

www.aatia.org

# The Letter

of the Austin Area Translators  
and Interpreters Association

November 2002

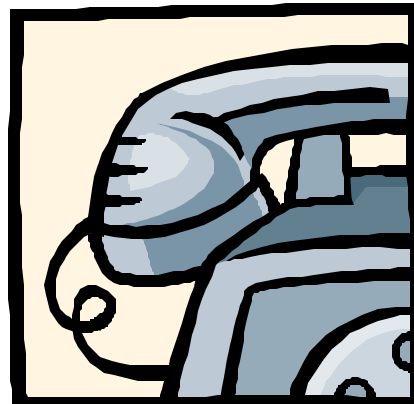
## 2003 Board of Directors elected

Tellers Committee member Edgar Guevara reported that a total of 68 ballots were received, all of which were valid. The following officers were elected to serve on the Board of Directors for 2003:

Office	Candidate	Votes
President	Harvie Jordan	65*
Secretary	Janet Peirce	64*
Directors		
Communications	Jonathan Cole	64*
Finance	Howard Simms	64*
Membership	Zoya Marincheva	42*
	J. Henry Phillips	24
Professional Development	Ezequiel Quijano	63*
	Tony Beckwith (write-in)	1

\*elected

In addition, the proposed bylaws amendment was approved by a vote of 61 for, 1 against. ★



November 9 meeting

## Interpret by phone: pros and cons

TELEPHONE INTERPRETING is a hot topic in the world of interpreting. It is often viewed with skepticism, even with hostility by some, while it is seen as a valid medium by many others. The fact is that it constitutes the fastest growing segment of the interpreting market worldwide.

AATIA member Odile J. Legeay from Houston will focus on three aspects:

- overview of the telephone interpreting market
- telephone interpreting from the interpreter's perspective
- telephone interpreting: pros and cons

Attendees may also enjoy the traditional networking session, door prizes, and tasty refreshments. ★

## Schwartz wins prize

AATIA MEMBER MARIAN SCHWARTZ recently received the following notification:

Dear Ms. Schwartz,

It is with great pleasure that I inform you that your translation of Nina Berberova's *Billancourt Tales*, published by New Directions, has been awarded the 2002 Heldt Translation Prize by the Association for Women in Slavic Studies.

The Heldt Prizes will be formally announced at the meeting following the AWSS luncheon at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Saturday, November 23rd at 12:30.

My heartiest congratulations on your perfect-pitch translation of a fascinating series of short stories!

Sincerely,  
Beth Holmgren  
Vice President, AWSS

## New banner debuts at board meeting

AT ITS OCTOBER MEETING, otherwise marked by routine matters, the AATIA Board saw the new AATIA banner, business cards, and bookmarks, designed by Mike Conner.

Members may obtain bookmarks and cards at the next general membership meeting on November 16. The banner will travel to Atlanta, Georgia that same weekend for display on the AATIA table at the ATA conference, but will return for member viewing at the January meeting. ★

## RENEWAL TIME!



IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS members will receive their renewal notices in the mail. Dues will remain at their 2002 level. Members should pay attention to the renewal deadline in order to be included in the printed version of the 2003 *Translation and Interpretation Services Directory*. ★

# Austin Area Translators & Interpreters Association

<http://www.aatia.org>

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## September meeting presentation

### Taking a global view

AATIA MEMBER TRACI SOLOMON offered attendees at the September 14 meeting a host of suggestions for taking advantage of the opportunities created by Austin's growing presence in the global marketplace. Solomon is international program manager for the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, where she works to promote Austin as a venue for international business. She also sits on the board of the Mayor's International

Partnership of Greater Austin (IPGA) and serves as Vice-President of the Greater Austin International Coalition (GAIC), both of which seek to create the commercial, governmental, educational and cultural infrastructure needed to encourage international business development in Austin.

In addition to IPGA and GAIC, numerous other organizations are working to promote Austin as an international region, and many of these organizations hold conferences and other events that afford translators and interpreters the opportunity to market

their services. *For Your Information - International*, a weekly online newsletter published by the City of Austin International Program, provides a listing of such opportunities. It can be accessed at [www.ci.austin.tx.us/international](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/international). A list of Austin-area international organizations prepared by Solomon for her presentation may be downloaded from AATIA's website [www.aatia.org/resource.htm](http://www.aatia.org/resource.htm). Contact Solomon at [solomon\\_traci@hotmail.com](mailto:solomon_traci@hotmail.com)

—Laura Vlasman, Secretary ★

## Beckwith on history of language, writing

WHERE AND HOW did writing begin? How did the earliest forms of language and writing eventually lead to the development of Castillian Spanish? Tony Beckwith examined these intriguing questions at the August meeting of the Spanish Special Interest Group (SpanSIG).

