

International Certification Study: Mexico

By Jiri Stejskal

The situation in Mexico has a certain similarity to that of Germany, which we examined in the last issue, because certification in Mexico is administered for the most part by state and local governments. While certification on the federal level also exists, there is no uniform credential comparable to that of Spain or Argentina. Mexico has twice as many states as Germany (32 to be exact), but unlike in Germany, only a few of them offer certification for translators or interpreters. Another striking difference is that while there is abundant information available online concerning the certification of translators and interpreters in Germany, information about certification in Mexico is rather scarce. Much of the information below relies on personal interviews and correspondence with Mexican translators and interpreters. These individuals more than compensated for the lack of online information, and their response to our request to provide guidance has been overwhelming.

It is important to note that the certification process for translators and interpreters in Mexico is in flux at the moment, and significant changes are happening even as this article is being written. Another notable fact is that while we focus on Spanish here, there are 62 indigenous languages in Mexico, ranging from Náhuatl, with more than 2.5 million speakers, to Teco, with only about 50 speakers. Mexico is second only to India in terms of the number of living languages within a single country, yet these are going largely unnoticed by the translation and interpretation community. Some successful efforts in this area were made recently by Esteban Cadena, president of the Organización Mexicana de Traductores (OMT). However, it remains to be seen what the future will bring for the Mexican

Indians in the area of language recognition and preservation.

I would like to thank the following individuals in particular for contributing to this article:

- **Esteban Cadena** (estebancc@infosel.net.mx): president of the OMT, a “perito” translator, and ATA member.

“...While certification on the federal level also exists, Mexico has no uniform credential comparable to that of Spain or Argentina...”

- **Leticia Damm de Gorostieta** (ldamm@infosel.net.mx): English↔Spanish “perito” translator (1969) and interpreter (1973), and member and founding chairperson of the Asociación de Traductores e Intérpretes de Monterrey, A.C. (ATIMAC).
- **Dixie Davis** (dixie@spanishlink.org): ATA member (accredited Spanish→English).
- **Lucila Llausás** (llausasv@aol.com): member of OMT and the Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias, a “Perito en traducción e interpretación” authorized by the Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District, and a “Perito en traducción para el 2º. Circuito” authorized by the Federal Judiciary Council.
- **Luis López Rodríguez** (luis_lopez_r@yahoo.com.mx): member of OMT and ATA (accredited English→Spanish), instructor of the OMT “Diplomado,” and a

member of the Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara Master’s in Translation & Interpretation faculty.

- **Fernando Orea** (etsfom@att.net.mx), “perito” translator, certified by the Federal Judiciary Board.
- **Cecilia Saba** (csaba@iserve.net.mx): associate member of ATA and the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters (NAJIT), and a “Perito en traducción e interpretación” authorized by the Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District and the Federal Judiciary Council.
- **Rishona Chaya Shiffman** (rishona@sistemica.com.mx): associate member of ATA, active member of ATIMAC, English→Spanish translator, and teacher of English to executives.
- **Georganne Weller** (gemavaniki@yahoo.com): active member of ATA, NAJIT, and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), and a founding and active member of the Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias and the OMT.
- **Patricia Yáñez** (patyyanez@mexis.com): ATA member and president of the Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias (1993-95 and current).

Among other translators who offered assistance were **Philip Dale**, **Jan Kñakal**, and **Salvador Virgen**. Translation of the Mexican legislation in this article was generously provided by **Michele Feingold** and **Henry Gonzalez**, Spanish translation students in the University of Pittsburgh Professional Translation Certificate Program. ➡

Certification for Translators

In Mexico, the only principle relevant to certified translation that is accepted or recognized by the Mexican legal system is certified legal translation. This means that a certified public translator, a concept we have encountered, for example, in Scandinavia and which is comparable to the concept of a certified public accountant, does not exist in Mexico. Thus, we cannot talk about a “certification” for *peritos traductores*, or official translators in general. The only credential currently offered in Mexico is an appointment or commission by the various government bodies—municipal, state, or federal—who publish lists of experts (*peritos*). “Official translators” are included in such lists, but only some states’ Superior Court of Justice include *peritos traductores* (Jalisco, Nuevo León, Mexico, Aguascalientes, Baja California Sur, and Mexico City). Not all of them call official translators *peritos*, yet all of the states recognize the concept of “aid in the administration of justice” where the translators are usually included.

