

Review: round-table discussion on the job market for recent arrivals in the world of AVT CITA V

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Abstract

On Friday, October 19th, CITA V (the International Conference on Audiovisual Translation hosted by ATRAE) offered a round-table discussion on the job market for recent arrivals in the world of AVT.

The panel was made up of eight professionals from various backgrounds with experience ranging from 15 to 3 years, a perfect example of how it really is possible to gain a foothold and land important assignments in a very short time. Participants included: Fernando Castillo, Eric Escribano, Marc J. Miarnau, Herminia Páez, Olga Parera, Mario Pérez, Iris C. Permuy and Inca Vallés. The discussion was moderated by Reyes Bermejo. The round-table was recorded and is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLRLebPOcM8&feature=youtu.be>

Key Words

AVT, job market, dubbing, subtitling, voice over, audiovisual translation



Introduction

Although most of the participants are now exclusively dedicated to AVT and many of them began translating voice-overs or dubbing scripts or doing audio description right from the start, some started working almost immediately in quality control, a career path that several participants recommended we should all keep in mind. Others, like Marc, landed a job in the vendor management department at a translation agency within just a few years. Or, like Olga, who now works as a dubbing director for advertising agencies, they've combined AVT with transcreation –translating advertising copy–, which is increasingly in

demand. Other panelists, like Herminia, changed the course of their careers. She was initially interested in intercultural mediation but ended up working in AVT. Mario had a similar experience. He started out doing translations for the EU and had his own agency, which specialized in sworn and legal translations, but he decided to turn his career around 180 degrees after catching the AVT bug. Some, like Iris, are juggling a doctorate with tourism translations, audio description and a master's in AVT. Iris explained that she's doing this, "to avoid putting all [her] eggs in one basket." Meanwhile, Inca started out doing a little bit of everything, including proofreading and conference interpreting, only to realize that this wasn't what she wanted to do. She found a client who asked her to translate films. Nevertheless, she still combines AVT with other types of translation and linguistic services such as terminology management. Inca's view is that, "each specialty has something to offer and helps [her] grow in every other area."

The experiences these professionals shared provided a lot of interesting tips on how to start out in this business. There was a lot of talk about strokes of luck, which often times aren't so much luck as simply being available in the summertime, when clients have a hard time finding translators and are more likely to entrust projects to recent arrivals. You have to "be around and have talked with everyone," according to Herminia. But, of course, once you start receiving assignments, you also have to go the extra mile to make sure your work is impeccable. That is your true calling card.

Round-table participants offered a lot of advice. For instance, they recommended juggling translation with another activity or another source of income at first so that you can start looking for clients and "refuse to settle for just any client, but rather find those who pay [you] what [you want] them to pay [you]," says Iris.

When it came to discussing how they managed to get to where they were, how their client profiles have evolved, and their pace of work during the first few years, the panelists agreed that at first you have to "suck it up" and accept any job you get. But you'll soon realize that what you need to do is "work less and invoice more," according to Fernando. You have to start finding more and better clients; because, although this may be hard to believe, there will come a time when you will simply be stretched too thin. And that's when it's time to start replacing your worst clients with your best (clients who pay more or pay sooner). Inca agreed, adding: "You start applying a filter: figuring out what is most profitable, who you want to work for, who you don't want to work for,

and replacing clients and making progress.” Oh, and always keep looking for clients; you never know when you’re going to need them. The discussion also emphasized how important it is to diversify services. Olga talked about the “redefinition of the weekend.” Our timetables, which we never actually follow, often demand that we work on weekends and take a Monday or Wednesday off. It comes with the job. At first, the pace of work is more hectic. But, as you become more experienced and gain your clients’ trust, you will also gain their respect and have more of a say in imposing your own conditions. Nevertheless, you will have workload peaks and you have to prepare “for the bad months during the good months,” says Herminia. Meanwhile, Mario talked about the “hamster wheel” that you can end up getting caught in when one season merges with the next and delivery dates begin to overlap, and about how difficult it is to create an organized work routine for yourself that allows you to take weekends and holidays off and that sort of thing.

Herminia recommended joining associations and groups, attending get-togethers with other professionals in the field, and signing up for all sorts of shindigs, conferences, talks, etc. Meeting people, mingling and making contacts is crucial. You could well land your first assignment or make a contact that is key for your career this way. In some cases, you may start off working at a certain pace or charging rates that you soon realize are not sustainable in the long run, like Inca did. When you join an association and start working with other translators –something everyone in the discussion recommends– you’ll realize that you can change the focus and course of your career.” Once you get rolling, [when clients] start trusting you and you realize that you’re not doing such a bad job, because you’re getting feedback from clients, things change.” Mario added that its very important to have contacts at every level, and that you’ll also find clients through recommendations from colleagues. The camaraderie among colleagues in the field was highlighted on several occasions.

You have to send out a bunch of résumés or CVs, create a professional image for yourself (business cards, online profiles, website...) and work the network. Nevertheless, you also have to get used to knocking on a lot of doors without getting any sort of response most of the time, according to Olga. There was a lot of emphasis on the importance of having a presence on the Internet and on social networks, the aim being to attract clients and have them come to you. You have to change your mindset, rather than “looking for work” you are “offering a service,” says Fernando. Your best bet is to introduce yourself as a professional and explain what services you can offer. LinkedIn was mentioned as one of the best ways to write to clients, according to Fernando, Eric and Marc.

