

Back to basics

Anne de Freyman, vice-chairman of ITI, asks whether we need more CPD events focusing on the craft of language, rather than on business and marketing



Anne de Freyman MITI is a freelance English to French translator based in York. In her fourth year as a member of the ITI Board, currently as vice-chairman, she also manages ITI's social media and coordinated the 2015 ITI Conference. Anne also tweets now and again (@annedefreyman).

At the end of September, translators around the world will celebrate International Translation Day. Here in the UK, some will attend the excellent annual event at the British Library, while others will mark the day on social media or at local events. Imagine that International Translation Day were celebrated with a big parade – thousands of translators in the streets and hundreds of floats, each proudly depicting an aspect of the profession – in several languages, of course. What would the ITI float be about?

Professionalism

Professionalism would have to occupy a prominent place (Iwan Davies opened his most recent chairman's column with the words 'Professionalism is a watchword for ITI and its members'). The float would also highlight the importance of CPD. Subject specialisation, business skills, translation technology and marketing would all feature prominently. But what about translation itself? Is the craft of translating sufficiently catered for in the current CPD offering? Or is it taken for granted?

In the drive towards professionalisation, ITI has focused first and foremost on subject expertise and business skills – and rightly so. Whereas a couple of decades ago being a specialist meant being an ex-lawyer/banker/engineer/doctor or taking a second degree in a chosen topic, today's training allows specialisms to be developed and maintained via a multitude of channels, including webinars and MOOCs.

So we have learned to specialise, and we have acquired business and networking skills. And the venues in which we seek our CPD have also multiplied. Conferences, seminars and summer schools, previously the domain of professional associations, are now being offered by individuals, training companies and even translation companies. This has taught us to widen our horizons and extend our hunting grounds for new opportunities. Many of us are now honing our specialisms by attending our clients' events. We

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are going to trade fairs and exhibitions, combining our passions and our business needs. The hunger for improvement and knowledge is palpable.

Honing our craft

However, even those of us who engage in regular CPD are sometimes guilty of overlooking the need to work on the translation skills that we think we have already proved with our MA, MITI or DipTrans. We tend to think that honing our craft is what we do every time we translate. And while copywriting courses are becoming

popular among translators as we recognise the importance of writing skilfully, few of us ever really seek to test the translating habits we have acquired over time.

Last month, however, 100 professional translators, including a dozen or so members of ITI, gathered in France for an event called Translate in Chantilly (two and a half days of hands-on training in French to English and English to French translation by top industry professionals). For once, there was no talk of specialisation, marketing or networking. Rather, the whole event was focused solely on the craft of translation, from the nitty-gritty of individual words to commented revisions and translation slams. Here were 100 professional, qualified and experienced translators learning how to translate better, listening and sharing. And judging from the number of 'aaaaahhh's, there was a lot of essential brain cell dusting going on.

Training events such as Translate in Chantilly aimed at practising professionals are few and far between. As individual translators, we should be crying out for them, very loudly. ITI's membership includes large numbers of translators out of English, and we should aim for a CPD programme where high-level continual translation training features prominently in as many language pairs as we dare to imagine. We already have language networks; we could also envisage exchanges or collaborations with our sister organisations to drive us forward.

More events, more expense, more competition for our time and money... As we reflect on what may be missing from our professional development, let's wonder if we have not become addicted to collecting CPD hours – the cheaper the better (maybe our choice of CPD is not always the most relevant, but at least it means we reach the recommended number of hours at minimum expense!). Regularly honing our craft with the best translators in the business does not come cheap, but sometimes it's important to think about value, not price.