

Next Generation Translation and Localization: Users Are Taking Charge

Sharon O'Brien
Dublin City University
Sharon.O'Brien@dcu.ie

Reinhard Schäler
The Rosetta Foundation
Reinhard.Schaler@therosettafoundation.org

Abstract

Nonprofit translation activity driven by users and volunteer translators now represent a market force that easily rivals the mainstream translation and localization industries. While they still try to understand the drivers behind this nonprofit movement and occasionally attempt to tap in to these newly discovered “resources”, nonprofit translation efforts for good causes are growing at a phenomenal rate. This paper examines the case of The Rosetta Foundation as an example of a not-for-profit volunteer translation facilitator. The paper focuses on the *motivating factors* for volunteer translators. A survey was distributed to the several hundred volunteers who signed up as translators in the first few months of The Rosetta Foundation’s launch. The paper provides some background on what might well become the next generation of translation and localization and present the results of the survey. Finally, we will explore how The Rosetta Foundation, and other not-for-profit translation organisations might better motivate volunteers to contribute their skills and expertise.

Next Generation Translation and Localization

A spectre is haunting the translation industry - the spectre of translators taking charge. Translators are not only translating millions of words every day outside of the well-established commercial framework, they are also covering languages the mainstream industry has continued to ignore, although they are spoken by millions of people, and their work has been truly life-changing for many of their “clients”. Life-saving, health related information has long been easily available on the web to speakers of English and the other G20 languages. This information is now also becoming available in languages such as Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Swahili, Tamil and Telugu thanks to the efforts of volunteer translators.

Industry analysts do not feel comfortable estimating the number of words translated by the companies they are selling their costly reports to (Beninatto & DePalma 2008a). However, they estimate the size of the global translation market (US\$19b for 2010), calculate the compound annual average growth of the sector (14.6% for 2008-2012), and use the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) to point out the extraordinary level of fragmentation in the industry (Beninatto & DePalma 2008b). Surprisingly, they completely ignore what surely has become one of the most dramatic phenomena in the industry over the past five years.

The Tipping Point

While the mainstream industry started to discuss “crowd-sourcing” in 2007 and is still trying to figure out its reaction to it, users and volunteer translators have quietly taken control (following a keynote by Jeff Howe at the Localization World conference in Seattle). Thousands of translators have long been involved in the localization of open source success stories such as Mozilla and Open Office, providing access to basic IT tools and technologies to those who do not represent a market for large multinational companies. With better collaboration tools and translation

technologies becoming freely available and internet access improving, the volunteer translation movement has now reached a tipping point. We estimate that volunteer work ranks way ahead of the Top 25 translation companies reported by Beninatto and DePalma. The number of volunteer translators and the number of words they are translating is a multiple of that reported by any commercial service provider.

However, the most important aspect of their work is not its volume measured in commercial terms. It is its impact on the languages covered, on the lives of the people they translate for, on their economic well being, on their access to justice, on their environment and on their health. They use their professional experience and skills to provide access to knowledge and information to people independent of their social, economic, linguistic or geographic background; people that have been ignored by the mainstream translation and localization industry because they do not represent a viable business case.

The Illusion of Control

In 2003, an illegal translation of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, appeared in Venezuela soon after the release of the English version and five months before the scheduled release of the Spanish translation. The MTC India Youth Icons used to be business magnates, cricket players or actors. In 2007, the award did not go to a person but to a website: Orkut, the social networking site translated by its users into Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu. Industry experts such as Greg Oxtan in *The Power and Value of On-line Communities* at the AGIS'09 event have been calling on digital publishers to give up "their illusion of control". The localization and translation decision is increasingly not being taken by the publishers but by users. It is increasingly based on real user requirements and not on carefully crafted business cases. Content and software are translated by those who really want and need it into their languages, often well ahead of versions translated by the professionals based on "solid" business cases.

The user is taking charge and examples for this are many. The best known example in the commercial sector is Facebook. The site grew from 34 million international users in early 2008 to well over 500 million by the end of 2010. Facebook now "speaks" more than 100 languages – all supplied by its users. Other examples are content, sites, and applications translated by the crowd for Symantec, Sun and Microsoft. In Open Source, users have translated "their" applications into well over 100 languages. Open Office, for example, is available in around 120 languages, among them Tigrinya, Sidama and Papiamento – hardly languages backed by a "solid" business case.

