide variety of social, academic and professional contexts.

Activity 3

As a learner progresses through the different levels of proficiency, they acquire more complex grammar and vocabulary. But what other elements do you think make up language proficiency? Make a note of the different areas you can think of before revealing the comment below.

Provide your answer...

Answer

You might have suggested things like pronunciation and fluency, writing skills, or the ability to read texts of increasing variety, difficulty, and length.

Lexical, phonological and syntactical knowledge and skills are probably the first thing most people think of when they think of language competence, and they all relate to linguistic competence. However, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence are also integral parts of communicative language competence. The CEFR defines them as follows:

Sociolinguistic competences refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use. Through its sensitivity to social conventions (rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community), the sociolinguistic component strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures, even though participants may often be unaware of its influence.

Pragmatic competences are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges. It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody. For this component even more than the linguistic component, it is hardly necessary to stress the major impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed.

(CEFR, 2002, p. 13)

A highly developed linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, both in their first and second languages, are essential for translators. It is true, however, that translators usually translate from their second (or 'passive') language into their main (or 'active') language, so they will not have the same level of proficiency in all skills in both languages.

3.2 Specific CEFR descriptors

As well as the global descriptors you've just looked at, the CEFR also has specific level descriptors for the different areas of 'Understanding' (i.e. listening and reading), 'Speaking' (both spoken interaction and spoken production) and 'Writing'. You can read

the detailed descriptors for the different skills in the CEFR document, but as a translator, you will need to focus in particular in developing your reading and writing skills and, for audiovisual translation, you will also need excellent listening skills. Here are the overall descriptors for those skills:

Table 2 CEFR descriptors

Overall reading comprehension	
C2	Can understand and interpret critically virtually all forms of the written language including abstract, structurally complex, or highly colloquial literary and non-literary writings. Can understand a wide range of long and complex texts, appreciating subtle distinctions of style and implicit as well as explicit meaning.
C1	Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/her own area of speciality, provided he/she can reread difficult sections.
Overall written interaction	
C2	As C1
C1	Can express him/herself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively.
Overall listening comprehension	
C2	Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed.
C1	Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar. Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly.

(CEFR, 2002, pp. 66, 69, 83)

3.3 Your CEFR levels

You will have noticed that we have emphasised reading, writing and, to some extent, listening skills. One important thing to bear in mind when thinking about levels of language proficiency is that it is not necessarily homogeneous across the different subskills. So, for instance, if you have learned a language by living in a country, you might have very good listening and speaking skills, but be less proficient in writing. Translators, on the other hand, might be more proficient in reading and writing than in speaking in their second or passive language (or indeed in any other languages they may have).

Europass is a set of documents that enable employers and educational establishments to understand your language skills and qualifications. One of these documents is the Language Passport, a self-assessment tool to record your language proficiency. On the Europass website you will find some information about the different Europass documents,

where there is a link to how to create your Language Passport online, as well as templates and instructions, and examples of completed Language Passports.

Before you start working on your language passport, have a look at the reference slides below. To navigate through the slides, hover over them and click the black arrows.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Now, create [your Language Passport online](#) and fill in the levels for the different skills for your language(s). When you've finished, download the document, and save it. You will come back to this again later.

3.4 Translators on language learning

In Section 2, you came across several translators giving an account of what their working day is like. We asked one of them, Charis Ainslie, a freelance translator (Italian and French into English) and editor, to tell us about her language background and her own language development. Here's what she said:



Figure 6 Charis Ainslie

My working languages are French and Italian into English. I learned French at school and did French and Italian at university followed by a Masters in Translation and Interpreting. I have lived and worked in France, and take every opportunity to spend time in Italy. I am particularly fascinated by Sicily. I also speak a little Arabic, having lived in Egypt for a year. I would love to add it to my working languages, but I'm not there yet!

(Charis Ainslie, a freelance translator (Italian and French into English) and editor)



Figure 7 Keith Baddeley

We also asked freelance translator Keith Baddeley about his language history and how he keeps up with his languages. This is what he told us:

Keith, tell us about your language background and the languages you use professionally.

