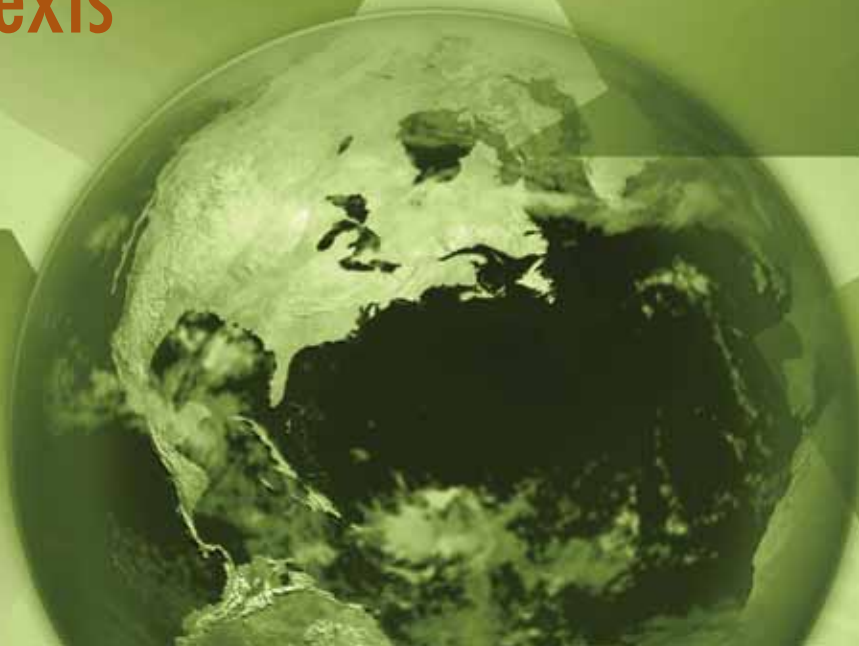


Going Green: Translating Environmental Texts

By Abigail Dahlberg



Translators can make their work easier by specializing in areas they find interesting and are passionate about. Environmental translation adds another dimension to this by allowing translators to have a direct impact on their surroundings. The environmental translation market is currently enjoying significant growth, spurred by tougher environmental laws and an increasing awareness of the damage caused to our environment by human activity. This article looks at the reasons this sector of the translation market is growing so rapidly, and examines the opportunities and challenges environmental translators face. It also provides a list of resources that can act as a starting point for those interested in specializing in environmental issues.

Looking Back

The term “environment” covers a

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multitude of issues, including, but not limited to, air pollution, climate change, emissions, soil conservation, environmental emergencies (floods, oil spills), environmental policy and technologies, nature protection, water and wastewater treatment, and waste management. Before looking at the reasons for the recent growth in the environmental translation market, it is prudent to outline some of the historic events that have raised awareness of environmental conservation issues.

In the U.S., the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which looked at the environmental impact of

the indiscriminate spraying of the pesticide DDT, proved to be a turning point in awakening America’s environmental consciousness. Public concern about the impact of this practice on human health and the environment led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, which banned the agricultural use of DDT in 1972. The book’s legacy was to create a heightened awareness of environmental issues and interest in how people affect the environment. (Years later, in 2006, former U.S. Vice President Al Gore’s documentary about global warming,

An Inconvenient Truth, would have a similar impact; it has been described by many as the new *Silent Spring*.)

The international community gradually became more aware of environmental issues in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1974, Nobel Prize winner Dr. F. Sherwood Rowland and his colleague Dr. Mario Molina concluded that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) caused damage to the stratospheric ozone layer. At that time, CFCs were being used in refrigerators, air conditioners, industrial processes, and as propellants for some aerosol products. In 1985, this research led the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to draft the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. This multilateral environmental agreement provided a framework for international efforts to protect the ozone layer without including legally binding reduction goals for the use of CFCs. The Convention served as the precursor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an amendment protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a 1992 treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gases that cause climate change.

Governments are now working together to conserve our environment and clean up the damage that has been caused over the years. Internationally, the Kyoto Protocol and its mechanisms have proven to be a springboard in terms of working toward mitigating climate change. Countries that ratify this protocol commit to working to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and five other greenhouse gases, or to engage in emissions trading if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases. (Emissions trading is an administrative approach that is used to control pollution by providing economic incentives for achieving reductions in the emissions of

pollutants.) The Kyoto Protocol now covers more than 170 countries globally, but only 60% of countries in terms of reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. As of December 2007, the U.S. and Kazakhstan are the only signatory

A Growing Market

Why is the environmental translation market growing, and is there enough work for translators to make a living in this field? Unlike finance, medical, or legal translation, very few

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nations not to have ratified the act.

