

International Certification Study: Spain and Portugal

By Jiri Stejskal

After reviewing a variety of private certification programs in Japan in the last issue, we will now revisit the continental model of certification by the government. This article will focus on the certification process in Spain, because Portuguese translators and interpreters go to ATA or elsewhere for certification and accreditation, as neither the Portuguese government nor any private organizations offer certification in the sense described in this series. Being of an orderly mind, I could not but wonder why I typed “Spain and Portugal” in the title of this column rather than the other way around, which would at least follow the order of the alphabet. After some reflection, I remembered the “kit and caboodle” example of Steven Pinker, professor of psychology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He stated that there are sound patterns that people prefer all over the world, such as short words coming before long words, or soft sounds coming before hard sounds. Hence, razzle-dazzle, not dazzle-razzle, and kit and caboodle, not caboodle and kit.

Having said that, I will begin with the longer- and harder-sounding Portugal anyway. Alberto Carvalho (betoaguair@yahoo.com), a freelance Portuguese translator, informs me that while there is no certification program for translators and interpreters in Portugal, there are several universities offering five-year programs for translators and interpreters, among them the Universidade Católica De Lisboa and the Instituto superior de linguas e Administração. The diplomas obtained from these universities are fully recognized by the Ministry of Education.

Translators and interpreters in Portugal are organized in the Associação Portuguesa de Tradutores

(APT), a member of the International Federation of Translators (FIT). While APT does not offer any certification, admission to membership is based on the evaluation of candidates’ resumes and proof of related work experience. APT’s web address is www.ap.pt.

In Spain, the situation is quite different, and can be compared to that of Argentina, described in the June 2002 issue. Alejandra Devoto (ale@aledevoto.com), who became a “traductor público,” or sworn translator, in Argentina but later relocated to Spain, provided me with detailed information on certification for Spanish translators and interpreters.

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In order to become a sworn translator in Spain, one has to earn a university degree first (not necessarily in translation) and pass an examination at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For this examination, the candidate must be a “diplomado universitario” (i.e., have a university degree called a diploma, which requires three years of study). Any diploma granted by a foreign university must first be validated by the Spanish Ministry of Education. The eligibility requirements also state that the candidate must be of age, and be either Spanish or a national of any country belonging to the European Union.

Robert Sette, current ATA director, generously provided a translation of the most recent relevant Spanish legislation (BOE 8322):

In virtue of the provisions of Royal Decree 79/1996, dated January 26, which amends various articles of the Regulation governing the Office of Interpretation of Languages, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“Boletín Oficial del Estado” dated February 23), and the provisions of the Order dated February 8, 1996 by which standards were established regarding examinations for the appointment of Sworn Interpreters (BOE of [February] 23), examinations for Sworn Interpreters are hereby called for, which shall be held as of October 1, 2002.

In order to participate in the examinations for Sworn Interpreters, the applicant must meet the following requirements:

- a) *Be of legal age.*
- b) *Have at least the Spanish degree of University Diploma, Technical Engineer, Technical Architect or the equivalent, or a foreign degree which has been approved as equivalent to one of the foregoing.*
- c) *Be a citizen of Spain or of any other member Country of the European Economic Union.*

Aspirants to the exam must fulfill the foregoing requirements as of the last day of the term for submission of applications.

The exams shall be limited only to official languages other than Spanish for which qualified evaluators are available, in the opinion of the Examining Board.

It is necessary to point out that in Spain, the designation “intérprete jurado,” or “sworn interpreter” in the Royal Decree above, is actually used for a “sworn translator.” While the profession of “intérprete jurado” in Spain dates back to 1841, the oral work of interpreters was not recognized as having any legal effect, or “carácter oficial,” until 1996, the year in which Royal Decree No. 79 extended this status from the translation of written documents to include oral interpretation.

The examination administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs consists of two components, written and oral. The written part is divided into two parts. The first part takes two hours, in which the candidate is given two short articles (one in the foreign language and the other one in Spanish). Candidates are not allowed to use dictionaries or other reference materials for this part. The text is usually of a general nature, such as a newspaper article. The second part is a legal translation into Spanish, which also takes two hours, and the candidates are allowed to use as many dictionaries as they can carry. The pass rate is very low, just as we have seen in other government-run certification examinations, and which is also the case in our own accreditation program. For the oral part, the candidates are given a newspaper article. First they read it and summarize it orally, and then they are asked a few comprehension questions and a few language questions. Reportedly, the oral component is much easier than the written one and the pass rate is very high, which makes the resulting certification as an “intérprete jurado” confusing to the outsiders, as translation skills are clearly examined in much greater depth. A detailed description of the

examination and interpreter-related issues can be found in an article by Dr. Cynthia Miguélez, published in the Spring 1999 issue of the newsletter of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT), entitled “Current Issues in Court Interpreting: Spain, A Case Study.” Go to NAJIT’s website at www.najit.com for more details.

