

# Gained in Translation

## Editorial



Welcome to my second Gained in Translation editorial!

Translation consulting networks are an interesting 'assisted-translation tool', which have had a remarkable appeal for professionals in the field since the late 1990s. Newsgroups, online discussion forums and professional mailing lists, together with professional social media accounts, definitely provide a most valuable resource to fight against the well-known isolation of translators, who normally work as freelancers from their home office. Nevertheless, they have survived during all these years of never-ending new online resources not because of this characteristic, but because of their value as 'mutual assistance tools'. There is a myriad

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of resources out there, but you really need to know their characteristics in depth - their flaws and strengths - in order not to get lost and get the most out of them! If you are interested in knowing them better, keep reading, and if you are already a subscriber to a professional mailing list for translators, please do share some info about it with us!

Please remember that the aim of this section is to provide a medium for open discussion among translators, and a written agora where we can exchange different and, maybe, amusing experiences. If you would like to contribute, please contact me. You are warmly invited to share your knowledge and thoughts.

Enjoy the article!

Laura

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## Translation consulting networks

Among the most popular translation consulting networks we find mailing lists, discussion forums and discussion groups. All of these are groups of professionals who interact, network, share knowledge and build fruitful relationships at a professional level. The first mailing lists for and run by translators started to appear in the mid-1990s, yet they are not commonly known to many professionals. Indeed, they are often not public and you need to be a member in order to get a grasp of content.

Translation consulting networks can be:

- Profession-oriented, where subscribers are linked by a common interest in promoting translation as a professional activity.
- Practice-oriented, where the common interest linking subscribers is the actual performance of translation-related activities.
- Education-oriented, where the focus is on training.<sup>1</sup>

### *What is a professional mailing list?*

They are different to discussion groups or forums as, instead of logging on to a website to view the latest threads, you receive posts from fellow members directly to your Inbox. They are a simple way of organising emails so that all subscribers to the list receive questions from, and answers to, any other member of the list.

Mailing lists can have memberships of different sizes, from a few dozen with slow activity, to several thousand and more than 100 messages a day, which normally adopt policies to manage the flow of information, allowing for filtering and summaries on a weekly or daily basis. All subscribers are free to leave or rejoin the list at any time.

Such lists can be an extraordinarily useful tool for translators who need an immediate answer to an urgent question. Experience shows that questions addressed to professional mailing lists never go unanswered. These communication channels create a sense of community, and give individuals access to the collective expertise of translators across the world, at virtually no cost. Within this large repository of expertise it is not always easy to find one's way. You need to know your fellow colleagues and take into consideration only those opinions from expert members.<sup>2</sup> It is obviously a flaw, but really outweighed by the strength of the lists.

The issues discussed go far beyond simple questions of terminology, even though these account for a large number of the exchanges. Indeed, generally, subscribers to mailing lists discuss a variety of topics, some of which are listed in Table 1. The effect of these lists is such that nowadays we could speak about 'subscriber-assisted translation' or 'mutual assistance tools', as they definitely represent

Table 1: Recurrent discussions on professional mailing lists

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Provide permanent assistance in solving terminology problems (a kind of terminological help line that translators call routinely when they do not understand a text segment or cannot find the name for something or are not quite sure about their translation).
Occasionally engage in in-depth analyses of terminological or linguistic issues.
Provide systematic assistance and advice in the use of translation tools.
Regularly discuss questions relating to rates and content of the service provided to clients.
Launch or revive major discussions on perennial questions such as punctuation, the use of upper case letters, style, etc.
Discuss issues relating to translators' status.
Exchange information on notoriously unreliable clients.
Discuss what attitude freelance female translators should adopt vis-à-vis their clients when taking maternity leave.
Keep each other informed of travel arrangements, and organise informal meetings.
Create an on-line portrait gallery to put a face to an email address.
Discuss a wide range of technical queries on topics such as: computer platforms, equipment (backup systems), software (voice recognition applications), Internet access providers, etc.
Compare the respective merits of different search engines.
Pass on to fellow subscribers extra work that they themselves are unable to carry out.

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Source: Goudaer.<sup>3</sup>

a supplement to traditional problem-solving strategies.<sup>3,4</sup>

There are now many such lists for translators or on the subject of translation. Most of them are restricted or 'moderated' lists:

- Restricted lists, by definition, are not accessible to all. Many of the mailing lists for translators have been set up and are managed by professional associations, and are, for obvious reasons, open to members only. Membership requirements greatly affect whether or not the network is composed of professionals.<sup>3</sup>
- Moderated or 'regulated' lists are supervised by someone similar to an editor-in-chief, who receives all the messages sent to the list, sorts them out, sometimes synthesises them and forwards them on to the list. So, the moderator can vet certain requests or offers and filter some of the information on the list to avoid unwanted messages.