At Wikimania in July 2010, Google reported that they are working with volunteer translators across India, the Middle East and Africa to translate more than 16 million words for Wikipedia into Arabic, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Swahili, Tamil and Telugu. Within three months, 600,000 words from more than 100 articles in the English Wikipedia were translated, growing Hindi Wikipedia by almost 20 percent. Since 2008, this effort alone produced a total number of 16 million translated words (Wikimania 2010).

Reports from the commercial use of crowd-sourcing indicate that languages in the so-called "long-tail" of the language curve benefit most from crowd-sourcing efforts, suggesting that speakers of lesser-used languages are better motivated to act as volunteer translators. For example, Rickard (2009), in his paper on the crowd-sourcing translation effort for Symantec's PC Tools application, reported that 78% of the contributions in the first three months were in the "long-tail". Rickard divides contributors into three groups (students, power users and professional translators) and suggests that they are all motivated by different factors (e.g. seeking experience, being able to shape the product, or keeping their skills sharp). On a more general level, Shirky argues that volunteers are driven by the need to fill their "cognitive surplus" (Shirky 2010).

Nonprofit Translation - Motivation

The Rosetta Foundation (TRF) has listed nonprofit localisation initiatives around the world (<http://www.therosettafoundation.org/index.php/en/ourcolleagues>) and invites translators to

provide additional information about initiatives they are aware of. The list provides more than 30 links to a wide variety of sites inviting translators to volunteer their services. Some of these provide access to a large number of initiatives seeking translators, such as idealist.org or United Way; they are run by nonprofit translation services, such as the American Alliance Language Services, HSA Translations or ITC Global Translations; they are linked to specific projects, such as TED, Ashoka, Handicap International, Global Voices or Wiser Earth; or they position themselves as brokers of volunteer translation services for good causes, such as Grassroots.org, Translations for Progress, Translators without Borders or The Rosetta Foundation.

This paper examines the case of The Rosetta Foundation as an example of a not-for-profit volunteer translation facilitator. The organization was established in 2009 to “relieve poverty, support healthcare, develop education and promote justice through access to information and knowledge across the languages of the world”. It was established and is supported by individuals and companies with many decades of experience in the localization sector who had become aware that current mainstream localization approaches actively promoted the exclusion of large numbers of people and languages from access to information and knowledge, information vital for their health, their freedom, their education and their economic well-being. The Foundation is working on a web ecosystem that aims to support nonprofit localization and translation communities, driven by the requirements of its nonprofit clients and its volunteer translator community. In 2011, The Rosetta Foundation aims to translate 40 million words.

The focus here is on the *motivating factors* for volunteer translators. A survey was distributed to the several hundred volunteers who signed up as translators in the first few months of The Rosetta Foundation’s launch. This survey examined what relevance volunteers give to various motivating factors such as improvement of language and translation skills, acquisition of translation experience, support of the stated cause of The Rosetta Foundation, support for lesser-used languages and intellectual stimulation. The survey also asked volunteers to provide feedback on what might motivate them to contribute even more, including factors such as payment, recognition on the web site, feedback on their work and free gifts. The remainder of this paper will present the results of this survey and explore how The Rosetta Foundation, and other not-for-profit volunteer-based translation organisations, might better motivate volunteers to contribute their skills and expertise.

Volunteers and Theories on Motivation

Shirky (2010), in his book entitled *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, posits that the era of one-way consumption of content is over and that people are so understimulated that many are now willing to create content for intellectual stimulation. However, the urge to do something with the so-called *cognitive surplus* is not motivated by boredom.

