

## **PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF TRANSLATOR CERTIFICATION TO STAKEHOLDERS IN THE TRANSLATION PROFESSION: A SURVEY OF VENDOR MANAGERS<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** Despite a “social turn” in the field of Translation Studies, there have been few systematic and descriptive studies of the translation profession. In this paper, the theoretical framework of information economics is utilized to examine the perceived benefits of translator certification to stakeholders in the translation profession. The vendor managers (i.e. the persons who are responsible for hiring translators in translation companies) were surveyed using an online questionnaire. The translation companies surveyed are a fairly diversified sample of the population of translation companies in the world representing small, medium-sized and large players. The respondents see translator certification as something that can enhance the overall image of the translation profession. In their view, certification does bring some benefits to translators who hold it (e.g. increase in number of job offers, higher self-esteem and respect from co-workers). However, increased monetary benefits brought by translator certification might be minimal. Translation companies generally welcome a system of translator certification, as it provides a relatively reliable signal of applicants’ linguistic ability, and this has made the recruitment process easier and more time-efficient.

**Keywords:** information economics, information asymmetry, signalling, translation profession, translator certification, professionalization

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Translation Studies has been quite frequently described as an “interdiscipline” (e.g. Toury 1980, 1995; Snell-Hornby 1988). Within the field of Translation Studies, there were conceptual and methodological changes in the late 1970s and 1980s. After this “cultural turn” in Translation Studies, translation began to be seen as a cultural process and a number of disciplines have been used to enrich the relatively young discipline. As Weissbrod (1998) points out, it is precisely the incorporation of new perspectives that will help systemic approaches to Translation Studies to survive and thrive.

In its early history, translation research focused on texts, particularly literary texts (Lambert 1998). It was not until recent years that more attention was paid to the social contexts in which translation activities take place. Some scholars state that a “social turn” (Wolf 2006) is emerging in the field of Translation Studies. Despite this social turn, the study of the translation profession is still relatively uncharted territory. As compared with other professions or even semi-professions, the study of translation as a profession is still very limited (Hermans and Lambert 1998; Gouadec 2007; Dam and Zethsen 2008). In the words of Chesterman (1998), “Translation Studies (...) [is] not concerned enough with the real problems at the messy grassroots of life in a big translation company”. In this paper, the theoretical framework of information economics is utilized to examine the perceived benefits of translator certification to stakeholders in the translation profession.

In Section 2 of this paper, a theoretical framework of asymmetric information and signaling is offered. It is also explained how this framework can be applied to the translation profession and translator certification. Section 3 describes the overall research procedures of the current research project and Section 4 discusses the findings.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Information economics is a branch of economics that studies how information affects economic decisions. This theoretical framework is believed to have great explanatory power and the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to three researchers (George Akerlof, Michael Spence and Joseph Stiglitz) for their contributions to information economics. A key concept from information economics for our purpose is asymmetric information. In a state of information asymmetry, one party in a transaction has more or better information than the other on which to base decisions. This creates an imbalance in power, which can adversely affect the transaction.

George Akerlof, in his seminal paper “The Market for Lemons: Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism” (1970), uses the example of second-hand cars to illustrate the problem of asymmetric information. Bad cars are called “lemons” while good cars are called “plums”. Because it is almost impossible for a potential buyer to tell exactly the difference between a good used car and a bad one by just looking at them, sellers may sell both at the same price (which is below the “real” worth of the “plums”).

Likewise, in the market of translation service, it is usually difficult for service buyers or clients to assess the skills of a translator before any business relationships have been established. This is particularly true if we take into consideration the fact that the turnover rate for freelance translators is high, as there are many service providers entering and leaving the translation market. Most of the time, service buyers or clients can assess the quality of translation only after they receive the translation or when the translation is used in actual communication acts for various purposes. Therefore, translation service is an experience good which is distinguished by the fact that “its quality, and hence its value to consumers, cannot be precisely determined by buyers at the time of purchase” (Moav and Neeman 2004:1).

Because of the asymmetric information problem previously illustrated, translation service buyers cannot effectively distinguish between a “good” translator and a “bad” one when they need to recruit new translators for their work. Therefore, they tend to pay a price that is below the “fair” level. It is worth pointing out however that we are assuming a fixed number of translators in the market and it needs to be emphasized that the terms “good”, “bad” and “fair” are for illustration purposes only and based on operational assumptions.

