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Writing Wrongs:  
Losing it in the translation

Part 2 –  
Life in the  
writing trades

Short title:  
Losing It: Introduction

by  
David Grossman

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## Life in the writing trades

This book is

A resource for dealing with the special issues that are faced in the exciting writing trades

These selected topics

reflect a personal and Jewish approach.

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## Working at Home

### *Introduction*

You *can* translate with children at home. Here's how:

- About<sup>1</sup>
- Attention: Children<sup>2</sup>
- Interruptions<sup>3</sup>
- When is the best time of day to translate?<sup>4</sup>
- Tips on training your children<sup>5</sup>

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Keywords: Business, Education, Home, Recording, Training



### *About*

Can you translate at home if there are children in the house?

Certainly. The children can be trained to *help* you with your work, and – if you do it right – both you and the children may benefit.

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<sup>1</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | About

<sup>2</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Attention

<sup>3</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Interruptions

<sup>4</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | When

<sup>5</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Training

However, you will have to adjust your lifestyle and working patterns. Your success in working at home will be determined by the following factors:

- Your personality
- Your flexibility
- Your patience<sup>6</sup>
- Your ability to train your children to handle interruptions<sup>7</sup> in a mature manner
- Your determination to teach your children to answer the phone<sup>8</sup> and deal with business calls properly

Ultimately, all of these points reflect two basic issues:

- Your determination to be able to help support your young family
- Your determination to give your children your best quality<sup>9</sup> time

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### ***Attention***

They also serve  
who only stand and wait  
- John Milton

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<sup>6</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Raising | Patience

<sup>7</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Interruptions

<sup>8</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Phone | Professional

<sup>9</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Quality

Don't get the wrong impression from the title of this page. All normal, young children demand attention. However, in many cases, the right training and communication can reduce the number of interruptions<sup>10</sup>.

Keep in mind that your children are your top priority. Under no circumstances should you ignore them or their needs. They must receive the attention that they need.

Indeed, children who crave attention will either get it in a positive manner, after you provide them with their needs, or else they will find alternative ways to get what they want. If you create a rule that they cannot accept, then they will find creative ways to foment crises that would not have existed otherwise.

Given unacceptable rules, some children might become unruly or disruptive. They might cause problems with their siblings. Still others might cause difficulties with friends, neighbors, or teachers, in order to attract your attention. In some extreme cases, they may create situations that will ultimately require the attention of the police.

You would be wise to take a proactive stance in order to control the situation. It will do little good to tell them to leave you alone while you are translating.

There are various solutions. You can give them quality time<sup>11</sup> when it is convenient or acceptable for you. They can then be

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<sup>10</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Interruptions

<sup>11</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Quality

trained to play acceptable games, possibly with friends, when you need to work.

Please note that even after receiving sufficient quality time, they will still demand attention. The next steps are as follows:

- To differentiate between the time that they can and should get attention from Mommy, and the time that Mommy is translating and cannot be disturbed
- To understand the difference between a desire for attention and an urgent need that cannot wait

A working mother can thus help her children develop some fine and mature traits, that will be of benefit to them throughout their lives.

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Keywords: Management, Parenting, Quality, Time, Translation

  
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### *Interruptions*

If you translate during the daytime, then you know that interruptions are inevitable.

Some translators may not consider those interruptions to be a problem or an issue. They actually welcome interruptions, because they need the break from their work. This section does not apply to them.

More likely, you require a reasonably quiet environment, without disturbances. You may even prefer to work without any background music. You may search for ways to deal with those interruptions so that you can get back to your work as quickly as possible.

### **What are your options?**

You can put your foot down. You can insist and demand that there be no interruptions. If so, then you will have to make allowances for those who did not hear your rules:

- People with messages
- Telephone calls
- Unannounced visitors

Yes, you can go away without leaving a forwarding address or phone number - but that's also counterproductive. After all, you are working at home because you want to work *at home*.

In addition, children<sup>12</sup> act in spontaneous ways. They will inevitably have things to tell you at random, unpredictable times. Those issues are important to them, and they don't have the patience<sup>13</sup> to schedule or postpone them until you are ready to offer them their daily allocation of quality time.

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Keyword: Translation

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<sup>12</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Quality | Talk

<sup>13</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Quality | Patient



## *Training*

How can you train your children to give *you* quality time for your translation?

Perhaps the best way to handle the situation is by explaining when the children *can* get your attention. The children cannot make these decisions by themselves. They do not know which needs are urgent, and which needs can wait until a better time. They must be trained.

Older children can leave you notes on a bulletin board. Be sure to take these notes seriously when they get their quality time, or before bedtime, or at several points during the day. Handle their issues efficiently and pleasantly, so that they feel that the bulletin board system "works" and that it was worth waiting for your attention.

In some cases, a small recorder<sup>14</sup> can solve the problem just as well. The children can record questions, issues, or discussion items as they occur. They will often be very excited as you play back their messages. They will always be impressed if you handle their issues, one at a time, in an efficient manner.

It is important to train your children how to use the recorder, just as you have to train them with the general concept of interruptions. Don't expect your children to know how to use

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<sup>14</sup> Losing It: Transcribing | Recording

that recorder effectively by themselves. However, the investment of time in this important skill will provide valuable side benefits.

Your children will have to be trained to distinguish between issues that should get a note or a message on the recorder, and other issues that deserve your immediate attention. Perhaps they can give you a signal when something should be handled right away.

You may want to have three levels of attention:

1. Things that must be handled now – such as a fire in the kitchen
2. Things that must be handled with reasonable urgency – such as a phone call or a guest
3. Things that can wait

You may want to train your children to give you a signal for Level 2 items. Teach them to wait patiently when they need your attention. At that time, be sure that you make yourself available for them, within seconds of their request. That's right - stop your translating to accommodate their (possibly repeated) needs<sup>15</sup>. Your children come first. The children should be aware of this – but they should learn not to take advantage of this relationship.

