

Interview on the new challenges of translation: translating scientific texts, the role of training and new opportunities for translators of ESP. Abigail Schteinman and Patrick Klein of RR Donnelley Translations & Multilingual Communications answer to Antonella Distante.

Antonella Distante, direttore della rivista

First of all I would like to express all my gratitude to Mr. Patrick Klein and Abigail Schteinman of RR Donnelley Translations & Multilingual Communications as they kindly accepted to be interviewed. This is an interesting opportunity for our journal: it is the first time we publish an entire text in English and it is a concrete chance for translators, experts and university students to get some essential but fruitful considerations on the world of translation. It may be our first attempt to start the process of providing the English version of our Internet site! Englishfor, the Journal of English for Special Purposes, addresses to a variety of readers but there is always a red wire: an interest for the extensive field of English for Special Purposes. We concentrate our attention on Legal English, English for Economics, Medical English, English for ICT, English for International Relations, Security and Defence, English for Food & Wine, etc. Every issue we present new challenging topics in order to discover some relevant aspects on these subjects. We may underline some major lexical characteristics of one specific topic or we may remark some other problems of translations among different texts. Through this interview we can construct a sort of simple framework on the world of translation and in particular on the difficulties of transferring concepts descending from a scientific discipline. It can also be a chance to reflect upon strategies on how to develop specific skills and hopefully enhance job opportunities. It is fundamental to promote a dialogue between all the parties involved: the world of translation and the aspiring translators, the academic and training field and last but not least the business sector. After these brief introductory features on our activity and on the objectives of this interview, it is now time to start.

Could you please outline a brief presentation of your company, in particular with regard to the sector devoted to translation services?

RR Donnelley & Sons, founded over 144 years ago and headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, is a Fortune 500 company who offers (among others) printing and financial services to a range of clients around the world (www.rrd.com). RR Donnelley Translations & Multilingual Communications (translations.rrd.com) was conceived in 1997; the concept behind it was to offer existing RRD clients the possibility to expand their business across borders by producing their documentation in different languages as required. RR Donnelley TMC proved a success and has grown to include Production teams based in New York, Luxemburg and Hong Kong, with its global headquarters located in London. The list of clients continues to grow and now we offer linguistic and desktop publishing services to clients in the Financial, Life Sciences and Technical sectors. We work through a network of truly global language practitioners, who are carefully selected and recruited according to their skill set and experience.

What do you think about the role played by translators in our post-global society? Do you find that this profession has changed during this last decade? In other terms, taking into account that there are many more technological tools at the translator disposal, do you believe that this job has become more demanding or this technological revolution has rendered this profession easier?

Translation as a regulated profession is relatively new; however we would like to point out that there have been language practitioners around for as long as there have been contacts between cultures that speak different languages. Translators play a fundamental role in facilitating communication across cultures. Globalisation has played a distinct role in defining the translation profession in the last decade. We have noticed, for example, that clients see the importance of localising content more than ever: the message is global, but in order for it to reach its intended target audience it needs to be local. The savvy of a professional translator, in terms of cultural knowledge and modulation techniques is, therefore, crucial. It is not unusual to receive a request from a client to produce targets in, for example, German, Swiss and Austrian German (not just "German") or in British,

Australian and American English (as opposed to just “English”). RR Donnelley Translation & Multilingual Communications work with linguists who translate into their native language only. This is the only way to guarantee the highest quality. In terms of technology, we have seen that translation memory tools have become a sign of the times, although this does not apply to all domains equally: it would be fair to say that most financial, medical and technical translations require the use of translation memory to ensure consistency, especially where the translation is an update of an earlier version of the same document, or to make sure that two different translators follow the same style. This would not be the case with translation work in the marketing or literary fields, where the work of the translator merges a bit with that of the author or copywriter, rendering the use of translation memory, more often than not, superfluous.

What kind of qualities a translator of ESP, and more in particular a legal translator, should own in order to provide a suitable and professional service? To what extent he/she should be concerned on the substantial issues before translating a scientific text?

Apart from being acquainted with the ethics of the profession and mastering the translation techniques available, translators are expected to acquire expertise in one or two domains if they want to be successful. Knowledge can be acquired either by experience or academic achievement. For example, we would advise individuals with a solid background in law who would like to translate in the legal field to advise with their national translators' professional body (in Italy this is the AITI (www.aiti.org), but there are regional instances as well, as indicated in the AITI's website) on courses or other ways to gain a translation qualification. For practising translators who would like to work in the legal field, conversely, there seem to be fewer choices in law courses geared towards translation. However, universities and professional bodies are starting to realise this and some now offer law courses for translators in the form of CPD (“Continued Professional Development”) classes and workshops for specific purposes such as the translation of contracts or criminal terminology. Lastly, RR Donnelley Translation & Multilingual Communications have seen cases of translators who team up with professionals in the Legal field and work together to produce fantastic results. This, of course, could apply to all fields of expertise.

Now I would like to skip to the field of training: can you tell us something about the weight of attending reliable courses in order to enhance the specific skills of the translator?

Attending training delivered by reliable institutions offers the possibility of expanding one's professional network while picking up tips on industry practice and reference material in the field. Translators who are working in isolation may be missing out on a wealth of resources. We would like to add that RR Donnelley Translation & Multilingual Communications considers ongoing education to be very important when reviewing CVs of translators who wish to be considered for inclusion in our database of freelance language practitioners.

Is there any advice you would give to Italian translators in order to improve their performances throughout the European and international framework? Is there enough room for their professional skills? What kind of specialties are mostly required?

In general, we notice that activity within the translation market does not apply equally to all language pairs: the demand for a specific specialty will increase or decrease depending on the economic and cultural exchange between two specific countries. To give an example, if the pharmaceutical industry is strong in Switzerland, there will be a strong demand for translators from French and German into the languages Swiss pharmaceutical companies trade with. In terms of legal translation, to give another example, the past years have seen an increasing number of British residents buying property in France and Spain, which has created a need for legal translators from French and Spanish into British English (and more specifically, those specialised in Property Law and Conveyance). This might change due to the well-known current economic malaise, to make room for translators specialised in other fields. In order to secure work opportunities, we would say that translators today need to keep a finger on the pulse of the global economy in order to meet clients' demands head-on. Those that do are just the kind of professionals that RR Donnelley Translation & Multilingual Communications are proud to work with.

Thanks a lot to Patrick and Abigail for their valuable contribution. I hope this interview can become a starting point to rethink and reconsider the role of ESP translators, at least to the extent it can offer an interesting and challenging framework.