Despite the broad nature of this topic, Beckwith provided a concise summary packed with fascinating historical anecdotes. To explain how the Sumerians first invented a written code by forming clay into small, flat pieces with inscribed symbols, he handed out nuggets of hot-pink clay. He pointed out that as soon as you have something malleable in your hand you begin molding it—it's an almost instinctual act. The Sumerians used these inscribed pieces of clay to catalog material goods and facilitate trade. The pieces were housed in small, spherical clay "envelopes" called bullas. Eventually, the bullas were replaced by tablets that included a complex system of phonetic pictographs called Rebus. The Phoenicians improved on this system and spread their writing to the Greeks who then simplified it into a 24-letter alphabet.

In the second part of his presentation, Tony traced how the Etruscans influenced the Romans who extended their empire, and the Latin language, into the Iberian Peninsula. Latin and regional languages were blended with the Arabic brought in by North Africans in the 8th century to give Spanish its unique characteristics.

For example, Tony pointed out how the word *cerveza* looks nothing like its equivalent in other European languages: *beer*, *Bier*, *birra*, *bière*, etc. That's because *cerveza* was originally a popular Basque word that was adopted by Spaniards.

The presentation was such a success that members of SpanSIG are hoping to convince Tony to reprise it for a future general AATIA meeting.

—Johnathan Cole ★

## Open Letter to the Membership

IT IS WITH SINCERE, DEEP REGRET that I inform you that Traci Andrighetti has resigned as Director of Membership. Personal obligations have led her to that decision. I must also tell you that it was a difficult decision for her.

Traci has been a stalwart Board member for two years. I knew last year that I could count on her this year. I was right. This year, Traci streamlined the directory production process, conducted an aggressive membership recruitment campaign, has thought through the membership renewal process and stands ready to share benefit of her experience, knowledge and insights. And, of course, without her, we would not have had access to more than one year of Andy Coulson's invaluable pro bono expertise in our database conversion.

Traci is not going away. She will continue to participate in AATIA activities, including the LitSIG Anthology Project.

Thank you, Traci, for all you've done!

Harvie Jordan, President ★

## And now for the good news

AT ITS OCTOBER 12 MEETING, the Board appointed Zoya Marincheva, newly elected Director of Membership for 2003, to fill the position vacated by Traci Andrighetti for the remainder of this year. ★

## Advertise in directory, newsletter

NOW'S THE TIME TO PLACE AN AD in AATIA's 2003 *Translation and Interpretation Services Directory*.

The printed version circulates to a choice audience, including local and regional businesses, state government agencies, university language departments and approximately 200 AATIA members. These are up-to-

date consumers, heavy users of computers, electronic network services, avid readers, buyers of books and magazines. The AATIA membership itself is educated well beyond the national average, a large proportion holding advanced degrees in a variety of fields. Your ad will make an impact all year long.

*The AATIA Letter* also offers a great opportunity to advertise your translation- and interpretation-related products and services. The online version of this bimonthly newsletter reaches a global audience through free downloads at [www.aatia.org](http://www.aatia.org). And at rates like these, you can't afford to miss this opportunity.

### Directory Ad Rates\*

Full page inside back cover	\$450
Full page inside front cover	450
Full page inside	340
Half page	200
Quarter page	100
Sixth page	60
Eighth page	45

### Newsletter Ad Rates\*

Full page	\$125
Half page	85
Quarter page	45
Business card	25

\*10% discount to members.

**Directory advertising deadline: December 31, 2002**

**Place your ad** at [communications@aatia.org](mailto:communications@aatia.org).

## An interview with Liliana Valenzuela

– translator of *Caramelo*, the new  
novel by Sandra Cisneros

By Tony Beckwith

SANDRA CISNEROS FINISHED her tuna, sprouts and jalapeño sandwich, and was gone. On the eve of a book tour promoting her new novel, *Caramelo*, she had a million things to do.

I turned to my other lunch companion and said, “Now that we’ve talked about the English version, please tell me what it was like to translate *Caramelo* into Spanish.”

