



ATA in the Nation's Capital

*By Barbara
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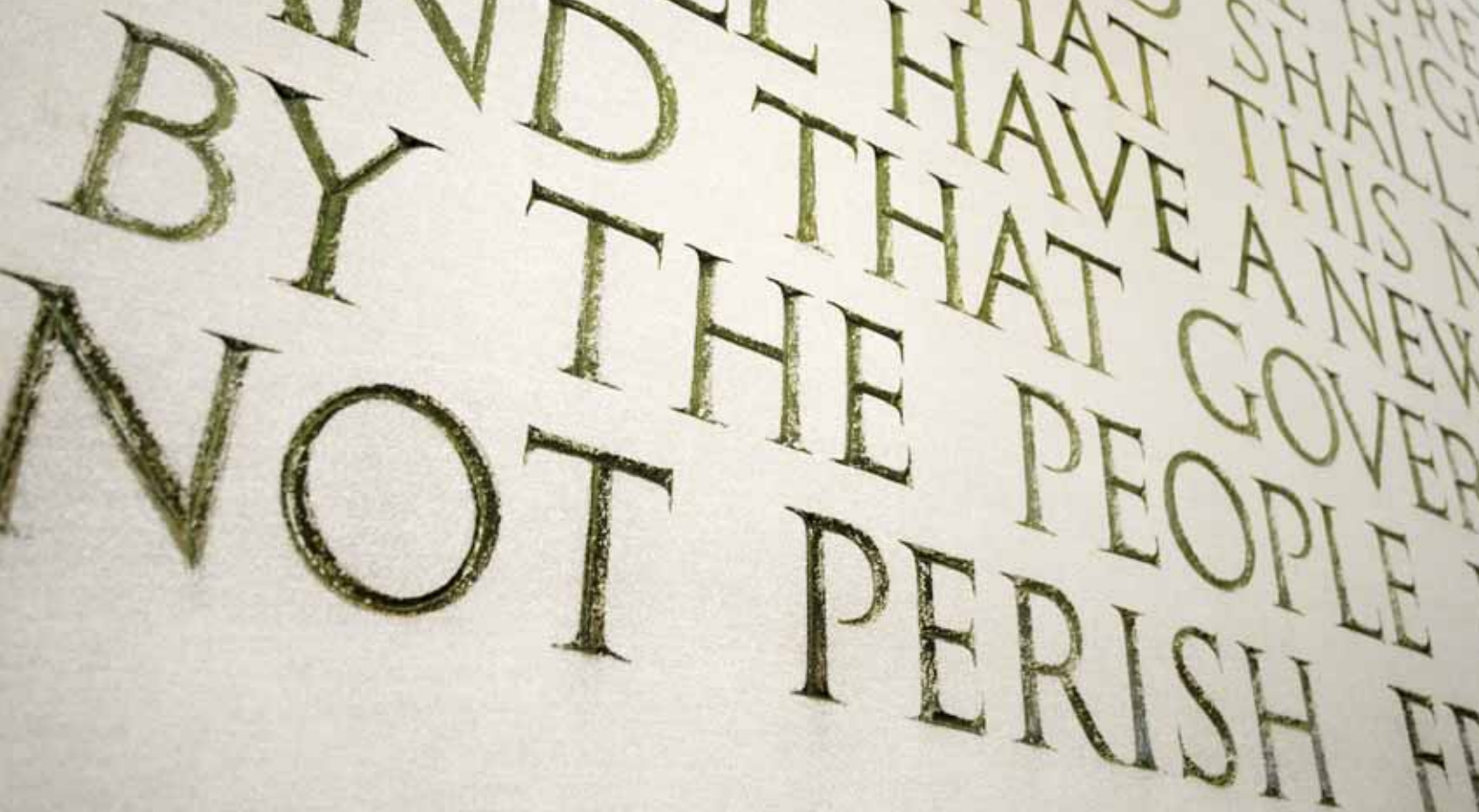
ATA's Government Seminar, held April 5-6 at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, DC, drew more than 100 attendees, some from as far away as Puerto Rico and Brazil! The seminar targeted translators and interpreters seeking advanced-level continuing education. Featuring eight in-depth presentations and 12 speakers, the weekend was packed with information about career opportunities and training requirements for interpreters and translators hoping to find work with the federal government. The event also provided opportunities to network during coffee breaks, over lunch, at the Job Marketplace, and at the Saturday night networking session. There is simply not enough space to cover all the excellent material presented to attendees during this intense two-day event, but if the highlights that follow pique your curiosity, you can always peruse some of the links provided in this article for more information.