I studied French and German at O-level and A-level at school and then did two years of a degree course before having to give up for family reasons. I came back to languages 20 years later, initially studying Spanish *ab initio* with The Open University. That turned into six years studying for a BA (Hons) in Modern Language Studies (Spanish and French). I then did an MA in Specialised Translation at the University of Westminster in 2014/15. I speak Spanish and French at C1 and still a smattering of German, perhaps to B1. During my MA, I also learnt Romanian during a subsidiary language module, although mostly passively. In other words, I can hardly speak it at all, but can pronounce it, read it and translate from it. Today, I use Spanish, French and Romanian in my translation work.

So what do you do on an ongoing basis to keep up your competence in the languages you use professionally?

Living in Spain definitely helps with my Spanish! I make sure I watch the news in Spanish, popular TV programs, the radio, etc. – all these help with my speaking in particular. I also do this for French, but to a lesser extent – online video news around twice a week. I also read a lot in Spanish and French, but usually more popular texts (novels, magazines, etc.) rather than the type of texts I translate – which of course I'm reading too in my source languages, as I only translate into English, which definitely maintains my language competence. It's easy to let your source language(s) / second language(s) slide – from a speaking and writing perspective – if you don't produce them and only translate from them, so the key is to keep producing your non-native languages as much as possible. If you don't live in your native-language country, make sure you don't neglect your native language either; you need to keep that up too, in my case, through reading the British press, watching British TV, listening to British radio.

And what advice would you give students who are about to embark on an MA in Translation?

I would say three things: first of all, produce your second language on any occasion you can – speak it with friends; write it, even if it's just for you. If you have agency clients in your second-language country, email them in that language, speak to them in that language – not in your native language. This is hard to get used to, but not only does it help you maintain your second language, it's professional too. In my experience, even though I translate into English only and am seen as an English-language specialist, clients appreciate it so much when I communicate with them in their language. Sometimes, there's no alternative: not all project managers in translation agencies in France, for example, speak English.

Secondly, if you are translating from your second language (and most people do professionally), go to trade shows etc. related to your specialist areas that are in your second-language country. Prepare and practise what you want to say before you leave for the show. While you're there, speak to anyone and everyone about their products, their services – in your second language. This is so important because such trade shows are a great source of direct clients, and you need to win and maintain those direct clients preferably using your second language.

Finally, in the early days of being a translator, even though you have level C1 in your second language, you will find you look up words a lot more than you thought you would and that you can never imagine translating 2,000 to 3,000 words a day. This is normal. It's all to do with experience and wanting to be sure you've chosen the right word, correct phrasing in the target language. Don't get disheartened. It will get easier after a few busy months - you end up trusting yourself more, trusting your instincts and settle into your own way of writing for the type of texts you specialise on.

(Keith Baddeley, freelance IT, business and financial translator, Spanish/French/Romanian to English, [Veracitrad](#))

Finally, we interviewed language coach, blogger and freelance translator Agnieszka Murdoch. Agnieszka runs the website [5-Minute Language](#). Her mission: to help and motivate language learners worldwide so that every person in the world has a chance to learn a foreign language! Here's the extended interview with Agnieszka:



Figure 8 Agnieszka Murdoch

What languages do you translate to or from? What do you specialise in as a freelance translator?

I translate from Polish into English and English into Polish, as well as from French into English. I have experience of translating literary and journalistic texts.

So, Agnieszka, what is your language background?

I'm fluent in Polish, English and French (C2). I also have some knowledge of Spanish (A2) and German (A1), and I'm currently learning Japanese (I'm a beginner). Polish is my native language, and I learned English and French when I was still at school. I took up Spanish, German and Japanese when I was already working full-time as a digital content manager.

What do you do on an ongoing basis to keep up your competence in the languages you use professionally?

Maintaining fluency can be a challenge, especially with languages I don't use frequently. Reading (newspapers, magazines and fiction) is my favourite way of keeping up my competence in my languages. I try to speak as much as possible as well, even if it's just talking to myself!

I try to incorporate language learning into my daily routine and make the most of the time I have to get better (e.g. by reading the news in foreign languages only, or listening to podcasts on my way to work).

What advice would you give students who already have a level C1 in their second language and who are about to embark on an MA in Translation?

My main piece of advice would be to focus on idiomatic language and collocations. Good translation is about making language sound natural, which is difficult to do without the knowledge of how idiomatic expressions and collocations work. Reading extensively, both in your target language and your source language, is in my experience the best way to approach this challenge.