Let us assume good translators are worth \$10 for a certain number of words and bad translators \$5. As clients do not have complete information about the quality of translators they first work with, they are only willing to pay according to a certain probability distribution. Assuming a probability of 50% for both types of translators, i.e. half are good and half are bad, clients are only willing to pay  $\$10(1/2) + \$5(1/2) = \$7.5$ . (This distribution is actually a little conservative. We often hear complaints about poor translations, but good translations are seldom praised.) Therefore, the probability that clients will expect a translator to be bad might be higher than 50%, and the price paid may thus be even lower, for instance,  $\$10(1/4) + \$5(3/4) = \$6.25$ .

One possible result is that most good translators will leave the market and poorer translators will stay. This phenomenon is called “adverse selection” (Stiglitz and Walsh 2002). In the illustration above, good translators should be paid \$10 but they receive only \$7.5 because of the asymmetric information problem. We can also observe many highly skilled translators set up their own agencies and then farm jobs out to freelancers. In this case, the former devote more time and effort to project management and marketing than to translation

work. Besides, some translators might acquire further academic qualifications and become translator trainers, as teaching usually gives them a more stable income and probably a higher status.

The problem of asymmetric information in the translation market is detrimental to the de facto professionalization of translators. Bell (2000) distinguishes between a pseudo-profession (one that resembles or imitates another profession), para-profession (one that bears a subsidiary and supporting relationship to a “true” profession), and proto-profession (one that is at an early and primitive stage of professional development), and points out that translators should “reject out of hand the ‘pseudo-’ label, resist the servile implications of the ‘para-’ label and focus on the ‘proto-’ to develop more sophisticated organization which will grow, in time, to a fully fledged profession” (Bell 2000:147).

One possible way to tackle this problem is to use an effective signal. According to Michael Spence (1973, 1974) who first proposed the theory, signaling is the idea that one party (the agent) conveys some meaningful information about itself to another party (the principal). In the translation market, translator certification is often suggested as a signal to differentiate good translators from bad ones if devised and implemented in a valid and reliable manner. In an online symposium in January 2000 organized by the Intercultural Group of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain titled “Innovation in Translator and Interpreter Training”, most discussants agreed on the importance of accreditation and certification (Englund Dimitrova 2000). Most of them believed that it would lead to the professionalization of translators, improving pay and working conditions, as the development of well-established profession prototypes like doctors, lawyers, and accountants has shown.

In fact, many countries, especially those in Asia, have developed or are in the process of developing their own translator certification systems. Even more mature certification systems offered by well-established professional translator associations have introduced a number of new initiatives such as mandatory continuing education requirements to further develop the existing system.

### 3. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The population of this translation industry certification survey is the vendor managers, i.e. the persons who are responsible for hiring translators in translation companies. In July and August 2006, about 375 e-mail messages were sent to vendor managers listed on ProZ and TranslatorsCafé, the two largest online portals for translators, to ask for their assistance in completing the questionnaire on my3q.com. This is a popular and stable platform for online questionnaires and respondents should be able to access this site and complete the survey easily.

Stratified sampling is used in this case to “[ensure] that appropriate numbers of elements are drawn from homogeneous subsets of that population” (Babbie 2007:206). In other words, translation agencies of different sizes are included in this survey. For ProZ, translation companies are classified into: fewer than 5 in-house employees, 6–10 on-site staff, 11–20 on-site staff, 21–40 on-site staff, and more than 40 on-site staff. For TranslatorsCafé, translation agencies are classified into small, medium-sized and large, based on a number of criteria like the number of offices the agency has in various countries, the number of working languages of the agency, how actively the agency seeks translators, etc. It is worth pointing out that many links to the translation agencies on ProZ and TranslatorsCafé are broken. This, to a certain extent, re-affirms the free entry and exit nature of the translation market.

In addition, e-mails were sent to 487 translation agencies around the world, using the American Translators Association List of Translation Agencies and Translators’ Handbook, from June to August 2006. With the assistance of Jiri Stejskal, the survey was also sent to the translation company division members of the American Translators Association in June 2006.

The questionnaire contains 34 questions. The first part asks the respondents to provide information about themselves and their company. The second part is to elicit responses from the vendors regarding their perception of the effectiveness of translator certification. Research subjects were asked whether they agree with some statements related to translator certification on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire is reproduced in the Appendix.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports on the questionnaires sent to persons responsible for hiring translators in translation companies around the world through the channels described above. It asks about views regarding translator certification and its relationships with translation companies, translators and the translation profession as a whole. The first sub-section provides a description of the background of respondents (including their job title, the number of years in the current position and the number of years hiring translators) as well as their companies. The sub-section that follows looks at some of the hiring characteristics of translation companies in this survey. There is one question asking which country the company mainly operates in. Other questions are about the situations of the companies in hiring in-house and freelance translators. Lastly and most importantly, research findings regarding the perceived benefits (or the perception of a lack of benefits) of translator certification to various stakeholders in the translation profession are presented.