Liliana Valenzuela is slight of build, soft-spoken and serene, yet her finely chiseled profile bespeaks the patience and determination needed to translate the hundreds of pages of this complex literary work. Her eyes brightened. “It was a huge project. And the deadline...!” She shook her head and smiled. Acknowledging that the Latino market is closely intertwined with the mainstream book-reading public, the publisher took the increasingly common step of orchestrating a virtually simultaneous launch of both the original work and the translation. “I was racing against the clock,” said Valenzuela.

### What were the challenges of translating a text that is already so heavily seasoned with Spanish?

“First of all, I refuse to accept that a so-called ‘neutral Spanish’ could be used to translate a literary work, especially such a multilingual and multicultural creation as *Caramelo*. Language always has a point of reference and implies a certain interpretation. An attempt to ‘neutralize’ the language in a novel such as this would deprive it of its flavor and all its distinguishing characteristics. It would also deny the particular dynamics and even the clash of languages and cultures that are embodied in the text. I tried to reproduce, for the Spanish reader, the book’s world of dual cultural refer-

ences, choosing Mexican Spanish in particular for the dialogue, and inserting a few English words and expressions that even the monolingual reader will, with the help of other clues, be



able to understand.”

### Was translating the dialogue particularly hard?

“In the dialogue especially, I used regionalisms, archaisms, non-standard expressions, common mistakes in the spoken language, as well as the so-called “pocho” dialect of Chicanos in the United States. Cisneros emphasizes not only differences between English and Spanish, but also the differences and prejudices that exist between those who speak Mexican Spanish and those who speak the Spanish/English blend of the border or of the interior of the United States. I have tried to be faithful to all those nuances.”

### And how about capturing the author’s voice in translation?

Valenzuela nodded. “I was a poet before I was a translator, and that helped,” she said. “I tried to convey Sandra’s poetic voice by recreating her elegant cadences, her use of alliteration and assonance, and the intricate and spectacular structure of her sentences that range from only one word to a whole paragraph. She gave me poetic

license to use my imagination and re-interpret her work. When I couldn’t reproduce a particular effect exactly, I explored alternative solutions and found other places where I could echo the original poetic elements.”

### Were you in close communication with the author during this process?

“Sandra is a night owl, and we had dozens of after-hours phone conversations that were so fascinating but that kept me up way past my bedtime!”

### How did this translation project land on your desk?

Sandra and I have been friends for years. Back in 1987, when she lived in Austin, she had already published *House on Mango Street* but had yet to become wildly famous. I took my first writing workshop from her, so she is also a literary mentor to me. When I started doing literary translation I asked her if I could translate whatever she wrote next. As it happened, she was just looking for someone to translate *Eleven*. The timing was perfect. That was about ten years ago. Then I translated two other books of hers, *Hairs/Pelitos* and *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. She was very happy with the results. She thought that my background as an anthropologist, poet, and translator helped me understand her work on several levels. So it was pretty well understood that when *Caramelo* was finally ready, I would translate it into Spanish.

*Liliana Valenzuela is a freelance translator, writer and poet living in Austin. Recent translation publications include: Caramelo, The Magic of Remedios Varo, Cuando los ángeles hablan, Bugs for Lunch/Insectos para el almuerzo, and Latin Jazz.*

*Tony Beckwith is a writer and translator living in Austin. ★*

**AATIA Member Profile****Frank Dietz***by Martyn Hitchcock*

LIKE MOST OF US, APPARENTLY, Frank Dietz, the AATIA's first webmaster, did not really intend to make a career as a translator. He earned his Ph.D. in American literature with a dissertation on Utopian literature and science fiction and had already as a graduate student acquired some responsibility for selection of and training on computers.

It was nonetheless as a translator that Frank first found work when he came to Austin, working as a free-lance on textbooks for Holt Rinehart & Winston; and in 1994 he was able to combine translation with his first love, science fiction and the Utopian, by becoming the in-house German translator for a computer-games company, Origin Systems. He remembers his four years there as a fascinating period of his life, when he might perhaps have been witnessing the birth of a new art-form. He particularly remembers working on the "Jane's Combat Simulations" series, which used the encyclopedia of weaponry as the basis for a computer game.

