Interview with Cressida Stolp

Welcome to the first installment of *Our World of Words* (OWOW), a new column in *The ATA Chronicle* that will take a look at the language services industry through a series of interviews. We translators and interpreters sometimes think we're a world unto ourselves, but of course we are part of a much larger universe of linguistic functions, disciplines, and hierarchies. *OWOW* will explore some of the neighboring planets in our universe, such as the agency world, the university world, and the publishing world, in conversations with an agency project manager, a university professor of translation, a UN interpreter, a lexicographer, and so on.

Now I would like to introduce Cressida Stolp, the senior project manager at Divergent Language Solutions."[1] As it turns out, Cressida and I have an Argentine connection. After graduating from University of California Santa Cruz (2004) with a BA in global economics, then studying in Cordoba, Spain, she spent three years in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, where she taught English and worked as an editor for Spanish translations. She then took an intensive interpreting course at the Granada Institute of International Studies in Spain, and went on to graduate with an MA in translation and linguistics from the University of Westminster, London (2012). With a solid education under her belt, Cressida says that she, "knew I wanted to be a freelance translator." Recognizing the challenges of entering the field with relatively little experience, she joined Divergent Language Solutions in San Francisco as an assistant project manager. Two years later, she is now the senior project manager, training new project managers as they're added to the team. Cressida was the lead project manager in the company's largest project to date, coordinating some 200 linguists to translate over 2 million words into 14 languages. "My goal is to learn the industry from the inside before ultimately venturing into the world of freelance," she says.

Countless translators have already taken that step.[2] Though some work directly

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with their clients, many rely on agencies that handle a vast amount of translation and interpreting business, so I was interested to hear what a project manager like Cressida had to say on a number of matters.

Divergent is a full-service translation and interpreting agency specializing in the legal and medical fields. What is the approximate breakdown of the company's translation and interpreting business?
Roughly speaking, our services are split as follows: 40% legal/business, 40% medical, and 20% technical. About 5–10% of our projects involve interpreting.

Are you involved in the recruiting and vetting of potential translators and interpreters? How is that process handled?
I'm involved in the recruiting and vetting process. We have a set of test documents for specific fields that allow us to compare new translations with previous versions. We have a database of trusted linguists whom we hire to evaluate the translation tests and identify the potential translators' strengths and weaknesses. Once linguists are approved, they are included in the regular rotation.

New translators and interpreters want to know how to get started, and those who are established want to know how to expand their

businesses. What specific advice would you give to those who want to apply to an agency and get into its system as a regular provider?
Providing a clear description of your experience—including your experience outside the translation industry—on your CV is a good way to break into the system. You may have gorgeous linguistic skills, but we can't know that until we test you. In order to make it to that stage, we should be made aware of your specializations and your experience in those fields. Of course, the best way to draw attention to yourself is to have someone else provide a referral. If a mutual contact or someone in the field gives us your name, we trust them to introduce us to linguists of the same caliber as those we already employ.

What do you look for in a résumé?
We receive 10–20 résumés and CVs every day. Some linguists stand out because they have years of experience in a particular field or because they work in language pairs that are hard to find. For new translators working in the more common language pairs, what we look for is real-world experience in their fields. For instance, do they have an MBA or a Juris Doctor? Have they worked in a bank? Can they produce work that matches the standards of their specialized fields? These are important distinctions for those who want to show that their translation skills are based on something more substantial than a three-month backpacking tour in Italy.

How much weight does ATA certification carry when evaluating a translator as a potential provider?
When searching ATA's online directory for a linguist, I first look for those who are ATA-certified. Although we have our own internal vetting system, this will at least tell me that the linguists who are certified *want* to set themselves apart from the rest. We can't know if their linguistic capabilities are better than those who haven't taken the exam, but it shows that they take themselves and their businesses seriously enough to market themselves in this way.

In your opinion, what are the benefits to a translator of working with an agency?

I spend a large portion of my day managing clients and their expectations. They may be lawyers who send 80 separate documents, each one more urgent than the last, or clients with redlines or rush translations. As an agency, we filter all the frenetic activity during pre-production so that the translator can focus solely on the task of translation.