In the questionnaire, the respondents who are responsible for hiring translators were asked to provide their job titles. The results are shown in *Table 1*.

*Table 1*

Job titles of the respondents

| Job Title                              | Number (Percentage) |
|--|---------------------|
| Project Manager                        | 25 (35.71)          |
| CEO/Managing Director                  | 11 (15.71)          |
| Owner/President                        | 8 (11.43)           |
| Operations Director/Marketing Director | 7 (10.00)           |
| Translation Manager                    | 7 (10.00)           |
| Senior Translator/Translator/Editor    | 4 (5.71)            |
| Human Resources Manager                | 1 (1.43)            |
| Others                                 | 6 (8.57)            |
| Not Answered                           | 1 (1.43)            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                           | <b>70 (100)</b>     |

There are a number of interesting observations to make. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most popular title for persons making the translator hiring decision is Project Manager (25/70). This category includes other similar titles like Account Manager, Vendor Manager, Project Coordinator or simply Manager. It was somewhat unexpected that the title Vendor Manager is used only three times, as vendor management has been a much discussed area in the global translation and localization industry (DePalma and Beninatto 2008). It is generally believed that the job duties of a vendor manager are to find, manage and monitor language service providers and improve relations with them.

It is also worth pointing out that 29/70 respondents are Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, President or are the company owners. One may suspect that there are quite a few “mom-and-pop” businesses in this pool and their owners like to give themselves fancy titles. But, in fact, among these, there are large companies with 2,500 active freelance translators as well as small companies with two in-house translators and six freelancers.

In the sample, the mean number of years the respondents have been in their current position is 6.90, and they have been responsible for hiring translators for a mean number of 7.94 years. We can interpret this as meaning that the respondents in this sample are fairly experienced in recruiting translators and they were responsible for hiring before they took up their current position.

In Question 4, the respondents were asked in which country their company mainly operates. The results are shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2

Countries or regions the companies mainly operate in

| Countries/regions the company mainly operates in | Number (Percentage) |
|--|---------------------|
| USA  | 15 (21.43)          |
| Hong Kong and China                              | 10 (14.29)          |
| Spain  | 7 (10.00)           |
| Israel   | 5 (7.14)            |
| United Kingdom                                   | 5 (7.14)            |
| Baltic states                                    | 4 (5.71)            |
| Latin America                                    | 4 (5.71)            |
| Worldwide  | 3 (4.29)            |
| Italy  | 2 (2.86)            |
| Australia and New Zealand                        | 2 (2.86)            |
| Others   | 10 (14.29)          |
| Not Answered                                     | 2 (2.86)            |
| Not Applicable                                   | 1 (1.43)            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                     | <b>70 (100)</b>     |

From the table we can see that this group of translation companies is a fairly diversified sample of the population of translation companies in the world. First and foremost, the United States accounts for more than one-fifth of the total sample. North America is arguably the largest segment in the international translation industry, and according to the estimate of the Common Sense Advisory (2005), North America accounted for 42% of the global translation market in revenue in 2004. To account for this, on one hand, as of 2008, the United States accepts more legal immigrants as permanent residents than any other country in the world. In that year alone, the number of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status totaled 1.1 million (US Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2008). On the other hand, the United States lays claim to the largest number of global corporate giants. In the Global 500 Companies survey carried out by the *Fortune* magazine, 140 of the largest companies in the world were American in 2008 (Fortune 2009).

Secondly, Hong Kong and China have 10/70 responses. Business activities in China are booming and the People's Republic of China is increasingly becoming a regional, or even international, software localization centre. According to one estimate (Hong Kong Trade Development Council 2003), the annual turnover of translation and localization business in China is about €1 billion.

The European market is also quite well represented in this sample (18/70), with the inclusion of Spain (7/70), the United Kingdom (5/70), Baltic states

(4/70) and Italy (2/70). Latin America and Australasia are also represented in this sample with 4/70 and 2/70 responses, respectively. Of course, some of these may be regional branches of international companies.

There are quite a number of translation companies in the category “Others”. The countries and regions include South Africa, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, which have shown a varied representation of the international translation industry. One point that needs emphasizing is that some companies state that they operate on the Internet, so it might be difficult to categorize which country they mainly operate in. This shows the increasing influence of the Internet on the translation business and the emergence of the global village. However, Canada is also one of the major translation markets, but it is not represented in this sample.