Children should feel that they are learning a skill that is usually entrusted only to bigger children or to adults. It should make them feel big and mature.

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<sup>15</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Attention

This attention should not reduce the amount of quality time<sup>16</sup> that you offer your children.

These recommendations for training will not remove all of the interruptions, and they will not resolve all of the problems that may arise. However, they will reduce their frequency, so that you will be able to get more work done.

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### ***When to translate***

Should you translate while the children are around and underfoot, or should you devote yourself completely to the children at that time?

That's a difficult question that has no definitive answer. Let us discuss the relative tradeoffs for both options:

### **When you are caring for children**

This *should* mean the daytime hours, although this is not necessarily the case. Ideally, if you are a "day person," you should be able to stay awake during the daytime and sleep at night.

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<sup>16</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Quality

However, this is rarely the case. Children will not necessarily allow you to sleep when you need it most. However, you should certainly strive to achieve this goal.

### **When your children are sleeping**

If you translate while your children are sleeping, then you may be able to minimize the number of interruptions<sup>17</sup>. You will be able to devote yourself exclusively to your children when they are awake, and you will be able to give your clients your best work when your children are sleeping.

Sounds like the ideal solution, right?

However, it does a basic question: When will *you* sleep?

Yes, that is the question that has been troubling professionals in the writing trades from time immemorial. When you figure out the solution, do explain<sup>18</sup> how you manage it. Many others would like to know the answer.

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Keywords: Management, Time, Translation



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<sup>17</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home | Interruptions

<sup>18</sup> Tzafun | Contact | Webmaster

## Social Issues

### *Introduction*

Some people perceive the translator's job as being very lonely. They may be right in some cases.

After all, we translators do sit together with ourselves most of the time. We do not have outside contact while we are working on most of our jobs.

Does that mean that only loners should be translators?

Of course not. However, it could mean that translators must find different ways to meet their social needs.

Some lively translators' meetings or translation forums<sup>19</sup> can help you be part of a social networking community<sup>20</sup>. They can offer ongoing contact with many like-minded people.

This section deals with the social aspects of translating.

- Contact with people<sup>21</sup>
- People<sup>22</sup>
- Impromptu translations<sup>23</sup>

Other social issues relating to translation are listed on the Hebrew Translating<sup>24</sup> forum and on the Jewish Glossaries<sup>25</sup> website.

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<sup>19</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Forums

<sup>20</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Forums | Community

<sup>21</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Social | Human Contact

<sup>22</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Social | People

<sup>23</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Social | What It's Like

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### *Interactions*

Some people say that translators lead a lonely life. Perhaps that's a relative term. Let's consider some other occupations.

Programmers interact only with their own computer for a great deal of their work. Editors often have a limited opportunity to look up from their work. They usually work with others' materials – not even their own!

In other areas, there is intensive personal contact – but can we say that people have quality time with their peers? Look at the traffic cop. He's in charge of an endless stream of cars whizzing by all the time. Poor fellow – those may well be disembodied vehicles, as far as he is concerned. People, people everywhere, but nobody to talk to.

How about elementary school teachers? Plenty of contact with people there, right?

Perhaps. However, their daily interaction is limited to their students. That's not really much of a social life, and it is certainly not conducted on the level of a peer relationship.

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<sup>24</sup> Achdut: Jewish Forums | Hebrew Translating

<sup>25</sup> Jewish Glossaries

Fourth graders certainly cannot conduct a serious discussion about the issues that the teacher studied in her college Shakespeare class.

A teacher who does her job well may move up the ladder. When she reaches the lofty goal of principal, she loses her contact. She's considered to be very important, and teachers and students alike start to avoid her. Students visit her when they are punished, and teachers visit her when they have to handle a transient, bureaucratic affair. Her ongoing contacts may be largely limited to the office staff and to a bevy of supervisors.

Instead of feeling in charge and in control, the principal begins to realize how many people are really in charge of her. Personal contact does exist, but certainly not in the form of equals. Can we say that a principal has a real social life during work?

Programmers, policemen, teachers, principals – when you think about it, none of them have a real social life. You've probably added to that list already.

So the supposedly limited social aspect of a translator's work is not so bad after all, when compared with other professions.

### **Translators do have a social life**

Translators who manage their time<sup>26</sup> wisely may well have more freedom than those in many other professions. They have more to share, because each translation is new and different. They do not have to sacrifice quality time with their

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<sup>26</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It. Part 2 | Time

family. There is life after translating – and often during the translation process as well.

In addition, translation offers infinite variety. It is a combination of a service and a product:

- It's a service, because the translator is always doing something useful for others. Those people usually appreciate the efforts of the translator.
- It's a product, because every working day provides a new document, and the work can easily be quantified and rated in quality.

Many people do not realize these advantages. They view the life of a translator as the contact between brain and pen (or computer). A translator is sometimes mistakenly thought to have weak interpersonal skills, with an ability to interrelate only with a pencil.

To some degree, of course, this is true. However, it is a very warped view of a great profession.

### **Is the translator lonely?**

Today's translator is far from lonely. He has to press the flesh at every opportunity in order to assure a steady and growing clientele.

In a serious translation, he has to meet with the author and publisher on a regular basis.

A job for a people person? Yes. Translation certainly holds its own in comparison with many other fields.

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### *What it's like*

There is a connection between those all-too-frequent rush jobs that translators have come to know so well, and the social aspects of translation.

Translators do get used to dealing with on-the-spot jobs and urgent issues. It's a win-win situation: The client pays more for this work, and the job involves intense interpersonal activity. The translator often has to entertain the client who is sitting with him. Yes, that may make the job take longer, but that's part of the game.

To complicate matters, the client often comes to these last-minute meetings with an incomplete and unworkable document. The translator-cum-psychologist may have to calm him as he collects and organizes his thoughts. It may even be necessary to help the client prepare and develop an outline, so that he can visualize what he wants to say, and then to create a reasonable draft.

