

Certification Worldwide: Survey of the FIT Status Committee

By Jiri Stejskal

More than two years ago, the *ATA Chronicle* published the closing article of a series entitled “International Certification Study.” The articles appeared in each issue between June 2001 and August 2003, and were later published as a book.¹ The study examined the ways in which translators and interpreters earn their credentials in more than 30 countries on six continents. In the closing article, I wrote that the study would continue under the auspices of the *Fédération internationale des traducteurs (FIT)*, as I had been appointed chair of the newly formed FIT Committee for Information on the Status of the Translation & Interpretation Profession (hereinafter, Status Committee). The Status Committee was created in order to examine the status of the translation and interpretation (T&I) profession throughout the world. The Committee’s objective was to collect information relevant to the status of translators and interpreters through direct contact with representatives of professional organizations, academic institutions, and governmental agencies in various countries. In particular, the Committee’s plan was to examine how the T&I profession is regulated in various countries, what credentialing procedures are in place, and what types of organizations are available to translators and interpreters. To that end, the Committee conducted a survey in 2004.

The survey, prepared in English and French, was distributed online to representatives of 119 T&I organizations in 54 countries, both members and non-members of FIT. A total of 63 valid responses from 40 countries were collected, corresponding to a response rate of 53%. The following countries are represented (with the number of responding organizations stated in parentheses following each country’s name):

- Argentina (2)
- Australia (2)
- Austria (3)
- Belgium (1)
- Brazil (1)
- Canada (7)
- China (2)
- Croatia (1)
- Cyprus (1)
- Czech Republic (1)
- Finland (1)

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- France (2)
- Germany (2)
- Greece (1)
- Guatemala (1)
- Italy (1)
- Japan (1)
- Jordan (1)
- South Korea (2)
- Lebanon (1)
- Mexico (1)
- Morocco (1)
- New Zealand (1)
- Norway (1)
- Panama (1)
- Peru (1)
- Poland (2)
- Portugal (1)
- Qatar (1)
- Romania (1)
- Russia (1)
- Slovenia (1)
- South Africa (1)
- Spain (4)
- Sweden (2)

- Switzerland (2)
- Ukraine (1)
- United Kingdom (2)
- United States (3)
- Venezuela (1)

The survey results reveal that in many organizations, membership status itself serves as a form of credential—a vast majority (93%) of the polled organizations stated that certain criteria have to be met to become a member. Close to one half of all respondents (45%) offer a credentialing program. The organizations that offer such a program provided the following information:

- In most organizations (61%), the credential is not open to non-members.
- In most organizations (81%), the credential is open to members abroad.
- The three most common eligibility requirements instituted in credentialing programs are (in order of frequency):

1. Experience (76%)
2. Education (68%)

Figure 1: Is the Credential Open to Non-members?

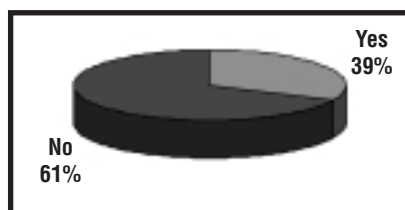
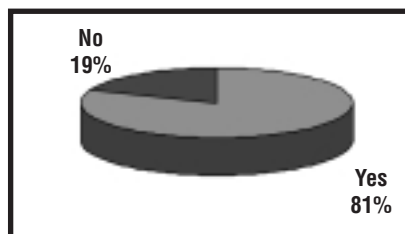


Figure 2: Is the Credential Open to Members Abroad?



3. Membership in organization (64%)

Other requirements were reported as follows: references or referrals (56%); a screening test in the language of the given country (36%); a mandatory seminar on ethics or best practices (8%); and a mandatory mentoring program (4%). In addition, 40% of the respondents reported using other criteria than those described above. Such criteria include: a national test with comprehensive aptitude and practice components; a code of ethics test; the submission of a translation portfolio where the translations are examined by two peers; interpretation credits for interpreters; interviews; and other tests specific to the given country.

- Many respondents reported that their credential was tied to continuing education requirements (in some cases, such requirements are not mandatory). For instance, the Translators Association of China requests that certificate holders pursue continuing education and provide proof of such education in order to be recertified every three years. The Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters is currently developing a new system of continuing education requirements with recertification every three to five years, and is hoping to launch the new system in 2006. British Columbia has a complex system of continuing education requirements in place. Many

organizations have a time limit ("expiration date") for their credentials. This limit can be as short as a year or, and this is more frequently the case, can be tied to membership in good standing in the given organization.

