



South African Translators' Institute

SATI's 2008 freelance tariff survey

The 2008 SATI freelance tariff survey was conducted in June. This year, a Web-based program was used to collate the results and members were able to provide data anonymously as respondents' IP addresses were not stored in the survey results. A link to the relevant Web page was sent to all SATI members who receive email communication from the Institute, which means that approximately 680 members were invited to participate in the survey.

Of the 210 members who began the survey, 156 completed it (in other words, a return rate of 22,9%). Only the data of those who completed the survey has been reported on here.

In order to retain respondents' anonymity as far as possible, it was decided only to release the results for language combinations for which more than five responses were received. As a result, instead of asking members about rates for specific languages, we divided the languages into groups. These were English/Afrikaans, Xitsonga/Tshivenda, the Nguni language group (isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati and isiNdebele), the Sotho language group (Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana), Western European languages (such as German, French, Portuguese, Italian), Eastern European languages (such as Slovak, Hungarian, Polish), non-South African indigenous languages (such as Swahili, Shona, Lingala) and minority foreign languages (any non-African language not covered in the other categories, such as Arabic, Turkish, Japanese and Russian).

Demographics

As can be seen in the results table, the majority of responses came from members working in English/Afrikaans translation (59%), English/Afrikaans editing (55,8%), Western European language translation (34,6%), Western European language editing (12,8%) and Western European language sworn translation (10,9%). It was disappointing not to receive more responses from those working in the South African official languages other than English and Afrikaans, particularly for interpreting services.

Based on the low number of responses received for the non-South African indigenous languages and minority foreign languages for the different services, we are not able to release any results for these two language combinations. Fees in these languages will have to be extrapolated on the basis of other charges.

Of those who participated in the survey, 58,3% were ordinary members, 37,8% were accredited members, 1,9% were student members and 1,9% were agencies. Again, owing to the low number of responses from agencies we are not able to release the results of the questions asked specifically of the agencies.

The majority of respondents were female (78,2%) and represented the following age categories: 51-60 years (24,4%), 31-40 years (23,7%) and 41-50 years (21,8%). Most of the respondents lived in Gauteng (23,1% in the Tshwane metro area, 21,2% in the Johannesburg metro area) and the Western Cape (19,2% in the Cape Town metro area, 12,8% in other areas of the Western Cape).

Of those respondents working in English/Afrikaans, the majority (36,4%) were based in the Johannesburg metro area. The percentage and region was the same for those working in the Western European languages. Thirty percent of the respondents working in the Nguni languages were based in KwaZulu-Natal and 28,6% of those working in the Sotho languages were based in the North West province.

The majority of respondents worked as full-time freelancers (71,8%), while 20,5% freelanced on a part-time basis and worked as in-house language practitioners, and 5,8% worked as in-house language practitioners without doing any freelancing. Most full-time freelancers are based in Gauteng (28,8% in the Johannesburg metro and 23,7% in the Tshwane metro).

The breakdown by the economic sectors in which freelance members work shows that the education sector is by far the largest user of language services (mentioned by 42,9% of respondents). The other sectors most mentioned were translation companies/agencies (25% of respondents), government (21,4%), media and publishing (21,4%), business (19,6%) and legal (15,2%).

The in-house translators were employed mostly by national government departments (17,1% of respondents), then local government and academic institutions (14,6% each) and media companies and translation agencies (12,2% each). The majority of in-house translators were based in Gauteng (29,3% in the Tshwane metro and 22,0% in the Johannesburg metro).

This year, we asked the freelance translators for more specific information on how they charge their clients. The results can be summarised follows:

- ◆ **Word count:** The majority of respondents (56,9%) charged according to the number of words in the source text and not according to the target text. The main reason given was that clients often insist on knowing upfront what the total charge is going to be. Those who charge according to target text indicated they do this usually when it is not possible to do an electronic word count of the source text (if it is in hard copy, for example). The results were similar for all the language combinations.
- ◆ **Urgent/after-hours surcharge:** The majority of respondents (60,8%) did not have a surcharge for urgent/after-hours work. Those who did, however, mostly charged between 20% and 30% extra on top of their normal rate. It was interesting to note that although freelancers are less likely to charge a surcharge than in-house translators, when they do charge extra the percentage is higher than what in-house translators charge.
- ◆ **Technical surcharge:** The majority of respondents (64,5%) did not have a technical surcharge. Those who did, however, charged on average between 10% and 20% extra on top of their normal rate. Many charged an extra 5c or 10c per word (rather than a percentage).
- ◆ **Consecutive interpreters:** The majority of consecutive interpreters (73,0%) had a standard price for all their clients. Those who differentiate between clients said that they charge overseas clients more than local clients, and they charge business/organisations more than government, NGOs or private clients.
- ◆ **Hourly rates for translation:** 92,4% of respondents did not charge an hourly rate for translation.
- ◆ **Hourly rates for editing:** 77,7% of respondents did not have an hourly rate for editing. Of those who did, the maximum was R500/hour, the minimum R60/hour, the average R235/hour and the median R200/hour.
- ◆ **Charging agencies:** We asked respondents for the rates they charged their private clients as well as the rates they charged translation agencies. On average, the rates were very similar, although only those working in English/Afrikaans translation and editing tended to charge the agencies more than private clients. For all the other language combinations and for interpreting, the agencies were charged slightly less than (or the same as) the private clients. However, as the figures differed by a few cents per word or a few rand per hour in each case, the difference is negligible.

Methodology

The Institute investigated the possibility of having the survey conducted by a market research company this year. However, the cost – in the region of R100 000 – was prohibitive. We therefore had to go back to a less statistically valid method of voluntary participation. With a response rate of over 20%, the results are probably still reasonably representative, but may be taken under reserve.

Two measures are given in the survey results – the mean (or average) and the median.

- The mean is obtained by adding all the values received and dividing the total by the number of responses. This gives the average charge over the entire sample.
- The median is the “middle” value of those received, indicating that in the sample half of the respondents charge more than the median and half the respondents charge less.