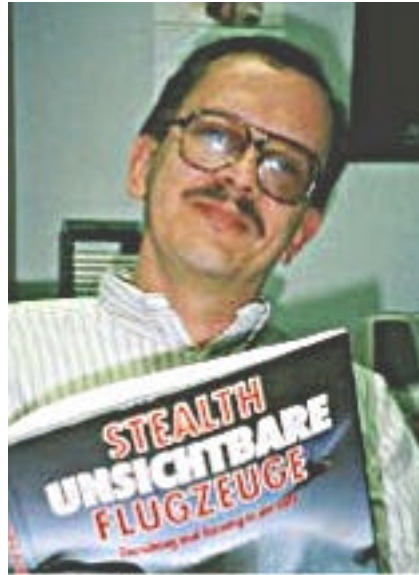
But by now Frank was also doing regular technical translation; and when, driving home late one night after a particularly grueling week, he found himself looking under his steering-wheel for the infrared display, he realized he was burning out. He still translates computer games from time to time, which he compares to translating non-linear novels (he reminds us all to make sure the translator's name appears on the game when that language-version is published). Now, however, his work is primarily as a "software localizer," one who not merely translates computer software but adapts it to the culture in which it will be used.

Some precepts for us:

You are a business (even if only for a few hours a week): so you must find a level of working and earning at which you feel comfortable and then be sure not to undersell yourself. Don't spend all your working hours translating: remember to put in some time on self-

marketing, on keeping abreast of new opportunities, and on brushing up what you thought you knew.

Technology is your friend (well, most of the time). Translation will



never all be done by computers, but they can be a great help in boosting productivity, e.g., by providing translation memory.

Never stop learning. There is always new and interesting technology to learn about, much of it related to the Internet. Keep reading in all your languages; and stay alert!

Frank's website [www.jump.net/~fdietz](http://www.jump.net/~fdietz), which he originally set up for his personal use but has now made generally available, offers over two thousand links to English and German glossaries. ★

**Call for submissions**

FOR ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION the journal *Two Lines* is seeking original translations into English on the theme "Parties." Suggestions include celebrations, factions, feasts, unions, orgies, cabals, holidays, etc.—see your thesaurus for more possibilities.

Deadline for submissions is December 31, 2002. See [www.twolines.com](http://www.twolines.com) for more information. ★

**Translate for MFA in Las Vegas**

TRANSLATION IS ONE COMPONENT of a new MFA program in Creative Writing offered through the Department of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The emphasis is on crafting publishable works of fiction or poetry, but students must also complete rigorous graduate-level coursework that offers preparation for professional careers in writing, teaching, or publishing, and one of the program's requirements is a significant translation from a language other than English. Students are also asked to spend at least one semester abroad in a non-English-speaking country.

Funding is available in the form of graduate assistantships (\$11,000) and Schaeffer Fellowships (\$25,000). For more info call 702-895-4366, e-mail [mfaunlv@unlv.edu](mailto:mfaunlv@unlv.edu) or go to the website: [www.unlv.edu/Colleges/Liberal\\_Arts/English/](http://www.unlv.edu/Colleges/Liberal_Arts/English/) ★

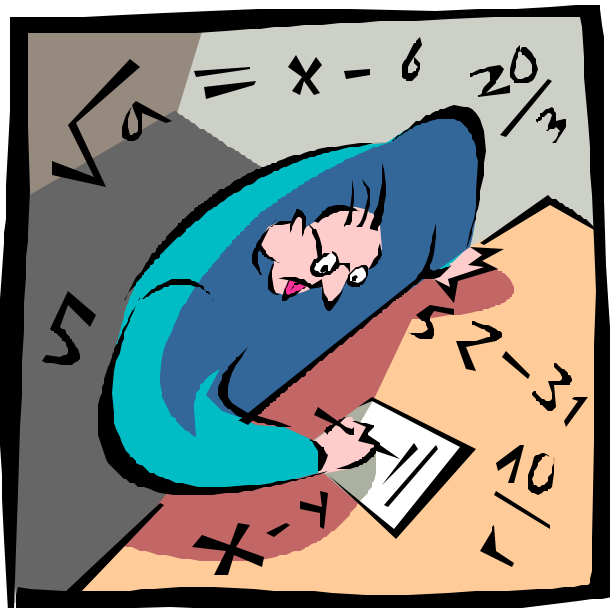
**Three for the bilingual bookshelf**

AATIA MEMBER Liliana Valenzuela has been busy lately.