Thus, legal translators can be certified: by a state superior court (applicable only in some states); by a governmental agency, such as the attorney general’s office or the state office of justice; by a federal body; and even, in some cases, by a legal department of a municipal government. However, this whole system might change soon, because at the last Saint-Jerome’s Day (International Translators’ Day) event held in Mexico, the chief justice in charge of superior court expert translators publicly requested that OMT promote an initiative creating the legal concept of certified public translation. This request was made in September 2002, and OMT, its Western Chapter in particular, has been

working in this area ever since in an effort to design a specific program for the certification of translators. OMT is currently conducting a search in order to establish what the actual situation is in every state of Mexico. OMT members also interviewed several state house members, who expressed some interest. OMT’s Western Chapter is presently working on a bill for the State of Jalisco to certify *peritos traductores*, and is planning to hold a *Diplomado en Traducción Jurídica* (a 120-hour course in English→Spanish legal translation) to train candidates for the exam. If this effort proves successful and OMT’s initiative is approved in the state of Jalisco (where its headquarters is located), OMT will continue at the federal level. In addition, OMT also offers a 120-hour course in translation (English→Spanish) leading to a *Diplomado en Traducción*, which has been held for three years now. In 2003, the French→Spanish combination will also be offered.

What about Interpreters?

Currently, there is no certification program for interpreters in Mexico, but the Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias is working on it. CONOSER is the organization in Mexico that is in charge of certification programs in general. The Colegio is currently holding discussions with CONOSER in order to find out what would be the best procedure to follow. One of the many stumbling blocks is the fact that interpreting as a profession is not recognized by some official authorities in Mexico. The Ministry of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública) acknowledges the existence of translators and interpreters, but the Ministry of Finances (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público) does not. Thus, the Colegio’s President,

Patricia Yáñez, is recognized by this Ministry as a “professional in languages” rather than an “interpreter.”

In 1996, the last time an examination for translators was held by the Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District, the Court summoned candidates for an examination to become “authorized interpreters.” Apparently, this was the sole occurrence of such an examination in Mexico, and successful candidates, such as Lucila Llausás, were certified as “authorized translators and interpreters” (*perito traductor e intérprete*) by the Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District. In November 2001, the Court summoned the certificants for recertification exams, but as of November 2002, no such examination had been held.

Eligibility Requirements

As was mentioned earlier, to be certified as a sworn translator in Mexico it is necessary to comply with the requirements each governmental entity sets forth. For example, in Mexico City, to be a sworn translator before the Superior Court of Justice for the Federal District, the candidate is required to:

- Be a Mexican citizen;
- Submit an affidavit stating that the applicant has a clean criminal record;
- Submit a certified copy of any diploma or degree in translation or interpretation, not necessarily a university degree;
- Submit certified copies of memberships in professional organizations in the field of translation or interpretation;
- Submit a current resume; and
- File an application requesting examination in a specific language pair (always into Spanish).

These documents and an application for inclusion in the list of sworn translators must be filed every year.

On the federal level, the eligibility requirements are set forth in the summons issued every year by Mexico's Federal Judiciary Council to assign "experts" or to certify translators. The Local Superior Court of Justice (Federal District) has been issuing summons every five years. The Court requires official documentation, including a certificate of studies and proven expertise, and also examines candidates. The document does not address the need for "translators" in particular, but rather for the "creation of a register of individuals who may serve as experts before the Federal Judicial Branch." The following is an excerpt from said Notification, issued by the Judicial Branch of the Federal Judiciary Board (translated from Spanish by Michele Feingold and Henry Gonzalez).

NOTIFICATION of the creation of a register of individuals who may serve as experts before the Federal Judicial Branch for 2003.