Marc said that vendor managers often run out of pages on LinkedIn in their quest to find translators, and they pay for pages where they can find good professionals; they're always looking. If you notice that a project or corporate manager has been checking out your profile, there's your chance. At some point or other, each of the panelists made it very clear that it's very important to know how to "work the network," make contacts and mingle. Of course, as Eric pointed out, you also have to know how to translate and be good at it in order to make a living, but knowing how to work your network is crucial.

As part of this ongoing search for clients, we talked about preparing a résumé, test translations used for recruitment, the sort of things clients value and how to approach clients. The panelists explained that they have all submitted test translations, but not all clients demand tests, because sometimes clients need a translation urgently and assign it to someone outright. And, as Herminia pointed out, when you do a test translation, make sure you do a good job, as if your life depended on it. And this also applies to every other project you work on for the rest of your life. If you're assigned a job, make sure you do what's expected. Olga also explained the sort of test translations used in the advertising sector and stressed how important it is to carefully re-read what you've written, so that you're not just settling for a phrase doesn't quite make sense or doesn't sound natural. She also said to make sure you read your translation out loud to see if there's anything that isn't working. Often times, you'll be given a deadline for submitting the test translation so that you can get a sense of the turn-around time you would have when working with that client. Mario added that, once you start working, "your work speaks for you." You will no longer be asked to submit test translations; clients will simply trust you based on your references, your professional experience and the products you have translated.

It's important to keep in mind that clients can be found all over the world; we're not simply going to limit ourselves to sending out résumés or making contacts with companies in our own country. In the international arena, it is a lot more common to be asked to submit test translations and have to go through a recruitment process. Eric and Marc recommended that you avoid using "an ordinary old," drab, outdated résumé or CV. You should add a distinctive touch that is visually appealing and will catch employers' attention (make it colorful, well-structured, use video or poetry, tell a story). That way, says Marc, you'll project a warmer and more familiar image; and, when the time comes to choose someone, clients are more likely to choose you. Marc also explained that he doesn't like seeing photos on résumés. What he's looking for are skills that demonstrate how you can be of service to them; not so much where you studied,

but rather what you've done most recently, what you can do and how much experience you have. His company always asks for test translations, as a minimum, to make sure you won't be making rookie errors. Oh, and Marc also reminded us that you should be suspicious if you're sent a test translation that is too long. Inca cautioned that, before submitting a test translation, it is important to ask if the company is willing to pay for it, what type of assignments they get, etc. See what the company has to offer you, not just what you have to offer the company. Iris recommended having several résumés, organized by categories, and one full-length résumé that you can use to pick and choose the most interesting information for each customer.

Marc also said it was important to "be shameless," something with which the rest of the panelists agreed, although Herminia rephrased it as "being courageous." And you should also know who you're addressing and explain why they need you, researching the company and their needs or requirements before writing to them. You should be able to demonstrate that you know who you're talking to. And be very careful with the details (typos, double spacing...).

Herminia said that she's better at "being shameless" live than online. She also uses LinkedIn and checks out other translators' profiles to find interesting companies, ask who she should talk to and send her CV to the person who should get it, not to some undefined generic contact person.

During the Q&A session, there were some doubts about preparing your first résumé when you don't have much experience to talk about. Marc recommended focusing on your skills, on what you can offer, even if it's something you've never done before that you think you might be good at. Also mention your interests, your passion and your enthusiasm. Just the fact that you like something could be a starting point. Herminia added that you could also work on projects as a volunteer or as a hobby or just practice in order to gain experience without waiting for a client to hire you. If you explain them correctly, talking about your hobbies and skills can be another way to show customers that you have learned a lot of things that could make you an asset. Eric pointed out that there is a lot of demand and there are a lot of ways to gain experience: from internships to the first few jobs with small studios that will hire you if they need people. Fernando made it clear that you should not think less of yourself for being a newcomer, because that's not the way it works. There are people who have been in the market for just a short while who have managed to land very juicy assignments. When you least expect it, you'll get your big break.

Iris also talked about how, aside from films and popular series, there are a lot of different lines of activity that will allow you to make a decent living. You have to knock on every door. Eric also mentioned linguistic testing and quality control.

Another question from the audience was about what to do if you're feeling vertigo or are hesitant to take the plunge into the labor market. Olga responded that it's a good idea to have a Plan B, a Plan C and so on, so that you can diversify and multiply your options. Be an all-rounder. Herminia, who is on the organization's education committee, took this opportunity to promote the courses ATRAE organizes specifically for audiovisual translators. You can start by surveying the whole range of options available and see what you like and what you're good at, whether it's through ATRAE or at other educational institutions.

With regards to the next question, Mario suggested that you "drop hints" to clients about your interests, likes and dislikes so that they'll keep them in mind when assigning a project. And this also helps to prevent us from getting "pigeonholed" into a certain type of product, genre, etc.

The last question focused on unpaid work: how do we draw the line between gaining experience and being exploited? Herminia recommended looking at who the project is for and what they're offering in exchange. And any work you do, whether you're practicing or volunteering for someone, is experience you've gained and serves as a sample of your work.