

“What do employers want?” A study of online job  
advertisements for translators in Thailand  
“นักแปลแบบใดถูกใจผู้จ้างงาน” การศึกษาประกาศรับสมัครงาน  
ออนไลน์ตำแหน่งนักแปลในประเทศไทย

Tongtip Poonlarp<sup>\*</sup>  
tongtip@hotmail.com  
Nattharath Leenakitti<sup>\*\*</sup>  
nattharath@hotmail.com

### Abstract

This research involves an investigation into the needs and expectations that employers have towards translators in Thailand. The aim of this study was to identify preferred qualifications of translator recruits from the perspectives of employers in the hope of adjusting training to the realities of the labor market. To this end, 95 job advertisements for translators posted in eight online recruitment websites were collected between 31 January 2012 and 21 February 2012, their content then analyzed and codified using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. The areas investigated included general information about the job (job titles and responsibilities, types of businesses, salary), required qualifications (sex, age, education, experience, knowledge, skills and aptitude), languages involved, as well as other related information (salary). In addition to providing valuable insights into the employers’ needs and expectations on the one hand, the advertisements reflected some general misconceptions about the translation profession on the other, including the ‘anyone who knows the language can translate’ and ‘the translator is an interpreter’ notions, as well as the mismatch between the job titles advertised and the described responsibilities. Based on the findings, the authors suggest how both language and translation degree programs can prepare their graduates for future translation careers.

**Keywords:** job advertisements, translation markets, translators, professional aspects of translation, Thailand

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Lecturer of Chalemprakiat Centre of Translation and Interpretation, Faculty of Arts,  
Chulalongkorn University

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Special lecturer at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งศึกษาความต้องการและความคาดหวังของผู้ว่าจ้างที่มีต่อนักแปลในประเทศไทย โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อให้ทราบว่าผู้ว่าจ้างต้องการนักแปลที่มีคุณสมบัติใดบ้าง เพื่อนำไปปรับการเรียนการสอนแปลให้สอดคล้องกับสิ่งที่เกิดขึ้นจริงในตลาดแรงงาน ผู้วิจัยเก็บข้อมูลจากประกาศรับสมัครนักแปลจำนวน 95 ชิ้นจากเว็บไซต์สมัครงาน 8 แห่งตั้งแต่วันที่ 31 มกราคม ถึงวันที่ 21 กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ.2555 แล้วจึงวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาและลงรหัสข้อมูลในโปรแกรม Microsoft Excel และ SPSS ประเด็นที่เลือกศึกษาประกอบด้วย ข้อมูลทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับงาน (ชื่อตำแหน่ง หน้าที่รับผิดชอบ ประเภทธุรกิจ สถานที่ทำงาน และเงินเดือน) คุณลักษณะ ทักษะ และความรู้ที่ต้องการ (เพศ อายุ เชื้อชาติ ทักษะทางภาษาและทักษะด้านอื่นๆ ความรู้ด้านคอมพิวเตอร์) ตลอดจนการศึกษาและประสบการณ์ ประกาศรับสมัครนักแปลนั้นนอกจากจะให้ข้อมูลที่เป็นประโยชน์เกี่ยวกับความต้องการและความคาดหวังของผู้ว่าจ้างแล้ว ยังสะท้อนสิ่งที่สังคมมักเข้าใจผิดเกี่ยวกับวิชาชีพนักแปล เช่น เชื่อว่าใครก็ตามที่รู้ภาษาหนึ่งๆ ย่อมจะทำงานแปลได้ หรือมองว่านักแปลก็สามารถทำลாம்ได้ด้วย นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าบางครั้งชื่อตำแหน่งงานกับหน้าที่ที่ระบุไว้ไม่ตรงกัน ข้อค้นพบที่ได้จากงานวิจัยนี้สามารถนำไปเป็นแนวทางให้กับหลักสูตรภาษาและการแปลระดับมหาวิทยาลัยในการเตรียมผู้เรียนให้ทำงานแปลได้ในอนาคต

**คำสำคัญ :** ประกาศรับสมัครนักแปล, ตลาดงานแปล, นักแปล, วิชาชีพแปล, ประเทศไทย

## 1. Introduction

It has been generally agreed that one of the main goals of a degree program is to produce well-qualified graduates who meet the demand of the labor market. Indeed, the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance (AUN Secretariat 2011) clearly stipulates that the graduates “should be oriented to the job market and be able to develop their careers” (p.14). In Translation Studies, scholars have also stressed the importance of incorporating market needs into translation training (Pym 1993, Aula.int 2005, Kelly 2012). In Thailand, however, while translation has been taught as a course at tertiary level since at least the 1950s<sup>1</sup>, with universities having been offering translation courses at undergraduate level as part of language degrees, and at post-graduate level as an MA in translation degree program<sup>2</sup>, little has been studied as regards the market needs for translators in Thailand. Indeed, information of this kind would be valuable for stakeholders, from administrators and program directors to lecturers in translation, who need to be aware of what will be required of their graduates in order to identify the necessary skills and competencies that should be developed and as a result, prepare their students for the labor market accordingly.