At a certain point, the client will present his ideas in his source language. He may want to recite the text rather than to write it down. A translator who is also a good typist can enter the translation as the client speaks – and often at the same pace. An even better typist and translator can type the

material in the *target* language as the client speaks in his *source* language. This is written simultaneous translation at its best.

### **Putting on a show**

Yes, translators sometimes have to put on a show for clients. After some time and experience on the job, a good translator may be able to lighten the atmosphere by interspersing some uplifting humor about the material being translated. It's useful to make the client feel good about his work, even though he did not prepare it properly.

The translator may be able to edit some of the typed material while the client is thinking about the next part. Yes, there will be interruptions as new material is added, but it does impress the client when the translator is multitasking – constantly working on and improving his document. It also means that the translator has to develop some important skills:

- He has to concentrate on the new, ongoing material while working on the old text
- He has to concentrate the client at the same time as he deals with his work

The system pays off. At the conclusion of the job, the translator presses a few buttons and the client has an on-the-spot translation – and a broad smile on his face. You have made a new friend, as well as some money.

Yes, sometimes the translator has the privilege of looking over and improving the work quietly later in the day – but that does not happen often enough.

Now, what was that about the social limitations<sup>27</sup> to translating?

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<sup>27</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Social | Meetings

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## Offensive Material

### *Introduction*

How do those in the writing trades deal with offensive or objectionable material?

- About<sup>28</sup> translating offensive material
- Comments from a thread on the Translation Teacher<sup>29</sup> forum
- Comments from Rabbis<sup>30</sup>

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Your exercise for this article is as follows:

Keyword: [Offensive](#)

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### *About*

There are various ethical reasons for rejecting translation jobs.

You are not likely to agree to translate certain types of material under any circumstance. Other material might pass your criteria, although you would *prefer* not to do it.

For example, you may draw a line with material that violates your religious beliefs, or that includes language that is

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<sup>28</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It. Part 2 | Offensive | About

<sup>29</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It. Part 2 | Offensive | Rabbi

<sup>30</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It. Part 2 | Offensive | Rabbi

beneath your dignity to translate. On the other hand, you may be willing to translate material that disturbs you to a lesser degree. You do have to make some serious decisions.

You might vary your criteria based on your workload. You may be more selective if you already have a great deal of work.

Keep in mind that your decisions will have certain tradeoffs. The more you reject, the less work you may have.

A young or inexperienced translator might want to consult with his parents or teacher in order to determine whether the material is proper. An older person might consult with a Rabbi in order to determine whether it is acceptable according to Jewish law. He may consult a lawyer to determine whether he may translate material that is copyrighted, that violates international law, or that is inciteful.

In any event, this is a delicate topic.

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Keywords: [About](#), [Introspection](#)



***Your own Rabbi***

Some people have submitted responses from known Rabbis regarding the translation of offensive material. One comment is presented here, and future editions of this book may include additional comments.

From Noa, 2006:

According to Rav Shlomo Riskin, it is forbidden to help another person perform an *averah* – a sin.

The reasoning seems to be the opposite of your own logic:

It is forbidden to translate this material if the person does not know that he is writing objectionable material. However, if the writer knows that he is writing material that is forbidden, then – according to halacha – it is permitted to translate it. Nonetheless, it would be wise to let another person translate it.

The same ruling applies to objectionable political messages.

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Keyword: [Rabbis](#)



### *Translation Teacher*

Some people are very selective about the material that they agree to translate.

However, a translator cannot turn down too many offers.

- You can say that the job is in Biology, and you only do botany
- You can say that the job includes prurient material, and you won't deal with it
- You can say that it does not match your political views

However, you may then be a very hungry translator.

It is important to determine the things that are most important to you, and to keep as many tolerable options as possible in your list.

### Query 1

For that reasons, the author submitted the following query to the Translation Teacher<sup>31</sup> forum in May 2006:

Our Translation students come from varying backgrounds, religious proclivities, and sensitivities.

How shall we deal with their questions about whether to translate material that they find to be objectionable or offensive? They might reject the material because of their moral, political, or cultural standards.

Can we bring objectionable material to class as translation exercises?

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<sup>31</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It. Part 1 | Forums | Translation Teacher  
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Shall we assume that they will have to deal with this material anyhow in the future, and that they might as well be exposed to it now?

Alternatively, should we make a point of selecting exercises that are not objectionable to any of our students?

David Grossman

The following sampling is representative of the responses to the group. Surprisingly, not everybody agreed with the initial thesis:

### **Response 1**

This is an interesting question. Our core MA theory and practice of translation unit covers the questions of ideology and ethics in translation and the translator's own agenda, and students are encouraged through examples to reflect on how certain issues or elements of a text might become ideologically 'loaded' for them, and thus present problems in translation. In Britain I suspect we are fairly careful to avoid introducing material or indeed using language that might offend our students.

### **Response 2**

I thought these people were supposed to be professionals. Is a medical student exempted from learning to treat certain diseases because they may be abhorrent to him, or contracted in immoral circumstances? Is a doctor allowed to refuse to treat a patient on these grounds? Let these students wake up and engage the real world. It is educational to see how others live and think, and may well be linguistically useful. This

does not imply that they have to believe in the material they are translating; it just means they should be professional.

### **Response 3**

Being professional as a translator is not the same as being a doctor who treats certain diseases, however immoral or abhorrent the cause, where health and life is at stake. A translator need not compromise his morals, values, and integrity, and he has the freedom to choose to refuse to translate a certain text, as much as a teacher who can choose which texts to use when teaching history or literature, given the multiplicity of viewpoints. I am sure the client would understand how a translator would not wish to put his name to a translated text that he does not feel comfortable with, and which therefore might well detract from how good the translation turns out, in tone and accuracy. Does this not call for a significant degree of professional responsibility!