The novel *Caramelo* by Sandra Cisneros has just been published simultaneously in English and Spanish by Knopf, with the Spanish translation by Valenzuela.

She has also translated *Latin Jazz*, by Raúl Fernández, a fully bilingual cultural history of Latin Jazz in the U.S., richly illustrated, published by Chronicle Books in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution. Valenzuela also translated the accompanying CD by the same name and a traveling exhibition at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., that opened on the book release date on October 19.

In addition, Valenzuela's translation of the children's book *Bugs for Lunch/ Insectos para el almuerzo*, by Margery Flacklam, illustrated by Sylvia Long, (Charlesbridge Publishing) was also released recently. ★



## Stupid Interpreter Tricks Liters, kilometers, the Golden Mean, and the Golden Rule

by J. Henry Phillips ©2002

### Liters and Quarts

To people from metric-speaking countries, a liter is simply the volume of a cube having 10-cm edges. People brought up on feet, inches, gallons and quarts have their vision of reality obfuscated by differences between U.S. and imperial gallons, and Americans actually find it simpler to define a quart as 95% of a liter and let it go at that. On tables provided by the Bureau of Standards they may find a liter listed as 10% larger than a quart, yet not trouble themselves over how the difference can amount to 5% in one direction and 10% in the other when discussing the two volumes. The discrepancy is due to the difference between dry quarts and liquid quarts, and it disappears when you stick to one or the other.

Those young enough to read the lettering on a Coke bottle notice that there are 33.8 fluid ounces in a liter and know from grade school that there are 32 such ounces to a liquid quart. In every case the 5% difference

will fit in a shotglass, and even technical-minded audiences accustomed to straining at gnats will forgive the nimble interpreter for multiplying and dividing by 4 when converting between liters and gallons.

### Kilometers and Miles

All of that changes when the discussion involves distances measured in miles and kilometers. Knowing that a mile is equal to 1.60934 kilometers or that a kilometer is equal to 0.62137 miles is

small consolation when interpreting 200 words per minute. Fifteen seconds wasted in the calculation can easily put the interpreter two sentences in arrears, and the speaker is there to inform the audience—not to slow down and accommodate the linguist. To find a handy way to remember the ratio and calculate the proportions, it is sometimes productive to contemplate one's navel.

The Ancients believed that the distance from your bellybutton to the floor stood in rational proportion to its distance from the top of your head. This fascinated designers like da Vinci and Le Corbusier and mathematicians from Fibonacci to Roger Penrose. Even the letter "A" in AATIA's logo is designed using the Golden Mean. To find it, ask yourself how to divide a given unit of length into two parts such that the ratio of the shorter part to the longer equals the ratio of the longer part to the whole. Translated into high school algebra this is  $(1-x)/x = x/1$ , which, when run through the quadratic formula we memorized way back then, gives us  $(\text{radical } 5 \pm 1)/2$ . When you add 1 to the square root of 5 before halving the total you get approximately 1.618034... or phi, and when you instead subtract the 1, halving the quantity yields 0.618034... (the decimal part

actually goes on forever, but here we have neither the time or space).

If you test this curious number phi with a calculator, you see that dividing one by it is the same as subtracting 1 from it; adding it to its square is the same as cubing it, and so on. If you type "Golden Mean" into a search engine you'll find 20,000 web sites with color graphics and diagrams of rectangles, spirals, triangles, tiling patterns and scroll lathing—plus numerous calculator tricks—all based on the magically mysterious number phi.

### Stranger than phiction

The part that interests us however is sheer coincidence. It just so happens that the ratio of miles to kilometers is very close to phi—so close, that if we use phi in its stead, we are off by only one part in a thousand. The interpreter can therefore define a mile as phi kilometers, round that to 1.62, better yet, 1.6, and round its reciprocal to 0.6. This reduces the problem of converting between miles and kilometers to a simple question of multiplying and dividing by 6, or adding and subtracting 60%. We can invert the fractional ratio by adding or subtracting 1. Immediately we see that 1000 miles is about 1620 kilometers, and 1000 kilometers roughly 620 miles. An oil well 17 miles offshore (multiply by 1.6) is just over 27 kilometers out by boat, and a coal mine 67 kilometers from town (multiply by 0.6) means a 40-mile ride back to the hotel.

