



GeekSpeak

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Got Translation?

The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators (www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit).

Forgive me for stepping over my tech guy boundaries once again as I share something important but not primarily technical. (Yes, there are such things!)

I just got back from a trip to the great city of Buenos Aires and a gathering of 1,700 translators for the conference of the Colegio de Traductores Públicos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. I was impressed with the high level of many sessions and the attendees' curiosity, but there was one event that really took my breath away—the conference was opened by none less than Argentine President Kirchner herself. Yes, you read that correctly. There was a translation conference in Argentina and it was personally opened by a major world leader, the president of Argentina. Should you still have lingering doubts about how special this was, why don't we ask President Obama to open ATA's upcoming Annual Conference in Denver and see what happens?

Now, Kirchner's politics are not particularly popular with many of those attending translators (though everyone there seemed to succumb to

her charisma), and what she actually said did not make much sense (but, again, there was the charisma). However, I cannot even begin to say how much her presence meant to the Argentine translation community, and, dare I say, by extension, the rest of the worldwide translation community.

I think—in fact, I know—that right now translation is more in the public eye than ever before. Not a week goes by without major stories about translation (or interpreting) appearing in the major media. Agreed, these often focus on failures, such as the poor, stumbling interpreter for Mexican President Calderón when he met with Obama in May, or the translation bloopers in a long-standing series of articles in *The New York Times* and many other media outlets. But there are also many articles about machine translation, which make many of us feel uneasy but definitely represent the fascination that the general public has with translation. There are stories like the one about Amazon's plans to release a series of books consisting only of translated literature. And, of course, there are accounts of a state leader opening a translation conference.

What does this mean for us? It means we need to strike while the iron is hot and be vocal about ourselves and our profession.

Let's write articles and have them published in major media outlets. Let's compose blog postings or other publications that are interesting not only to the translation community but to the general public as well. Let's be proactive in online discussions and not shy (while still diplomatic) in sharing our viewpoints. And let's present at conferences that are aimed beyond the boundaries of our industry. Each person who speaks up clearly benefits personally and professionally, but in extension it benefits us all.

We are fortunate. We did not need to hire any ad agencies to create a “Got ~~Milk~~ Translation?” campaign. Instead, the attention of the world seems to have just fallen into our laps (again). So let's seize the day and go to work on educating that world toward a better understanding of who we are and what we do.

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conditions” in your e-mail response? Please see the quote for the detailed date that we will deliver this translation: April 3 at 5:00 p.m. PDT.

4:12 p.m.

Potential client: *But I just told you I agree.*

4:37 p.m.

Judy: Do you mind if I give you a

quick call to firm up all the details?

Total elapsed time: 7 hours, 2 minutes.

Lesson learned: This could have been solved with a quick phone call, which is what eventually happened. I called the potential customer, gave her reassurance regarding the process, discussed all outstanding issues, received

her confirmation, and started the project the same evening. While e-mail is a powerful communication tool, and documents and contracts have to be e-mailed, many times a phone call is the ideal business partner to speed up the process, answer any questions, and cover all your bases. As we say in Mexico: *hablando se entiende la gente.*

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