### **Response 4**

Ok – wait – just what could one consider objectionable? Your medical student example is not what I would consider a good example of this. I don't think many med students go into that field being so naïve as to not know that people do stupid things that result in needing medical care. Anyway, there are doctors in the world who do not treat people with certain diseases or if they know how a disease was contracted. And doctors are allowed (or even required) to refuse to treat certain people in certain cases in certain areas of the world (take for example, abortion in many areas)

As for myself, I refuse to translate anything that I find objectionable or anything that disrespects my religion or any other religion. I have every right in the world to do this. I

simply tell the customer: 'Thank you for offering me this job but I cannot do it due to personal reasons.' If they want more of an answer, I tell them why. No customer has ever had a problem with this. Actually I (as a freelancer) don't even have to justify whether I do a particular job or not.

I know some translators who refuse to do translations for companies that have possible or obvious connections to the defense field. While I respect their decision, it is really difficult not to do translations for companies that could somehow be connected to this field – the defense machines of the world have permeated society quite extensively.

An in-house translator may have a different experience and will have to figure out how to deal with the situation with care and *professionalism*.

Professionalism does not have anything to do with what we do but how we do it. Street-cleaning is not seen as the highest job on the rung of life, but a street-cleaner can still do his/her job very professionally.

Maybe we should teach our students how to handle situations that are personally objectionable. Role-playing? A discussion about what the students think is objectionable, and why, could be very enlightening.

As for choosing texts for our students, I think a normal amount of common sense and respect for others should suffice. It is not necessary to choose inflammatory texts, in order to give students an opportunity to see many different facets of the world.

## Response 5

I recall a student who objected to translating a certain literary text. Be that as it may, translators are called upon to translate or interpret topics having to do with forensic medicine, for instance, and I've dealt with quite a bit of Holocaust stuff that was truly horrible. I certainly would not choose topics that were gratuitously problematic, but there's also an element of professionalism, particularly in training court interpreters, where you have to deal with whatever the situation dishes you, right down to reproducing vile language and invective, or detailing horrible events, racial slurs, and other unpleasantness. It simply goes with the territory, and if a student is too squeamish, s/he probably should rethink career goals.

## Response 6

I am not a translation teacher, but I know about translation teaching from the other side—I have been a translation student. I have a Certificate in Translation from New York University, where the curriculum is purely practical, not at all theoretical. All our time was spent in translating, and in lectures or explanations focusing on techniques of translating and on the subject matter of the selections. In our introduction to German to English translation class, we had one session on literary translation in which we were given a story about a German immigration officer who was prejudiced against every immigrant group who came through his office: Turks, Arabs, Italians, etc. The point, of course, was to poke fun at the biased immigration officer.

Now imagine an ardent anti-immigrationist taking the course; might he not find objectionable the portrayal of our official as a stupid lout, and consider this to be a slur upon, or unfair misrepresentation of, those who wish to restrict immigration? Should we then excise the story, when it is actually perfect

for the course, being at just the right level of difficulty, having humor, and illustrating a literary style students may really come across in their professional work? In the same session, we had to translate a poem by Heinrich Heine, the 19th century German Jewish poet, who writes in this poem of his love for Germany. I leave it to you to imagine what could be done with that one.

The point is, you just can't win. There is practically nothing in this world someone won't object to. But we all win if we realize we are out to learn, not to be politically correct.

### Response 7

He is putting his name to it as translator, not as original author – there is a difference. He is not taking responsibility for the ideas in the text.

### Response 8

A couple of considerations:

- Your client may not know what the source material says. (That's one of the reasons that clients look for translators). How is the client supposed to know whether the material is objectionable or offensive to the translator?
- Translators should expect to come across objectionable or offensive materials and be prepared to deal with them. (If it's obvious, they usually have the option of saying no right away. But what if it's an objectionable paragraph buried in the middle of something otherwise innocuous)?
- You probably have a good idea as to what constitutes "buttons" in Israel. You should not permit your

students to get out of translation homework by claiming it's offensive.

### Response 9

It's not specifically student-related, but there's an interesting example of ideological intervention on the grounds of objectionable content in Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin's article 'Not in Front of the Servants' in Holman & Boase-Beier, eds., *The Practices of Literary Translation: Constraints and Creativity* (St. Jerome, 1998). The translator translates the Italian 'fannulloni', fairly diagonally, as 'the idle rich' because the correlation of unemployment with laziness would be offensive in the target culture (Ireland), in which unemployment was a huge problem at the time.

### Response 10

Your response got me to thinking yet more about what I previously had said.

For myself, putting my name to something as a translator may or may not imply that I concur with the ideas put forth, as you rightly have stated.

The litmus test for me is whether or not I feel comfortable translating the subject matter. If not, I will not want to come back to it day in and day out and if I do, my resistance to doing it will get in the way of doing a fine job. It is not necessary to go into what makes me feel uncomfortable or for anyone else to have to illustrate the same it seems to me. This has nothing to do with fear of confronting what is aversive, for after having done so, I simply may not wish to go on doing it. If I am not opening my heart and mind to the material, I will not bring myself to doing it.

Too often I have done this, and find it leaves me no peace of mind, and the translation thus suffers the consequences of my agitation, at certain intervals. And when that happens, I need to set the whole project aside. This makes it incumbent upon me to check as much as possible what I may be getting into, before agreeing to do the work.

### **Response 11**

Education, at its best, is exposure to a wide range of ideas and experiences. It is only through this education that we can make knowledgeable decisions. I would suggest that nothing be withheld by teachers of translation, out of fear that it is the teacher's own prejudices and blindnesses that may be shaping a determination of "objectionable".

What is objectionable to me may have no sway over someone else, and vice versa.

If however a student can provide convincing arguments that some assigned work is objectionable to her/him, it is only logical that the instructor should provide an alternative assignment.

### **Response 12**

I agree. It would be very difficult to train people in legal translation if they objected to translating material introduced as evidence in a trial that they found objectionable.

