**Translator Facts: Everything You Need To Know About a Career in Translation**



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Language has been around for up to 200,000 years, and written language has for about 7,000. That makes for a lot of interesting translator facts!

During that time, translators have played a critical role in the development of trade, the exchange of global ideas, and navigating the wars that have shaped power across the face of the globe. Translation is an ancient and noble vocation that is still thriving today.

So, you want to be a part of the storied lineage of human translators? Let’s look at what that means, and at some of the interesting translator facts that make up this colorful, thriving industry.

**Translator Facts #1: It’s not just about fluency in source and target languages**

A translator is a custodian of intent. Her job is to see that the invisible idea behind the text arrives intact with the translated document. The vocation demands a considerable amount of attention to detail, and the ability to thrive on monotonous work.

It is egoless work, and a translator must be content as a background messenger, often having her work overlooked. In fact, the more successful a translation, the more invisible it is.

**Translator Facts #2: Translators are mobile**

Wealthy merchants used to travel with personal translators as part of their caravans along the Silk Road. Translators have always been natural travelers. But whether you’re a wandering spirit or the domestic type, the digital age allows translators to work remotely. This is a unique kind of freedom and independence for a working professional.

**Translator Facts #3: A translator is her own boss**

As a translator, you work on a project-by-project basis, which means you manage your own schedule, and pick up as much work as you want depending on your needs and market demand. No clocking in, nobody looking over your shoulder, and no demoralizing middle managers interfering with your work. You work for yourself and your clients.

Who your clients are depends largely upon you. You might go completely freelance and try to find your own individual clients, or you could contract with a translation services provider to bring you jobs.

Most translators take a lot of pride in delivering high quality work, gathering experience, learning, and translator facts of their own. But like any freelancing job, customers who are lay people often under-appreciate the quality of what you do. Instead, they tend to prioritize speed, erroneously assuming that translation is a mechanical process.

**Translator Facts #4: Here are the most frequent languages**

At Day Translations, our most requested non-English language is Spanish. But there is also a high demand for Arabic. Mandarin is generally considered the most important language for business, with over a billion speakers.

Some research suggests that by 2050, French could once again become the globally dominant lingua franca. Most translators consider Spanish the easiest language to translate.

**Translator Facts #5: Translation is a $40 billion industry**

It employs hundreds of thousands of professional translators worldwide. The United States is its biggest market, followed by Europe. But Asia is rising fast.

The translation industry was largely unchanged by technology until the 1970s. In the past few years, machine translation and AI have presented some interesting and unprecedented technological developments.

However, the need for human translation has not been impacted, and there is no indication that MT and AI will replace human translators.

**Translator Facts #6: The English language has around 250,000 words**

In point of fact, it’s impossible to accurately quantify. As Oxford Living Dictionaries points out: “It’s impossible to count the number of words in a language, because it’s so hard to decide what actually counts as a word. Is *dog* one word, or two (a noun meaning ‘a kind of animal’, and a verb meaning ‘to follow persistently’)? If we count it as two, then do we count inflections separately too (e.g. *dogs* = plural noun, *dogs* = present tense of the verb). Is *dog-tired* a word, or just two other words joined together? Is *hot dog* really two words, since it might also be written as *hot-dog* or even *hotdog*?”

It’s also difficult to decide what counts as ‘English’.

But as a ballpark estimate, a quarter million is close. About half of these words are nouns, a quarter are adjectives, one seventh verbs, and the rest are conjunctions, prepositions, exclamations, suffixes and so forth.

You only need a vocabulary of about 1,000 words to get by. With 3,000 words you can understand 95 percent of English writing. An average adult vocabulary for a native English speaker will be in the 10,000-20,000 word range, with 25,000 being graduate level and 35,000 being Shakespearian.

**Translator Facts #7: A professional translator translates 2000 words per day**

Some days are speedier than others, as are some texts. But the consensus seems to be that 2,500 is a good number to shoot for, and 2,000 is the threshold for a satisfying day’s work.

Some say 250 an hour is a good gauge. That’s about 520,000 words per year (equal to nearly one copy of David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest,*or 88.5 percent of Leo Tolstoy’s *War & Peace*).

**Translator Facts #8: The Bible is the world’s most translated document**

The Bible has played an important historical role in the development of translation, printing and written language. It has been translated into more languages by far than any other written work, including fictional languages. Here’s a sample of John 3:16 in Klingon:

*“vaD  joH’a’  vaj loved the  qo’,  vetlh  ghaH  nobta’  Daj  wa’  je  neH  puqloD,  vetlh  ‘Iv  HartaH  Daq  ghaH should ghobe’  chIlqu’,  ‘ach  ghaj eternal yIn.”*

Here’s the same verse in J.R.R. Tolkien’s elvish language Quenya:

*“An Eru emélië i mar tenna antië ernóna Yondorya, i ilquen ye savë sessë lá nauva nancarna, mal samuva oira coivië.”*

In Na’vi, from the movie *Avatar:*

*“Fìfya kifkey leru yawne Yawäru, alunta pol tolìng ‘awa ‘itanit sneyä, fte pori fratìspusaw ke tiverkup, ki fìfrapor livu tìrey frakrr.”*

And in LOLCat, a fictional internet language:

*“So liek teh Ceiling Kitteh lieks teh ppl lots and he sez ‘Oh hai I givez u me only kitteh and ifs u beleeves him u wont evr diez no moar, kthxbai!'”*

Of the next 25 most translated books, 15 of them are published by Watch Tower Society, a Jehovah’s Witness organization.

**Translator Facts #9: The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is next**

The UN Commission on Human Rights’ document has been translated into 462 languages. And as far as literature proper, the most translated book is Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s 1943 French novel *The Little Prince*, translated into 300 languages.

**Translator Facts #10: The short story highest on the list is from Kenya**

“The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright” by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was published in 2016 in Kenya. Though the author is fluent in English and has taught at New York University and Yale, he deliberately wrote the fable in Kikuyu in the interest of language preservation.

**Translator Facts #11: UNESCO has a cool online database of translated works**

This database is called Index Translationum. Authors with the most copies of translated works in print are Agatha Christie and Jules Verne, followed by someone named William Shakespeare

Source: https://www.daytranslations.com/blog/translator-facts-career/