



Piercing the Veil: OMG, You Say They Do What?

By María Cristina de la Vega



Nataly Kelly



Jost Zetsche

I just finished reading *Found in Translation*, the new book by Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetsche. (It is already lined up for a fifth print run!) I recommend it heartily to anyone interested in translation and interpreting. Having worked in the industry for so many years and always striving to keep up with new developments, I now realize that until I read the book, I only had a miniscule idea of all of the ways our profession affects global events ranging from personal issues to business to governmental affairs and everything in between. It is an enjoyable “must read,” and it will broaden your horizons and allow you to speak authoritatively to promote what we do. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to talk with Nataly and Jost about their thoughts on the book and the industry in general.

What new fields do you see opening up for our profession in the digital

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age? Have you noticed any type of interpreting that has become obsolete over the years?

NK: The digital age is helping both the fields of translation and interpreting evolve, although it is also making things more complex. For the past few years, I have been interested in real-time online translation, which is somewhat of a hybrid between interpreting and translation. It occurs in real time, but is in written form.

Data culled for *The Language Services Market: 2012* from Common Sense Advisory indicates that all

types of interpreting are growing, but especially onsite interpreting. There is always a lot of buzz about video and telephone interpreting, but they are not growing as swiftly as one might expect. Onsite interpreting has not become obsolete. Quite the contrary, it is one of the fastest-growing services in the market.

As for types of interpreting that may become obsolete, some people believe that consecutive interpreting eventually will, since simultaneous is so much faster, even though some studies suggest that the quality of simultaneous is often inferior, ➡

mostly due to the delivery speed. When it comes to language services, it seems that speed trumps everything else for most applications and settings.

What is on your “wish list” for technological advances/devices for the profession, and how close are we to achieving any of them?

JZ: In general, I think we are on the right path with how translation technology is developing. For a long time we were stuck in the same old paradigms of translation memory and termbases, but in the past couple of years development has started to move in more interesting areas.

One area that I think is particularly interesting is a more intelligent analysis of data in databases such as translation memories. This results in many more possible matches, also called subsegment matching. The other area that I expect great things from is a close integration of machine translation into more traditional technology. I do not mean the typical “pre-translation” by machine translation that is post-edited by a translator, but processes by which data that the translator has collected can “communicate” with external machine translation data to achieve more helpful results.

On the project management side of operations, I think we will see more efficient models to allow for direct contact between the translation buyer and the translator. This in turn will challenge language services providers to find creative ways to bring added value to the table.

How can we bring together language associations around the world to help their members leapfrog the learning curve in those areas where the profes-

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sion is very young or has not developed significantly?

JZ: This is an interesting question. First, we can learn what went wrong when translation technology initially entered the market 15 or 20 years ago. It was a painful experience to convince all of the different stakeholders—translation buyers, language services providers, translators, and educators—of the value of those technologies. Those stakeholders who adopted the technology at the beginning—primarily translation buyers and larger language services providers—found that their needs were naturally accommodated more in the ensuing development process.

How could clearer communication have made this process go more smoothly? That is an essential question to answer and then apply so that we can do a better job of introducing new technology and helping other industries get over similar humps. For instance, perhaps some of the more technology-skeptical interpreters could learn from the experiences of translators.

Our profession is actually still underdeveloped in some ways in the U.S., where many members of the translation and interpreting fields have a non-industry-specific educational background. Many places in Europe and South America are ahead of the game. I believe our emphasis should be on more accessible tertiary

education in the U.S. that prepares students for actual work in the real world.

Associations can play an important role in helping to build and promote such programs. In the U.S. translation arena, associations tend to be compartmentalized. Rather than having one or two associations that can speak for the entire industry, our current associations represent specific constituencies. I would like to see our associations speak with a single, united voice that represents the industry as a whole rather than focusing on the dissimilarities among the different voices. This is something that we tried to do when writing *Found in Translation*—represent a multiplicity of perspectives with a strong, cohesive voice. I think associations should do the same to forge a stronger profile in supporting and initiating educational programs and raising public awareness.

After reading your book and about the successful instances of translation crowdsourcing for well-known publications such as *The Economist*, do you think crowdsourcing can spread to traditional sources of income for translators?

NK: Crowdsourced translation has been a source of income for freelancers and agencies for many years now. Already, many companies pay

for professional editing services and volunteer translator community management. It just is not a very big area, which is why so few people ever see those projects.