It seems as if someone other than the instructor is "framing" a text as objectionable, and if the framer doesn't like it, it is their responsibility to (1) register the objection and (2) take the consequences for not doing the assigned work or

negotiating with the instructor for an alternative, if such is feasible. That is, one needs to approach the issue professionally in *both* cases I mention here.

### Response 13

I can see where problems can arise in translating some literary material. I had a student who does not like the novelist Murakami Haruki (Japanese) and some of his work requires one to develop his perspective on an issue (I was thinking of his essay/story about Thailand, which is rather philosophical). She doesn't like Murakami for some reason, and I can't imagine that she can suspend judgment sufficiently to take on his points of view. (I don't mean *agree* with his points of view, but *see* them).

### Response 14

Your reply has gotten me to rethink my position, as follows:

- If one's reaction to the material would lead to a poorer quality translation, one should turn it down.
- If I thought that my translation would spread or encourage a practice I disapprove of, even if I thought I could provide a good quality translation, I would turn the job down too. If I am opposed to a practice and I were given an assignment to translate material relating to it, if it were purely informative (such as an article in a scholarly journal) or academic (for example, a class exercise), I wouldn't hesitate to translate it, but if it was designed to encourage the practice, I would refuse. If we are talking about beliefs rather than practices, I think I would apply the same test. In a class setting I can see no reason to object, and one can learn from the experience.

## Response 15

I suppose that this would be a place to point out to students that if they were considering accepting a lengthy piece of fiction or essayistic writing for translation, it would be a good idea to read the entire work. Another approach would be to have, in advance, a specification of what the translator considers unacceptable (violence? religion? politics?) and discuss it with the author/publisher.

On the other hand, in practical, commercial translation, it's unlikely that translators will encounter a lot of hidden, embedded vignettes of this sort.

If they are unwilling to translate, say, for the military or the government, or on oil drilling, usually that will be apparent in the document fairly quickly.

## Response 16

I entirely agree. Furthermore, it is possible that the client has no idea as to what the document is about. One colleague told me that she had been asked to translate a text that the client, who saw the word "electric" multiple times in the document, assumed was about electric power plants. Actually, the text was about fashion but had repeated references to the color "electric blue". She referred this client to someone else, not because she has some moral objection to dressing in the latest fashions or seeing pictures of women who do, but because she doesn't know much about fashion and didn't want to research terms on sleeves, fabrics, etc.

Unless you're going to be a hermit, you're going to be exposed to current language and mores, regardless of your

profession. Furthermore, words have multiple meanings. Being unable to handle exposure to objectionable material is an issue beyond the scope of a translation class.

## Query 2

In May 2006, our forum discussed the problems relating to translating objectionable material in class.

At that time, many teachers of translation skills suggested that students have no choice but to accept and work with the material that they receive.

However, in practice, this seems to create a Great Divide.

Some students cheerfully translate documents that may be considered to be objectionable, while some of their classmates may reject the material on religious, ethical, social, or political grounds.

In other words, teachers of translation skills "can lead the students to water, but we can't make them drink."

Perhaps we should re-open that discussion. Have any of you approached the question of objectionable material differently as a result of our discussions? Have your classes accepted the need to translate any material that they are offered? Can we force students to translate material that they reject?

## Response 1

I believe the essence of freedom is choice.

In my professional, as well as my personal life, I'd defend the right to choose what I do or what I involve myself with (provided I don't hurt anyone).

I don't even consider it a proposition to 'force' anyone, let alone a student, to work with material that is objectionable to them on any grounds. Maybe I've misunderstood the concept?

However, I would suggest students need to have a clear a process of discrimination that helps them decide what's objectionable to them and why. The 'why' is the clue to making an informed decision as to the reasons one may consider something 'objectionable'.

Knowing your own ethics and the ethics of the profession and how to apply them provides a good starting point in this process.

The other side of the coin is teaching students how to articulate to your potential clients your reasons for not undertaking translation of objectionable material.

The more difficult question for me to answer would be "How does a practicing translator deal with the issue of translating objectionable material (to him/her) when and if required by law?"

## Response 2

Here is my current thinking on objectionable material:

When you are out in the real world you can do as you please, but a learning experience is a learning experience, and is not to be passed up because you object to the material. If you do, you are the one who loses.

It reminds me of the woman who wrote to the "Pakn-Treger" (journal of the National Yiddish Book Center in the US) objecting to a Yiddish lesson which was printed in it, because it taught how to say "global warming" in Yiddish, and, as a registered Republican, she did not believe in global warming. How then did she expect to say "I don't believe in global warming" in Yiddish if she rejected the lesson teaching the expression? Every learning experience, even if it goes against your beliefs, is a learning experience and so of value. If you reject it you are missing something.

### Response 3

I would say that we should not force our students to translate material they object to. The fundamental question to ask is:

Is there a pedagogical purpose to this objectionable material?

In the real world of translation, translators can and do reject translation assignments for any number of reasons, including capacity, lack of subject matter expertise, etc., but certainly including ideology or an aversion to a particular topic. As translation teachers, we are training our students in the skill of translation, and this can usually be done quite adequately by selecting texts with appropriate translation challenges, subject-matter difficulties, etc., that lie in the mainstream of translation activity.

Perhaps, in an ideal world, there might be room for a class on "Translation of Ideologically Challenging Texts", but for the most part, it goes beyond what we need to do to train competent translators.

#### **Response 4**

That's why one needs to qualify what is "objectionable" for starters and if anything, teach a process for discriminating between valid objection and personal bias.

#### **Response 5**

Good point, and to address this point I think we should take specific cases and not just deal in the abstract and general, even if it is painful. I propose the following, and I am sure others can think of other cases:

What if you were a student in a course in medical translation and you were a devout Catholic and were asked to translate a description of an abortion procedure?

What if, in a political science translation course, you were an Israeli and were asked to translate an anti-Israeli article from a magazine or newspaper?