Since, to our knowledge, no study on the expectations of translator employers has been carried out in Thailand, we explored market needs from the employers’ perspectives through job announcements, with the hope of bridging the gap between the translation job markets and the educational provision. This research aimed to address the following questions:

- (1) What are the roles and responsibilities of translators in Thailand?
- (2) What are the personal qualities, skills and knowledge required by their potential employers?
- (3) What are the educational qualifications and experience required by their potential employers?

## 2. Literature Review

Researchers into employer expectations have been using job announcements as a primary source of data across various disciplines. In these studies, content analysis was conducted to gain insights about employer expectations and the current state of the profession and the market. As noted by Hostench (2010, 26), research into job offers not only “reveals market development

from a very specific, practical perspective” but also “makes it possible to objectively analyze any preconceptions and clichés regarding the market”. But more importantly, it has obvious implications for teaching and would give students some ideas about what is required of them when they enter the job market (p.33).

The use of job ads for translation research was found solely in Bowker (2002, 2004, 2005), and Hostench (2010) lamented the lack of job offer research in Translation Studies, noting that “it would be very useful to have more articles of this kind from other countries” (p.33). Bowker compiled a database of translation-related job ads in Canada and investigated the state of terminology professions (2002), the translation professions (2004), and the perception of employers towards translator professional recognition (2005) in Canada. In her 2004 article, which is most relevant to the present study, Bowker explored 301 advertisements for translation-related jobs in Canada collected between January 2000 and December 2002, and looked at the types of jobs, locations, languages, qualifications, and required skills. It was found that more than half (53.5%) of the jobs in the ads were for translator, while 15% of the jobs were for hybrid positions, e.g. translator-reviser, translator-writer, translator-terminologist. Sixty two percent of the ads sought candidates with a degree, and the overwhelming majority of these ads expressed a preference for a degree in translation. The numbers of years of experience preferred were 3 years (21%), 5 years (19%), and 2 years (17%), suggesting unwillingness to hire new university graduates on the part of the employers. The top 5 sought after skills and knowledge mentioned were computer skills (61%), team player (40%), work under pressure (37%), written communication skills (36%), and domain knowledge (32%). The study also revealed other professional-related aspects, such as the shortage of seasoned translators in the market, and the increasing pressure in the changing global market place.

Other research on translator employers can be found in Chan (2011), who investigated translator recruiters’ view about the importance of translator certification through the use of interview. With the economic theory of signaling as a framework, he asked eight translator recruiters in Hong Kong to rank 12 fictitious resumes and carried out a semi-structured interview with each of them. The study revealed that while almost all recruiters considered work experience necessary, the decisive factor, in fact, lied in the relevant academic degree, with translator certification being viewed as an “add-on” rather than a requirement.

### 3. Translation competence

Translation scholars have long discussed the necessary knowledge and skills required in translating, known as translation competence, which is identified as ‘the underlying knowledge system of the declarative and procedural knowledge needed to translate’ (PACTE, 2008). Proposals about translation competence have come from authors such as Bell (1991), Neubert and Shreve (1992), Cao (1996), Kelly (2012), as well as expert groups such as PACTE (2003, 2008) and the European Master’s in Translation (EMT) expert group (2009). The components are useful as frames of reference for translator training programs, from which courses are designed to develop competence in learners. Based on the PACTE model (2003, 2008) and Kelly’s (2012) description, the components of translation competence are summarized as follows:

- *Communicative and textual competence in two languages and cultures.* This competence includes active and passive skills in the languages involved as well as textual knowledge, discourse, and discourse conventions in both languages.
- *Cultural and intercultural competence.* This category subsumes not only encyclopedic knowledge of history, geography, institutions, etc. of the cultures involved, but also values, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors (Kelly, 2012: 33).
- *Subject area competence.* The translator needs to have sufficient knowledge of the subject area to allow correct interpretation of the text and access to specialized documents to solve translation problems.
- *Professional and instrumental competence.* This involves the use of documentary resources, terminological research, information management, or IT for professional practice, including word-processing, desk-top publishing, Internet, and e-mail.
- *Psycho-physiological or attitudinal competence.* As noted by Kelly (2010) and the PACTE group (2003, 2008), this category includes attitudinal components (memory, attention span, self-concept, self-confidence) and abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis, and synthesis.

- *Interpersonal skills*. As noted by Kelly (2010), this category involves the ability to work with other professionals in the translation process (e.g. revisers, terminologists, project managers, layout specialists) as well as actors (clients, users, subject area experts). Teamwork, negotiation skills, and leadership skills also fall in this category (Kelly 2012).
- *Strategic competence*. This involves problem identification and problem-solving in the process of translation.