I also strongly recommend that students focus on expanding their vocabulary vertically. What I mean by that is not learning more words but learning additional ways of expressing the things they can already say. This includes learning synonyms and understanding the difference between them. Accurate translation requires knowing the difference between two words which may initially look very similar.

Finally, I would encourage students to reflect on what it is that they're interested in, and what their strengths are. Translation is a very versatile field, with a number of specialisms. Understanding what excites and motivates you is a key element of your professional development that can help you shape your career and focus on the things that are right for you.

(Agnieszka Murdoch (BA, MA, CELTA), language coach, blogger and freelance translator)

We also interviewed Marta Stelmaszak, a Polish/English translator based in the UK. You can find out more about Marta from her website: [Want Words](#). When we interviewed her, Marta told us about the languages she uses professionally, how to keep up to date with her languages and the fields she specialises in. She also gave some advice for Translation students about how to keep up their language skills. Listen to the following two audio recordings to find out what she said:

Audio content is not available in this format.



Marta Stelmaszak Part 1

Audio content is not available in this format.



Marta Stelmaszak Part 2

3.5 Case studies

Having looked at translation competence and at the CEFR level descriptors, let's look at two case studies of learners who are thinking of studying for an MA in translation.

Read each case study and, thinking back at the CEFR descriptors and the concept of translation competence, try to assess the potential language gaps these students might have, and what they should focus on in terms of their language development in preparation for the quiz below.

Case study 1: Stuart



Figure 9 Stuart

Stuart is a native speaker of English. He studied Spanish and English linguistics for his language studies degree in the UK four years ago. Although he reached a level C1 in Spanish, he has not used Spanish much since then, and feels he has forgotten a lot. He is now thinking of doing an MA in Translation, and feels anxious about his level of Spanish, especially his speaking and listening. He would like to specialise in technical translation.

Table 3 Stuart's skill level

Mother tongue(s)	English				
Other language(s)	UNDERSTANDING		SPEAKING		WRITING
	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	
Spanish	C1	C1	B2	B2	C1

Case study 2: Silvia



Figure 10 Silvia

Silvia is originally from Italy, although she has lived in Scotland for over 30 years. She still speaks Italian with her family and friends back home, and often spends her holiday in Italy, but doesn't do much else to keep up her Italian. She has occasionally helped in her husband's company, translating emails and invoices, and interpreting when Italian clients have visited. She never studied English formally, and although she speaks it fluently, she is not very confident when writing. She has not thought about what she would like to specialise in.

Table 4 Silvia's skill level

Mother tongue(s)	Italian				
Other language(s)	UNDERSTANDING		SPEAKING		WRITING
	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	
English	C1	B2	C1	C1	B2

Activity 4

Now have a look at the different pieces of advice, and decide if they are more relevant to Stuart or to Silvia:

Don't worry too much about your speaking – the most important skills for a translator are reading and writing.

- Stuart
- Silvia

Read a wide range of English literature, newspapers and academic publications to improve your reading.

- Stuart

- Silvia

Engage with the more formal aspects of English such as grammar and syntax.

- Stuart

- Silvia

It is important to re-engage with your L2 language and culture, as you will have lost some of the proficiency you had as a student by not using the language for a while.

- Stuart

- Silvia

Focus on practising your writing in a variety of different styles (prose, essay writing etc.). Writing is your main weakness.

- Stuart

- Silvia

Keep up to date with your native language and culture by reading the press, watching TV, etc. It is important to keep up your cultural and linguistic competence in your mother tongue!

- Stuart

- Silvia

Read some specialist publications to improve your specialist vocabulary and your knowledge of relevant text types in the area you want to specialise in.

- Stuart

- Silvia

Try to incorporate your L2 into your daily life as much as possible (watching TV, listening to the radio or going online and visiting sites in your target language).

- Stuart

- Silvia

Now look at your language passport, where you did an audit of your language skills, and think about what you might need to work on if you want to become a translator.

Write a short profile about yourself like the two in the case studies you've just looked at, and then write five pieces of advice you would give yourself. This is the basis of an initial language development plan if you want to work towards becoming a translator.

4 Translation: theory and practice

In this section, you will focus on semantic and communicative translation.