Question 5 asked the respondents whether their company hires in-house translators. Thirty-four (34/69) of the translation companies in our sample hire in-house translators and thirty-five (35/69) said that their companies do not hire in-house translators. One respondent did not answer this question. The mean number of staff translators for those who do hire in-house translators is only 6.03. The standard deviation is 8.15, meaning that the difference in the number of in-house translators hired is quite large. Indeed, most translation companies hire just one or two staff translators, and only 5/34 of them hire more than 10 in-house translators. The two companies that hire the highest number of in-house translators mainly operate in the UK and Spain. The UK company has 40 staff translators and, somewhat surprisingly, no freelancer. The Spanish company has 29 staff translators and 30 active freelancers.

Question 7 asked the respondents whether their company hires freelance translators. Only four (4/70) of the translation companies stated that they have not hired any freelancers. After close scrutiny, it was found that only two are valid responses, because the other two said that they hire neither in-house translators nor freelance translators. Between the two valid responses, one is the British company mentioned in the previous paragraph and the other is probably a “mom-and-pop” translation house in China which has only three translators.

In Questions 8 and 9, respondents were asked the number of freelance translators they have recruited and the percentage of active freelancers. On average, the translation companies that hire freelancers have 680 translators in their pool. The standard deviation is astonishingly high, about 1,224 translators. The top three employers have recruited 6,000, 5,000 and 4,000 translators respectively, and they are all American companies. In addition, there are eight medium-sized companies that hire 2,000 freelancers or more. Companies that hire 100 freelancers or fewer account for the rest (59/70) and they can be regarded as small companies. Respondents were asked whether the translators in their freelance pool are active. The percentage of active translators ranges from

10% (meaning only one-tenth of their freelancers are active) to 100% (meaning all their freelancers are active) and the mean is 59.13%.

From the questionnaire results, we can see that hiring freelancers has already become a rule rather than an exception in the translation industry. Virtually all companies hire freelance translators. However, in-house translators are not a thing of the past, and talk about the “extinction” of staff translators may be an exaggeration. There might be two reasons for this. First, in-house translators are still needed for editing, revision and quality control, as well as offering coordination and administrative support. Second, the presence of staff translators can act as a signal of quality to the clients. Clients sometimes ask for the number of in-house translators versus freelancers, in order to evaluate the quality and reliability of translation service providers.

Moreover, if we use the number of freelancers as a proxy for the size of translation companies, it can be said this sample consists of large, medium-sized and small companies. The three US companies with more than 4,000 freelancers can be considered large. In fact, in recent years, as a result of merger and acquisition activities in the translation industry, a few big market players have been increasing their market share in the global translation industry. Of course, there are also many small translation companies in this sample. They can be represented by those hiring 100 or fewer freelancers, which account for slightly less than half of the total sample. In between, there are also a few medium-sized companies, and they may be represented by those having 2,000 to 4,000 freelancers in their database.

Another point worth mentioning is that a number of respondents failed to provide figures regarding the number of in-house translators and freelance translators. The respondents may consider the information sensitive and have some reservations about revealing company data.

Questions 10 and 11 asked the respondents about the degree of difficulty in recruiting in-house and freelance translators.

*Table 3*

Degree of difficulty in hiring in-house and freelance translators

| Question  | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|---|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 10. The company finds it easy to hire suitable in-house translators.  | 2.67 | 1.24 | 12 (21.05%)           | 14 (24.56%)           | 18 (31.58%) | 7 (12.28%)         | 6 (10.53%)         |
| 11. The company finds it easy to hire suitable freelance translators. | 3.30 | 1.42 | 8 (12.12%)            | 17 (25.76%)           | 6 (9.09%)   | 17 (25.76%)        | 18 (27.27%)        |

In general, the respondents thought that it is more difficult to recruit in-house translators than freelancers. As shown in *Table 4*, 35/66 of the respondents believed that it is relatively easy for them to hire freelance translators, but only 25/66 of the respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that hiring in-house translators is a relatively straightforward task. Also, the view is more clear-cut for freelance translators, as far fewer respondents chose “Neither” as their answer.

*Table 4*

Whether the newly hired translators increasingly have translator certification

| Question   | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|--|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 12. Newly hired translators increasingly have certification (e.g. MCIL, ATA, NAATI, CATTI) | 3.01 | 1.37 | 12 (17.65%)           | 14 (20.59%)           | 15 (22.06%) | 15 (22.06%)        | 12 (17.65%)        |

These survey results make sense, as hiring in-house translators is a more long-term and committed investment for the companies. Direct labor costs may include salaries, medical benefits and travel allowances. Moreover, as there are peak and off-peak seasons in the translation market, hiring freelance translators may provide more flexibility to the translation companies. And as some translation companies provide services in dozens of languages, they cannot have in-house translators for every single language. More importantly, as revealed, most translation companies hire only one or two in-house translators. Therefore, staff translators may need to be responsible for ensuring the quality of the translation services provided by different freelance workers. These few in-house translators may need to be, in a sense, masters of all trades. No wonder recruiting in-house translators is more difficult in the eyes of our respondents.