#### 4. Research Methodology

To explore the employers' needs and expectations, a database of 95 online job advertisements for translators was created to gather the data. The ads were compiled between 31<sup>st</sup> January and 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012 from eight recruitment websites: 1) Bangkok Post Classified, 2) JobBKK, 3) jobsDB.com, 4) Jobstreet.com, 5) JobTH.com, 6) jobthai.com, 7) JOBTOPGUN, and 8) Nazionejobs.com. The reason for selecting these websites as the source of data was because the ads posted here are accessible to everybody. Three search terms, i.e. 'นักแปล' (translator), 'แปลภาษา' (translate language), and 'translator', were used to retrieve translator job ads in both Thai and English. The use of 'translator' as a search term allowed for the collection of ads with titles containing the word 'translator', which may co-occur with other related positions (e.g. 'translator-interpreter, translator-secretary, translator-visa assistant). The categories presented in this study emerged from an examination of the data, which allowed us to establish a set of indexing criteria, as described in Table 1. Each ad was given a code number (e.g. TI001) based on the job titles advertised (T for translator, TI for translator plus interpreter, and TO for translation plus other jobs) for ease of retrieval. Then, in each category, a number was assigned to each variable. For example, for minimum education level, 1 was assigned for vocational diploma and lower, 2 for a Bachelor's degree, and 3 for a postgraduate degree. Ratio data such as salary was noted and calculated for the mean. The data was entered into Microsoft Excel and SPSS for statistical analysis.

Table 1 Indexing criteria used in the database

Topics	Items
<b>1. General information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job titles and responsibilities</li> <li>- Types of businesses</li> <li>- Salary</li> </ul>
<b>2. Personal qualities, skills and knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sex</li> <li>- Ages</li> <li>- Nationality</li> <li>- Languages</li> <li>- Standardized proficiency test required</li> <li>- Other knowledge and skills</li> </ul>
<b>3. Education and experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimum education level</li> <li>- Fields of study</li> <li>- Translation-specific degree</li> <li>- Number of years of work experience</li> <li>- Areas of work experience</li> <li>- Experience in translating</li> </ul>

It should be noted here that though the job postings collected involved a variety of businesses, none was from government or intergovernmental agencies. Information that did not contribute to answering our research questions, such as fringe benefits offered by the employers, number of working days, working hours, or how to apply for the job, was excluded from the present study.

## 5. Findings and discussion

Exploring the job ads database allowed us to gain valuable insights into the expectations of potential employers on the one hand, and the current state of the translation profession in Thailand on the other. In this section, we start with the general roles and responsibilities of the translator, then proceed to describe the personal attributes, skills and knowledge, and education and experience.

5.1 General information

5.1.1 Job titles and responsibilities

As in most job ads, the first thing that draws the attention of a job seeker is the job title, usually printed in bold and larger font on top of the page. As job titles suggest what is expected of a position, the combinations of titles reflect what types of jobs await translator recruits and in turn, allow them to decide whether it is the type of work they are looking for. In this research, the job titles are grouped into three main categories: translator proper, translator-interpreter, and translator-others, based on the frequency of the data and the nature of the job (see Table 2).

Table 2 Number of ads for translation-related positions

Job titles	Number of ads	Percentage
Translator proper	62	65.26%
Translator-interpreter	15	15.79%
Translator-others	18	18.95
<b>Total</b>	95	100%

While more than half of the jobs (65.26%) in the database are for translators proper<sup>3</sup>, it is interesting to note how translators in Thailand are expected to do more than just translating, as one-third of the ads apparently seek candidates to fill hybrid positions. fifteen point seven nine percent of the ads are for translator-interpreter, while the remaining 18.95% are for candidates to fulfill dual roles. A breakdown of the dual titles is provided in Table 3.



Table 3 Breakdown of the dual translation-related job titles

Job titles	Number of ads
Translator-proofreader	4
Translator-administrative staff	4
Translator-editor/copywriter	3
Translator-secretary	3
Translator-coordinator	1
Translator-visa assistant	1
Translator-international affairs officer	1
Translator-English instructor	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

It can be seen that translators are expected to be able to perform hybrid roles, ranging from language professionals (i.e. editor, copywriter, proofreader) to administrative officers (secretary, administrative staff, coordinator, visa assistant, international affairs officer) and, interestingly, language instructor. Gouadec (2007) calls the combination ‘translator plus’, which he describes as involving the translators “combin[ing] their translation skills with another type of competence, especially where and when the workload does not justify employing a full-time translator [...] or when the job of ‘translator’ is not recognized as such within the company, or when the particular circumstances of the job so dictate” (p.116). In our context, it might be the case that some companies may not have the luxury of hiring two persons for two job posts at a time, so collapsing the positions into one allows them to save costs. In this case, the ‘translator plus’ has to be equipped with additional competences, e.g. managerial, administrative, interpreting, or even teaching skills. It should be noted that the variety of administrative positions found in our database seem to be specific to the Thai context since they were neither reported in Gourdec (2007)<sup>4</sup> nor Bowker (2004), who noted that Canadian translators’ dual duties involve only those of language professionals, for example, reviser, writer, and terminologist.