Promoting Excellence in Language Services

No matter what your role in the language profession may be—staffer or freelancer, translator or interpreter, linguist or project manager—your career should be spent in the pursuit of excellence. How does the U.S. government achieve professional excellence through recruiting, testing, and training, as well as in the actual delivery of services? How does it reconcile the need for excellence in language work with the realities of the assignments it handles?

The Department of State's Office of Language Services

The U.S. Department of State's Office of Language Services (LS) has been providing answers to the questions above for over 200 years, and



the three LS panelists to take the podium for the first session certainly did not disappoint their audience.

Translating Division: Joseph Mazza, the chief of the State Department's Translating Division, emphasized that at the State Department, the world watches what you translate. Translators and interpreters spend entire careers preparing themselves for important moments, knowing that their work will be scrutinized not only at the time, but also later by historians and policymakers. In spite of tight deadlines and many nerve-racking moments, Mazza feels that the work is extremely rewarding.

To illustrate the urgency with which State Department documents must often be translated and the work environment for doing so, Mazza provided attendees with a brief communication from a Minister of Foreign Affairs written during World War I, and asked us to translate it into English. With visuals, he transported us back in time to 1914 (when sophisticated translation tools did not yet exist), and although we were permitted to consult with colleagues, our


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only language tool was a limited vocabulary list. During the few minutes we were given to complete the task, Mazza interrupted several times to remind us of the impending deadline. The exercise certainly impressed upon us the importance of the work that has been undertaken by generations of State Department linguists, and we were ready to learn more about its current activities.

Today, the Translating Division can handle almost every language used in international diplomacy, but regularly deals with more than 100 language pairs, the highest volume being into Spanish and into Arabic. Duties include translating, reviewing, writing short and in-depth summaries, transcribing, and comparing and certifying treaty texts. Text types range from treaties and other international agreements, laws and regulations, VIP

correspondence, speeches, policy statements, reports, vital records, and court records, to foreign-language mail from private citizens. (One unusual translation request involved a quilt embroidered in Arabic!)

Striving to provide excellence in human resources, the Translating Division devotes considerable time to the continuous cycle of needs analysis and recruiting, testing, contracting, training, and maintaining its resources. High standards are required throughout the workflow cycle, including project management, translation, reviewing, and incorporating feedback and lessons learned.

Mazza gave an overview of the LS translation test and some tips. Applicants can prepare for the exam by reading current foreign language texts as often as possible, staying abreast of national and international current 

events, translating as much as possible, finding a mentor, and reviewing style and usage rules in their target language. Mazza mentioned that common mistakes on the exam include mis-translating and/or omitting text, slavishly adhering to the original, following the source text punctuation

inferior work, skill testing must yield quantifiable measurements and the government must demand quality from its contractors up front. There have also been discussions among federal departments and agencies participating at meetings of the Interagency Language Roundtable about using

conference interpreting in that direct interaction with the listeners is permitted if clarification is required. English-language officers assist with travel, logistics, and cultural adaptation for participants in various visitors programs who speak some English. Assignments range from three to six weeks.

Recruiting, testing, and assessing interpreters is a time-consuming and ongoing process. Fallow gave some additional information and advice about interpreter testing, explaining that applicants are tested for linguistic ability, public speaking skills, general background knowledge, cross-cultural empathy/understanding, and personal/political adroitness. The best way to prepare for the test, he said, is to practice interpreting every chance you get and to read, read, read.

The best way to prepare for an interpreting test is to read, read, read.

rather than the rules of the target language, and failing to proofread.

Mazza closed his presentation by asking us not to forget the reason many of us chose to work with languages in the first place—our love of words, language, and another culture.

Procurement/Performance Standards: Brenda Sprague, the director of the State Department's Office of Language Services, spoke about the State Department's and attendees' shared commitment to professionalism and excellence. She also discussed the procurement policy and quality/performance standards.

