

International Certification Study: Finland and Sweden

By Jiri Stejskal

In the January issue we looked at the complex certification process of the Canadian *Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec*. We will now move on to Scandinavia, with a review of the Finnish and Swedish certification processes. The following description is based on the information provided by Meeri Yule, membership chair of the Mid-America Chapter of the ATA; Ari Penttilä, vice-chairman of the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (Suomen kääntäjien ja tulkkien liitto, SKTL); Sven H.E. Borei, chairman of the Swedish Association of Professional Translators (Sveriges Facköversättarförening, SFÖ); David Jones, chairman of the Federation of Authorized Translators (Föreningen Auktoriserade Translaterer, FAT); and Kerstin Björkholm, representative of the Swedish Legal, Financial, and Administrative Service Agency (Kammarkollegiet).

Finnish professional linguists are organized under the umbrella of the SKTL. Until 1987, the certification process was administered by both the Finnish Chamber of Commerce and the Translator Examination Board. Currently, certification exams are administered solely by the Translator Examination Board, appointed by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland. The Translator Examination Board has been administering exams for translators since 1967, which is when the first Act on “sworn translators” came into effect. The current type of examination was introduced in 1988, when the Act was amended. In order to become certified, the candidate must pass a translation exam consisting of two parts: general and specialized. Examinations are conducted between any two domestic languages,

or a domestic and foreign language, in either direction. The domestic languages are Finnish, Swedish, and Lapp (Sami). No educational entry qualification has been prescribed for the test, but the candidate must be a legally competent person residing in one of the member states of the European Union or in some other country included in the European Economic Area (EEA). Further

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information on the certification procedure and on the SKTL is available at www.megabaud.fi/~sktl, or you may contact Ari Penttilä directly at asengl@kolumbus.fi.

In Sweden, the certification process also used to be administered by the Chamber of Commerce, but the responsibility was taken over by the state at the beginning of the 1960s—originally by the Swedish Board of Trade and now by the Kammarkollegiet (www.kammarkollegiet.se). The following rules and procedures are required by the Kammarkollegiet (based on the information received directly from the Kammarkollegiet):

Conditions of Authorization

To qualify for authorization as a translator, you must:

- Reside in Sweden or any other state within the EEA;
- Be 18 years of age and not under the legal guardianship of an administrator (under the provisions of Chap. 11, Sec. 7 of the Code on Parents and Children) or be subject to any similar restrictions in another state;
- Be of known personal integrity and otherwise be suitable to work as a translator; and
- Have passed the proficiency examination as set down by the Kammarkollegiet.

If special grounds exist, a person residing outside the EEA may also qualify for authorization.

Administration of the Test

The examination is held in September in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Umeå. On each examination, you may translate from **one** language to **one** other language only. One of these languages must be Swedish.

Once authorized, translators have their own individual stamp and are entitled to vouch for the accuracy of their translations. In some cases, Swedish government agencies are enjoined to entrust translation to authorized translators, and an authorized translation is required in a number of official contexts. Authorization is a requirement for some translation posts within the Swedish civil service and for inclusion in some of the framework procurements of translation services by state agencies. Some authorized translators are authorized to work from more than one language into Swedish, and some are authorized to work both to and from Swedish into another language, but the vast majority are authorized in one direction only.

There are two organizations for translators in Sweden—the already-mentioned FAT and SFÖ. FAT only admits authorized translators while SFÖ membership is open to anyone who meets their criteria for entry. FAT currently has about 325 members, working either into or from about 30 languages. FAT represents the interests of these translators and organizes annual seminars for candidates for the authorization test. It also publishes a quarterly newsletter called *Fataburen*, and is involved in the production of word lists. Further information is available at the Federation's website (www.eurofat.se) in Swedish only, or directly from the Federation's chairman, David Jones, at david@rhetorica.se.

According to the chairman of the SFÖ, the organization feels that the government authorization does not successfully answer the question as to whether a translator maintains a high level of ability and quality over time. The test, being academic in nature, does not address the question of end-user satisfaction or any of the ISO- and/or DIN-related translation administration issues. In an attempt to accomplish this, the admission procedures of the SFÖ are very strict, and a great emphasis is placed on continuing education. To be admitted to full SFÖ membership, a translator must provide three recommendations from customers for each language pair, and submit proof of having worked five years as a professional translator (applicants who do not meet the five-year requirement can become associate members). There are currently approximately 650 members in the association. Applications are screened by members of the SFÖ board. All recommendations are checked, with the focus being on ascertaining the applicant's level of

established ability and capacity. There is no requirement that an applicant be a citizen or resident of Sweden, nor that Swedish be one of the languages of the pair. Translators are required to translate only into their mother tongue, though exceptions may be granted by the membership committee. Further information on the SFÖ can be obtained directly from Sven Borei at heskon@algonet.se, or at the organization's website at www.sfoe.se.

The above-mentioned Swedish Kammarkollegiet has, according to law, an advisory council for questions relating to interpretation and translation (Rådgivandenämnden för tolk- och översättningsfrågor) where the SFÖ and FAT each have a seat. All major interpretation organizations are represented, as are the larger users of authorized interpreters and translators. The council deals with standards, integration of standards, problems with the test procedures, the definition of languages, and other related questions at their semi-annual meetings. In between sessions, there are task forces on specific questions. This council has potential to develop into a major player in raising and maintaining interpretation and translation standards in Sweden.

Another form of certification in Sweden, though as yet without any formal linkage to any of the above-named organizations, are various university courses leading to a diploma. The main representative is the Interpreter and Translator Institute at the University of Stockholm (Tolk- och översättarinstitutet, TÖI), with which the SFÖ has first-level contacts in an effort to ensure that those who graduate have attained a quality level that is in itself sufficient for membership in the SFÖ.

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Finnish and Swedish organizations in terms of mutual recognition of linguistic credentials, Sven Borei of the SFÖ has expressed interest in such an arrangement either within FIT in general or else limited to the ATA and SFÖ. Next time we will revisit the certification process in Canada, namely the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council certification, as well as the current initiative of the Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia, geared toward mutual recognition of credentials between the ATA and STIBC.

As the editor of this series, I encourage readers to submit any relevant information concerning non-U.S. certification or similar programs, as well as comments on the information published in this series, to my e-mail address at jiri@cetra.com.

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