The demand for hybrid roles is evidenced not only in the job titles but also in the description of job responsibilities, and even translators proper, in fact, are not excluded from multiple tasks. While we would expect the translators

proper to translate only, it turned out that only one-fourth (24.19%) of the 62 ads for translators proper allow them the luxury of doing so. Indeed, about half of the ads require the applicants to carry out other tasks as well. Table 4 provides a list of responsibilities found in the job ads for translators proper.

*Table 4* Responsibilities found in the job ads for translators proper

Responsibilities	Number of ads	Percentage
Translate only	15	24.19%
<b>Interpret</b> only	1	1.61%
Translate and carry out related tasks	8	12.9%
Translate and <b>interpret</b>	3	4.84%
Translate, <b>interpret</b> , and carry out related tasks	4	6.45%
Translate and carry out unrelated tasks	10	16.13%
Translate, <b>interpret</b> , and carry out unrelated tasks	5	8.06%
Other unrelated tasks	1	1.61%
Not specified	15	24.19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>100%</b>

From Table 4, it can be seen that translators proper are expected to undertake a variety of tasks. As it turned out, 13 ads (20.97%) mentioned interpreting as a responsibility, 12 of which to complement translating. In one ad, the translator is required to ‘perform translation for the Senior Executive Vice President in the management meetings and board meetings’ (T028), while in another, the translator has to ‘interpret in the three modes of interpreting (sight, consecutive and simultaneous) in meetings’ in addition to producing translation of documents (T022). In both examples, the translators are also expected to act as a professional interpreter – a highly skilled one, in the latter case. It is worth noting that from a theoretical viewpoint, translating and interpreting, despite the fact that they both constitute language transfer, are two different modes of communication: oral versus written, and require a different set of skills and aptitudes. As noted by Taylor-Bouladon (2007), the major difference lies in the psychomotor component, which explains why even the best translators may not perform successfully as

interpreter. As interpreting is a means of providing an immediate understanding of the spoken words, interpreters have to possess qualities such as rapid grasp of meaning, quick thinking and ability to adapt immediately to different speakers, situation, excellent memory, and good public speaking skills. These are not required for translators, who have time to read text and use dictionaries before coming up with the translation. Translators and interpreters are therefore not “interchangeable”, despite the common misconception that they require the same skills.

In addition to interpreting, translators proper are found to be required to handle both ‘related tasks’ and ‘unrelated tasks’. ‘Related tasks’ are defined here as tasks that are directly related to the process of translation, such as editing and proofreading. In 19.35% of the ads (=12 ads), translators are expected to provide editing and proofreading services, generally considered the work of the language professional and therefore fall within the scope of their work. In contrast, ‘unrelated tasks’ are defined as tasks that are not related to the process of translation, for instance, secretarial and administrative work, coordinating jobs, as well as specific assignments such as creating a database for movies or songs, or interviewing celebrities from other countries. This type of responsibilities appears in 16 ads (25.8%).

For the ads recruiting translator-interpreters, the duties and responsibilities generally involved both translating and interpreting, many of them in factories where the recruits have to translate documents and mediate between the management and the local staff. Extra responsibilities are possible, however. For example, an ad posted by a language school required the translator-interpreter candidates to ‘teach Thai to the Japanese and teach Japanese to the Thai’ (TI014). Some ads were less specific, stating that the recruit was also supposed to ‘[give] support to Japanese boss’ (TI013) or ‘carry out other assigned responsibilities’ (TI012).

For the translator-others group, the recruits’ extra responsibilities can be grouped into two broad categories based on the job titles. The first category, the translator plus editor, copywriter or proofreader, had to undertake text-related responsibilities in addition to translating, for instance, ‘proofread and edit other translations’ (TO016), ‘check the accuracy of the translation to ensure that it can be used in dubbing’ (TO018) or ‘give final approval to any changes to the translated

documents after they have been proofread and edited’ (TO001). The second group, the translator plus administrator, secretary, coordinator, customer service officer, etc., had to carry out administrative chores specific to their job titles. Thus, translators wishing to apply for the dual job titles have to be aware of the administrative responsibilities that come with it.

**5.1.2 Types of businesses**

From the data, translators were found to be in demand in a wide variety of businesses (see Table 5), with the highest demands coming from manufacturing industry (18.94%), followed by translation and localization (13.68%), and media, entertainment and tourism (12.63%). The jobs advertised for industries involving manufacturing and production, automobile, electrical appliances, construction and energy are likely to be based in factories and industrial estates outside Bangkok, such as Bangpu (Samut Prakarn), Amata City (Chonburi), and the Eastern Seaboard (Rayong), where the recruits are expected to act as the language mediator between the local workers and the foreign management. Work related to translation and localization, marketing and finance as well as consultancy tend to be based in Bangkok. It is worth noting that in the media, entertainment, and tourism group, seven out of the eleven jobs (7.37%) were advertised by gaming companies, indicating a demand for game localization.