The Judicial Studies Commission of the Federal Judiciary Board, pursuant to the provisions of Article 81, Section XXIX of the Federal Judiciary Act; Article 61, Section XVII of Order 48/1998, which governs the Organization and Operation of the Federal Judiciary Board; and Article 6 of Order 37/2001, which establishes the Procedures for the Annual Creation of the Register of Individuals who May Serve as Experts before the Federal Judicial Branch, the Formal Process for their Nomination, as well as their Rights and Obligations, issues the following:

NOTIFICATION

To all those individuals who are qualified to prepare expert opinions

in any professional area of science, technology, or the arts necessary to assist in the administration of justice, and who fulfill the requirements that are set forth in the "Conditions" section of this notice.

The list of individuals who may serve as experts before the courts and entities of the Federal Judicial Branch for the year 2003 shall be established in accordance with the following:

Conditions

1. **PARTICIPANTS**—*Participants may include any individuals who have a degree in the fields of the arts, sciences, or technology, in which areas they may provide expert opinions, in the event that these fields are regulated by law; or who have knowledge of the specific areas of arts, sciences, or technology, in the event that they are not regulated by law.*
2. **REQUIREMENTS**—*The interested parties must fulfill the following requirements:*
 - I. *Have a degree in the field of art, science, or technology, about which expert testimony must be given, in the event that these fields are regulated by law.*
 - II. *Have general knowledge of the respective art, science, or technology field, if not regulated by law.*
 - III. *Have a minimum of five years of professional experience, except in the case of a recently developed field, in which case the minimum shall be equal to the time since the inception of said field;*
 - IV. *Maintain good conduct and be of known moral character;*
 - V. *Have no prior convictions for any felony, theft, or fraud, obstruction of justice, or crimes committed with malice aforethought; and,*



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VI. *If the individual has been a civil servant, he/she must have no record of having been sanctioned by a Federal or State Judicial Entity, or any Federal or State Government Office, for the commission of any act of gross negligence.*

The following documents are then required to accompany the application of those who wish to be included in the list of individuals who may act as experts before Federal Judiciary Courts:

- I. *Current CV, including: complete name, date of birth, citizenship, marital status, tax identification number, residence, telephone, and studies completed;* ➔

II. Affidavit stating:

- a) that the applicant has never been convicted of any felony, theft or fraud, obstruction of justice, or crimes committed with malice aforethought;
- b) that the applicant, if he has held a public service position, has never been penalized by Federal or State Judiciary courts, or any Branch of Federal or State Civil Service, for the commission of any act of gross negligence.
- c) the subject areas, fields, art, or specialty for which the applicant is qualified to provide expert opinion, and wishes to be registered; and
- d) the reasons for which the applicant wishes to be included on the list;

III. Two letters from individuals who know the applicant and can vouch for his/her conduct and moral character. These letters must include personal identifying information;

IV. If applicable, a copy of the last three opinions that the applicant has presented before any Court or public institution;

V. A certified copy of any relevant degree or professional credential; and,

VI. A certified copy of any certificate that the applicant may have in his/her possession documenting areas of expertise in the field in question, in those cases where the art, science, or technology fields are not regulated.

These documents should be initially filed during the annual application period. After that, it is sufficient to file a letter requesting continued inclusion in the list. Applicants for the *perito* appointment need to submit a certificate or diploma attesting to their knowledge of a given foreign language, along with

recommendation letters and an application form. For candidates who hold university degrees, the Supreme Court requires them to submit the diploma which certifies their expertise in a given area, together with a proof of professional experience (resume), a list of companies they have worked for, projects they have participated in, other certificates, etc. The list of approved candidates is published once a year in the *Official Gazette* of the Federation and in the leading newspapers.

Only a few states require continued education in some technical areas, such as medicine, graphology, engineering, etc. However, this is not required for the *perito traductor*. In some cases, the state authority establishes a certain amount of hours in training to renew the appointment. Reportedly, Nuevo León requires that “*peritos*” submit certifications of ongoing studies for each renewal in translation.

Case Study

Cecilia Saba is a certified translator. She has a federal and local (Mexico City, Federal District) certification, and holds a bachelor’s degree in interpretation. She was first certified locally in 1989. At that time, the Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District was the only entity that certified translators not working in-house. The attorney general’s office only certified translators working in-house, and they could act as certified translators only for that body. Back then, the requirements to become certified by the Superior Court of Justice included submitting certified copies of official documentation proving that the candidate had a degree in translation, interpretation, linguistics, or any other related career. In addition, candidates had to supply evidence of experience, such as a copy of the last five projects

completed, references, and evidence of knowledge of the language. Cecilia had to renew the certification every year by submitting the same type of certified documents.

