

Never lost in translation

The recent EU enlargement is bound to drum up extra work for the pool of translators and interpreters working in Ireland, reports **Caroline Allen**

IRELAND'S presidency of the EU has meant increased opportunities for translators and interpreters. Dr Marie-Annick Gash, managing director of Dublin City University (DCU) Language Services, which sources translators and interpreters for the Government and businesses, reports being four times busier than normal. "Sometimes we are so busy that we have to go to the UK or to other countries, such as Greece, for people," she says.

The accession of the 10 new states into the EU has not had an immediate effect but should generate extra work, says Gash. Mary Phelan, public relations officer of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association (ITIA), expects that as time goes on and as trade develops with the accession countries there will be a demand for more translation of documents and that interpreters will be needed for conferences and business trips.

At the moment, the languages in demand for translation and conference interpreting are French, Italian, German and Spanish with Russian and Czech making inroads. Russian, Arabic, Romanian, Cantonese Chinese and Mandarin have emerged as the popular languages for community interpreting.

Translation involves working with written text in one language and translating it into another. Most translators convert into their mother tongue, points out Phelan. They are generally freelance, working from home and usually send their work by email to their clients or an agency. "This is solitary work and their tools are specialised dictionaries and, in some cases, computer programmes for machine translation," she says.

Translators who specialise in localisation often work in teams as part of a company. Phelan estimates that thousands of people

are working in localising software in Ireland, usually from English into other languages. EU translators work on the translation of EU documents into the other official EU languages.

Interpretation is the oral translation of what is said. According to Phelan, conference interpreters are the best paid and work in the European Parliament and Commission as well as at conferences organised by other bodies. In Ireland, she says, conference organisers are freelance and usually recruited by agencies. "Conference interpreters usually interpret into their mother tongue. In the EU, for example, interpreters need their mother tongue plus a number of other languages. They interpret from other languages into their mother tongue," Phelan explains.

Bilateral interpreters work in and out of their native tongue. Community interpreters work with people from ethnic minorities living in Ireland and interpret what is said at garda stations, courts, hospitals, medical appointments and many other situations. "There are over 900 community interpreters in this country and the Courts Service can provide interpreters in 210 languages," points out the spokeswoman for the ITIA.

Demand for Irish

There are some Irish language translators in Dáil Éireann who also act as interpreters if a member of the Dáil speaks in Irish. While those who want to specialise generally choose between translation and interpreting, in practice many interpreters work as translators between jobs and some translators also work as interpreters, according to Phelan. There are new multimedia opportunities, for example in localising websites and subtitling television programmes and DVDs, plus videoconference interpreting, for both professions.

Embassies and other organisations hire translators and interpreters on a freelance basis. Claudia Bachkoenig, commercial attaché with the Austrian Trade Commission in Dublin, outlines that it hires local staff who have German as a second language when requested by Austrian or Irish companies focusing on either market. The embassy itself also hires translators and interpreters for advertising and brochure translation and conference interpreting.

Dr Eithne O'Connell, chair of Graduate Diploma/MA in Translation Studies at the School of Applied Languages and Inter-



Dr Marie-Annick Gash

cultural Studies at DCU, says it is difficult to satisfy the particularly strong demand for translators with German or Irish at present.

"It is important to remember that becoming a truly professional translator is a process that continues after graduation, as skills are developed and honed over years. For this reason, we generally recommend that our graduates try to work as staff translators for a few years before going freelance," says the senior DCU lecturer.

"The general public does not seem to be aware of the huge demand for translation in Ireland, as well as overseas. Many people still think there are few opportunities for fluent, accurate speakers of Irish, for example. Nothing could be further from the truth," she states.

"Texts ranging from legislation, school books, literature and television programmes need to be translated into and from Irish.

The growing demand for Irish translators is set to increase further as a result of the Official Languages Act, 2003. It would be even greater if the Government was to throw itself behind the popular campaign for Irish to be given the status of an official language within the EU, alongside newcomers such as Slovenian and Maltese," says O'Connell.

Versatile range for translators

Bassia Bannister is a translator and interpreter who trained in Poland and came to Dublin 20 years ago. Having started off teaching Russian and Polish in this country, she got a job in a translation agency. She now works from home, working for clients such as the Government, AIB and the Northern Area Health Board.

Her work brings her in touch with a broad range of situations including asylum seekers' units, Department of Justice interviews, appeals tribunals, police stations, courts, social workers' home visits and hospitals.

She also works with delegations coming to this country and has taken part in management training programmes. "In this profession, you have to be versatile and you have to update your knowledge constantly. I am quite familiar with legal vocabulary and can translate affidavits and wills," she says.

She is involved through the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association in introducing certified translation for translators in this country. "In other countries, it is necessary to receive that certification through the government. We are setting up a programme to professional members who pass independent linguistic assessments," she states.

DIY Gaelgóir

Australian Ariel Killick puts it up to us — as she is self-taught in Irish and now works in Irish translation in Dublin.

"I come from a multicultural area of Sydney and grew up with a lot of first and second generation immigrant children. Many of those I went to school with spoke other languages. My family is a mixture of Irish, English and Scottish, and I felt I was missing out on something," she says.

Drawn to Irish, she arranged to sit the Leaving Cert Irish higher level paper in 1996 in Sydney and scored over 90pc. She is now a government-listed translator and recently completed a series of certificates for the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in Dublin Castle. She also did conference interpreting in Belfast in 2002.

Translating government documents is balanced by her involvement in Irish language entertainment projects. "I love the intellectual challenge of translation and the entertainment projects allow plenty of creativity," she says.

Route to the job

The Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association regards a degree and proficiency in languages alongside a specialism in an area such as law, insurance or medicine as the best route into the profession.

Dublin City University (DCU) offers a 30-week Graduate Diploma and an MA in Translation Studies. Students may take one or two of French, Spanish, German, Irish and Japanese. The programme has become even more attractive to aspiring translators since the Higher Education Authority decided to subsidise the fees from 2001/2002 to 2006/2007 for EU member applicants under its Postgraduate IT Conversion Skills Programme. Fees currently stand at €1,200 instead of approximately €4,000.

The Dublin Institute of Technology has a one-year online postgraduate translation course. NUI Galway also offers translation studies at postgraduate level. DCU is offering a new Graduate Certificate in Community Interpreting from September.

Undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, through Irish, in association with Fiontar, can also be undertaken at DCU. Queens University Belfast runs an MA in Irish Translation. Trinity College Dublin is starting a new MA in Literary Translation in October.

The University of Limerick includes translation and interpreting as part of its undergraduate course in applied languages. It also offers a postgraduate course in software localisation. Those who wish to become conference interpreters will have to take a course abroad as there isn't one available in this country.