*Table 5* Types of businesses placing job advertisements for translators

Types of businesses	Number of ads	Percentage
Manufacturing and production	18	18.94%
Translation and localization	13	13.68%
Media, entertainment, and tourism	11	11.58%
Automotive	9	9.47%
Consumer goods	7	7.37%
Information, information technology and telecommunications	7	7.37%
Marketing and finance (including banking and insurance)	7	7.37%
Electrical appliances	7	7.37%
Consultancy	6	6.32%
Construction and energy	4	4.21%

Education	2	2.10%
Law firm	2	2.10%
Not indicated	2	2.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

The demand for translators in the businesses listed above carries didactic implications for educational stakeholders, from language degree program and university administrators to translation lecturers. Language degree programs can prepare language students for the jobs by encouraging, or enabling them – in case the university regulations do not permit, to take courses in other disciplines to enhance their knowledge in a specialized field other than language. At the same time, the university should be aware of demands from different sectors and should encourage students in disciplines such as engineering, law, or finance, especially those with a good command of language, to take courses in translation or interpreting as technical translator/interpreter could be one of their prospective careers. Translation lecturers should also include technical translation, audiovisual translation, as well as business translation in their course syllabus, and introduce the related text types to their translation classroom.

### 5.1.3 Salary

With regard to salary, only 27.36% of the job ads indicated the salary. The majority (69 ads = 72.64%), however, did not specify a figure. The latter group included ads which stated that the salary offered will be based on the experience and ability of the candidates or that the sum is ‘negotiable’ between the applicants and the employer. This condition is reasonable as there are different variables involved in calculating the salary, such as work experience, competency, assigned responsibilities, education, etc.

Of the 26 ads that specified the salary, it was found that the translator plus administrative or other jobs received the lowest salary, with the monthly salary starting from 9,500 THB and the highest being 30,000 THB. Translators proper fared slightly better, with the minimum being 12,000 THB and the maximum at 40,000 THB. The translator-interpreter group enjoyed the highest salary range ranging from 25,000 THB to 70,000 THB (see Table 6). The data showed that interpreting skills were highly rated due to the perceived difficulty of the task, while

additional administrative roles, surprisingly, were rated lower and therefore given lower salary.

Table 6 Advertised salary for translators (in Thai baht)

Category	Minimum	Maximum	Average minimum	Average maximum
Translator proper	12,000	40,000	18,375	28,636
Translator-interpreter	25,000	70,000	28,333	45,000
Translator-other jobs	9,500	30,000	13,500	19,666

5.2. Personal characteristics, skills and knowledge

In this section, we describe the desired personal qualities, skills and knowledge of the translators found in the job ads, from sex, ages, nationality, and languages skills to other knowledge and skills.

5.2.1 Sex

Though most of the ads (88.42%) do not specify the sex of the applicants, 9.47% required female candidates, compared to a meager 2.11% for male translators. The demand for female employees is probably due the fact that the translator’s responsibilities sometimes include secretarial and coordinating tasks, which are viewed in Thailand as predominantly women’s jobs.

5.2.2 Ages

From the data, the preferred average age of translators was found to be between 22-36 years old, with the maximum age being 50 years old.

5.2.3 Nationality

It is perhaps safe to assume that overwhelming majority of the ads (94 ads = 98.9%) targeted Thai nationals, as some clearly stated that the candidates must be a Thai (19 ads = 20%), while the others contained texts written in the Thai language. Only one ad (1.05%) required the translator to be a native Japanese speaker, as s/he would also be required to work as a Japanese language editor which required native-level proficiency.

5.2.4 Languages

While Thai is spoken as the official language throughout the country, one could say that English is its unofficial second language, as it is frequently used in

business communication. Thus, it is not surprising to see that these two languages were mentioned with the highest frequency in the translation job ads. For English, most ads included standardized phrases such as ‘Good command of English’ or ‘Excellent proficiency of spoken and written English’. Only two ads (2.1%) were found to indicate preferred standardized test scores: one for a translator required an IELTS score of 5.5 or above or a TOIEC score of at least 700; the other for a senior translator-editor-copywriter required an IELTS score of 7.5 and above or a minimum TOIEC score of 900.

Other language requirements mentioned in the ads are given below. Note that more than one language can be found in one ad.

*Table 7* Languages mentioned in the job ads

English	68 (71.58%)	Burmese	4 (4.21%)
Thai	49 (51.58%)	Korean	3 (3.16%)
Japanese	39 (41.05%)	Others	6 (6.31%)
Chinese	15 (15.79%)		

In addition to English and Thai, Japanese and Chinese were found to be in high demand. This could be attributed to the presence of Japanese companies and investors in Thailand, and to the increasing transactions with China as a growing market. The demand for Burmese is likely to result from the influx of Burmese migrant workers from Myanmar, while Korean was found to be required in game localization businesses.

As for the language directions, it was found that 26.32% of the job ads required the translator to translate from L2 into L1, and vice-versa, while 12.63% required one direction only. Though the rest did not specify the language direction, it is possible that the former is usually the case. Therefore, the degree programs should equip their students with the ability to translate both from and into their mother tongue.