#### *Your virtual extended family of colleagues*

The list becomes a kind of virtual professional 'club', making freelance translators feel less isolated. Indeed, they offer an antidote to the oft-lamented isolation and loneliness of translation professionals.<sup>3</sup> Discussion lists eventually create some kind of virtual extended family. Messages from subscribers who suddenly feel lonely late at night, or stressed out by impossible-to-meet deadlines or furious over software bugs or outrageous client behaviour, prompt for messages of solace and support in return. The subscribers come to represent a living, closely-knit community, and in cases where a member is in dire trouble, everyone comes together to provide psychological or moral and even financial support, which in some cases has gone as far as helping a subscriber retain clients who otherwise might have been lost due to protracted illness. Friendship is no less supportive for being expressed via cyberspace. At the same time, as in any other community, there is also

indignation, violent contradiction, passionate debate and even outrage at times – usually starting from some trivial linguistic question.

#### *Where do I find the one that works for me?*

Discussion groups and mailing lists on translation can be accessed from <https://groups.yahoo.com>, from Facebook Groups, by contacting the translators' association in the country of reference, or by asking any web browser. In some countries, you may also find professional mailing list platforms created by government bodies. This is the case, for example, in Spain with RedIRIS, which is an academic and research network that provides advanced communication services to the scientific community and national universities. It was funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and has over 500 affiliated institutions. Medical translators working from or into Spanish often communicate thanks to a professional, specific, practice-oriented mailing list in this platform – MedTrad – *Foro de traductores profesionales de biomedicina* (<http://www.rediris.es/list/info/medtrad.html>).

In Table 2, I have listed some mailing lists and discussion groups. Although it is not a comprehensive list, it includes interesting references; you are obviously invited to share your own 'must-know groups' with us; a more detailed list could be published in the future!

#### *Personal experience using professional mailing lists for translators*

Currently, I subscribe to two specific practice-oriented medical translation mailing lists and to a generalist one. I am also a member of several discussion groups both on Facebook and LinkedIn.

In my opinion, mailing lists tend to be more practical:

- Messages arrive directly into your Inbox, which may result in an overload of messages to read

Table 2: Professional medical translation discussion groups and mailing lists

Name	Topic	Languages	Platform	Restricted
Frensemble	Generalist (G)	FR <> EN	Yahoo Groups	Yes: Société Française des Traducteurs
French Translation	G	FR <> Any language	Yahoo Groups	Yes: Members of the group
MedTrad	<i>Specific to medical translation (S)</i>	ES <> Any language	<a href="http://www.rediris.es">http://www.rediris.es</a>	Yes: Medical translators and writers
AITI Discussion Forum	G	IT <> Any language	<a href="http://www.aiti.org">http://www.aiti.org</a>	Yes: Associazione Italiana Traduttori e Interpreti
IAPTI Discussion Forum	G	Any language combination	<a href="http://www.iapti.org">http://www.iapti.org</a>	Yes: International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters
Universitas Forum	G	DE <> Any language	<a href="http://www.universitas.org">http://www.universitas.org</a>	Yes: UNIVERSITAS Austria Interpreters' and Translators' Association
Tradutores Com Vida	G	PT <> Any language	Facebook	Yes: Members of the group
SFÖ Medtrans	S	SV<> Any language	Yahoo Groups	Yes: Swedish Association of Medical Translators
Übersetzer/innen	G	DE <> Any language	Facebook	Yes: Members of the group
Swiss Translation	Translation queries related to Switzerland	Any language combination	Yahoo Groups	Yes: Members of the group
Peempip	G	EL <> Any language	Facebook	Yes: Translators from the Ionian University
Translatum	G	EL <> Any language	<a href="http://www.translatum.gr">http://www.translatum.gr</a>	No
Norskjal	G	DA, NB, SV, FI, FO, KL, IS and EN	<a href="http://listar.ismennt.is/mailman/listinfo/norskjal">http://listar.ismennt.is/mailman/listinfo/norskjal</a>	Yes: Members of the group
Magyar Forditok Elektronikus Fóruma	G	HU <> Any language	Yahoo groups	Yes: Members of the group
Medivert	G	NL <> Any language	Yahoo Groups/Facebook	Yes: Members of the group
MedPharm	S	Any language combination	Yahoo Groups	Yes: Members of the group

Abbreviations: G, Generalist; S, Specific to medical translation; DA, Danish; DE, German; EL, Greek; EN, English; ES, Spanish; FI, Finnish; FO, Faeroese; FR, French; HU, Hungarian; IS, Icelandic; IT, Italian; KL, Greenlandic; NB, Norwegian; NL, Dutch; PT, Portuguese; SV, Swedish.

but you can set a rule so that the messages go into a specific folder, which you can consult at the end of the day or whenever you wish.

- Professional mailing lists group expert professionals who are already working in the field and passionate about what they do – you would not join one if you were not really interested, as the risk is to have your Inbox overloaded with messages.
- They are an excellent repository of colleagues, should you need someone to share some extra work.
- They provide the largest technical library of articles that I know, and what's even better, articles are presented by colleagues, which means you already have a summary and can decide whether to allocate some time to them or not.

Discussions are extremely interesting and constructive. I have learned a lot being a subscriber and

find they are a must for any professional working in the field. They not only represent a means to share knowledge but are also a way to be updated immediately with any news in the field in which you are working.

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