**The Education of a Translator**

Translators come from all backgrounds. Some have Masters Degrees in translation from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, some have certificates from Georgetown, others have degrees from schools in Europe (such as the ones in London or Geneva) or Asia (such as Simul Academy in Tokyo or Winzao in Taiwan) and many have a degree in a general field such as literature or history. While a specialized degree in translation is useful (I have one), it is far from necessary. What counts more than anything else is ability. So, where does this ability come from?

Perhaps it is nature, but I suspect that nurture helps immensely. Most translators are very well-read in their languages, and can write well. Some are writers who use translation as a way to write for a living. Others are fascinated by language and use translation as a way to be close to their favorite subject. Still others are experts in certain fields and use their language skills to work in that field.

Almost all professional translators in the United States have at least a college degree. Some even have advanced degrees either in translation or in the field they specialize in.

Most translators have university-level language training in their B and C languages. Some started their languages earlier, others later, but very few translators have no language training at all. Of course, language training might mean specialized courses from a variety of schools.

Translators also generally have lived in the countries where their languages are spoken. I lived in Japan for almost three years. I know of translators who have spent seven or even 10 years abroad. Some translators have spent more time in the country of their B language than in the country of their A language. The notable exception to this is Spanish in the United States and English abroad. Because Spanish is used so widely and available in many parts of the U.S., some translators learn and then work in the language without ever leaving the U.S. As well, translators in other countries often work from English into their native language with just the language training they received in school.

**Bilingualism**

A good translator is by definition a bilingual person. However, the opposite is not necessarily true. A born and bred bilingual will still need two things to become a translator. First, the skills and experience necessary for translation and second, the knowledge of the field in which he or she will translate.

The skills and experience for translation include the ability to write well in the target language, the ability to read and understand the source language material very well, and the ability to work with the latest word-processing and communications hardware and software.

This brings up the question: does a born and bred bilingual makes a better translator than someone who learned the B language later in life? There is no definite answer, but the following issues are important. First, a born and bred bilingual often suffers from not truly knowing any language well enough to translate. Second, born and bred bilinguals often don’t know the culture of the target language well enough. And last, they often lack the analytical linguistic skills to work through a sticky text.

However, the acquired bilingual might not have the same in-depth knowledge of slang, colloquialisms, and dialect that the true bilingual has. As well, the acquired bilingual will not be able to translate as readily in both directions (from B to A language and A to B language; for instance, I cannot easily translate into Japanese). Finally, true bilinguals often have a greater appreciation of the subtleties and nuances of both their languages than someone who learns their B language later in life can ever hope to have.