It is worth noting that as regards the Japanese language, some employers would specify the desired level of Japanese language proficiency expected of the candidates. Therefore, the applicants should have already taken the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT)<sup>5</sup> and provide the test results with their application.

The levels required most were Level 2 (upper intermediate) and Level 3 (intermediate), with 11 and 10 ads respectively, out of the total 39 ads for Japanese translators, while Level 1 (advanced) was found in only one ad for 'Technical Translator Japanese/English' (T032). A closer inspection into the database revealed that the degree of proficiency expected was lower for translators proper (six ads for Level 2; seven for Level 3) than translator-interpreters (five ads for Level 2; two ads for Level 3). This perhaps reflects the employer's view that a translator-interpreter would require a higher level of fluency.

### **5.2.5 Knowledge and skills**

Job ads are a rich source of information regarding the employers' expectations on preferred knowledge, skills, and personal attributes of the translators. This section begins with computer literacy, and proceeds to describe other required skills and attributes.

#### **- Computer literacy**

From the data, 58.95% of the database (=56 ads) sought applicants who were computer literate, a figure which is almost similar to the 60.5% reported by Bowker (2004). The remaining 39 ads (41.05%), however, did not mention it as a requirement. For job ads in which computer literacy was a requirement, candidates were usually expected to have basic computer skills and to be able to use Microsoft Office (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint), while quite a few ads also mentioned the ability to use Internet applications. Some companies might have additional requirements, for example, in one ad, it was stated explicitly that the applicants should be 'accustomed to using a computer not merely as a typewriter or a tool to surf the internet, but also as a tool to make art works' (T002). Fast typing speed was also preferred; for example, an ad from a translation company stated that the candidate's typing speed should be at least 40-60 words per minute for English and 35 words per minute for Thai (T059). Indeed, it was found that 11 ads (11.58%) mentioned good typing skills as one of the requirements. For translators aspiring to work for a localization company, the ability to use Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools such as Trados, Catalyst, Idiom, and etc. was necessary, but if the candidates were unfamiliar with the software, s/he should at least demonstrate willingness to learn, a condition reflecting flexibility on the part of the employer.



It should be noted that the findings have an interesting implication for the translator training programs. While the translation literature overwhelmingly stresses the importance of integrating translation technology into translation classrooms, the truth is, many local businesses seeking in-house translators, with the exception of Language Service Providers (LSPs), seem to be unaware of technological advances and the benefits they bring to the process of translation, i.e. speed, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness, and are still happy to see their translators typing out their translation on Microsoft Word, because the amount of translation required is not on an industrial scale. Knowledge of sophisticated tools is not a requirement in the context. Thus, the translation trainers should decide whether to gear their students towards traditional translation or localization labor markets, or to strike a balance between both.

#### **- Other skills and personal attributes**

In addition to computer literacy, employers also listed a number of related skills and characteristics required of the candidates in the job ads<sup>6</sup>. A skill has been defined as “proficiency at a given task, usually acquired through learning and experience” (Skill 2007). The skills and attributes favored by the employers are as follows:

*Table 8* Sought-after skills for translation-related jobs (ordered by frequency)

<b>Skills and attributes</b>	<b>Number of ads</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Fluent written communication skills	43	45.26%
Fluent oral communication skills	36	37.89%
Interpersonal skills	19	20.00%
Translation skills	15	15.78%
Passionate about learning/ fast learner	13	13.68%
Team player	12	12.63%
Enthusiastic	11	11.57%
Ability to work under pressure	9	9.47%
Having domain knowledge	9	9.47%
Detail-oriented	9	9.47%
Hard-working	8	8.42%
Problem-solving skills	7	7.36%
Service-minded <sup>7</sup>	7	7.36%

As can be expected, skills specific to the translation job, that is, written communication skills and translation skills were found to be frequently listed, with 45.26% and 15.78% respectively. But the candidates were also required to be fluent in oral communication (37.89%), which suggested that the recruits would need to be articulate and to translate orally. Employers also listed strong interpersonal skills (22.11%), team player (12.63%), and service-minded (7.36%) as important. All these seem to be portraying a different image of the translator; instead of toiling for hours alone in a small cubicle with little human contact translating away documents, the translator in the Thai corporate setting is rather a social, active, customer-oriented individual who shifts between different job responsibilities.

Attitudinal components listed by employers included enthusiastic, hard-working, ability to work under pressure, and passionate about learning. It should be noted here that some employers even mentioned 'pleasant personality' (T028, T0017, T0003) and 'good cheerful disposition (T049) as a requirement. Though the number was marginal, it reflects the fact that Thai employers place emphasis on the recruit's presentable personality and likability.

The set of skills and qualities required by Thai employers bore resemblance and differences when compared to the translation competence described by translation scholars. Employers gave utmost importance to communicative competence in both languages, and were aware that interpersonal skills and subject area competence were necessary, similar to the proposed competence model. However, cultural and intercultural competence was not mentioned, and strategic competence, which involved problem identification and problem-solving in the process of translation, was not given emphasis, since the phrase 'problem-solving skills' found in the ads was meant in a general sense and did not pertain to the translation process.