In 1972, Deci substantiated the theory that motivation is both extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation refers to cases where the activity itself is a reward whereas intrinsic motivation refers to activities where the participant gets paid (Shirky 2010: 72). Deci also identified two intrinsic emotions: the desire to be autonomous and the desire to be competent. Shirky (2010) refers to the former as “personal motivation” and to the latter as “social motivation” and he points out that while we have always wanted to be autonomous, connected and competent, new social media have become an enabler for those goals (ibid: 84). Benkler and Nissenbaum (2006) identified two broad social emotions, one centring around connectedness or membership and the other around sharing and generosity. Shirky (2010: 73) also refers to a study by Frey and Goette (1999) which demonstrated that in real world situations, where money was offered as a reward for volunteering, it depressed the number of hours the average volunteer contributed.

In our study of TRF volunteers, we were interested in finding out if any of these theories on motivation were evident. For example, was there evidence of personal and social motivation,

of desire for autonomy and competence, of connectedness and generosity? And, would payment have a negative impact on TRF volunteers' willingness to contribute? Most importantly, what can we learn about motivating factors so that volunteers will continue to donate their time?

The Survey

In order to understand what was motivating people to sign up for and undertake unpaid translation work for TRF we conducted a survey of the volunteers who were signed up by July 2010. The link to the survey was sent by e-mail to the addresses provided by volunteers.¹

Volunteers were asked to answer five questions which sought to probe their motivations for volunteering as translators and to find out what might motivate them to continue volunteering in the future. The survey was limited to five questions only in order to keep the time required for answering to a minimum. Online surveys have a notoriously low response rate. However, the response of the Rosetta Volunteer Community was an impressive 54% (139 responses out of 257 volunteers). This high response rate is most likely due to the fact that the volunteers are already highly motivated and reasonably committed to the cause.

Volunteer Profile

222 volunteers signed up under the category of "professional translators", while 35 signed up as "amateurs". Of the professional translators, 82% were female. However, for the amateur group, the bias towards female volunteers was reduced, with only 54% being female.

Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of relevant work experience and they could chose from categories "beginner", "some", "a bit out of practice", "a lot". 42% indicated that they had "a lot" of experience, while 18% indicated they were "beginners" (even though they had signed up as professional translators). Only 2% stated they were a bit out of practice, which leaves 38% as having "some" experience. The relatively high numbers of volunteers self-identifying as having beginner level or only some experience might explain the reason for some of the motivating factors identified in the survey (see below).

Those who signed up as amateurs were also asked to state if they had experience, some experience or no experience with translation. Only 23% said they had no experience, while 46% said they had some.

When asked how many hours per week the translators might be able to dedicate to The Rosetta Foundation, the average was an impressive 8 hours. As some people listed values as high as 20 and 35 hours per week here, it is possible that the question ("How many hours per week do you think you could offer your translation services?") was misunderstood and some volunteers were indicating how much time they normally spend on translation per week. The average value of 8 hours per week should, therefore, probably be reduced as this might prove to be an unreasonable expectation.

Language and domain profile

182 of the professional volunteers identified English as a source language, 71 identified French, 64 German and 60 Spanish.² Other languages mentioned as Source Languages included Arabic, Bulgarian, Belorussian, Catalan, Czech, Croatian, Chinese, Filipino, Danish, Dutch, Italian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Swedish and Ukranian, but the number who listed these languages was considerably smaller.

For Target Languages, 90 listed English, 87 Spanish, 31 French and 23 German. Additional target languages mentioned were Arabic, Armenian Catalan, Croatian, Chinese,

¹ The authors would like to sincerely thank Stefanie Scheeder of The Rosetta Foundation for all her help in distributing the survey and collating the data. We also thank the translators who took the time to answer.

² Note that several volunteers listed more than one source language.

Filipino, Finnish, Greek, Galician, Dutch, Italian, Irish, Polish, Portuguese (and Brazilian Portuguese), Romanian, Russian, Swedish, Slovene and Turkish.

A wide variety of “fields of expertise” were listed, including, for example, IT, telecoms, medical, legal and mechanical engineering.