What if, in the political science translation class, you were a Moslem asked to translate an article maintaining that all Moslems are terrorists?

What if you were asked to translate an article denying the Holocaust? A neo-Nazi political tract?

And yes, what if you believed that global warming is a myth and just junk science, and you had to translate an article about combating global warming?

And, to be right up to date, I saw just this morning, on a translation terminology forum, a request for a translation of

the expression "honor related violence"? Would you want to translate the paper this came from?

### **Response 6**

We must consider that we are talking about teaching translation to students, and choice of material is very important from the instructor's point of view.

There are many ways to teach a point, I don't think a smart teacher would use controversial topics in a class, for example:

Abortion issue:

If I were a teacher in a medical translation course I would choose my material carefully, taking into account the most obvious sensitivities of the students (it's common practice in Australia to factor these things in, as we have such a diverse community not only in languages but in cultures, religious beliefs, etc); I'd choose another procedure in lieu of abortion, perhaps a ablation or something of the sort.

- If for some reason the abortion stuff were required, I'd make a special exception for this or other students who had a valid objection to it and find an alternative topic for them. After all, in real life, a professional translator HAS a choice of what they want to translate or not. Maybe if a translator is overly sensitive or sensitive to too many issues, they should find work in another profession, though.

Anti-Israeli case:

Ditto, I try never to use controversial material in my translation classes, it's not worth it. There are so many other topics to choose to prepare students in translation, why use controversial stuff? I just don't see the point.

Same process applies for the rest of the cases...in my view.  
I'm teaching translation, not conducting a debate!

### **Response 7**

Can I give my opinion, as a professional translator, not as a teacher?

Translator is a devout Catholic.  
He received a job: translating a violent attack on the RC church, published in a local paper.

Question: who for?

Is it the Vatican wanting to know what all the ado is about?  
Yes, translate.

Is it a well-known academic who is writing a book on anti-RC attacks?  
Yes, translate.

Is it an organization devoted to anti-RC propaganda? No, do not translate.

So, in my view, the problem is not the contents or slant of the text, but the "who for" factor.

### **Response 8**

In the case of court interpreting and sight translation, the court needs to understand what is written, no matter how objectionable it may be in principle.

Even if we do not require undergraduate students to translate such material, it helps a lot for them to have awareness of the contexts in which such translation may be required.

### **Response 9**

I agree that students need to be aware of the broad scope and the diversity of subject matter that professionals are exposed to "out there"....("you can run but you can't hide"!) and how to deal with it.

They need to be taught a process of analysis by which to identify what is truly objectionable to them. They need to be able to discriminate between what "seems" objectionable, but once looked at it in a bit more depth may not be and what is truly and validly objectionable and how to deal with both.

I just think that giving students objectionable material to translate against their principles is not a methodology that engenders learning....

(a very good discussion, I must say, good topic, thanks for bringing it up!)

### **Response 10**

Your message reminds me of a friend who has learned absolutely everything there is to know about the language of drug smugglers during her work as a court interpreter. But she is neither user nor dealer: just a plain court interpreter.

And, of course, there is the case of the famous discussions between Bertrand Russell and Father Frederick Copplestone about the existence or nonexistence of God. If you are not to translate what you do not agree with, the discussions would

require two different translators, one for what BR said, the other for Father Frederick.

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Your exercise for this article is as follows:

Keywords: Agenda, Communicate, Employment, Holocaust, Quality, Responsibility, Translation

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# Time

## *Introduction*

Good translators know that it is good business to manage time properly:

- About time management<sup>32</sup>
- How much<sup>33</sup>
- Taking control of your time<sup>34</sup>
- Take time off from working<sup>35</sup>
- Translation Time<sup>36</sup>: How long will it take?
- Pacing while transcribing<sup>37</sup>

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Keywords: [Time](#), [Translation](#)



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## *About*

Time flies  
like an arrow.  
Fruit flies

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<sup>32</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | About

<sup>33</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | How Much

<sup>34</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | Control

<sup>35</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | Off

<sup>36</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | Translation

<sup>37</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Time | Pacing

This section about time management relates to recommendations to translators for organizing and managing their daily routine.

This is important. Without having to punch a time clock, it is very easy to get involved in other issues. This could mean that an otherwise good translator will not be able to carry out his job because he was not able to manage his time successfully.

Since the most important issue for a translator is to submit his job on time<sup>38</sup>, this section may well be more important than the sections relating to the job itself.

Time management is also discussed in a book<sup>39</sup> that relates to the psychological issues that are involved in making the most of a person's time and life.

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Your exercise for this article is as follows:

[/GrossmanTranslation/Time/About](#)



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<sup>38</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing it | Part 1 | Who can be a translator? | Success and failure | Punctuality

<sup>39</sup> Yiddishe Kop | Time

## **Control**

*gnothi se'auton*  
(Know thyself)  
- Inscription  
on the Oracle of Apollo  
at Delphi, Greece  
6th century BCE  
- Also attributed to  
Socrates

A translator must take control over his translations and over his time. He can do this by keeping track of the time that he spends on different parts of his work.

- Some translators charge<sup>40</sup> by the hour
- Some translators need to evaluate whether the amount that they charge per page or per word will be profitable

Some people may argue that time and the clock control the translator. A translation job takes a specific amount of time, and the translator must be available for that time. He must also build in the additional time required for bureaucratic details, contacts with the author, billing, and accounting.

In some other ways, however, the translator is in control of his time. This does not come naturally to everybody, but good translators do not want to be overwhelmed by their work. It is important for them to develop time management skills.

Translators should see their entire day as a comprehensive unit:

- It should have a specified beginning and end
- It should have a specified number of hours allocated to the translation project

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<sup>40</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Part 3 – Making money | Rates

- It should have a number of "reserve" hours allocated to unspecified emergency or rush projects
- It should have one or more periods of time blocked off for the translator's personal activities

Some translators are more relaxed about their working time. However, they, too, must be aware of how many hours of the day will be spent on (or available for) translating. This factor determines whether it is possible to accept additional jobs or to schedule outside interests.