Questions 13 and 14 ask the respondents the minimum years of experience they require and prefer their translators to have, respectively. The companies' minimum requirement is 2.71 years (standard deviation 1.79 years) and their preference is 3.61 years (standard deviation 1.79 years). It is worth pointing out that 6/65 respondents do not require their applicants to have any experience but almost all respondents prefer their applicants to have some years of experience. The respondents' preference for job applicants with experience can be explained as reflecting that if translators come with some on-the-job training, there will be less need for the translation companies to provide training opportunities. Thus, training costs can be minimized for the employers.

Question 15 asks the respondents whether their newly hired translators increasingly have translator certification.

As discussed above, more and more countries have developed or are in the process of developing their own translator certification system. However, as illustrated in *Table 5*, it is not certain that the newly hired translators increasingly have translator certification, as the responses of agreement (26/68) are almost equal to the ones of disagreement (27/68), while 15/68 of them answered “Neither”.

It might be interesting to see how large translation companies (defined as those that have 2,000 or more freelance translators in their pool) and small ones (defined as those that have 50 or fewer freelance translators in their pool) answered this question. Large companies tend to “strongly agree” that the newly hired translators increasingly have translation certification (arithmetic mean and standard deviation are 3.82 and 1.17, respectively) while small companies “somewhat disagree” (arithmetic mean and standard deviation are 2.47 and 0.96 respectively) with the statement. This may be interpreted as suggesting that large companies tend to employ more translators with certification while small ones do not. However, it is also possible that the translators who have earned their certification believe that they are more competitive and apply for a position of freelancer in large companies instead of small ones.

*Table 5*

Identification of job applicant’s linguistic and subject knowledge through translator certification

| Question   | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|--|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 15. Translator certification makes it easier to identify applicant’s linguistic knowledge. | 3.46 | 1.35 | 9 (13.24%)            | 10 (14.71%)           | 6 (8.82%)   | 27 (39.71%)        | 16 (23.53%)        |
| 16. Translator certification makes it easier to identify applicant’s subject knowledge.    | 3.03 | 1.39 | 14 (20.59%)           | 11 (16.18%)           | 13 (19.12%) | 19 (27.94%)        | 11 (16.18%)        |

Translation service companies are important stakeholders in the translation market. If the translator certification system is to be successful, support and even input are needed from them. Therefore, how translation service companies perceive the translator certification system is an important area to explore. Questions 15 to 20 ask the respondents whether they think that translator certi-

fication can make the identification of a job applicant's linguistic knowledge and subject knowledge easier, and whether they believe that translator certification can facilitate the recruitment process and reduce the staff attrition rate.

From *Table 5*, which shows the responses to Questions 15 and 16, it is quite clear that most respondents believe that translator certification makes it easier to identify the applicant's linguistic knowledge. In answer to Question 15, 43/68 strongly or somewhat agree that they can have a better understanding of the applicant's linguistic knowledge through translator certification. The arithmetic mean and standard deviation are 3.46 and 1.35, respectively.

However, the respondents were not so certain when they were asked whether translator certification can help them identify applicants' subject knowledge. The arithmetic mean is 3.03, indicating that most respondents have answered "Neither" and/or the answers "Strongly Disagree/Somewhat Disagree" offset those of "Strongly Agree/Somewhat Disagree". As shown in *Table 6*, this is indeed the case, as 13/68 of the respondents chose "Neither". Those who disagree (30/68) with the statement "Translator certification makes it easier to identify applicant's subject knowledge" somewhat exceed those who agree with it (25/68).

*Table 6*

Perceived benefits to the recruitment process and staff retention through translator certification

| Question  | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|---|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 17. Translator certification makes the recruitment process easier.      | 3.46 | 1.31 | 9 (13.24%)            | 10 (14.71%)           | 6 (8.82%)   | 27 (39.71%)        | 16 (23.53%)        |
| 18. Translator certification makes the recruitment process cheaper.     | 2.35 | 1.21 | 14 (20.59%)           | 11 (16.18%)           | 13 (19.21%) | 19 (27.94%)        | 11 (16.18%)        |
| 19. Translator certification makes the recruitment more time-efficient. | 3.21 | 1.40 | 12 (17.91%)           | 9 (13.43%)            | 13 (19.40%) | 19 (28.35%)        | 14 (20.90%)        |
| 20. Translation certification reduces the likelihood of staff turnover. | 2.58 | 1.13 | 15 (23.08%)           | 14 (21.54%)           | 20 (30.77%) | 15 (23.08%)        | 1 (1.54%)          |

From *Table 6*, we can see that about 43/68 of the respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree that “Translator certification makes the recruitment process easier”, and 33/67 either strongly agree or somewhat agree that “Translator certification makes the recruitment more time efficient”. However, when it comes to cost considerations, the respondents are not as certain. The arithmetic mean for the statement “Translator certification makes the recruitment process cheaper” is only 2.35, meaning that, on average, the respondents do not believe that translator certification can reduce the expenditure of the recruitment process.