4.1 Semantic vs communicative translation part 1

Translator scholar Mona Baker explains how interest in translation is practically as old as human civilisation, and that there is a vast body of literature on the subject which dates back at least to Cicero in the first century BC (2001, p. 277). Baker also highlights, however, that the academic discipline of Translation Studies is relatively young, only a few decades old, and that although translation has been used and studied in academic environments in the past (e.g. comparative literature or contrastive linguistics), 'it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that scholars began to discuss the need to conduct systematic research on translation and to develop coherent theories of translation' (2001, p. 277).

Translation studies brings together work from a wide variety of other academic fields, including linguistics, literary theory, communication theory, history, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and cultural studies.

In this section you are going to do a translation activity, but first you will familiarise yourself with a key concept in translation theory that will help you to understand some of the challenges of translation.

The key concept in translation theory that we will focus on is the concept of equivalence. When you translate a text into another language, can you say that the two are equivalent? Or, to say it another way, when you translate a text, are you simply replacing the word in the source language by the 'equivalent' word in the target language? Scholars have grappled with these question, and offered several ways to understand the notion of equivalence, and indeed, some have also questioned the idea of equivalence itself, arguing that thinking of translation in these narrow terms reduces translation merely to a

linguistic exercise (replacing words in one language by their equivalent in another) rather than taking into account the cultural context in which the translation takes place, the type of text and its purpose, who has commissioned the translation and the needs of the audience of the translated text, among other issues.

4.2 Semantic vs communicative translation part 2

Translation scholar Peter Newmark (1916–2011) tackled the notion of equivalence by asking if a translation should try to remain as close as possible to the source language or if it should, instead, aim to be free and idiomatic. He called these two approaches semantic translation and communicative translation respectively.

According to Newmark, 'semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original' (1981, p. 39). Semantic translation has a source language bias; it is literal and the loyalty is to the ST (source text) author. It is readable but remains with the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential message of the text. It tends to be more complex, more awkward, more detailed, and tends to overtranslate – it is more specific than the original in transferring nuances of meaning. Semantic translation relates to the word or the word-group (1981, p. 60).

On the other hand, for Newmark, 'communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original' (Newmark, 1981, p. 39). Communicative translation has a target language bias; it is free and idiomatic. It attempts to make the reading process easier for the TL reader 'who does not anticipate difficulties or obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary' (Newmark, 1981, p. 39). It must emphasise the force rather than the content of the message. It is likely to be smoother, simpler, clearer, more direct, more conventional, tending to undertranslate – it uses more generic terms in difficult passages. Communicative translation relates to the sentence (1981, p. 60).

In the following activity, identify which features belong to Newmark's communicative approach, and which features are part and parcel of Newmark's semantic translation approach.

Activity 5

For each of the cases below, decide if it relates to semantic or communicative translation.

A translation that attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allows, the exact contextual meaning of the original.

- ☐ Semantic translation
- ☐ Communicative translation

A translation that makes the target language text smoother, more idiomatic.

- ☐ Semantic translation
- ☐ Communicative translation

A translation that is concerned mainly with the receptors/readers.

- ☐ Semantic translation
- ☐ Communicative translation

A translation that is concerned with the author.

- Semantic translation
- Communicative translation

A translation that attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original.

- Semantic translation
- Communicative translation

A translation that aims to recreate the precise flavour and tone of the original.

- Semantic translation
- Communicative translation

A translation used in the case of most non-literary writing, journalism, informative articles and books, textbooks, reports, scientific and technological writing, non-personal correspondence, propaganda, publicity, public notices, popular fiction.

- Semantic translation
- Communicative translation

A translation that is used in the case of original expression, where the specific words of the speaker or writer is as important as the content, e.g. philosophical, religious, political, scientific, technical or literary (authoritative texts).

- Semantic translation
- Communicative translation

Newmark acknowledged that sometimes a communicative translation worked better than a semantic one. Indeed, he maintained that a semantic translation does not allow for corrections or improvements of the source text and that therefore a communicative translation may be better on occasion since one has the right to: correct logic, clarify ambiguities and jargon, replace clumsy with elegant structures, remove obscurities, eliminate repetition, and normalise badly written texts.