- Language combinations offered by individual organizations range from a single language (e.g., the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators only offers certification in Spanish-to-English) to any language combination requested by the candidate (e.g., in Canada and the Ukraine).
- All organizations that responded certify candidates for translation or interpretation into their native language. Nearly all (96%) offer the credential in the opposite direction as well (native into foreign language). Some (38%) offer the credential for language combinations not involving the candidate's native language.
- The vast majority (96%) of organizations responding to the survey offer a credential in translation; a majority (65%) in interpretation; some (23%) in terminology; and a few (12%) in other areas (e.g., judiciary interpreting, sight translation, editing). Accordingly, a majority (77%) of credential holders are translators.
- The vast majority (96%) of organizations use an examination to assess the candidate's capability. Most organizations (52%) have both a written and oral component to their examinations; others use a written test only. No organization uses an oral examination without a written test. ➔

Figure 3: Eligibility Requirements

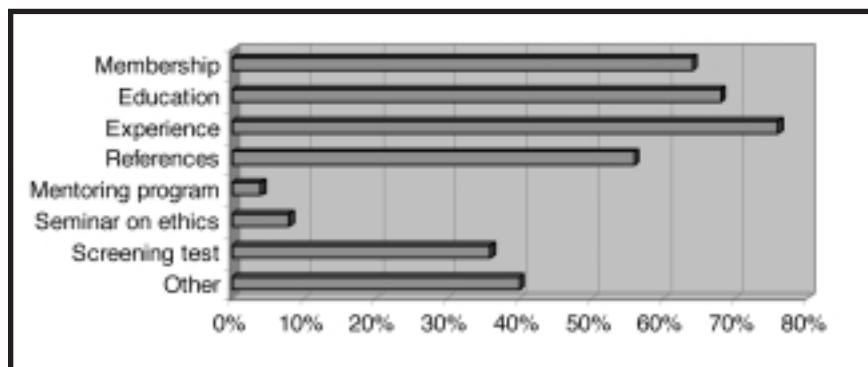


Figure 4: Language Directions

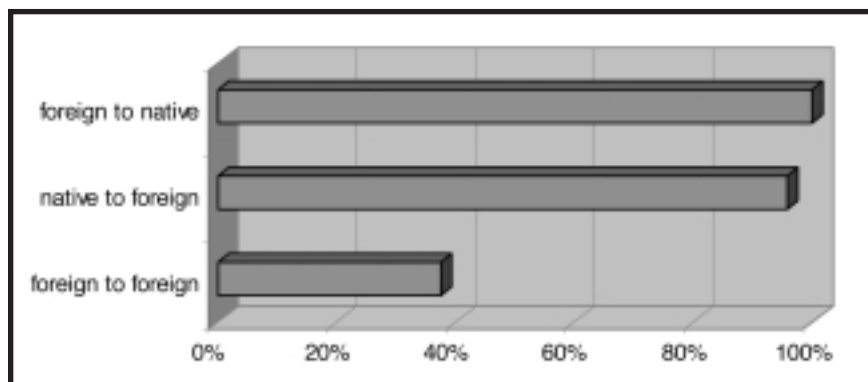


Figure 5: Types of Credentials

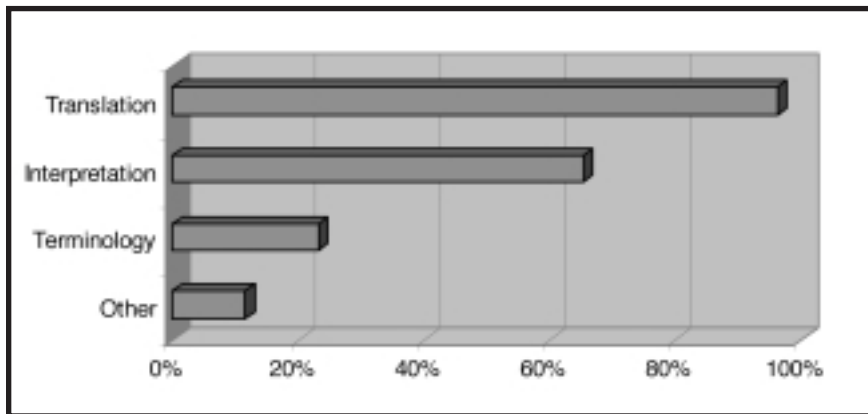


Figure 6: Examination Format

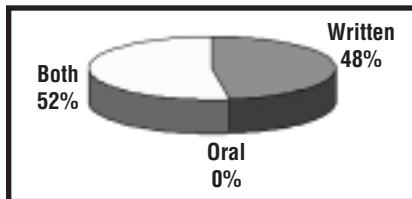


Figure 7: Computerized Examination

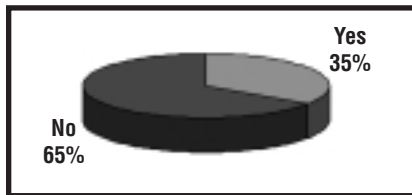


Figure 8: Use of Reference Materials

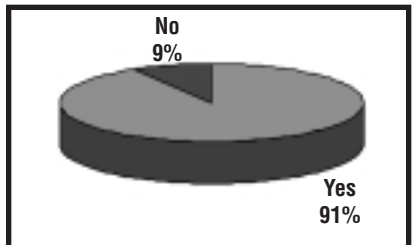


Figure 9: Government Involvement

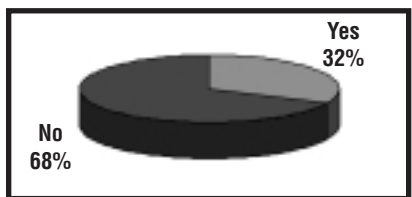
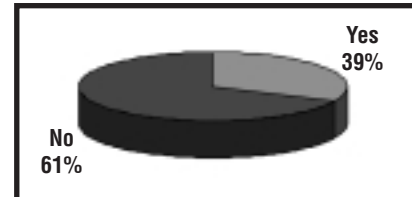