### The Golden Rule

It is easy to make mistakes juggling simultaneous interpreting with mental arithmetic, but fortunately there are ways to cheat. If you are old enough to know how to read a slide rule, you can place the 1 on the slider over the 1.62 on the bottom rule. This will enable you to convert from miles to kilometers when English is coming into your headphones. Pushing the slide the other way, sliding the 1 over the 62 on the bottom rule helps when converting from kilometers to miles when you are speaking English into the microphone. For younger inter-

preters, Golden Rule teamwork is a good solution. If you make friends with your colleague in the booth, one can do the multiplication (using a calculator with 0.62 or 1.62 stored in memory and multiplication key already pressed) and—while the other is interpreting—display the converted figures on the calculator. Both of you will have speaker and audience alike gasping in astonishment at this incredible combination of arithmetical legerdemain and linguistic concentration—Quite Easily Done.

### Summary and Review

The difference between liquid quarts and liters is a mere 5%, small enough that—for interpreting purposes—it can be ignored.

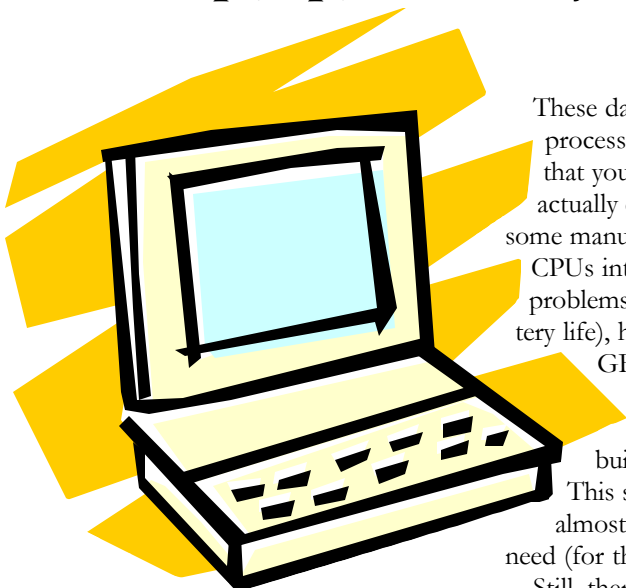
The ratio of miles to kilometers is so close to the Golden Mean that the interpreter can treat it as such and take advantage of corresponding arithmetical peculiarities.

Going back over what we've covered in previous columns, remember that one square meter is approximately 11 square feet—which reduces conversions between these units of area to a matter of moving the decimal one place to the right or left and adding or subtracting a corresponding 10% difference.

In discussions of heat, cold and temperature, for every nine-degree change in the Fahrenheit temperature scale the corresponding difference in centigrade or Celsius is exactly 5 degrees. If you are comfortable at 75°F and sweating profusely at 93°F (18°, or two nines hotter), that's the same as sitting pretty at 24°C and sweating bullets at 34°C (two fives hotter). For other equivalences, 16°C is 61°F, -40°C is also -40°F, a sweltering 40°C is 102°F, and as the Centigrade scale goes up and down by fives, the Fahrenheit scale goes up and down by nines. ★

## The Lap(top) of Luxury

by Frank Dietz © 2002  
<http://www.jump.net/~fdietz>



These days, laptops come with fast processors (make sure, though, that you buy one with a processor actually designed for a laptop—some manufacturers stick desktop CPUs into laptops, which can cause problems in terms of heat and battery life), hard drives with at least 20 GB, DVD-ROM or combined DVD/CDRW drives, numerous ports, built-in networking, and more.

This should prove plenty for almost anything a translator will need (for the time being, that is).

Still, there are some drawbacks. Notebooks cost more than comparable desktops, and one spilled cup of coffee (or a fall from your desk) can become very expensive. They are also not as easily upgradeable as desktop PCs, as they lack expansion slots. On a desktop machine, for instance, you might gradually add a better video card, a second hard drive, a USB 2.0 connection, or other features, to extend the useful life of the machine, whereas laptops are much more limited in this aspect.

So, if mobility and a space-saving design are major factors in your decision process, you should consider notebooks. In terms of upgradeability and price/performance ratio, though, desktops still come out ahead. ★

WHEN IT IS TIME TO REPLACE that trusty but by now ancient computer (gosh, it must have been at least three or four years ago that you bought it), you might want to consider a notebook (laptop) rather than a desktop. Notebook computers, which used to be underpowered and overpriced, have come much closer to desktops in terms of performance and price/value ratio.

