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## Found in Translation

### **Global business demands, broadening foreign contacts and multicultural concerns in social services have created a growing market for translators and interpreters**

**by Darrell Smith - Bee Staff Writer**

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Monica Nainsztein remembers sitting in darkened theaters as a child in her native Buenos Aires, watching her favorite movie stars. As the images flickered on-screen, the Spanish subtitles that gave voice to the English dialogue were flashed below.

But the words she read rarely matched what she heard.

"I grew up watching movies in Argentina saying, 'Hey, that's not what they said.' "

Maybe not, but she knew what they *should've* said.

Two decades later, Nainsztein is still reading Spanish-language subtitles. But now she's writing them, too. As head of the Sacramento firm Spanish Media Translations, the 35-year-old creates Spanish-language movie and TV subtitles used by some of Hollywood's biggest studios.

Nainsztein works from her Natomas home, but her team of 13 co-translators and proofreaders is spread from Argentina to London.

"You work with people who know what they're doing, who are immersed in American culture. Sometimes you can't (only) translate, you have to *think* in Spanish."

Nainsztein is one of thousands of U.S. translators and interpreters who unlock language for others, whether it's a business needing its technical manuals translated for foreign customers, a hospital requiring translators in its emergency room or a university working with a multilingual student body.

It's a growing field for translators and interpreters, whose numbers have increased with the demands of a multicultural world and a global business economy.

In 2004, the last year that federal statistics were available, about 31,000 individuals in the United States were listed as translators and interpreters in schools, health care, courts, airlines, telecommunication and other fields.

The actual number is estimated to be considerably higher as many in the translating and interpreting industries work part time or as freelancers, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The average salary is roughly \$16.30 an hour.

The industry's employment figures are expected to jump as much as 26 percent in the next eight years, according to the bureau, primarily because of the demand in the United States for foreign languages and broadened ties with foreign countries.

"There's a whole industry dedicated to this now," said Don Schinske, executive director of the Sacramento-based California Healthcare Interpreting Association, which represents some 600 medical and health care interpreters statewide.

"Between the Internet and globalization of markets," he said, "a whole industry has been built

around crossing cultures and languages."

At least one local translator has become celebrated for his efforts. William O'Daly of Auburn was recently nominated for a Quill award, one of literature's top honors, for his translation of a volume by the acclaimed Chilean poet, the late Pablo Neruda.

Garry Pratt also has seen the industry evolve firsthand. His Davis-based International Translation Service has served Sacramento-area public service, academic and collegiate clients since 1970.

Thirty years ago, he said, the number of translation services could be ticked off on one hand, and the language palette for translators was fairly standard: Spanish, French, German, Chinese and Russian.

Today, Pratt's service is, linguistically speaking, all over the map. He's been asked to translate written words ranging from the scientific to the romantic, from Japanese chemical formulas for the University of California, Davis, to love letters for foreign sweethearts.

Among the more obscure languages that Pratt has been asked to help with was Ilocano, a language spoken in the northern Philippines. He's also been asked to provide a Samoan interpreter and someone to interpret Navajo in a recent court case.

His bread-and-butter work is translating birth certificates, diplomas and other public and academic records. Among his recent clients are Chinese students at UC Davis, as well as Russian immigrants and French-speaking Senegalese in the area.

Pratt says he charges \$70 for translation services on a birth certificate and 15 to 20 cents a word for other documents.

Translating can be time-consuming work. For Nainsztein's film and movie jobs, it can take 24 hours of listening and translating to create subtitles for a typical, one-hour TV program.

Since opening in 2002, Nainsztein's company has worked on more than 200 projects, primarily for post-production companies that work for major studios, including Disney, Fox, Sony and Universal. She recruits most of her Spanish-speaking translators and proofreaders from outside the United States, traveling twice a year to South America to find new employees in Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

For the native South American, it's not about just literal translation, but capturing the nuances of what's seen on screen.

"It's about being loyal to the script, respecting the writers," Nainsztein said in the kitchen of her Natomas home office.

For Dagmar Dolatschko's business, precision is the middle name. Literally.

President and founder of Peritus Precision Translations Inc. in San Carlos, Dolatschko provides translations in more than 100 languages, primarily for business and government clients.

She typically contracts work out to 300 to 400 translators a year. This year, that number grew to nearly 500 as she branched out to meet demand for different languages.

And despite competition from Internet translation services, Dolatschko says the human touch is necessary. "For instance, it could be an elephant's trunk or the trunk of a car. How's a computer supposed to know?" she asked. "They can't quite replace us yet."

Given the large number of freelancers abroad, Dolatschko said finding translating talent has become easier for firms like hers. But it's also become harder for many U.S. translators.

"California translators have a hard time competing with Peru, Chile and Slovakia. For us, it's one of our biggest challenges," noting the state's high cost of living can sometimes send companies looking overseas for translation services.

There is no uniform certification of U.S. translators. Only one state -- Washington -- offers

certification for interpreters, according to Schinske of the Healthcare Interpreting Association.

But the American Translators Association, with some 9,500 members in 70 countries, provides accreditation in more than 24 languages to its members.

Nainsztein's passion for translation dates back to her teens when she started teaching English in her native Argentina. In her 20s, she formed a company that taught English and Spanish to managers at large foreign-based companies. Her launch into films got started in 1998 when she worked for several Argentinian film festivals.

After moving to Sacramento in 2001, Nainsztein said she started cold-calling film production companies and talking her way into interviews.

She drove to Los Angeles, armed with only a sales pitch and a laptop computer filled with samples of her work. By the time she arrived back in Sacramento, she'd already landed a call, clinching her first Hollywood contract in 2001 to do subtitling work.

Today, she said, the job still has its fringe benefits. "You're helping people understand. You're connecting cultures, informing people," Nainsztein said. "And showing your family your work on screen? That's priceless."

## Unlocking Language: The business of translations

**What they do:** Translators transcribe the written word into other languages, working with documents such as brochures, training manuals, movie scripts and public records. Interpreters deal with the spoken word.

**Where they work:** About 31,000 individuals were employed as translators and interpreters in the United States in 2004, the last year that statistics were available. The actual number is believed to be significantly higher, because many work part-time or as freelancers. • Of the 31,000, nearly one third -- about 9,900 -- were employed in schools, colleges and universities. • Other sectors were health care (primarily hospitals), government, airlines, publishing, telephone companies and interpreting/translating agencies.

**What they earn:** Salaried interpreters and translators had median hourly earnings of \$16.28 in May 2004. Pay rates ranged from roughly \$9.70 to \$27.50 per hour.

**What's required:** Many agencies or companies only employ those who have worked in the field for three to five years or who have a degree in translation studies, or both. Only one state, Washington, offers certification in translation services.

**What's in demand:** The industry is projected to increase 26 percent in the next eight years, due to the expansion of global commerce and the influx of foreign-language speakers in the United States. Demand will remain strong for translators of the so-called "PFIGS" languages (Portuguese, French, Italian, German and Spanish), as well as the principal Asian languages - Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; California Healthcare Interpreting Association

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