Survey Questions and Responses

Question 1 asked: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 indicates "high relevance" and 1 indicates "no relevance", please rate each of the following motivating factors for volunteering as a translator for The Rosetta Foundation:

1. To improve my language skills
2. To improve my translation skills
3. To gain professional translation experience
4. To support The Rosetta Foundation’s cause
5. To support translation of information into a lesser-used language
6. To gain intellectual stimulation

Options 1-3 tested the hypothesis that volunteering is sometimes motivated by self-serving needs, in this case to gain professional experience or to improve language or translation skills (Shirky’s *personal motivations* as mentioned above). Options 4-5 tested the hypothesis that motivation can be inspired by beliefs in external causes, for example in TRF’s specific stated aim or, more generally, by the wish to support translation into languages which are less regularly targeted (Shirky’s *social motivations* as mentioned above). Option 6 tested the hypothesis that volunteers have a “cognitive surplus”, and are seeking ways in which to gain intellectual stimulation. We had no pre-established assumptions about which of the factors would be rated highest or lowest, but we assumed that some, or all, of these factors were motivating ones. Respondents were also given the opportunity to make a comment about any of the factors listed and/or to list any motivating factors that had not been covered in options 1-6. Table 1 shows the actual number of responses and Figure 1 displays this data graphically.

Options	1 (no relevance)	2	3	4	5 (high relevance)	Response Count
1. Language Skills	25	23	28	21	38	135
2. Translation Skills	13	15	23	31	56	138
3. Professional experience	12	8	19	28	68	135
4. Rosetta Foundation	3	4	20	45	68	139
5. Lesser-used languages	31	12	27	31	37	138
6. Intellectual stimulation	5	9	33	36	56	139

Table 1: Motivating Factors for Volunteering

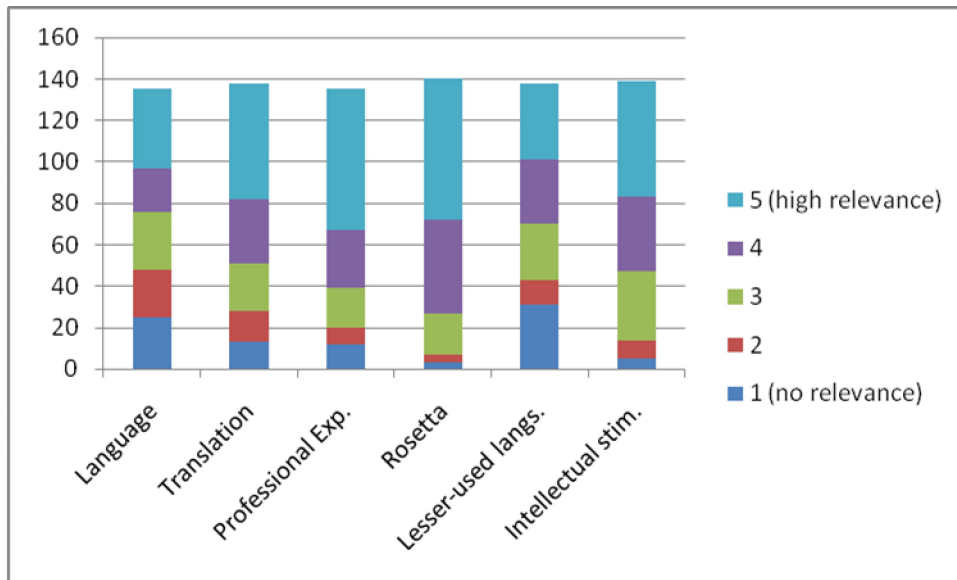


Figure 1: Motivating Factors for Volunteering

If we combine the values of 4 and 5 on the Likert scale, and assume them to indicate "high relevance" as a motivating factor, we can see that the support of TRF's cause emerges as one of the most highly motivating factors. This is followed closely by the wish to gain professional translation experience. On the other end of the scale, by combining the values of 1 and 2 and assuming them to indicate "no relevance", we can see that the wish to improve language skills is the least motivating factor, followed by the wish to support lesser-used languages. In both cases (high and low motivating factors), two different types of motivations are represented, i.e. social motivation (i.e. TRF/lesser-used languages) and personal motivation (i.e. gaining professional experience/improving language skills). This suggests that, at least in the case of TRF, volunteer translators are motivated by both personal goals and social causes.