In 1994, a new president of the Superior Court of Justice reportedly decided that there were too many expert translators and interpreters on the list, and decided to cut it randomly. As can be expected, many professional translators and interpreters who were left out without reason took legal action. In 1996, the Superior Court of Justice decided to create a new list and issued a summons requesting more or less the same documentation, but adding an examination for candidates. Cecilia took the test and was certified again in 1997. (The test consisted of a written translation where the use of dictionaries was not allowed.) Around 1998, a law was passed to create the Consejo de la Judicatura Federal (Federal Judiciary Council), and in 1999 the Council issued the first summons to certify experts in different fields, including translation and interpretation. Reportedly, the Council has been quite meticulous in the issuance of summons and lists every year. Cecilia received a letter from the Council in the summer of 2002, in which she was assigned an “expert number.” Regarding the local certification, it is supposed to be effective for five years. A summons was issued in December 2001, but no date or time for the English→Spanish translation exam was assigned as of November 2002.

T&I Organizations

The Organización Mexicana de Traductores, A.C. covers most of the Mexican Republic and is divided into four chapters: Central, East, West, and South. Each chapter has its own president, and the national presidency goes

to one of the regions biannually. OMT, a member of the International Federation of Translators, was established in Mexico City in 1992, and as of November 2002, there were 106 members. OMT's website, available in Spanish only, is www.traductores-omt.org.mx.

The Colegio Mexicano de Intérpretes de Conferencias, A.C., was founded in 1982 and currently has about 100 members, all interpreters (but most of them also act as translators). The Colegio is the only association in Mexico exclusively for interpreters. In order to be accepted as a member, the candidate has to file papers proving that he or she has worked as an interpreter for a certain amount of days (200 days to become an active member), and this work has to be certified by the signatures of five members of this association. The Colegio's website is www.cmicac.org and is available in Spanish, English, and French.

ATIMAC (Asociación de Traductores e Intérpretes de Monterrey, A.C.) is among the oldest organization of translators and interpreters with uninterrupted activity in Mexico (20+ years). Based in Monterrey, ATIMAC has been very active for more than 20 years, and has around 35 members locally. The association's website is www.atimac.org.mx. Reportedly, ATP (Asociación de Traductores Profesionales) in Mexico City was the first to be founded in the country; however, it has become inactive.

Academic Institutions

The following schools offer a degree in T&I:

- Universidad de Baja California, School of Languages, Mexicali, Baja California Norte;
- Instituto Superior de Intérpretes y

- Traductores (ISIT), Mexico City;
- Universidad Tecnológica Americana, Mexico City;
- Universidad Intercontinental, Mexico City;
- Tecnológico Monterrey (Tec), Campus Monterrey;
- Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Guadalajara;
- Universidad de Colima, Colima;
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM), Mexico City;
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nuevo León, Monterrey;
- Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City; and
- Colegio de México, Mexico City.

In addition to the institutions listed above, there are educational programs for translators and interpreters offered by private institutions such as Berlitz, which offers a one-year diploma program for translators and interpreters. There are also individual translation courses, such as the 60-hour legal translation course given by Javier Becerra every year at the Escuela Libre de Derecho (a prestigious law school). The IFAL (French Institute in Mexico City) offers a diploma program in French and Spanish translation. Also, several universities in Mexico have a *licenciatura* (B.A.) in foreign language teaching or in linguistics (mainly English) with a branch in translation. However, none of these *licenciaturas* are fully devoted to translation or interpretation.

The above-mentioned ISIT has been offering a *licenciatura* in interpretation for the past 20 years. The program is acknowledged by the Secretaría de Educación Pública, and is reportedly the only program in Latin America solely devoted to interpreting.

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With this article on Mexico, our series has completed coverage of the North American region (for articles on Canada, see the 2002 January and March issues). In the next issue, we will revisit South America and review the certification process in several countries there to complement the articles on Brazil and Argentina, published in the July 2001 and the June 2002 issues, respectively. 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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