Although the recruitment of more freelancers in the language service industry may increase the flexibility of personnel needs, it may not significantly reduce recruitment costs. One possible reason is that the costs of recruitment are not simply the hiring costs, such as the costs of advertising on various printed media and the Internet, but also include the indirect costs of a bad hire (Bellizzi and Hasty 2000). The costs of a bad hire are difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Increasing quality assurance costs and even reduction in returned business may be included. Therefore, as more translators have translator certification, it might be easier and more time-efficient for language service companies to locate potential vendors.

In answer to Question 20, “Translation certification reduces the likelihood of staff turnover”, only one respondent strongly agrees. The arithmetic mean is 2.58. In general, staff turnover is considered undesirable for translation companies, as it involves various costs. The costs of staff turnover can be significant and may include administrative costs associated with the leaver’s separation from the company, administrative costs associated with creating a vacancy, costs of covering the vacancy until it is filled, advertising and agency costs for the vacancy, costs involved in the selection process (including but not restricted to the administration and evaluation of translation tests) and training costs.

According to *Table 7*, the respondents agreed that a person with translator certification gets more job offers. In answer to Question 21, 38/66 of the respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the statement. The arithmetic mean is 3.52. When asked whether a person with translator certification is more likely to be hired at the respondents’ firm, the respondents are not as certain. The mean is only 3.14, and 12/65 of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. These two results may be interpreted as follows: although translator certification may be a well-appreciated addition to the applicant’s résumé, when a company makes recruitment decisions, other factors might be considered as well. A very interesting observation is that even fewer respondents believe that a person with translator certification would receive higher pay. The arithmetic mean is 3.08. Although 28/66 of the respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the positive relationship between translator certification and pay, 11/66 have the extreme view that translator cer-

tification does not lead to higher pay. To some extent, this shows there is keen competition in the language service industry and, unlike other professions, almost anyone with a university degree and some translation experience can enter the translation service market.

Table 7

Perceived monetary benefits of translator certification to translators

| Question  | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|---|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 21. A person with translation certification gets more job offers.                 | 3.52 | 1.21 | 5 (7.58%)             | 9(13.64%)             | 14 (21.21%) | 23 (34.85%)        | 15 (22.73%)        |
| 22. A person with translator certification is more likely to be hired at my firm. | 3.14 | 1.39 | 12 (18.46%)           | 10 (15.38%)           | 12 (18.46%) | 19 (29.23%)        | 12 (18.46%)        |
| 23. A person with translator certification receives higher pay.                   | 3.08 | 1.27 | 11 (16.67%)           | 9 (13.64%)            | 18 (27.27%) | 20 (30.30%)        | 8 (12.12%)         |

Table 8

Perceived benefits of translator certification to translators as regards the indication of language proficiency and subject knowledge

| Question  | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|---|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 24. A person with translator certification has better language proficiency. | 2.88 | 1.26 | 12 (17.65%)           | 15 (22.06%)           | 17 (25.00%) | 17 (25.00%)        | 7 (10.29%)         |
| 25. A person with translator certification has better subject knowledge.    | 2.75 | 1.25 | 13 (19.12%)           | 17 (25%)              | 19 (27.94%) | 12 (17.65%)        | 7 (10.29%)         |

Questions 24 and 25 ask the respondents whether a person with translator certification has better language proficiency and subject knowledge, respectively. According to *Table 8*, in general, the respondents do not agree with these

two statements. Twenty-seven (27/68) of the respondents either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement on language proficiency and thirty (30/68) with the statement on subject knowledge. This difference is in line with Questions 15 and 16, which ask respondents whether they agree with the statements “Translator certification makes it easier to identify applicant’s linguistic knowledge” and “Translator certification makes it easier to identify applicant’s subject knowledge”.