Sprague explained that the government has various requirements to obtain language support, but sometimes the agencies procuring the services have difficulty defining those requirements or knowing how to fill them. The LS office has a relatively small in-house staff, so it uses mostly subcontractors to meet its needs. As such, quality assurance is a constant area of concern, since there are always people who promise to deliver anything and are willing to work for nothing. To guard against receiving

translation memory and other tools to maintain quality and consistency.

In terms of the procedure for evaluating the qualifications of its applicants, Sprague described the State Department's interpreting test. First, a screening test, including an assessment of U.S.-related knowledge, is conducted over the telephone. If the applicant passes this test, a consecutive interpreting test is given by a video presenter and taped for evaluation later.

Interpreter Assigning Unit: Marc Fallow, chief of the Interpreter Assigning Unit, oversees assigning interpreters in some 50 languages to a variety of U.S. government-sponsored programs. The languages needed most frequently are Arabic, Russian, Spanish, French, and Chinese.

Conference-level consecutive and simultaneous interpreting services are provided for public diplomacy assignments. Both consecutive (formerly "escort") and simultaneous seminar interpreting are provided for public diplomacy assignments involving foreign visitors to the U.S. Although seminar interpreting is conducted in the simultaneous mode, it differs from

Translating and Interpreting for the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Margaret Gulotta, the chief of Language Services at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the bureau's senior language authority, gave attendees a glimpse into the FBI's Foreign Language Program.

Critical to the FBI's success in protecting national security is its ability to prioritize, translate, and understand in a timely fashion the information to which it has access. In this regard, the Foreign Language Program's support to the FBI's law enforcement function is substantial. In addition to supporting the FBI's two highest priorities of counterterrorism and counterintelligence, increasing demands have been placed on the Foreign Language Program to support the FBI's criminal and cyber-crimes programs, international training, international deployments, and interpreting/interviewing assignments.

Linguists are the first line of analysis for information collected in a

language other than English. Approximately 100 languages are covered in the program, and the volume of work is extremely high. More than 1.5 million pages of text on a wide variety of topics are translated annually, and unrealistic deadlines are the norm. All text is reviewed for its intelligence value, and significant materials are then summarized. Since 98% of the work is classified, the majority of work is done onsite for security reasons.

There is a strong quality control system in place. To ensure consistency and accuracy, a manual of translation standards has been created for internal use, and everything that is translated into a foreign language is reviewed. Additionally, the program is under continuous internal supervision, as well as external supervision by the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and the U.S. Congress.

Besides translating documents, the FBI also reviews approximately 2,000 hours of audio material per day. In FY 2007, FBI linguists spent more than 22,000 hours doing simultaneous/consecutive interpreting. The FBI also receives many unsolicited requests, including one involving a “suspicious” cassette tape that was turned over to the New York Police Department after being found in Grand Central Station.

Linguists can apply for employee positions as special agent linguists or for contractor positions as contract linguists, language monitors, or testers. Those who pass the initial screening then take the foreign language test battery—a combination of listening and reading comprehension tests, translation or English composition tests, and speaking tests. Components vary depending on the position being applied for and the languages involved. In

addition, thorough background investigations are conducted. The FBI’s standards are very high: of the approximately 10,000 language tests administered per year, the FBI hires only one out of 10 applicants.

Translating for the National Virtual Translation Center

Jeffrey Robinson, the director of the National Virtual Translation Center (NVTC), discussed the organization’s mission and possible job opportunities.

Established by law in 2003 under the U.S. Patriot Act and the Intelligence Authorization Act for the purpose of providing timely and accurate translations of foreign intelligence, the NVTC’s goal is to augment existing government translation capabilities by:

- Acting as a clearinghouse for facilitating interagency use of translators.
- Partnering with elements of the U.S. government, academia, and private industry to identify translator resources and engage their services.
- Building a nationwide team of highly qualified, motivated linguists and translators connected virtually to the program office in Washington, DC.
- Applying state-of-the-art technology to maximize translator efficiency.

The NVTC is a virtual workplace, which means that personnel and linguists are located throughout the U.S. and connect via various networks into and out of the main program office to perform their work. There is a staff of 25 to 30 in the main headquarters program office in Washington, DC, in addition to some 500 vetted U.S. citizen independent contract linguists

(ICLs), and another 1,300 self-identified U.S.-based ICLs, all drawn from a wide range of resources. In addition to proficiency in a second language, linguists must also have subject matter expertise.