Figure 11: Reciprocal Arrangements



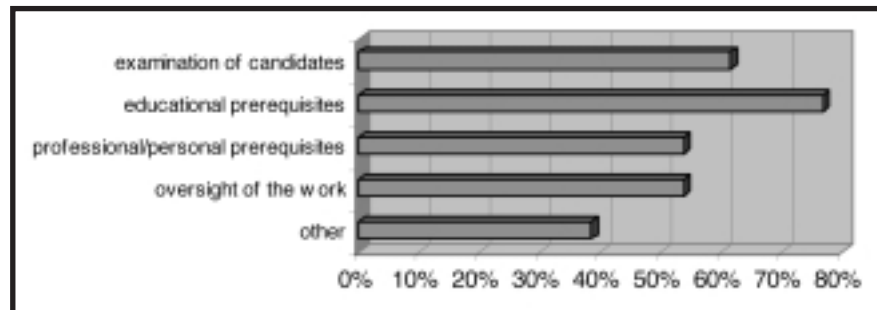
their respective governments in the area of certification, the task that is most frequently delegated to the organization by the government is the establishment of educational prerequisites (77%), followed by the examination of candidates (62%).

- For written tests, a majority of organizations (65%) do not allow the use of a computer during exams. The vast majority (91%) allows the use of reference materials. Further inquiry showed that there is currently no computerized testing among the polled organizations that would satisfy the stringent requirements of ATA's certification exam.
- More than one half of the respondents (57%) reported that their organization does not have any reciprocal arrangements with other organizations (i.e., does not recognize credentials granted by other organizations).
- The average pass rate for the credentialing examination is 37% (37 out of 100 candidates pass the examination). The rates range from 5% to 75%. Most organizations (67%) do not offer a practice test.
- In most organizations (68%), the government is not involved in the credentialing process. For those organizations that cooperate with

The summary results presented here give a picture of the current situation worldwide, but should not be viewed as a benchmark of what a certification program should look like. Detailed results of this survey will be made available on the FIT and ATA websites in PDF format. The FIT Status Committee is planning further work in this area to identify best practices and

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Figure 10: Authority Delegated by Government



and back home is deductible. However, since his tuition is paid to attend classes at an accredited institution in the U.S., it may be more beneficial for him to take a Lifetime Learning credit rather than an education deduction. He should consult his tax advisor to determine which credit or deduction will provide him with the greatest benefit.

- John is a Japanese-to-English translator who travels to Beijing to take university courses in translating Chinese-to-English. His expenses are not deductible because they do not relate to improving his existing Japanese-to-English translation skills. The expenses are to acquire new skills, and such expenses are not deductible.
- Nicholas grew up in a Greek household and speaks some Greek. He did some interpreting in the summertime for friends

who came from Greece. They paid him for his services and he thought it could be a fun career. So he flew to Athens to study at the Parthenon Institute to improve his Greek and take an interpreter certification exam. His expenses are not deductible because the purpose of his course of study was to acquire minimum skills in his profession. The Parthenon Institute was also not accredited and therefore a questionable institution.

Substantiating your expenses and spending the majority of your time engaged in activities related to your education are very important, so be sure to keep a written record detailing how your time was spent. Also keep in mind that education offered on a cruise or at a resort is suspect and usually considered purely personal.

Why is it important to take as many deductions and credits as you legally can? Let's look at an example.

Mary works for herself as a freelance translator. She files her income taxes as a single person with no children. She earned \$20,000. The income tax on her earnings in 2004 is \$1,450. When she deducts her business expenses of \$5,000, including home office depreciation, computer, software, printer, supplies, dictionaries, ATA dues, workshops, travel, etc., she reduces her taxable income and her tax goes down to \$705. This saves her \$745. Therefore, she has cut her taxes by more than half. She can now use the money she saved on taxes to buy a computer, printer, dictionaries, or other necessary items that will help her improve her productivity.

Therefore, the more you can legally deduct from your earnings in order to reduce your taxable earnings, the more of your hard-earned money you get to keep in your own pocket. After all, that's why we're in business.

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possibly develop guidelines for certification programs.

I would like to thank the members of the FIT Status Committee who actively participated in the drafting of the survey and helped to collect contact information: Marion Boers (South African Translators' Institute); Ann Macfarlane (National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators); Huang Youyi (Translators Association of China); Mary Hoecker and Peter Krachenwitzer (Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V.); and Bill Chilcott (Institute of Translation &

Interpreting). I would also like to thank all the survey respondents who were kind enough to fill out the online survey. Without their help, there would have been no results to report here.

1. *International Certification Study* by Jiri Stejskal, Ph.D. 110 pages. Published by ATA in 2003 and available through ATA Headquarters. For more information, visit www.atanet.org.

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