4.3 Semantic vs communicative translation part 3

Newmark argued that the vast majority of texts require a communicative rather than a semantic translation. He suggested that the communicative approach is to be adopted for most non-literary writing, textbooks, technical writing, popular fiction, propaganda, whereas the semantic approach is to be adopted for texts 'where the specific language of the speaker or writer is as important as the content'. Indeed, for Newmark, 'any important statement requires a version as close to the original lexical and grammatical structure as is obtainable' (Newmark, 1981, p. 44). The example he provides is of Charles de Gaulle's 18 June 1940 broadcast and adds that autobiography, private correspondence and any personal effusion requires 'semantic treatment' since the 'intimate flavour of the original is more important than its effect on the reader' (1981, p. 45).

Activity 6

In the following table, rephrase each of the semantic translations into English into a more appropriate communicative one. Even if you do not understand the source

language, you should be able to understand the semantic translation sufficiently to be able to produce a workable communicative version:

Source text	Semantic translation	Communicative translation
Bissiger Hund!	Dog that bites!	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Défense de marcher sur le gazon	It is forbidden to walk on the turf	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Attention / Glissant	Attention / Slippery	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Frisch gestrichen!	Recently painted!	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Hombres trabajando	Men working	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Al salir tengan cuidado de no introducir el pie entre coche y andén	When you leave, take care not to put your foot in between the train and the platform	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
一箭双雕	One arrow for two birds	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
软硬兼施	Soft and hard measures combined	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Vietato l'ingresso	Entry forbidden	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Si prega di non disturbare	You are asked not to disturb	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Answer

Source text	Semantic translation	Communicative translation
Bissiger Hund!	Dog that bites!	Beware of the dog!
Défense de marcher sur le gazon	It is forbidden to walk on the turf	Keep off the grass
Attention / Glissant	Attention / Slippery	Caution / Slippery when wet
Frisch gestrichen!	Recently painted!	Wet paint!
Hombres trabajando	Men working	Men at work
Al salir tengan cuidado de no introducir el pie entre coche y andén	When you leave, take care not to put your foot in between the train and the platform	Mind the gap
一箭双雕	One arrow for two birds	To kill two birds with one stone
软硬兼施	Soft and hard measures combined	The carrot and stick approach
Vietato l'ingresso	Entry forbidden	No entry

Si prega di non disturbare

You are asked not to disturb

Do not disturb

Which approach you choose to adopt will undoubtedly depend on the translations you have to deal with. Often as a first draft, it feels natural to work semantically, e.g. from the smaller units and then build up into something more communicative, but there are many ways of tackling material for translation. At times, you might want to spell things out more literally and then a semantic approach might be more appropriate.

Now, if you would like to try the activity the other way round, it will enable you to practise doing both a semantic and a communicative translation into any language you speak. For each expression in the English source text in the first column, do a semantic translation (i.e. translate it word for word) into your other language. Then, in the communicative translation column, see if you can think of a more idiomatic way to say it in that language. If you are not sure, you can look it up online!

Source text	Semantic translation	Communicative translation
Beware of the dog!	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Keep off the grass	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Caution / Slippery when wet	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Wet paint!	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Men at work	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Mind the gap	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
To kill two birds with one stone	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
The carrot and stick approach	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
No entry	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
Do not disturb	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Conclusion

In this free course, *Translation as a career*, we have introduced you to what being a professional translator is like. We hope you have found it useful to think of the skills and knowledge needed to be a translator, both in terms of translation competence and more specifically in terms of language competence. We hope you have enjoyed meeting the translators who have shared glimpses into their lives with you, and finding out about possibilities for volunteering in this field. Finally, we hope you have started to think about how translating is not just about translating literally one word for another, but that there are other issues to consider, and that translation theory provides strategies and constructs to enable us to think about some of the issues that are involved when we translate.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [L801 Introduction to translation theory and practice](#), which is the first part of the OU's MA in Translation. You might also be interested in the second part: [L802 Translation in practice](#).

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For some additional insight into the importance of professional translation work, and the mistakes that can happen without proper preparation, see the anecdotes at this link: <https://www.languagealliance.com/resources/translations-with-major-consequences/>

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Text

What makes a good translator: What is translating? Routes into Languages: Adapted from

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!Warning! Calibri not supported<http://www.nationalnetworkfortranslation.ac.uk/resources/what-are-skills-required>

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