Spain has a procedure in place for the recognition of translator and/or interpreter credentials granted in other European countries. Candidates who are sworn interpreters or translators in a European country that offers such certification can register in Spain as such without the examination, as long as they can provide proof for such a credential. This is not just a theoretical possibility; reportedly, a rather large percentage of sworn translators residing on the Spanish island of Mallorca are Germans who earned their credentials in Germany, and whose certification was recognized by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In addition to Spanish, three other languages are officially recognized in Spain: Catalan, Vasco, and Gallego. In Catalonia, where Catalan is the official language, the autonomous government (in particular, the Department of Linguistic Policy) makes a distinction between sworn translators and sworn interpreters, and offers a three-part examination for conferral of status as either “traductor jurat” or “intèrpret jurat.” The first part of the exam tests for knowledge of the Catalan language, the second one for knowledge of Spanish law, and the third part tests either translation or interpretation skills, depending on the choice of the candidate. The written test consists of two texts, general and legal, to be translated from and into Catalan. In the

oral test, the candidate is presented with a video of a judicial situation and is asked to act as an interpreter.

Sworn translators and interpreters in both Spanish and Catalan are organized in the Catalan Association of Sworn Translators and Interpreters (Asociación de Traductores e Intérpretes Jurados de Cataluña, or ATIJC, listed below). The association’s website is currently available in Catalan only, but Spanish and English versions are reportedly coming soon. For further information on ATIJC, please contact the association’s president, Josep Peñarroja, at jppf@eresmas.net. Catalan is also the official language of the Principality of Andorra, a tiny nation sandwiched between Spain and France. The Andorran Ministry of Culture offers examinations for “traductor jurat” in the Catalan language. The examination is similar to the one offered in Catalonia.

There are many organizations for translators and interpreters in Spain. Among the members of FIT are the following:

Associació Col·legial d’Escriptors de Catalunya (ACEC)
[candidate member]
www.acec.tv

Asociación de Intérpretes de Conferencia de España (AICE)
www.aice-interpretes.com

Euskal Itzultzaile, Zuzentzaile eta Interpreteen Elkarte (EIZIE)
www.eizie.org

Traductors i Intèrprets Associats pro Col·legi (TRIAC)
www.traductors.com

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A Translators' Tea Party in Boston Continued

to interfere with your workspace or your working hours. But, by the same token, do not let work overtake your personal life. Stick to your schedule and take evenings and weekends off.

Always answer the phone in a businesslike manner. Do not use cute recorded messages. Do not let children answer your business phone. Have a separate fax line. Be sure to be reachable by e-mail and/or cell phone. This is a service business: you need to be available when the client needs you, not when it suits you.

Invest in your equipment. Buy an up-to-date computer, software, fax, and printer, and have a high-speed Internet account. Get dictionaries and reference materials. All these items are a necessary initial investment in your business. Keep detailed records of all your expenses, as a lot of them will be tax deductible. Likewise, keep

very good records of your income, and don't forget that you owe estimated tax payments. When you can afford to, hire an accountant who has experience working with the self-employed. Devise a system for following up on unpaid receivables.

Once you are set up, market your services. Get business cards and a good resume. Network to become known. You should try several approaches, including mailings, contacts with colleagues, professional forums, etc. Decide on your rates before clients call so you will have an answer ready when asked. Present your estimates in writing. Ask questions and make sure you understand what the assignment involves and what the client expects is included in the price. Never miss deadlines for any reason. Always remember that you are a businessperson and act accordingly.

This last bit of advice is something all the panelists agreed on. Another oft-repeated recommendation was to network, network, network. Serendipitously, the organizers had arranged a cocktail hour at the end of the day where we were able to practice our newly acquired networking skills. Everyone had garnered some useful ideas and expressed appreciation for a very interesting, well-organized event.

To round out the weekend, complementary events were scheduled for Sunday. An accreditation sitting was held Sunday morning, and Courtney Searls-Ridge, head of the ATA Mentoring Task Force, offered mentor and mentee training. In case you missed them in Boston, all three events will be repeated at the ATA conference in Atlanta (advance sign-up required).

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Other organizations include:

Asociación Profesional Española de Traductores e Intérpretes (APETI)

www.lai.com/lai/spanish.html

ACE Traductores (ACEtt)

www.acett.org

Asociación de Traductores e Intérpretes Jurados de Cataluña (ATIJC)

www.atijc.com

In the next issue, we will examine the fresh efforts in the area of certification in the Ukraine. 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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What's in It for Me? Continued from p.27

make the most of a limited amount of time, to set and stay within boundaries, and to improve communication. It's much easier than you think!

More than ever, today's newcomers to our profession need the advice and encouragement of working translators and interpreters who have on-the-job experience. It is, after all, a dog-eat-dog world out there. But the ATA does not have enough mentors! We need more experienced translator and interpreter volunteers! Please consider this challenge and take this opportunity to make a difference.

Participation in the ATA Mentoring Program is an ATA member benefit open only to ATA members. To become an ATA mentor, complete the mentor application on the ATA website (www.atanet.org/Mentor), attend the mentor training session in Atlanta on Wednesday, November 6, and wait to be matched with a very excited and grateful ATA mentee.

Questions? Contact Mary David at ATA Headquarters; mary@atanet.org or (703) 683-6100 ext 3009.

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