### **Day people and night people**

You should know which time of day you work best. Night people will set their alarm clock so that they can work late at night. Day people might insist on working during traditional business hours.

Night people have certain advantages: The telephone<sup>41</sup> is less likely to ring and interrupt you at night – except for some people who realize that that is indeed when you are available.

Those people can be told that you spend this time translating, and that you do not want interruptions at night. Some people will cooperate – and others won't.

Day people have other advantages. They can work with the sun shining cheerfully through their window and use the night for sleeping. Day people frequently set aside blocks of time for translating. They may reject phone calls during this time. Some of them follow a policy that is similar to that of night people – they tell people that they work on translations during

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<sup>41</sup> Jewish Parents Should Be Licensed | Phone

specific (and stated) times during the day. In that way, they reduce the number of interruptions.

Some translators do have a need to compromise on their preferred time. If translating is a second or secondary<sup>42</sup> job, then you might not be available at the time that you would prefer. You may also have to satisfy clients who demand rush translations.

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David  Grossman

*How much can you translate?*

Mile by mile,  
it's a trial.  
Yard by yard,  
it's hard.  
But inch by inch,  
it's a cinch.  
- Unknown

There's an old joke: How do you eat a cow? One bite at a time.

The same principle applies to major translation jobs. They have to be reduced to bite-sized pieces.

You may have just landed a six-hour translation job, but you feel that you don't have enough time available. As a result,

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<sup>42</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Part 3: Business | Part time

you procrastinate. When you finally do sit down, you involve yourself in interruptions<sup>43</sup> and in other shorter projects. Your self-fulfilling prophecy soon comes true – and indeed, you don't have enough time to complete the project.

What's a translator to do?

There is a solution. Do not schedule that massive six-hour job for one day. Schedule a single page for today, another page for tomorrow, and yet another page for the following day's todo list.

Yes, it will take several days, but you will be able to eat that entire cow, one bite at a time.

### **What are your limits?**

How many words can you translate in a day?

- 600 words?
- 2,500 words?
- 7,000 words?
- 25,000 words?

You might not know – but this question is important.

- Translators may be asked whether they can finish a job in a specified amount of time or by a certain date
  - They have to give a reasonably accurate quote about the amount of time that would be required to finish a job.
  - They need to track the time it takes to work

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<sup>43</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Home

A typical translator can complete about 2,500 words per day (a double-spaced A4 or letter-sized 8½x11" sheet of paper equals about 250 words).

It takes less time to translate a text than to edit it, when using the method<sup>44</sup> proposed in this book. Although it was just stated that a "typical" translator can handle ten pages a day, there are tremendous individual differences among translators. The amount of time will also vary based on content or genre, the time required to look up unfamiliar expressions or to consult with an on-line translation forum<sup>45</sup>, for consultations, and for editing and proofreading.

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### ***Crises are inevitable.***

Prepare for the inevitable in advance. That way, when there is a funeral, a meeting, a brit, an illness, or a forgotten wedding or a social event, then your translation will be prepared.

The same holds true for a lecture<sup>46</sup>, a lesson, or any other obligation.

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<sup>44</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing it | Part 4 – Teaching | How to translate | How I translate

<sup>45</sup> Jewish Unity Forums | Hebrew Translating

<sup>46</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing it | Part 2 – Making money | Time | Submitting it on time

Those who assume that problems will arise are usually right. Those who blithely (and foolishly) assume or hope that they will be spared these problems will face them anyhow, time and again.

Unfortunately, it doesn't help to tell most clients that things arose that were not your fault. They do not care about your problems or *simchas*. They want their work.

Build in time for the inevitable. It will make it possible to attend the event or to handle the issue with a free mind, while still making your clients will be happy.

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Your exercise for this article is as follows:

Kw time kw planning

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***Submit it on time***

Note to myself: This article will have the following keywords: time kw translation kw method

What is the most important issue in any lecture?

- Is it your presentation?
- Is it your content?
- Is it your sense of humor?
- Is it your ability to relate to your audience?
- Is it your ability to get your point across?

Well, all of those issues are certainly important. However, the issue of primary importance is *to be there* – to appear at the time that you're supposed to appear, and possibly even a bit early.

It also assures that everything will be presented in a smooth manner. However, it is not clear to some people.

Oh, yes. Your content has to be good. That is unquestionably the next order of importance. Once you're there, then you can handle the next level of importance – to be sure that you can deliver a top-notch presentation.

You just have to be there. That seems quite obvious, doesn't it? Does it really have to be mentioned in a professional book such as *Losing It*?

Perhaps we can understand the issue by thinking about the other options.

- What would happen if you would not appear on time for your lecture?
- What would happen if you would announce that you are not prepared to give your lecture at the specified time?
- What would happen if you would make an excuse – any excuse you like?
  - Go ahead – say that you didn't finish it
  - Say that it's not good enough yet
  - Say anything!

You won't get away with it.

Your audience is waiting for you to speak to them. You have committed yourself to give your lecture on a certain date and time. You *must* present it at the time that you promised.

Quality, ability to communicate, and proper contact with the audience are all secondary issues. The most important is to appear for your lecture.

Yes, this is quite obvious when we deal with lectures. Of course the lecturer has to appear on the time specified. However, many people do not realize that this issue is no less important when they have to submit a job such as a translation.

That's right – you must think of your submitted translation the way a lecturer plans for his presentation.

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### ***Time off***

You may think that the best way to measure your success as a translator is by the amount of work that you do. Of course, a good translator does a great deal of work. However, workaholics and proficient translators are not necessarily the most successful, efficient or productive workers. Perhaps your life goal should not be to work, work, work.

Yes, despite your finest intentions, you will work more during certain periods of time than others. You may not have control over those times. They may be determined by the availability of clients, and by their needs.

