

Subject: 1/20/03 letter to ATA Accred Com etc
From: boeke@mail.berkshire.net (Wanda Boeke)
Date: Mon, 06 Oct 2003 17:57:03 -0400
To: interpreter@portugueseinterpreter.com

Henry,

Below is an email letter I sent to the chair of the ATA Accreditation Committee, the Prez, the Editor of the Chronicle, a board member back in January of this year. I'm overjoyed that 300 other ATA members are as concerned as I am about the board imposing continuing education on certified members. Don't know if it can be posted to the members list the group has or whether that would be appropriate. If it is, please post (I'm sending this message to you and other 3 alternative proxies). Thanks for standing as a proxy for the amendment & candidate votes. - Wanda J. Boeke, translator (boeke@berkshire.net)

Dear Lilian,

I understand the Accreditation Committee is going to be meeting in March regarding the idea of requiring CE's to maintain ATA accreditation. I wanted to share my views with you (and perhaps you could pass them on to the other members).

Personally I am not behind the idea of requiring CE's for several reasons.

1) CE requirement penalizes accredited professionals

Using the CE model to stiffen the accreditation standard among already accredited translators is a seemingly punitive and regressive move. CE work appears to be a penalty, when, in fact, the idea all along among the membership in addressing the problems with the accreditation standard and process has been to relieve the burden on professional translators to 'prove' their merit. Why not encourage translators to become accredited in the first place by giving accredited members discounted memberships & benefits? Why not videotape all sessions that qualify as 'CE-worthy' and make the information available at a low charge so professionals can feel more positive about enhancing their knowledge & technique, without making it a requirement for already accredited members? Why not require viewing of a selected handful of such videos along with a preliminary exam as part of the initial accreditation process?

2) Cost to ATA - possible increase in membership fees

Years ago I worked with AASECT (American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists), an organization that based its CE model on the APA's (American Psychology Association). Over a 2-year period, AASECT members had to acquire a large number of CE's to retain their credentials. No sooner had they managed by the skin of their teeth to go to enough seminars, conferences, workshops, and retreats to get the magic number of credits within the allotted window, than they had to start the rat race all over again. The AASECT office was itself severely burdened having to keep track of all the individual cases, credentialing upcoming educational events, maintaining individual files, and doling out recertifications. The cost to AASECT to run this program was pretty high - and more staff had to be hired just to keep up. This drove up the price of AASECT membership.

3) For individual translators gathering CE's becomes too expensive.

As various translation forums are growing, each mini-conference requires an average of \$200 to \$300 to register so a translator can participate in perhaps one seminar/workshop to receive CE's.

The reason I don't go to every ATA annual conference is that this conference is already prohibitive enough for me not to go every year. I am also a member of other professional organizations, each of which has its annual or biannual conference, so each year it's pick and choose, either two less expensive ones, or the ATA conference. With the economic turndown, attending even one conference a year, with all its inherent costs, is becoming financially questionable.

4) Participating in a number of CE-offering mini-conferences becomes too time-consuming and disruptive of professional relationships

I have no idea how many CE's a translator would have to accumulate to maintain ATA accreditation, but attending several events per year takes the individual translator away from his/her bread & butter. In addition, if you're not available to work when the phone rings, the agency or company simply won't contact you again. Even longstanding clients become hesitant to call.

5) CE training adds little to experienced translators' arsenals

The nature of translation assignments already entails constant learning in a number of areas. Translation is not an entirely stagnant field. Every day we enlarge our expertise. However, unlike medicine, where, for instance, physician assistants have to accumulate CE's to retain their credentials in an every-changing field confronted with new equipment and techniques, translation methodology changes very little (with the exception of MT/AT software) and I feel CE training is redundant.

6) Not enough translation programs and diverse CE mini-conference opportunities

Although there are a number of opportunities for translators to receive CE's, there are still not very many and over time, the options overlap so that CE's in certain areas would become an exercise in repetitive and unproductive exposure.

7) Literary translators and translation educators will be the dupes

As a literary translator engaged in a number of cultural projects every year, all of which are long, low-income projects done alongside commercial ones, having to interrupt work and jeopardize deadlines by attending several CE seminars each year is really not justified. Literary translation pays half of what commercial translation pays, so literary translators would pretty much have to shut down their activities to participate in purely commercial work in order to subsidize CE accumulation. These same arguments apply to educators. However, being forced to quit translating literary or scholarly work is unthinkable, for one because to many in the outside world 'translation' is synonymous with good literature and research from elsewhere entering the publishing world. Surely ATA doesn't want to contribute to the decline of foreign works entering the US market (the current tendency that we literary translators are fighting as hard as we can)?

8) Personal concerns

a) I strongly object to the continuing education credit model of retaining accreditation in translation to bolster the ATA standard. I believe that we in ATA are more concerned about the quality of our accreditation than those outside the organization who hire translators and translation companies. Sure, I want a high standard, but I think the Accreditation Committee's overhaul of exam grading already moves us in this direction.

b) As an individual translator who has no partner to help assure the roof over my head, it falls on me to take care of all translation business, including bookkeeping, billing, taxes, but also all office business, including keeping up with supplies, updating reference library, computer replacement, software updates, plus maintaining the home front. In

addition, good translators travel regularly to their source-language country or countries - a considerable expense in itself. Adding the burden of attaining CE's literally makes me cry. I am churning out as many words as possible in a year and am just making ends meet.

c) As I mentioned, I am unable to attend the ATA annual conference every year because it is simply too expensive to do so. I am also a literary translator and breaking up a schedule agreed upon with publisher and author(s) undermines the project and relationship(s). Spending proportionately large sums to get CE's (including registration fees, travel, lodging, meals, parking, etc.) is enormously disheartening, since I would have to work even more days per year. I already translate 7 12-hour days a week for 10.5 months overall, with accounting & other business matters taking up a good portion of the rest of the year. As a person who wants to be active in my community, I would have to reduce my already scarce time to do so. My private life is already at a minimum and consists mostly of keeping up with household concerns - I may go to 2 movies a year and eat out with a friend every 2 months. To allay stress, I take 2 1-week vacations per year. The CE requirement is making me think about leaving my beloved occupation.

c) As a translator who was active before there were any translation listings in the yellow pages, who watched translation grow from an eclectic 'field' to a full-fledged 'industry,' I know my skills have grown along with the field. Since I work with languages of lesser dispersion, only recently have reference works become more professionally oriented, with greater professional accountability in their production. My own research has been indispensable for me for over 20 years to create trustworthy glossaries and a reliable, updated reference library. Generic seminars have little to offer me at this point in my career. In principle, starting translators could benefit tremendously from additional workshops and seminars in various professional specialties. However, these translators are financially very vulnerable and so requiring such participation would be devastating for them on the financial level.

d) Remember the discussion at a previous annual conference when translators objected to having to continue ATA membership to retain accreditation? That discussion centered on the financial burden as well (just the cost of membership!). The average translator earns below \$60K per year (adjusted gross is probably more like \$25K). In the professional fields that require CE's to maintain credentials, the members annually earn at least \$60K. Educators (not very well paid as a rule), who must participate in continuing education to retain teacher certification, are usually subsidized to do this so as to help insure quality education in K-12 schools.

CONCLUSION

All in all, I feel that requiring members to attend CE seminars to retain ATA accreditation will be both an unnecessary financial burden and overly time-consuming activity for individual translators as well as the ATA itself. It is also a punitive measure rather than a supportive one.

Please reconsider the ATA's drive toward requiring accumulation of CE's to retain ATA accreditation.

Sincerely & with the best of intentions,

Wanda Boeke
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