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What’s ahead

• ATA at a glance
• ATA’s Certification Program
  • Overview/stats
  • Exam format
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ATA at a glance

• World’s largest T&I organization
• ~ 10,000 members
• Translators and interpreters
• Annual conference with upwards of 1,500 attendees
• Well-respected publications
• Website/directory (atanet.org)

• Programs include:
  • Best business practices
  • Professional development
  • Interpretation policy
  • Government Division/GLOTF
  • Translator certification
ATA: Government-related activity

• Encouraging the federal government/CDC to declare in-person interpreters front-line workers with vaccination priority.

• Advocating for individuals in Iraq and Afghanistan who are in harm’s way because of their language services provided to US military presence in those countries.

• Working for exemption for T&I freelancers from California’s AB5 and similar legislation in other states, which would threaten their livelihood as independent contractors.
ATA Certification: Overview

- Translator certification only (no interpreting credential)
- 30 language combinations currently offered
- Languages:

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<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Russian</th>
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<td>Croatian</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
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- In the pipeline: Korean, Farsi, Romanian
ATA Certification: Stats

- Currently ~1,800 ATA-Certified Translators (CTs)
- Credential is available to ATA members only
- Cost: $525
- 400-500 exams administered in a normal year
- Average pass rate: < 20%
ATA Certification: Exam format

- Three-hour exam administered in organized sittings
- Open book/resources, including limited internet access
- Live proctoring
- Bring your own laptop
- Handwritten option available

However...
ATA Certification: Remote testing?

- COVID-19 has increased the impetus to explore remote (online) testing.
- 2020 saw steep drop in exam volume: 400 → 30.
- Good prospects for remote testing sometime in 2021.
- Format would include necessary security controls, including real-time (but remote) proctoring.
ATA Certification: The passages

• Candidate chooses 2 out of 3 texts to translate.

• Each passage is roughly 250 words.

• General subject matter; no specialized knowledge or dictionaries needed.

• Each passage includes translation instructions, providing context for the translation, were it a real-life assignment.
Example: A Croatian magazine of current affairs and social commentary is launching a web edition in U.S. English aimed at educated readers, and the following text is an excerpt from the inaugural issue. Translate the following text for the specified purpose.

- Source, purpose, audience, medium.

- Providing translation instructions, or a brief for the assignment, is consistent with best practices in translation and testing theory.
ATA Certification: Passage selection

• Passages can be in any subject matter (nontechnical, uncontroversial).

• Carefully vetted not only by the graders who select them and will be grading them, but also by an internal task force to ensure intra-program consistency.

• Challenges at text, sentence, word level must be articulated and addressed in the selection and vetting process.
ATA Certification: Skills tested

• Source language comprehension

• Target language proficiency

• Transfer skills

• Adherence to translation instructions
ATA Certification: Comprehension

Does the translation demonstrate full understanding of the source text?

• Attention to and understanding of the topic are used to help solve challenges and arrive at a correct rendering.
• Attention to and understanding of the topic help the candidate use dictionaries competently.
• Everything integral to the source text is included in the target text, and nothing that is not implicitly or explicitly stated by the author is added.
• Accurate analysis of the source text ensures that the target text reflects the view, argument, or presented information on all levels (text, sentence, and word).
ATA Certification: Target proficiency

Does the translation demonstrate good writing skills in the target language?

• The target text flows smoothly and does not contain awkward expressions that mark it distinctly as a translation.
• There are few or no mechanical errors (relating to grammar, usage, spelling, or punctuation).
Does the translation demonstrate solid familiarity with various translation strategies?

- The view, argument, and information are presented appropriately for the target culture.
- The syntax is appropriate to the target language; the target text does not necessarily imitate the sentence structure of the source text.
- The idioms in the source text are rendered so as to convey a comparable meaning in the target text.
- The wording is as unambiguous as possible.
Does the translation demonstrate compliance with the translation instructions provided for the passage?

- The translation is usable and intelligible in the specified context.
- The register, style, and wording match comparable documents written in the target language.
ATA Certification: What’s not tested

- Not a vocabulary drill
- No in-depth subject matter knowledge
- Research skills
- CAT and translation memory tools
ATA Certification: Grading

• Each exam goes to 2 graders, and a 3rd if tie-breaker is needed.

• Error point scale is 1 / 2 / 4 / 8 / 16, depending on severity and impact on usability of translation.

• Up to 3 quality points may be awarded.

• Pass is 17 points or lower in each passage.

