Moving sideways: breaking into book translation and working with publishers
Co-chair:

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Who are literary translators?

Data from a survey of early-career translators, conducted via the UK-based Emerging Translators Network

Emerging literary translators' highest qualification

- No post-18 qualifications
- BA/BSc
- MA/MSC
- DipTrans or other professional translation qualification
- PhD
Who are literary translators?
A few of the other jobs done by emerging literary translators...

**Books:**
- Editor
- Bookseller
- Fiction writer
- Editorial assistant
- Journalist
- Poet
- Rights executive (publishing)
- Library assistant

**Earning a living:**
- Waitress
- Bartender
- Receptionist
- Call centre worker
- Barista

**Education and research:**
- Exam invigilator
- Language tutor
- English as a second language teacher
- High school teacher
- Research assistant
- University lecturer
- Documentary researcher

**“Other”:**
- Bicycle mechanic
- Doctor
- Yoga teacher
- Drystone waller
- PR consultant
- Lawyer
- Psychologist

**Other areas of the arts:**
- Film maker
- Musician
- Lighting designer
- Theatre practitioner
- Artist
- Dance artist
- Artist's model
101 of 616 emerging literary/book translators surveyed also do commercial or technical translation at least part-time – and for more established translators, the proportion may be higher. Here are some of their thoughts...
“I think the distinction between 'commercial' and 'literary' translation is a largely arbitrary one. When I translate books, I'm working with a direct client who is a publisher. It's a different style of work, but ultimately, the principles are the same: it's all about customer service, professionalism, and turning in a product that meets the client's needs.”

“I actually like the combination a) because it gives me a bit of variety and, importantly, b) because it keeps me solvent - you have to wait so long to get paid for literary work!”

“The nice thing about having a book to work on is that I can organise my time entirely as I see fit, rather than responding to urgent requests and having to turn a translation round in 24 hours.”
“You get more feedback in the literary world; there is a lot of back-and-forth with various editors. Obviously that takes up time, but it makes me feel so much more invested in my work.”

“Working on books means I have concrete projects I can showcase to existing and potential clients.”

“I have survived by translating mass-market books and working in the commercial sector in order to ‘fund’ my literary habit.”

“Doing business translation allowed me to do what was effectively a five-year paid apprenticeship before taking on anything literary. It was like taking a second degree.”
Getting a foot in the door

• Build your profile
• Build your network
Build your profile
Join the online literature community and add your opinion to the mix

Charlotte Collins @cctranslates · Jun 9
#TheEighthLife is coming! Loving this taster from @ScribeUKbooks with the beautiful cover art, & an introduction by @PGJpublishing. Nino Haratischvili’s Georgian-German masterpiece is translated by me and @the_germanist & is out in English this November.

Dr Ruth Martin @the_germanist · Jul 25
What new fiction in translation are people particularly looking forward to this autumn? Help me out, I have to write a thing... @andothertweets @ScribeUKbooks @Istros_books @PeirenePress @PushkinPress @TiltedAxisPress and all you other lovely publishers of translations.

Dr Ruth Martin @the_germanist · May 11
Leaving the @CeatINews AGM with lots of ideas for future projects. And with more knowledge about horse breeding, Finnish idioms and the history of urinals, because... well, translators.
Build your profile

Submit to literary journals
Build your profile
Do sample translations
Build your network

- English-language publishers
- German-language publishers
- Literary and cultural organisations
- Cultural institutes
- Authors
- Other translators
- Professional associations

Professional associations

Cultural institutes

Authors

Other translators

German-language publishers

Literary and cultural organisations

English-language publishers

Build your network
Build your network

• Hang out with other literary translators
• Find a mentor
• Go to book fairs and translation events
• Chat to publishers at book launches
• Join a(gether) professional association (ALTA/AG/TA)
• Connect with cultural institutes
To pitch or not to pitch?
Working with publishers
Negotiating a contract: what do I need to negotiate?

• Fee
• Deadline
• Rights
• Responsibilities
Negotiating a contract

https://pen.org/a-model-contract-for-literary-translations/
All contracts are negotiable (and publishers expect to negotiate)

What is important to you?

Battles you might want to pick:
- Fee paid in instalments to regulate income
- Retention of copyright
- Royalties
- Retention of subsidiary rights
• The negotiation of fees is a matter for the individual translator and publisher to resolve. You should always feel comfortable about asking to be fairly paid. In the SoA’s experience, UK trade publishers will pay in the region of £95 per thousand words [$120] for a prose translation. The word count can apply to either the source or target language.

• The agreed sum may come as a flat fee, an advance against royalties, or a fee plus royalties from the first copy sold. For poetry we have observed payment in the region of £1.10 [$1.42] per line with a minimum of £35 [$45] per poem.
Don’t accept low fees, even for your first book!
Working with publishers

1: The commissioning editor

- Manage expectations: provide a sample translation, request a sample edit
- Discuss contact with the author
- Check in occasionally
- Request an extension in good time
- Include notes on your ms
- Translations might not get a full line edit
Working with publishers 2: The copy editor

• Request a house style manual
• Find out if your copy editor is in-house or freelance
• Hard-copy proofs? Learn the most common copy-editing marks
• Copy editors are fallible! Don’t be afraid to disagree
• Don’t be alarmed by a heavy copy edit
Working with publishers
3: The production editor

- Allocate time in your diary for proofreading
- Stick to the schedule
- After typesetting: typos and single-word changes only
Working with publishers
4: The publicist

• Decide how much time you have to give
• What do you expect to be paid for?
• Launches, festivals and readings
• Social media
• Blog tours and interviews
• Reviews
• Or maybe: nothing...
Q&A

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