Those who work on classified materials receive their assignments via secure channels through arrangements with other government facilities. Linguists who work on unclassified projects can work from many different work sites (including home), provided they have sufficient connectivity and the necessary hardware and software to complete the job. Linguists work for the NVTC on a flexible, on-demand basis. Because the NVTC is Web-based, virtual translation allows linguists across the U.S. more flexibility and is cost-effective for the government.

The NVTC handles many types of requirements into and from English, 75% of which are unclassified. Classified information is handled by the NVTC ICLs who hold top-secret clearance. Languages and dialects used are driven by demand, and the workload is growing. The NVTC handled 23 jobs in 2003, and that number had risen to over 7,000 by 2007.

Robinson predicts that, in the future, translation will no longer be considered a commodity and translators will be called internationalists. The trend is toward hiring language analysts—people who have language capability and the ability to summarize and analyze content.

Interpreting for the Federal and State Courts

James Plunkett is the foreign language court interpreter coordinator for the District of Columbia Superior Court. Plunkett explained that everything on the record in court must be interpreted, word-for-word, usu- ➤

ally simultaneously but sometimes consecutively. Occasionally, a court interpreter may be asked to do a

venues include: prosecutors' and public defenders' offices; mental health units; investigative, enforce-

included ways of finding work (contracts and full-time jobs) and letting the government know about your translation/interpreting work. Each of these was described in considerable detail, and DeCamp made navigating the systems seem a little less onerous. Several resources and suggestions from her presentation are provided below.

DeCamp also touched on the catch-22 regarding obtaining a security clearance: you cannot get a security clearance unless you do classified work, but you cannot do classified work unless you have a security clearance.

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verbal sight translation at the last minute (e.g., court forms, marriage certificates, etc.).

In addition to being fluent in both languages, interpreters must recognize and convey nuances, as well as be familiar with legalese and slang. Ideally, they should also be familiar with the case, the client's speech patterns, and any relevant names and numbers. Although the client's emotions need to be mirrored, Plunkett feels that if the client is very emotional it is best for interpreters to maintain a neutral tone to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

Interpreters should devise their own symbols for note-taking in the consecutive mode. When in the simultaneous mode, interpreters should resort to chunking or queuing (mentally storing) information for use during a pause. Plunkett emphasized that interpreters must acknowledge their limitations. In general, an interpreter's stamina drops drastically after interpreting for 30 minutes, which is why it is important to work with another interpreter who can take over when a break is necessary.

A court interpreter is not restricted to working in a court of law. Other

ment, probation, and court reporting offices; jails; and the offices of private companies. Interpreting can be done in person or over the telephone.

Federal Court Interpreter Certification is available in Spanish. Tests are given every other year and consist of a written portion (both languages, with multiple-choice questions) and an oral exam (five parts involving simulations). The oral test is difficult, and only 10% of applicants pass. Each state court has its own requirements, but most states participate in a consortium to allow certification reciprocity among states.

Plunkett considers court interpreting a service to society because it puts the limited English-proficient individuals in the courtroom on an equal footing from a language standpoint.

Working with the Federal Government: Information Resources

Jennifer DeCamp, human language technology chief scientist for MITRE, a corporation with three federally funded research and development centers and a homeland security center, provided attendees with numerous resources related to translating and interpreting for the federal government. These resources

Resources/Suggestions for Translation/Interpreting Opportunities with the Federal Government

American FactFinder

<http://factfinder.census.gov>

This is an interesting link for information about language demographics.

BuyUSA

www.buyusa.com/page/mygtn/splash.asp

Crump, Ted. *Translating and Interpreting in the Federal Government* (American Translators Association, 2001)

www.atanet.org/kiosk/ATA_PubWare.pl

This book contains information on more than 70 organizations that employ translators and interpreters.

Federal Business Opportunities

www.fedbizopps.gov

This single procurement site replaced the *Commerce Business Daily*, and allows the user to search on active bids.

