



TRANSLATION AS A CAREER

What is translation?

A translator puts a text written in one language into another language in such a way that the message remains the same. In order to do this, the translator must have the following abilities:

- An outstanding command of the target language (preferably the translator's mother tongue) in order to produce a translation in an appropriate style and in idiomatically and grammatically faultless language
- A thorough knowledge of the source language so that the translation conveys the same message as that contained in the source text
- Knowledge of the relevant field of specialisation (e.g. law, medicine, agriculture, etc.) to ensure a grasp of the subject matter of a text
- A sound general knowledge
- Application to detail (e.g. doing research to find the right term or turn of phrase; factual accuracy; layout of the source text)

What is the nature of a translator's work?

The multilingual nature of South African society necessitates translation over a wide field. Translators usually specialise in one of the following fields:

- *Technical translation:* This involves the translation of documents of a technical or scientific nature for all sectors of the economy (*inter alia* for multinational companies), research bodies and government departments.
- *Administrative translation:* The State, in compliance with its official policy of equal treatment of all official languages, still provides a great deal of work in this field because of the many official documents of Parliament and government departments, such as annual reports, that have to be translated into the official languages. The Constitution requires national and provincial governments to use at least two official languages.
- *Commercial translation:* This involves the translation of financial texts and legal documents for, *inter alia*, the banking sector, the commercial and industrial sectors and government departments.
- *Media translation:* This comprises the translation of press material for a variety of newspaper and magazine concerns as well as government departments.
- *Literary translation:* A type of translation generally considered to be highly demanding because of the artistic touch that is needed. Publishers usually employ translators on a freelance basis to translate novels and children's books. The translation of poetry and plays is mostly done by writers.
- *Advertising translation:* This involves the translation (and frequently also the creation) of advertising copy, such as advertisements for all sections of the media (newspapers, radio, television, etc.) – a very demanding discipline because it likewise involves creative work.
- *Television translation:* This involves the translation of mainly television plays, but also documentary programmes.

The sworn translator translates documents for legal purposes and then certifies the translations as true and correct. He/she must pass a sworn translator's examination and must be sworn in by the High Court.

What are the entry requirements for this occupation?

A BA degree with one or more official languages as major subjects is usually required. In addition to a knowledge of modern languages, it is also recommended that prospective translators include subjects such as economics, political science, history, etc. in their courses. In keeping with the rest of the modern professional world with its increasing specialisation requirements, aspirant translators may enrol for courses in translation studies or related subjects offered at various universities. Information on academic training for translators is available from the address at the end of this pamphlet.

Practical in-service training is a very important aspect of the training of new translators. In big translation offices this is undertaken by experienced and qualified members of staff.

Some employers require a pass in their internal translation examination in order to be appointed as a translator.

What are the prospects in this profession?

At present the primary need locally is for translators between the official languages. The need for translation in the official indigenous languages is growing. The need for translation in European languages such as German, French, Portuguese and Russian is changing as South Africa's stature in the international arena grows.

The state is one of the main employers of translators in South Africa, *inter alia* through the National Language Service, the SA National Defence Force, Parliament, the Department of Justice and the provincial governments. In the private sector banks, insurance companies, multinational companies (such as oil, computer and pharmaceutical companies), publishing firms, trade unions and translation agencies make use of translation services.