### **5.3 Education and experience**

In this section, we discuss the levels of formal education, the translation-specific degree and the fields of study as well as work experience as required by the employers.

### 5.3.1 Minimum education level

From the data, it was found that the majority of the employers (80%) sought applicants with a Bachelor's degree, as illustrated in Table 9, while 9.47% set high vocational or vocational diplomas as the minimum threshold, and 9.47% did not specify the preferred qualification. Only one ad (1.06%) stated that it required a degree higher than the Bachelor's.

*Table 9* Levels of education sought by employers

Levels of education required	Number of ads	Percentage
Higher than Bachelor's degree	1	1.06%
Bachelor's degree	76	80%
High vocational diploma or vocational diploma	9	9.47%
Not specified	9	9.47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

While it is not unexpected that employers would require a Bachelor's degree as the default qualification for translators, the fact that only one ad is found for a degree higher than the Bachelor's (presumably Master's) carries a negative implication for educational establishments offering a postgraduate translation degree. In Thailand where Thai is the national language, Thais' L2 proficiency is generally low (with the exception of those who have the privilege of immersing in a bilingual environment, e.g. attending an international school or studying abroad). University graduates with a Bachelor's turn out to be competent language users, but unlikely fully-fledged translators. Unless one is endowed with aptitude in translating, to become a professional and well-informed translator requires either postgraduate education (i.e. Master's degree in translation), translation training, or years of experience. The employers' willingness to accept candidates with a Bachelor's degree, let alone vocational diploma, therefore points towards the general misconception that anyone knowing the language can produce a translation, and towards the failure of the translator training programs to make the public recognize the importance of translation training.

The implicit recognition for translator education is further emphasized by the low number of ads which required the applicants to have a degree in

translation. From the study, only a handful of ads (6.32%) indicated that a degree in translation is needed, while 89 ads (93.68%) did not mention it. This reflects the fact that most employers were not even aware of the existence of postgraduate translation degrees, or may not realize how a translation degree would help to better the quality of translation.

### 5.3.2 Fields of study

From the data, one-third of the ads collected (34.74%) did not specify the required field of study, with some indicating simply ‘university graduate’ or ‘Bachelor’s degree’, while 8.42% wrote ‘Any field’, both suggesting that anything goes. For ads which specified specialization, the fields of study tended to center around a specific language (16.34%) e.g. ‘Bachelor’s degree in English language’, ‘Bachelor’s/ Master’s degree in Japanese major’, but in many cases the employers seem to be less specific and opt for ‘related fields’, leaving room for interpretation as to what may constitute the ‘related fields’ for a particular job post. Some ads were equally vague, stating only ‘Arts and Humanities’ (8.42%). For candidates without a language degree, other fields of specialization related to the translation jobs, such as biology, mechanical engineering, etc. were also welcome if the candidates had good language skills. Table 10 lists the areas of specialization found in the database.

Table 10 Fields of study sought after by employers

Areas of degree specialization	Number of ads	Percentage
Specific language	16	16.84%
Specific language or related fields	13	13.68%
Related fields	11	11.58%
Arts and humanities	8	8.42%
Specialized fields/ language-related fields/specific language	6	6.32%
Any fields	8	8.42%
Not specified	33	34.74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 5.3.3 Work experience

As Chan (2011: 45) noted, work experience is seen as “conveying information about the suitability of an applicant” as it signals that the applicants have ‘hand-on’ and ‘real’ practice in translation. It is considered very important as it allows novice translators to move from the beginner status to become a professional, and for the professional to stay active in the industry. Indeed, experience has been generally perceived as valuable, sometimes to the point of compensating the lack of formal training in translation. The importance of experience was highlighted in one job ad from a translation company which stated clearly: ‘DO NOT APPLY if you don’t have at least ONE year working experience’ (T059).

From the database, it was found that 68.42% of the ads collected required the candidates to have some work experience, while the remaining (31.58%) did not expect them to. The numbers of years of experience required by employers fell in the range between 1 to 5 years, with one year found to be highest in frequency, which suggests that Thai employers’ willingness to hire and train less experienced translators. Gouadec (2007) noted that three to five years’ experience is a pre-requisite for many jobs with responsibilities, a figure similar to that reported in Bowker’s (2004) who attributed it to employers considering training the new graduates to meet their clients’ pressing needs would take too long.

Further investigation revealed the areas of experience required by employers. Interestingly, half of the 95 ads did not specify the areas of experience, while one-fifth simply wanted the applicants to have experience in translation, and 3.16% in interpreting only. In addition, 7.37% of the ads required experience in translating and/or interpreting, while 9.47% needed experience in translating and interpreting in related technical fields. It is worth noting how potential candidates were also expected to have previous experience in interpreting, which is, for many translators, not their area of expertise. Table 11 lists the areas of experience required by the employers.