Table 9

Perceived non-monetary benefits of translator certification to translators

| Question  | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|---|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 29. A person with translator certification earns the respect of co-workers.       | 3.23 | 1.13 | 7 (12.28%)            | 7 (12.28%)            | 16 (28.07%) | 22 (38.60%)        | 5 (8.77%)          |
| 30. A person with translator certification is more satisfied with his or her job. | 3.13 | 0.93 | 5 (8.77%)             | 6 (10.53%)            | 27 (47.37%) | 17 (29.82%)        | 2 (3.51%)          |
| 32. A person with translator certification has a higher sense of self-esteem.     | 3.62 | 1.03 | 4 (7.14%)             | 2 (3.57%)             | 17 (30.36%) | 24 (42.86%)        | 9 (16.07%)         |

Questions 29, 30 and 32 look at the perceived non-monetary benefits of translator certification to translators. These include peer respect, job satisfaction and self-esteem. As shown in *Table 9*, the respondents believe that translator certification is likely to increase a translator’s peer respect (mean = 3.23) and self-esteem (mean = 3.62). It should be noted that about 33/56 of the respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree that translator certification leads to higher self-esteem. However, far fewer respondents believe that translator certification can lead to more job satisfaction (mean = 3.13) and most of them said “Neither”. This makes sense, as job satisfaction may be due to a number of reasons and translator certification may not be a relevant factor.

Questions 27, 28, 31 and 33 ask the respondents about the perceived benefits of translator certification with regard to translators’ long-term career development. According to *Table 10*, quite a large proportion of respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree with Questions 27 and 28, that translators with certification are more committed to their career (33/55) and less likely to

leave the translation profession (33/56). The means for these two questions are 3.50 and 3.32, respectively. Having translator certification can be interpreted as having the intention to develop a relatively long-term career in translation. However, whether that career will be successful might be a different story. That is why respondents give a much lower rating for Question 31, which states that “A person with translator certification is more likely to have a successful career”.

Table 10

Perceived benefits of translator certification with regards to long-term career development

| Question   | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|--|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 27. A person with translator certification is more able to deal with change occurring in the industry. | 2.84 | 1.21 | 14 (24.14%)           | 6 (10.34%)            | 18 (31.03%) | 16 (27.59%)        | 4 (6.90%)          |
| 28. A person with translator certification is more likely to have a successful career.                 | 3.27 | 1.21 | 8 (13.79%)            | 5 (8.62%)             | 19 (32.76%) | 18 (31.03%)        | 8 (13.79%)         |
| 31. A person with translator certification is more committed to his or her career.                     | 3.50 | 1.10 | 5 (9.09%)             | 2 (3.64%)             | 15 (27.27%) | 24 (43.64%)        | 9 (16.36%)         |
| 33. A person with translator certification is less likely to leave the translation profession.         | 3.32 | 1.15 | 6 (10.71%)            | 3 (5.36%)             | 14 (25.00%) | 25 (44.64%)        | 8 (14.29%)         |

One striking observation is that the respondents do not agree that people with translator certification would be more able to deal with change occurring in the industry. For Question 33, the mean is at a low of 2.84. Twenty (20/58) either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree, and eighteen (18/58) answer “Neither”. This is understandable, as translator certification is usually granted after a one-off pencil-and-paper translation test. For example, the two well-established professional translator associations, the American Translators Association [ATA] and the Chartered Institute of Linguists [IoL], United Kingdom, require candidates to take written tests in an examination hall. However, it is worth pointing out that for some professional translators associations such as the Japan Translation Association (2008), candidates are now able to take their certification test online.

In the real world, professional translators need to be able to use translation memories and to work with machine-translated texts. What is more, as translation projects require collaboration and co-operation among translators, revisers and desktop publishing professionals and have become increasingly team-based, the inauthentic setting of conventional translation tests might not be an adequate response to the changes in the translation marketplace. This may explain to some extent why translator associations have paid more attention to continuing professional development (CPD) and some even make CPD a mandatory requirement if their members desire to reach a higher status in the membership hierarchy. The designation of Chartered Linguist of the Chartered Institute of Linguists is a vivid example (Chartered Institute of Linguists 2007). Of course, as in many other professions, CPD is still a relatively new phenomenon and there is still much work for the translation profession to make these efforts cater better to market developments.