The obvious argument for a notebook is its portability. If you often work on-site (for linguistic software testing, for instance) or travel abroad, you will need a mobile solution anyway. One possibility would be to buy a so-called docking station that allows your laptop to be hooked up to a regular keyboard and a full-sized monitor while being used at home, but is easily disconnected when you need to take the computer on the road.

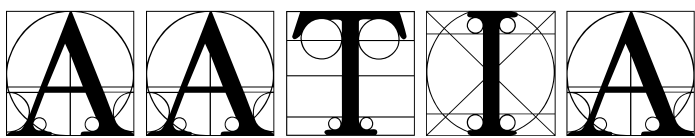
Even without a docking station, modern notebooks offer relatively large screens (14 or 15 inches are common, though Sony recently offered a 16.2-inch behemoth), and if you do not like the built-in keyboard, you can always attach a different one via the PS/2 or USB port. If your “home office” consists of a corner of your living room, you will appreciate how much space a laptop can save you.

### Half-price sale

20 specialized dictionaries

German to English  
&  
English to German

Email for list:  
[IngridLansford@cs.com](mailto:IngridLansford@cs.com)



**Austin Area Translators & Interpreters Association**  
PO Box 13331 ★ Austin, TX 78711-3331 ★ 512-707-3900  
<http://www.aatia.org>



*AATIA welcomes visitors to the Austin History Center at 9th & Guadalupe on the 2nd Saturday of odd-numbered months for general meetings and even-numbered months for board meetings.*

#### EVENTS IN AUSTIN

- Nov 9 10 a.m. SpanSIG meeting  
1–4 p.m. AATIA member meeting  
Dec 7 ATA accreditation exam sittings  
Dec 14 10–12 noon. MCISIG meeting  
12 noon. MCISIG networking lunch  
1–4 p.m. AATIA board meeting  
Jan 11 SpanSIG meeting and AATIA member meeting  
**IN SAN ANTONIO**  
Apr 25–27, 2003 ATA Spanish Language Division's 2nd Annual Conference: [virginiasps@comcast.net](mailto:virginiasps@comcast.net)

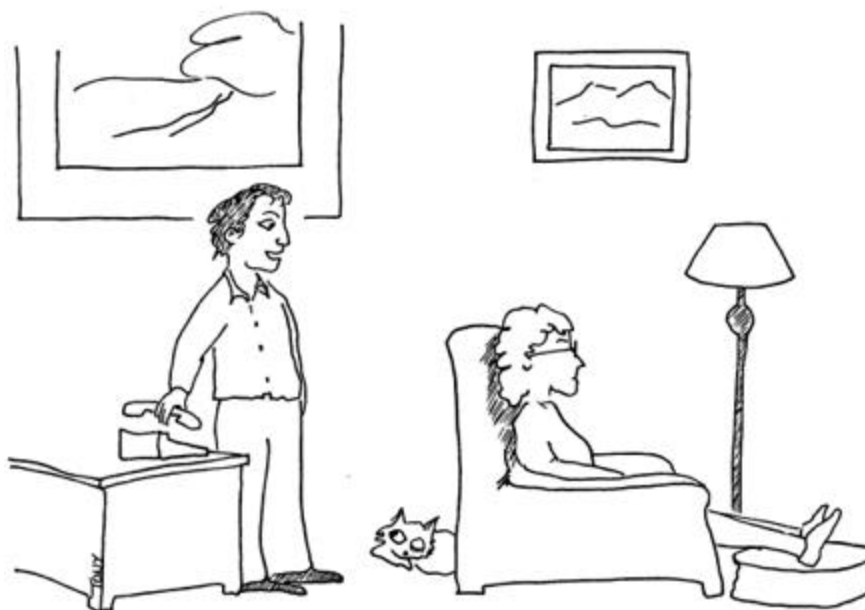
## Are you there?

NOT SURPRISINGLY, people of different countries answer the telephone differently. Greeks say the equivalent of “Come in.” Germans give their names. Russians open with “I’m listening.” Italians start with the directive “pronto,” meaning “read.” What the Japanese say amounts to the same as “Excuse me.”

*from L.M. Boyd's column in the Austin American-Statesman, September 24, 2002*

## Medical interpreting standards published

THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED California standards for healthcare interpreters are available on the website of the California Healthcare Interpreters Association <http://www.chia.ws>. ★



Well, the cows have come home. Now what?