Table 11 Areas of experience required by employers

Areas of experience required	Number of ads	Percentage
Translation only	19	20.00%
Interpreting only	3	3.16%
Translation and/or interpreting	7	7.37%
Translation and interpreting in related fields	9	9.47%
Specialized field(s)	9	9.47%
Any field	1	1.05%
Not specified	47	49.48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>100%</b>

It is also interesting to note that 9.47% required experience in specialized fields, e.g. business and finance, automobile and mechanical engineering, as well as electrical appliances and parts, and not experience in translating. This figure seems to suggest that some employers view specialized knowledge as more important and that translating is a skill that can be learned on the job.

## 6. Public misconceptions

In addition to reflecting the market needs, the findings from the present study point towards a few general misconceptions about the translation profession in Thailand. The first has to do with the word ‘translate’, which, in the translation circle, has a specific sense restricted to the transfer of meaning in the written mode. As Gouadec (2004) rightly put, “translators are not interpreters” (p.88), yet from the collected job ads, it was found that the words ‘translate’, ‘translation,’ and ‘translator’ were used in a broader sense to include the spoken mode as well, as illustrated in 1.1. Another case of point involves a job ad for ‘Japanese Translator’ which, in the description, writes: ‘Interpreter in Production Line’ (T040). The mismatch seems to reflect the fact that the general public did not recognize the distinction between translating and interpreting and thus perceived the two activities simply as the transfer of language, regardless of the mode of communication and the type of necessary skills involved.

Another misconception is related to the popular notion: ‘anyone who knows the language can translate,’ which perhaps explained the low number of job ads requiring a degree in translation. This reflected the fact that the public did not perceive translator training/education to be important. As a result, translators are viewed merely as a good user of language, not a translation professional, and are therefore given all sorts of language-related responsibilities, from ‘coordinating between Thai team and international counterparts’ (T023) and ‘handling secretarial and administrative tasks upon request from the CEO’s secretary’ (T053) to ‘teaching Thai language to Japanese workers, and Japanese language to Thai workers’ (T1014). This reflects the status of translators, similar to that in many countries, where, as Gouadec (2007) sees it “translation is often seen as little more than glorified secretarial work” (p.245).

## **7. Conclusion and recommendations**

From the study, it can be seen that in the Thai corporate setting, in-house translators were expected to be a well-rounded individual capable of undertaking a variety of jobs (depending on businesses), ranging from interpreting to administrative work, in addition to translating documents. In many cases they have to interact with different groups of people, from the management and customers to the local workers, which explains why interpersonal skills, a team spirit, and a pleasant personality were preferred. Therefore, the work of the translators in this context is not exactly a pure desk job, but rather involves juggling between different roles and responsibilities. The profile of in-house translators that emerged from this study is therefore different from that found in the localization businesses and in previous research e.g. Bowker (2004), Lafaber (2012), in which translators were language specialists whose jobs involved translation and translation-related work only.

Taking into consideration the findings of this research, we propose that universities offering language and translation programs may consider the following to cater to the market needs:

- providing translation courses for non-language major undergraduates to cater for the market needs for domain-specific translators and in turn, to open up a new career opportunity for the students. The courses can either be a basic one, e.g. Introduction to translation, for

students from different faculties, or they can be designed in accordance with the areas of specialization of the students, e.g. a legal translation course for law students, or a technical translation course for engineering students.

- introducing various domain-specific text types to language and translation students ranging from business and financial documents, to manuals, technical specifications, and audiovisual texts.
- offering a basic interpreting course to both language and non-language students to enable them to acquire interpreting skills as a value-added qualification. Interpreting is generally perceived by employers as difficult, so interpreting skills are highly valued and thus higher paid.
- incorporating interpersonal and teamwork skills development, e.g. through group work and collaboration, into translation courses.
- helping language students develop organizational and administrative skills, as they are likely to be assigned administrative work.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Based on the Regulations and Curriculum of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Chulalongkorn University 2485 B.E. (1942)

<sup>2</sup> At present, there are six universities offering an MA in translation: Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Mahidol University, Ramkhamhaeng University, Mae Fah Luang University, and King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok (as of 29 May 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The term is used after Bowker (2004) to mean 'translator only'.



<sup>4</sup> Gourdec's examples include translator-cum-information manager, translator-cum-terminologist, translator-cum-technical writer, and translator-cum-interpreter.

<sup>5</sup> The JLPT is a standardized criterion-referenced test which measures the level of proficiency of the non-native speakers. It is divided into five levels: N1 (advanced level), N2 (upper intermediate level), N3 (Intermediate level), N4 (elementary), and N5 (basic level). N1 is the most difficult and highest level, and requires near-native level of proficiency.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted here that many of the job ads put up by headhunters tend to be short and concise as regards qualifications, while those published by the hiring companies themselves tend to be more detailed.

<sup>7</sup> The term is used predominantly in the Thai context and is not a phrase used in Standard English. The equivalent of it is 'customer service oriented'.

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