**Defense Security
Cooperation Agency**

www.dsca.mil

Government Services Administration

www.gsa.gov/language

International Trade Administration

www.commerce.gov/Services/DEV01_005463

**Minority Business
Development Center**

www.mbd.gov

**MITRE's Foreign
Language Resource Center**

<http://flrc.mitre.org>

National Virtual Translation Center

www.nvtc.gov

**North American Industry
Classification System Code 541930
for Translation and Interpretation**

www.census.gov/epcd/ec97/def/541930.HTM

The NAICS replaces Product/Service Classification (PSC) codes.

**Office of the Director of National
Intelligence Technology Forum**

www.techforum.odniflpo.tswg.gov

**Government Outsourcing
Equals Opportunities**

I had never given much thought to what went on behind the scenes at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) until this presentation by Flori Berrocal McClung, an international postal affairs specialist. I found it fascinating that so many different areas and departments collaborate to deliver the mail nationally and internationally.

McClung explained that the Universal Postal Union (UPU) is a specialized agency within the United Nations (UN). The USPS's Interna-

tional Postal Affairs (IPA) office works with postal counterparts of the 191 UPU member countries to set policy for smooth international mail delivery. The UPU's Congress meets every four years to set the world postal strategy for the next four-year cycle.

The UPU comprises the Council of Administration (CA), the Postal Operations Council (POC), and the International Bureau, which acts as a *secretariat* for the two councils. The councils have 40 member countries, each with numerous committees and work groups. Although not all member countries are on all committees, they can and do provide input at plenary sessions held twice a year. Headquartered in Bern, Switzerland, the UPU's official language is French; working languages include Arabic, English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian.

Anything related to international matters goes to IPA first before being forwarded to its intended destination. This includes official and unofficial correspondence from all over the world addressed to the postmaster general that needs to be translated. Other areas requiring translation and interpreting are the Visitors Program, which handles guests from postal-related organizations, and making official travel arrangements for USPS representatives participating in postal meetings. The USPS is also involved in training and capacity building to assist developing countries in bringing their postal systems up to date.

The international affairs office that coordinates an agency's participation in the relevant international organization to which it belongs may employ only one or a few in-house language specialists to handle the language needs that arise. They may have to outsource work for translation because the in-house specialists do not work in that specific language, because of a pressing deadline,

or simply because it is more efficient to do so. McClung included in her presentation the names of some other agencies that use language professionals in this sector:

- The Labor Department's Bureau of International Labor Affairs works with the International Labor Organization.
- The Commerce Department's International Trade Administration collaborates with the World Trade Organization.
- The Treasury Department has a large international affairs office and counterparts in many international organizations and agencies.
- The Department of Agriculture works with the Foreign Agricultural Service.
- Homeland Security Department experts work with the World Customs Organization and the UPU.
- The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative works with the World Trade Organization and the UPU.

**Maintaining Successful Client
Relationships with U.S.
Government Agencies**

When Muriel Jérôme-O'Keeffe, president of JTG inc., formed the company in 1991, she was surprised to discover that, in government circles, her translating expertise and ATA certification mattered less than she expected. This is because the world of procuring language services for the military and intelligence communities is a separate culture, with separate values and a separate lingo.

Jérôme-O'Keeffe, speaking as a language services provider, stated that a "culture clash" exists between ➡

the private sector and the federal government. For the former, a professional translator has a college degree and translates into his or her native language. Translation is a mirror image of the original. For the federal government, a college degree may not be required. The linguist translates in either or both directions, and “native” means a foreign-born person who is asked to translate into English. An acceptable translation is rated 2 to 3 on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale (lower than commercially acceptable).

The U.S. military has been training 2,000 linguists a year since World War II, and in general, having an in-depth knowledge of narrow categories of terminology has been sufficient. Most linguists have not been required to use these terms in sentences, paragraphs, or conversation, or to consider the cultural impact those words might have.

The federal government's post-9/11 critical language needs have been overwhelming, however, and unfortunately it has been difficult for the language industry to meet the demand. In response, translation companies have flooded the market, and large and small government and defense contractors have stepped in as well. Linguists whose level of expertise is lower than ATA standards are often assigned tasks they are not prepared to do. Companies can build on linguists' experience, though, by training them on ways of producing a better translation.