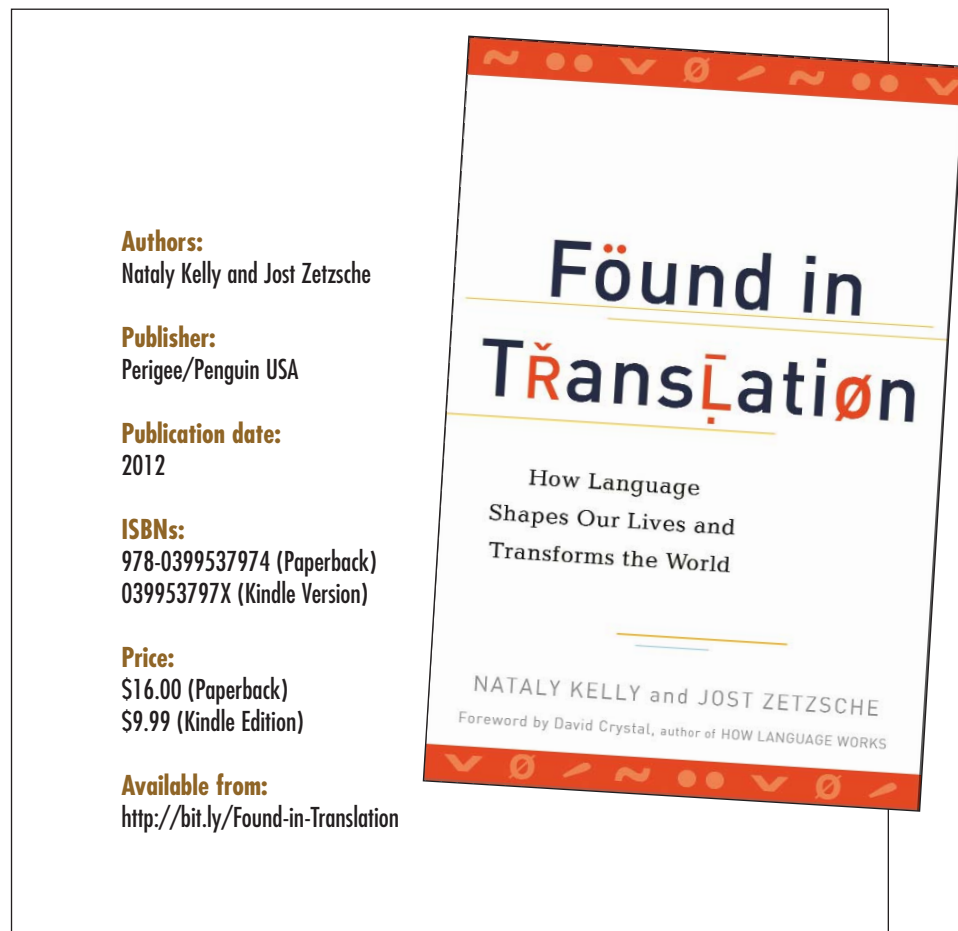
However, it is important to remember that crowdsourced translation is not free. Also, saving money is not the primary motivation for using this model. Many high-tech companies do this just because their online communities begin to request it. In some cases, users simply begin translating content without them even being asked to do so by the companies. As a result, some of this activity springs up without the company's permission or even their awareness at first. This is the case of *The Economist*, where a number of devoted fans routinely volunteer their free time to translate the British periodical into Chinese, to the tune of three hundred pages' worth of articles per week.

Have you noticed any pronounced differences in work categories between the U.S. and other parts of the world for interpreters and translators?

JZ: In many parts of the world outside the U.S., translators and interpreters have a stronger standing because they are seen as "real" professionals. In the U.S., with its generally low level of language learning, anyone with a smattering of any second language is perceived as capable of engaging in translation and interpreting. We hope that our book can serve to change that.

Considering the large number of retiring baby-boomer interpreters around the world, how can we increase the number of potential interpreters in the feeder?

NK: Some educational programs for



interpreters report to me that their graduates cannot find work. Other sources are telling me that there is a shortage of interpreters. Much of it depends on geography, setting, and language combinations. For example, the U.S. has a shortage of interpreters for languages of national security. Locations that receive large refugee populations also typically struggle to find enough medical, community, and court interpreters for new arrivals. The challenge is not unique to the U.S., of course. Countries around the world face similar challenges.

The fastest way to attract more young people to the field is to improve remuneration, but that alone is not enough. The profession as a whole needs to become more devel-

oped and mature. Education and training programs are lacking for many areas of the field, especially in the U.S., but we are seeing more and more emerge each year.

From your experience, what advice would you give to those considering becoming interpreters and translators who want to make it to the top as quickly as possible?

JZ and NK: We can answer this one in unison—do not be afraid of technology! It really is your friend. Technology, training, and passion for languages are really the three key ingredients for success.

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