The second part of the question stated: Please indicate which of the following might motivate you even more to volunteer as a translator for The Rosetta Foundation;

1. Payment
2. Free gifts, e.g. T-shirt
3. A monthly list of the top-ten translators
4. A "Translator of the Month" profile on the Rosetta Foundation web site
5. A publicly viewable profile of translators
6. Invitations to public events/regional networks
7. General feedback from Rosetta Foundation clients
8. Feedback from qualified translators on your work

The list was inspired by the knowledge that lists of top contributors, contributor of the month, or just online profiles are incentivisation tools used by other volunteer collaboration efforts. We listed payment in an attempt to see if Frey and Goette's theory would hold true (see above). Invitations to free public events was included because we felt volunteers would be interested in networking and we listed feedback from TRF and professional translators simply because we suspected that these might be motivational factors. Respondents were also asked to comment on anything else that might motivate them and we analyse their additional comments below.

Table 2 gives the results for this question and Figure 2 demonstrates the results graphically.

Options	Response Count
Payment	47
Free Gifts	45
Monthly top-ten list	39
Translator-of-the-month profile	36
Public profile	63
Invitations to events	77
Feedback from Rosetta clients	92
Feedback from qualified translators	98

Table 2: Future Motivating Factors

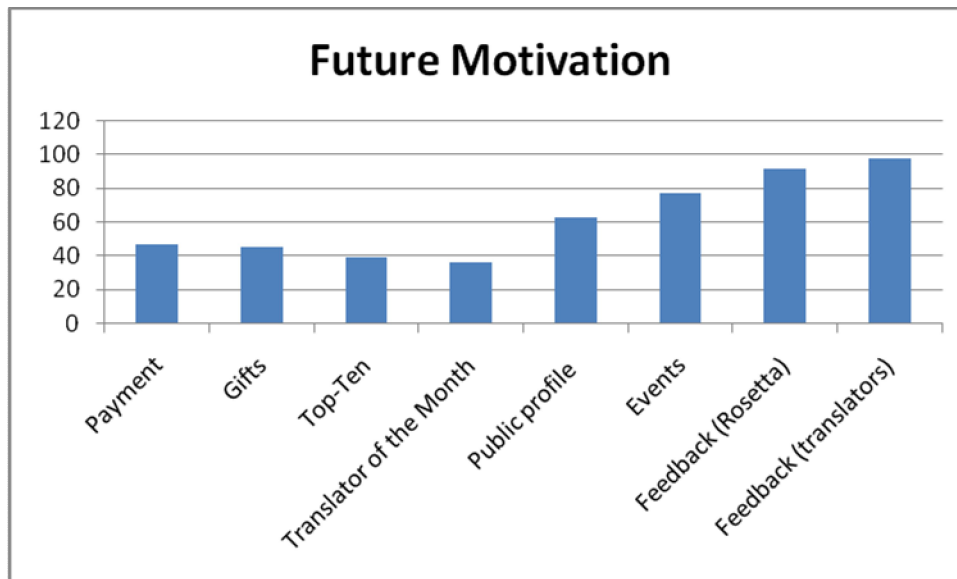


Figure 2: Future Motivating Factors

It can be immediately ascertained that feedback from both TRF clients and professional translators were identified as the most influential motivating factors for future volunteering. These results reflect those that were identified as the strongest motivating factors in question 1. That is, we can draw a link between supporting TRF's cause as an initial motivating factor for volunteers and getting feedback from TRF clients as an ongoing motivating factor. We can also draw a firm link between the initial motivating factor of wanting to gain professional translation experience and getting feedback from professional translators as an ongoing motivational factor.

What is also interesting, is the comparatively low status awarded to payment, online profiles, top-ten or translator of the month lists. It seems that the volunteers for the TRF are more interested in the cause and in improving their own competences than in being rewarded either financially or in the form of "online kudos". Their comments and testimonials (see below) add further support for this conclusion.

Analysis of comments

The survey invited volunteer translators to contribute comments by first asking them "*Is there anything else that might motivate you that is not listed above?*" and, secondly, by inviting them to provide a testimonial about what motivated them to sign up as volunteers. Twenty-seven

translators provided answers to the first question. The answers were analysed and coded for dominant themes, which are summarised here.