Table 11

Perceived benefits of translator certification to the translation profession

| Question   | Mean | SD   | Strongly Disagree (1) | Somewhat Disagree (2) | Neither (3) | Somewhat Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
|--|------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 34. A person with translator certification enhances the image of the profession. | 4.06 | 0.98 | 3 (5.17%)             | 0 (0.00%)             | 9 (15.52%)  | 26 (44.83%)        | 20 (34.48%)        |

The last question, Question 34, asks the respondents to evaluate the benefits of translator certification to the translation profession. It has the highest arithmetic mean of all the questions, which is 4.06, and the standard deviation is relatively small (0.98). A higher percentage of respondents believe that a person with translator certification enhances the image of the profession: 46/58 of respondents either strongly agree or somewhat agree with the relationship between translator certification and the image of the translation profession.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In sum, we can say that in this sample of small, medium-sized and large translation companies from around the world, the respondents reported that they maintain a pool of freelancers but still hire a few in-house translators. They see translator certification as something that can enhance the overall image of the translation profession. In their view, certification does bring some benefits to translators who hold it (e.g. increase in the number of job offers, higher self-esteem and respect from co-workers). However, increased monetary benefits brought

by translator certification might be minimal. Translation companies generally welcome a system of translator certification, as it provides a relatively reliable signal of applicants' linguistic ability, and this has made the recruitment process easier and more time-efficient.

Last but not least, it is also important to point out the limitations of this online quantitative study. Obviously, there are many advantages of collecting survey data via the Internet. Apart from cost- and time-efficiency, one of the most relevant advantages to this research is that the Internet can possibly generate a global sample and provide access to respondents across geographic boundaries. However, online surveys have the following limitations and accompanying constraints. First, the response rate is low. Among the 375 e-mail messages sent to vendor managers, only 70 questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 18.7%. According to Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister (2006), the response rates of online surveys were sometimes 90% before 2000 but have been dropping fast to between 2% and 30% in recent years. If we compare the response rate of this survey with these figures, it is not particularly low.

Perhaps a more serious problem is the validity of self-reported data in online surveys. As noted by Hewson et al. (2003), when questionnaires are administered via the Internet, rather than in person, the researcher is less able to judge the extent to which responses are sincere and genuine. In the research findings regarding the hiring characteristics of translation companies (Question 8), there was a large translation company which claimed that it has 2,500 active freelance translators. According to Dr. Jiri Stejskal, President of American Translators Association, only companies such as Lionbridge (probably the largest multinational which hired 4,600 full-time staff in 2007) language service provider can possibly have this number of active freelancers. Therefore, it is quite likely that a few companies may exaggerate their number of freelancers to make it look like they are large.

In short, the statistical significance of these findings should not be overstated. Caution needs to be taken when we make claims that involve generalizability and representativeness. That having said, well-conducted surveys of a limited scale still have a contribution to make. As pointed out by Punch (2003:39), "we can learn something useful from almost any sample as long as the research is carefully and thoroughly carried out".

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## Appendix

### Translation industry certification survey

1. What is your job title? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. In total, how many years have you been hiring translators? \_\_\_\_\_ years
4. In which country does your company mainly operate? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Does your company hire in-house translators? Yes/No
6. If yes, how many in-house translators does your company currently employ? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does your company hire freelance translators? Yes/No
8. If yes, how many translators are there in your freelance pool? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What percentage of them are active freelancers? \_\_\_\_\_%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Circle one.

|   | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|---------|----------------|----------------|
| In general, our company finds it easy to hire suitable in-house translators.  | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |
| In general, our company finds it easy to hire suitable freelance translators. Increasingly, newly hired translators have certification (e.g. MCIL, ATA, NAATI, CATTI) | 1                 | 2                 | 3       | 4              | 5              |

|   |
|---|
| How many months or years of job experience in translation is your company's minimum requirement? _____ months _____ years |
| How many months or years of job experience does your company prefer for newly hired translators? _____ months _____ years |

With specific reference to the organization you currently work for, how much do you agree or disagree with these statements about the benefits of translator certification?

| <b>Translator certification...</b>                           | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Neither</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Makes it easier to identify applicant's linguistic knowledge | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Makes it easier to identify applicant's subject knowledge    | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Makes the recruitment process easier                         | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Makes the recruitment process cheaper                        | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Makes the recruitment more time efficient                    | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Reduces the likelihood of staff turnover                     | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |

Thinking specifically about translators with certification, e.g. MCIL, ATA, NAATI, CATTI (compared to those without translator certification), how much do you agree or disagree with these statements? Circle one.

| <b>A person with translator certification</b>              | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> | <b>Somewhat Disagree</b> | <b>Neither</b> | <b>Somewhat Agree</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Gets more job offers                                       | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is more likely to be hired at my firm                      | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Receives higher pay  | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Has better language proficiency                            | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Has better subject knowledge                               | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Receives more customer complaints                          | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is less able to deal with change occurring in the industry | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is more likely to have a successful career                 | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Earns the respect of co-workers                            | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is satisfied with his/her job                              | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is more committed to the career                            | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Has a higher sense of self-esteem                          | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Is more likely to leave the translation profession         | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |
| Positively enhances the image of the profession            | 1                        | 2                        | 3              | 4                     | 5                     |

Thank you for your cooperation!