However, you do need time off in order to be able to continue to work well in the long run. You have three ways to schedule this time:

- You can build time off into your schedule
- You can be aware of or predict slack periods, and plan to relax at those times
- You can let nature take its course, and take off when your body demands a break

No, the third method is not recommended. The first two options are far more realistic.

If you are aware that a slack period is approaching, then will not have to build in time to take off. If you do not have natural slack periods, then you should make specific plans to take off.

Those predictable slack periods do not necessarily come schedule themselves at your convenience. Some translators can predict that their busiest time is just before the Passover holiday. They don't want to translate then, because they have other obligations at home. However, other translators don't want to work then either – and for the same reason.

Translators who plan their work know that it is important to set aside time to clean and buy Passover necessities in advance, so that they will be able to reserve time for the predictably busy pre-Passover season. They keep in mind that

work comes to them easily during that time, and in some cases they can charge more for your work.

## Other times

Plan for various categories of time off:

- Follow the recommendations of ergonomics experts
  - Stretch, get away from your computer monitor, and look at a distance every 20 minutes or so
  - Look up "ergonomics" on your favorite search engine – and follow the tips
  - Questions? You can join an online forum<sup>47</sup> that deals with the issue
- Take at least one longer break during the day
  - Work on something different at that time
  - If possible, work away from the computer
- Take time off at least once during the week
  - You will need a block of several hours
  - Get out and do something different
  - This does not count the time that you will take off for Shabbat
- Take a longer vacation from time to time during the rest of the year
  - It's best to schedule an occasional day or block of several days
  - This does not count time off for holidays

Of course, an important client might ask you to forgo your break or your vacation day. In some cases, you may agree, in order to make him happy. This is part of your job as a translator.

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<sup>47</sup> Ergonomic Life, at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ergonomiclife/join>  
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However, this exception should not become a regular practice.

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Keyword: [Employment](#), [Time](#), [Translation](#)

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## *Pacing your transcriptions*

Some translators dictate their material into the second language. They then arrange to have it transcribed<sup>48</sup>.

This method is so efficient that it will be necessary to pace yourself in a manner that is different from other translators.

Transcribed work requires touching up before it can be edited. If the work is still fresh in your mind, then this light editing can be completed quickly.

However, dictations make your translation work move along very quickly. You are likely to be tempted to dictate much faster than you can edit the material.

If you record too much material before editing, then you are likely to lose out on your ability to review the typed material *shortly* after it is thrown on to the paper<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Writing Wrongs | Part 11 - Transcribing | Recording

<sup>49</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing It | Part 4 - How to translate | Throw it

That delay in reviewing your dictations may cause you to forget the original context. You will have to review the original source language more frequently and more carefully.

Yes, at a later stage you will certainly review the material against the original. However, that extra effort should not be necessary at *this* stage.

### **A better way**

You can gain more speed by transcribing a reasonable, but limited amount of work. You can then review and edit it before you forget it. Follow this with another recording session, and then review and edit the new material while it remains fresh in your mind. The work will move along much more quickly and efficiently, and you'll get much more accomplished in that way.

There is another reason.

Recording is just plain fun. That is why some translators are tempted to do too much recording at once – and to leave too much editing for a later time. Editing your own material is not as much fun as recording – after all, you've already seen the text.

An experienced translator balances the recording with the editing. He alternates between the fun work with the more serious editing work.

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Your exercise for this article is as follows:

Analyze the rates charged by Israeli translators. What are your conclusions?

Keywords: [Recording](#), [Time](#), [Transcription](#), [Translation](#)



### *How long does it take?*

How long will the translation take? This figure should be at your fingertips – for various reasons<sup>50</sup>.

There is an easy way to find out how long it takes to translate:

- Translate and edit a few lines of the document
- Calculate the number of lines on a full page
- Divide the result by the time that you spent translating those few lines
- Multiply that new result by the number of pages

You will then have a reasonable estimate of how long it takes.

Remember that this estimate is not accurate. There are other factors to consider:

- You work more slowly over the course of time
- You work more slowly if you are tired
- You work more slowly if you have not had a vacation in a long time
- You work more slowly if you have other issues on your mind
- You need time for final editing

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<sup>50</sup> Writing Wrongs: Losing it | Book 2 – Life | Time | How much can you translate | What are your limits

- You need time for proofreading
- You need time to read the material to somebody else
- Many additional issues are involved in your own style of translating

You do try to be fair to your client. Now it's time to think of yourself.

- Don't shortchange yourself
- Don't put yourself in a difficult position
- Don't quote less than a realistic amount

Your estimates will improve over the course of time. At a certain point, you might not have to do that sample translation. You'll be able to scan through a document briefly and give a reasonable and accurate estimate.

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We include writing, translating, editing, proofreading, lexicography, and transcribing in our definition of the writing trades.

The series is divided as follows:

#### ***Part 1: General issues***

- Find out about this book
- Translation humor
- Truth
- Who can translate
- Forums

#### ***Part 2: Life as a translator***

- Working at Home
- Social issues
- Translating offensive or objectionable material
- Time

#### ***Part 3: Making money as a translator***

- What are the differences among the Business, Surviving, Marketing, and Rates sections?
- Business
- Surviving

- Getting jobs
- Marketing yourself
- Rates
- Directory of translators, to or from Hebrew – canceled.

#### ***Part 4: Teaching translation***

- How to teach the writing trades
- Teaching Translation Skills
- How to translate
- Assignments for teaching Translation Skills
- The first day
- Back translations

#### ***Part 5: Lesson plans***

- Lessons

#### ***Part 6: Distinctions***

- Hebrew-English differences

#### ***Part 7: Languages, lexicography, and glossaries***

- Language
- Names
- Pluritis
- Additions to my own dictionary and word finder

#### ***Part 8: Editing and proofreading***

- Editing
- Proofreading

***Part 9: Writing***

- Writing

***Part 10: Transcribing***

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