Feedback

Several volunteers commented that feedback from TRF clients on their translation work and on how the translations were put to use would be a motivating factor. Additionally, volunteers identified feedback from peers as being potentially motivating.

References

Some comments highlighted the importance of references from TRF as being important, e.g. being able to list TRF as a client was deemed to be valuable as was the possibility of getting a letter of reference for the work done. There was interest in receiving regular statements from TRF on the Foundation's ongoing activities. Interestingly, one comment had to do with *not being contacted* – there was noticeable disappointment in having volunteered but in not having been offered any work to date. The desire for connectedness, as mentioned earlier, is evident here.

Professional opportunities

A recurring theme in the items listed as motivating factors was the opportunity TRF provides to improve volunteers' professional translation skills.

Goodwill

A common response was that future motivation was linked to the opportunity for volunteers to simply feel rewarded for having contributed to a cause that they believe in.

Non-motivating factors

Some volunteers took the opportunity to mention factors that would *demotivate* them. In particular, turning their activities into a competition by making them bid against each other or simply compete for positions on leadership boards was highlighted as something that would demotivate the volunteers.

Free items

Finally, a few comments mentioned that donations of free items might help motivate them further, e.g. free attendance at relevant conferences or free CAT tools.

Thirty survey respondents supplied short "testimonials". On analysis, recurring themes were found here too. Eight people identified the opportunity to help others through translation as a primary motivating factor, for example:

Everyone can do something to making the world a better place, I have found my way as a volunteer translator.

Six testimonials identified helping people while improving skills as combined motivating factors:

It is a great way for professionals to use their skills and expertise and have an impact in the lives of less favoured people.

Four testimonials specifically mentioned breaking down language and cultural barriers as being rewarding:

I strongly believe that neither language, nor culture, should be a barrier in healthcare.

Finally, some testimonials mentioned the value of being connected to a global group:

The work made me feel part of a worldwide group...The work was inspiring.

Summary

The main outcome from the survey and the feedback given by the volunteer translators to The Rosetta Foundation could be summarized as follows:

1. Support for TRF's cause and opportunities to increase professional experience emerged as the two greatest motivating factors for TRF volunteers. There is clear evidence here for both personal and social motivations working in tandem.
2. Feedback from clients, from TRF and professional translators was rated highest among future motivating factors. Again, we can see a link here between personal motivation (increasing professional competence) and social motivation (wanting to see one's work making a positive impact on society).
3. The introduction of payment or competition was rated as a low or even negative motivating factor.
4. There is evidence in the testimonials provided that a feeling of connectedness and belonging to a group was highly valued and could contribute to motivation.

Of course, the survey responses may have to be taken with a proverbial "grain of salt". The cynic might suggest that the respondents are saying what they think TRF would like to hear. However, the proof of volunteers' good will is to be seen in the statistics on the translation activity in the Rosetta Foundation's first year of existence: Within only a few months of launching its translation service to nonprofits and with very limited resources and overheads, more than 300 translators had signed up and helped TRF to translate close to 60,000 source words into approximately a quarter of a million target words, covering Arabic, Armenian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

Conclusions

What are the implications for TRF and similar organisations? Firstly, it would seem that continued promotion of the cause is important, along with frequent communication with the volunteer base regarding the impact their work has had on clients. It would also seem important that a mechanism for feedback on translation quality should be created. For example, such a mechanism exists for volunteer translators of Ted.com content: the translator is put in touch with a QA linguist to discuss the translation and suggested modifications, where necessary. The ability to use the volunteer experience as a means of securing paid work, through reference letters from TRF for example, was also highlighted as being important. While volunteers would appear to value offerings like free conference registration, it was indicated by those surveyed that payment and competition in the form of leader boards etc. might very well dampen enthusiasm. Finally, if organisations like TRF wish to maintain and grow their volunteer base, it seems that being able to supply work to volunteers is a must – signing up and getting no work is likely to demotivate. In

conclusion, we have seen that both personal and social motivations were identified as being important by TRF's volunteer base. Volunteers are in control of what they will give and this is determined to some extent by the cause, but also by what they get back.

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