The Protocol separates countries into two groups: "Annex I" industrialized countries, and "non-Annex I" countries, which have no greenhouse gas emission reduction obligations, but may participate in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). By 2012, Annex I countries must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by a collective average of 5% below their 1990 levels. CDM allows Annex I countries to invest in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions in developing countries as an alternative to undertaking more expensive emission reduction initiatives in their own countries. After a relatively slow start, CDM is now gaining momentum, with more than 2,600 projects currently in the global pipeline, according to UNEP. As cited in the 2008 *UNEP Yearbook*, these projects are estimated to have a total value of over \$2.5 billion (www.unep.org). The demand for translation services that these projects generate should not be underestimated. A vast amount of paperwork is involved in such bilateral or multilateral projects between industrialized and developing countries.

translators focus on this fascinating field, creating a shortage of qualified translators. Therefore, there is plenty of work for those who choose this specialization.

One area that is a primary source of work is environmental legislation and policy. After adopting international agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol, national governments must subsequently draft guidelines and legislation to implement the environmental requirements. In doing so, they may peek over the fence and see what neighboring countries are doing in this regard, thus creating demand for translation services. Down the chain, local and regional environmental authorities have to take corresponding measures as well. In countries with large immigrant populations or more than one official language, all documents released to the public need to be translated. A similar situation exists for regional initiatives, such as European Union directives, which must be translated into multiple languages.

In an effort to meet these national targets, companies and municipalities will have to invest in environmental technologies. This is one area where native speakers of U.S. English ➡

might encounter texts for translation, as European companies, in particular, have gained a great deal of expertise in developing sophisticated technologies that could be exported to the U.S. market. For instance, as the U.S. starts to run out of landfill space, local and city governments might look to introduce new recycling technologies that can divert waste away from landfills.

With increasing globalization, more large foreign environmental companies are also looking to translate their websites and press releases into English. Within this area, corporate social responsibility reports are now very much in vogue, with count-

translators also encounter many of the difficulties facing other niche markets. One challenge is that this area produces a broad spectrum of literature for translation, ranging from simple flyers informing homeowners of new waste sorting arrangements to high-register international environmental agreements. Specialized translators not only need to be able to handle various registers, but also a wide range of text types, including annual reports, press releases, technical descriptions, research reports, and conference presentations. When specializing in a niche area, customers must view you as a one-stop shop for all of their environmental translation

bins for sorting waste: one each for paper, plastic, metal, glass, biowaste, and residual waste (everything else). In an effort to reduce the number of bin collections, one municipality considered introducing a *Zebratonne* (literally: zebra bin), whereby the gray (residual waste) and yellow (lightweight packaging) bins would be merged into a single bin, creating the image of a zebra-like striped bin. A literal translation would have left an English-language reader perplexed, so providing a description of the initiative worked best in this scenario. This is the type of problem-solving strategy that the environmental translator must employ often in an environmental policy setting.

When specializing in a niche area, customers must view you as a one-stop shop for all of their environmental translation needs.

less companies (even those that are not in the environmental business per se) providing details of their efforts to reduce their environmental impact. These reports typically contain figures about the use of recycled materials, energy savings, and water usage. Many companies also certify their plants and sites according to international ISO standards, in particular the ISO 14000 series of environmental management standards, which help organizations minimize how their operations negatively affect the environment. (To learn more, go to www.iso.org/iso/management_standards.htm.)

Challenges

On the negative side, environmental

needs. Additionally, environmental translators face a shortage of professional development opportunities. Few presentations are ever held on this topic, and continuing education courses on environmental issues are few and far between in the U.S. Therefore, the environmental translator is reliant on self-study, especially given the fast-paced nature of this field.

Environmental translators also have to deal with their fair share of weird and wonderful terminology. Furthermore, one country may have terminology or concepts that do not yet exist in another culture. For instance, many western European countries are light years ahead of the U.S. when it comes to waste recycling initiatives. Many offices in Germany have six or more different

Resources

One of the main challenges facing environmental translators is the shortage of bilingual dictionaries. Few paper dictionaries are available, and the ones that are out there usually date back a good decade and contain obsolete terminology. Before purchasing a new paper dictionary, environmental translators should test it out by selecting a term that is tricky to translate, but not so obscure that it would not be listed in the dictionary. In German, one term I search for is *Altlastensanierung*, which can be translated as “the cleanup of Brownfield sites” in U.S. English, or “the remediation of contaminated sites” in British English. If I see anything literal, like “old site sanitation,” this is the first clue that it might not be a stellar dictionary. This dearth of bilingual or multilingual resources has led specialized translators to consider compiling and publishing their own dictionaries, although time and financial constraints are preventing these projects from coming to fruition.