The company brochure talks about strict quality control guidelines at every step of the translation process. How are those controls implemented?

We test our translators for their specific capabilities and assign projects to those who are comfortable with the particular subject matter. We provide them with style guides and glossaries and put them in touch with other linguists when the project is large enough to require a group effort. We have trusted teams of editors, desktop publishing editors, and proofreaders. We also allow a comfortable cushion of time on the back end to implement quality and formatting checks.

Does the agency provide feedback for translators and interpreters?

When a linguist requests specific feedback, we're happy to oblige. Occasionally, clients will express feedback of their own, which I pass along to the translator or interpreter so that he or she receives acknowledgement for a job well done, or else becomes aware of the areas where improvement is needed.

What are the top three qualities your company looks for in a translator?

We look for high-quality translations, attention to detail (punctuality included!), and strong communication skills. This can range from asking questions or being quick to respond.

What are the top three qualities your company looks for in an interpreter?

The top three skills we look for are experience in the particular field, professionalism (this also includes punctuality!), and strong, articulate communication skills. A brief phone conversation can tell a lot about what kind of interpreting services a linguist will provide.

Can you tell me something about the logistics of managing a huge project?

For large multi-language projects, organization is the key. At a project's inception, a thorough evaluation of the material and the size of the content is imperative to construct a plan for a project that can often span several months. Spreadsheets are my friends! We track every file, linguist, production stage, and the individual deadlines. We update glossaries, translation memories, and style guides whenever possible. I also keep extensive e-mail records with clients regarding their specific needs. When managing a very large multi-document project, there is a learning curve at the beginning as we coordinate a new team of linguists to work together as efficiently as possible. Once everything is smoothed out, there is something very fluid and enjoyable about the routine of the workflow. There are less chances for surprises. I often prefer managing these large, rolling projects over the smaller, more fast-paced turnarounds.

From your perspective, what are the growth areas for translation and interpreting, both in the U.S. and in the global arena?

Being based in San Francisco, most of our interpreting services are for the technology industry. As San Francisco continues to attract startups and tech companies from around the world, I believe there's great opportunity for all language pairs in the tech field. This applies to translation as well. Technical projects are often the most difficult to place because there is only a small pool of highly specialized technical translators.

Computer-assisted translation (CAT) is obviously here to stay. How much of this sort of work does your company handle? Do you provide CAT tools to the translator? Which market sectors will be most affected by CAT in the future?

We try to use CAT tools whenever possible. For longstanding clients, it's the best way to ensure consistent terminology and to maintain our high expectations of quality. We don't provide CAT tools, but do provide user-friendly files to linguists, depending on their capabilities and the programs they have at home. We use Wordfast because it has proved to be extremely user-friendly. I believe that the pharmaceutical and technology fields will continue to benefit from CAT tools

in the future. The impact that CAT tools have on longer-standing legal projects is particularly relevant.

Is there a future for translators who do not use CAT tools? If so, in what fields?

All that said, I believe it will be a very long time before CAT tools are able to produce anything comparable to human translation. There are too many nuances and implied meanings in each language and the cultures they represent. Trying to capture them is the most challenging aspect of translation, and it takes an empathetic, highly critical human to do it. As long as there are lawyers and doctors there will be a need for human translators. That's because they cannot afford mistranslations in these fields.

I don't want to ask any specific questions about rates, but is there anything you would like to say about rates, rush rates, translation versus editing rates, interpreting rates, etc.?

Every client and every project is entirely unique. We may have to drop our rate to win a bid or add a rush rate to compensate for a linguist working quickly to meet a deadline. We're always negotiating rates with our clients. We ask that they be flexible when we need to negotiate. Likewise, we will be flexible when they feel the need to negotiate. The industry is altogether subjective!

Thank you, Cressida, for your time and your insights. I hope our readers have enjoyed this interview. I look forward to meeting more professionals like you for the next installment of *Our World of Worlds*. ◉

NOTES

1   www.divergentls.com/about/index.php

2   ATA's membership is broken down as follows: 70% independent contractors; 10% private sector employees; 10% company owners; 6% educators; and 4% government employees (including military).

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