• Failed candidates may request review (new set of eyes), and may appeal a review that upholds the fail.
ATA Certification: Practice test

ATA also offers a practice test:

- Retired exam passage
- Marked test is returned, showing error markings by point and category, as well as grader feedback
- Affordable: $80 for members, $120 for nonmembers
Besides passing the exam, ATA-Certified Translators must:

- Subscribe to the Code of Ethics/Standards of Practice
- Periodically submit Continuing Education units
ATA refers to two of the ILR’s Language Skill Level Descriptions in creating and administering the Certification Exam:

- Reading Levels
- Translation Levels
ATA & ILR: Reading Levels (1)

ATA Certification Exam passages correspond roughly to ILR Reading Level 3.

Excerpted from that descriptor, emphasis added:

[…] Text-types include news stories similar to wire service reports or international news items in major periodicals, routine correspondence, general reports, and technical material in his/her professional field; all of these may include hypothesis, argumentation and supported opinions. […]

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ATA & ILR: Reading Levels (2)

From ATA’s passage selection standards (emphasis added):

• The passage should present a clear and coherent progression of thought and reasoning in which the candidate may be required to follow an argument or supported opinion and possibly author inference.

• Texts that present straightforward factual material are generally too easy, while highly evocative pieces are usually too difficult. Editorials in newspapers such as the New York Times and the Washington Post are typical examples of texts at the appropriate level.

• An ideal passage would require the candidate to read and translate at the paragraph level, i.e., to follow a line of thought throughout an entire paragraph or text.
Success in the ATA Certification Exam corresponds roughly to ILR Translation Performance Level 3.

Excerpted from that descriptor, emphasis added:

[...] abstract language, showing an emerging ability to capture their intended implications and many nuances. [...] situations and events which are subject to value judgments of a personal or institutional kind, as in some newspaper editorials [...]. Linguistic knowledge of both the terminology and the means of expression specific to a subject field is strong enough to allow the translator to operate successfully within that field. Word choice and expression generally adhere to target language norms and rarely obscure meaning.
Skills tested by ATA

• Source language comprehension
  ➢ Capturing intended implications and nuances of abstract language

• Target language proficiency
  ➢ Adherence to target language norms with little or no obscuring of meaning

• Transfer skills
  ➢ Choosing the equivalent expression in the target language that both fully conveys and best matches the meaning intended in the source language (*congruity judgment*)

• Adherence to translation instructions
  ➢ Linguistic knowledge strong enough to allow the translator to operate successfully within the given field
From the Preface to ILR’s Skill Level Descriptions for Translation Performance:

In summary, an individual’s translation performance level depends on (1) command of two languages, (2) ability to exercise congruity judgment and apply a translation methodology, (3) familiarity with the cultural context of both languages, (4) knowledge of terminology in specialized fields, and (5) ability to finalize the product within time constraints and according to specifications.

Key: ATA definitely tests this / ATA tests this to some extent / ATA doesn’t test this
Level 0 (Minimal Performance): Expressions reflect the limitations of the source language. Individuals at this level have no practical ability to transfer information from one language into another. Accuracy is haphazard. Necessity of constant oversight and review of the product are necessary.

Level 1 (Minimal Performance): Able to render into the target language some straightforward, factual texts in the standard variety of the source language. Can usually identify the source language structure in the target language, but may not reach the absolute subject matter accuracy of the specialist in the given field. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control.

Level 1+ (Minimal Performance): Can generally translate a variety of texts, such as many scientific or financial reports, some legal documents and some colloquial writings. Can translate materials outside the individual’s specialties, but may not reach the absolute subject matter accuracy of the specialist in the given field. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control.

Level 2 (Limited Performance): Can translate texts that contain highly original and specialized content. May be subject to quality control.

Level 2+ (Limited Performance): Can produce fully accurate translations in a number of subject fields. Oversight and review of the product are necessary.

Level 3 (Professional Performance): Includes those whose work is characterized by an accurate and faithful rendering of the source language. They produce translations that are correct with respect to meaning and form. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control.

Level 3+ (Professional Performance): Can successfully apply a translation methodology to translate texts that contain difficult, abstract, formal, and informal elements, including those where lack of linguistic and cultural parallelism between the source language and the target language require detailed analysis and attempts to identify the most accurate translation, subject to quality control.

Level 4 (Professional Performance): Includes those whose work is characterized by the ability to operate in fields outside areas of specialization. The resulting product is a draft translation, subject to quality control.

Level 5 (Professional Performance): Includes those whose work is characterized by the ability to operate in fields outside areas of specialization. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control.
ATA & ILR: Alignment challenges

In seeking greater alignment with ILR standards, ATA’s Certification Program sees several challenges:

• ATA assesses the translation; ILR assesses the translator.
• ATA isn’t as concerned with non-linguistic factors: time, subject-matter knowledge, access to resources.
• ATA measures performance at a static point, ILR considers a full range of performance levels.
Questions?

Visit www.atanet.org

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