The good news is that a plethora of

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Online Environmental Resources

The links below are just a sampling of what is out there, including a growing number of reputable online glossaries and dictionaries.

Clean Development Mechanism
<http://cdm.unfccc.int/index.html>

Ends Europe Daily
www.endseuropedaily.com/articles/index.cfm
Europe's environmental news service.

Environmental Protection Agency Sites
www.epa.gov/OCEPAterms
A monolingual glossary of environmental terms.

www.epa.gov/epahome/whereyoulive.htm
A tool to find regional and state environmental agencies.

www.epa.gov/epahome/newslett.htm
This site contains various EPA newsletters on environmental issues.

www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/recycle/ecycling/donate.htm
This page contains information on computer recycling.

European Community Biodiversity Clearing House
http://biodiversity-chm.eea.europa.eu/nyglossary_coverage

European Environment Agency
www.eea.europa.eu/all-terms

European Environment Agency's General Multilingual Environmental Thesaurus
www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet

European Pollution Registry Glossary
www.eper.ec.europa.eu/eper/glossary.asp

Google Environmental Glossary
www.webref.org/environment/environment.htm

ISO 14000 Series of Environmental Management Standards
www.iso.org/iso/management_standards.htm

Journal of Environmental Economics and Management
www.aere.org/journal/index.html
The official journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economics. It publishes theoretical and empirical papers devoted to specific natural resources and environmental issues.
(Published by Elsevier, www.elevier.com.)

Kyoto Protocol
http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

Review of Environmental Economics and Policy
<http://reep.oxfordjournals.org>
Also from the Association of Environmental and Resource Economics, the Review aims to fill the gap between traditional academic journals and the general-interest press by providing a widely accessible yet scholarly source for the latest thinking on environmental economics and related policy. It publishes a range of material, including symposia, articles, and regular features. (Published by Elsevier, www.elevier.com.)

United Nations Environment Programme
www.unep.org

UNEP Yearbook (United Nations Environment Programme, 2008)
www.unep.org/geo/yearbook/yb2008/report/UNEP_YearBook2008_Full_EN.pdf

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
www.unep.org/Ozone/pdfs/viennaconvention2002.pdf

monolingual resources is available. National Geographic has published numerous insightful books about environmental matters. For translators

working in Europe, *Ends Europe Daily* is a valuable, although expensive, resource that covers the latest national environmental policy developments. Translators

should also consider subscribing to newsletters published by environmental associations and nongovernmental organizations, which are excellent sources for harvesting terminology. Last, but not least, subscriptions to environmental trade journals in source and target languages are a must. (Please see the list of references on page 13 for other sources of information.)

One of the main challenges facing environmental translators is the shortage of bilingual dictionaries.



Tips To Reduce Your Environmental Footprint

Minimize your power consumption.

Change your light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs where possible.

Print on both sides of the paper wherever possible.

Always collect your waste paper for recycling.

Use chlorine-free, recycled paper where possible.

Repair your computer to keep it running as long as possible.

Go digital with your documents to reduce paper consumption.

Consider donating your old computer to a school, community center, or nongovernmental organization.

Recommended Reading

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring* (Mariner Books, 2002).

Gore, Al. *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (Rodale Books, 2006).

Lomborg, Bjørn. *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Rogers, Elizabeth, and Thomas M. Kostigen. *The Green Book: The Everyday Guide to Saving the Planet One Simple Step at a Time* (Three Rivers Press, 2007).

Schwartz, Debra. *Writing Green: Advocacy and Investigative Reporting about the Environment in the Early 21st Century* (Loyola College/Apprentice House, 2006).

Reducing Your Environmental Footprint

It would be remiss to conclude this article without including a few tips on how we, as translators, can do our part to reduce environmental damage.

- Minimize your power consumption. Turn off the lights when you leave a room for more than a few minutes. Plug your office equipment into a power strip with a switch, and turn it off when you are going to be away for a longer period of time.
- Change your light bulbs. Use compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs where possible. CFLs use only one-third of the electricity consumed by traditional light bulbs, and can last up to 10 times longer.
- Print on both sides of the paper wherever possible.
- Always collect your waste paper for recycling.
- Use chlorine-free, recycled paper where possible. Chlorine bleaching paper mills release toxic chemicals that can pollute water, thereby harming animals and ecosystems.
- Repair your computer to keep it running as long as possible. After removing all data from defunct computers, consider donating them to schools, community centers, or nongovernmental organizations. Alternatively, many computer companies (notably Dell) will take back your old computer when you buy a new one and recycle it.

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