Sometimes, however, those in charge do not understand what the foreign language requirement entails. At times, because contractors need to support requests for individuals who know a second language but have little training in translation, those with a security clearance and knowledge of a second language are given prefer-

ence over those with a higher skill level but no clearance.

Decision makers must realize that translation is a highly specialized career and that professionals provide a “full context translation”—a value-added, quality product. Attendees also learned that a translator's ATA certification becomes more relevant when tied to ILR or Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) scores.

Jérôme-O'Keeffe has learned to speak the government's language. She says that giving customers what they want without lecturing or trying to “educate” them, responding with language they can understand, breaking down the requirements into manageable pieces of information and getting clarification on those requirements, and working together are all key to maintaining a successful customer relationship.

Language Consulting at the Internal Revenue Service

Verónica Coon, John Vázquez, and Carmen Gómez—the consulting team providing onsite language technical assistance and advisory services to the Virtual Translation Office (VTO) of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)—gave the final presentation.

The VTO supports the Tax Forms and Publications Division, serving as a central office producing, reviewing, and managing official IRS translations of vital documents. Further, it facilitates compliance with Presidential Executive Order 13166: Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency, issued in August 2000. Some 70 tax documents have been translated into Spanish, and a limited number are in French. The VTO will produce documents in Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Vietnamese in the future.

Verónica Coon provided an overview of the various language activities conducted daily to produce translations of tax documents. These range from translation and review workflow procedures to quality assurance, terminology management, and the promotion of cutting-edge language technologies.

John Vázquez explained that the workflow process involves a program manager, a translation coordinator/translator, four bilingual tax law specialists (who translate the documents), a reviewer, a tax analyst, and the language consulting team (who do additional quality assurance). Teams of two always work together comparing the original document to its translation. Vázquez also explained that for legal, not linguistic, reasons there are two versions of some Spanish documents. There is one document for Puerto Rico and another for other Spanish-speaking people in the Continental U.S., since tax laws in some instances are different for Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories. (The Puerto Rican versions have been localized.)

Coon then spoke about the various technologies the team uses. These include Idiom's WorldServer 9.0 (which includes translation memory and an extensive terminology database), as well as SGML/XML authoring tools, document repositories, and network programs such as Sharepoint. She explained that text can be changed for stylistic reasons or because of a tax law change, but the high level of accountability requires that all text revisions be documented on paper, indicating what change was made and why.

Carmen Gómez spoke last, describing some of the challenges the team has encountered along the way. Topics discussed included the learning curve and the trial-and-error

Check These Out!

Executive Order 13166
"Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency"
www.LEP.gov

Federal Bureau of Investigation
www.fbi.gov/employment/employ.htm

Federal Bureau of Investigation Foreign Language Program
www.fas.org/irp/agency/doj/oig/translation.pdf

Federal Court Interpreter Program
www.uscourts.gov/interpretprog/interp_prog.html

JTG inc.
www.jtg-inc.com/JTGEmployment.html

Interagency Language Roundtable
www.govtilr.org

Internal Revenue Service
www.jobs.irs.gov/home.html

MITRE
www.mitre.org/employment/index.html

National Virtual Translation Center
www.nvtc.gov/employment.html

USAJOBS
www.usajobs.gov

U.S. Department of State Careers
www.careers.state.gov

U.S. Department of State Office of Language Services
www.oig.state.gov/documents/organization/72300.pdf

U.S. Postal Service
www.usps.com/employment

steps that take place as new technologies are learned; regrouping to reassess a procedure if the results are unsuccessful (e.g., alignment of documents with a translation memory tool); and overcoming workflow procedures as in-house employees and outside consultants merge activities to work together. Gómez explained that using WorldServer has presented its own challenges, but that the newer version of the Web-based software has more capabilities for tracking changes electronically. WorldServer also provides a way of recording and

managing vendor/project actions while allowing work to be done in a virtual environment.

The VTO team has accomplished a lot in two and a half years. It has built capacity, created style guidelines, streamlined workflow, improved the use of language technologies, and conducted more in-depth research of terminology. The team has achieved the level of trust and collaboration needed for success and balance between the two very different worlds of taxes and translation.

Learning

Seminar attendees received an abundance of useful information covering many different areas. Attendees were also given several opportunities to talk individually with the speakers about their presentations and their work. The insight gained from experts in their respective fields proved invaluable for all those who attended.

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