

# Starting over

*A career change can be a scary business. One newcomer to translation charts the year she took the plunge*



CAROLINA CASADO PARRAS

As I arrived in London in October 2016, the trees were getting ready for a season of renewal, and so was I. After two years living in Germany, I was set to start a new life in a new place – once again. Although I had moved reluctantly, I felt settled within a month and it was then time to confront the elephant in the room: I did not want to teach any more. Ten years in the classroom as an English and Spanish teacher had equipped me with priceless linguistic insights; maybe London could help me to realise my true vocation: translation.

I had been active in this field for five years, wishing to make it my main occupation without daring to take the plunge. My first step towards a full-time career in translation was a painstaking search for information, which led me to the CIOL and, inevitably, to the Diploma in Translation (DipTrans). With an MA in Linguistics and a TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) qualification under my belt, it was the obvious next step.

By this point, the trees outside the window of my office-to-be were bare – and it was late to apply for the next DipTrans exam. What to do? I decided to apply and fortunately my registration was accepted. Suddenly, there I was, perusing examiners' reports and looking at pass rates just seven weeks before D-Day ('D' for 'DipTrans'). This is what followed: phase 1: panic; phase 2: shopping spree for hard copies of resources to bring to the test; phase 3: practice, study, practice, study.

## *What next?*

After the exam, I was faced with the question: 'What next?'. Insecure about my chances of securing translation work but anxious to start earning, I applied for teaching jobs out of habit. Each application felt wrong; my heart was not in it, and as a result, not one was successful. Yet it was these failures that brought me a step closer to my goal. Learning and teaching languages has taught me that there is no progress without mistakes, so there I was, making mistakes to move forward.

Between rejections, I went on a race to fill the gaps in my knowledge and CV. I immersed myself in webinars, literature on technology and specialisms, guides to succeed as a translator, and translation courses. Every new piece of knowledge sparked my excitement and confirmed that I was doing exactly what I should be doing; I had never been so exhilarated about my job.

Every now and then this joy subsided: what was I doing? I wasn't sure until March 2017, when I attended my first big networking event: CIOL Members' Day. This is when the epiphany occurred: I was not alone; there were many other linguists working from the seclusion of their homes; and, most importantly for me, many of them were trying to switch careers, too. Realising that I was part of a professional group gave me self-confidence and a sense of self worth – invaluable in keeping me going. It was a reminder never to underestimate the powerful, emotional benefits of 'belonging'.

## *Making plans*

Encouraged, I worked on developing a clearer plan of action. I created a document

to record every idea that sprang to mind: people to contact, social networks to join, publications to read regularly, indemnity insurance companies to contact. I had a go at the daunting SWOT analysis (to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), chose and conquered a CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool (although I will never stop learning it), and found a mentor, who helped me with marketing tips and eased my anxiety.

Next, I became friends with WordPress and created my own website. This was, and still is, a journey. A website is a work-in-progress: it always needs updates, new client reviews and entries in the CPD (continuing professional development) record. This is why I chose to do it myself, rather than depending on a web developer to implement every change.

In the middle of all this action, the DipTrans results arrived, bringing a magical breath of validation. It was time to tackle other tasks, such as opening a separate bank account for the business, creating templates of invoices, establishing terms and conditions, asking a friend to design a logo to my brief, and coming up with a business name: VibrantWords Translations (which, like many ideas, woke me up in the middle of the night). I also applied for Chartered Linguist status, and officially became CL in November 2017.

## *Me? A specialist?*

As for specialisms, I learned that: 1) many translators find it challenging to choose theirs; and 2) being a generalist is rather stigmatised. My brain was so overloaded by this point that I could not see straight and I lost some sleep over the subject of



specialisation. My experience until then had been in the field of aeronautics, which happened by chance in 2011. However, I was not willing to let my specialism choose me; I wanted to pick something that would make me jump out of bed in the morning, ready for work.

Education and literature were clear interests from the beginning: I had the academic and professional knowledge, and writing is one of my passions. But I had read and heard enough to know that it would be difficult to make ends meet as an emerging specialist in these fields.

Patience is a good friend, as I have learned, so I put the question of specialisation to one side. And, sure enough, one Friday afternoon it clicked. According to my research, most people choose their areas of translation based on previous experience, subjects they love or the experts they are surrounded by (e.g. relatives and friends with whom they can discuss terminology).

I considered all of the above and came up with the areas I could add to education and literature: tourism, arts and culture, and gastronomy. I am not an expert (yet), and this is why I do not sell myself as a specialist in these fields. I have, however, read, learned, listened and watched enough to feel confident to tackle such texts, with the due amount of research.

### A destination in sight

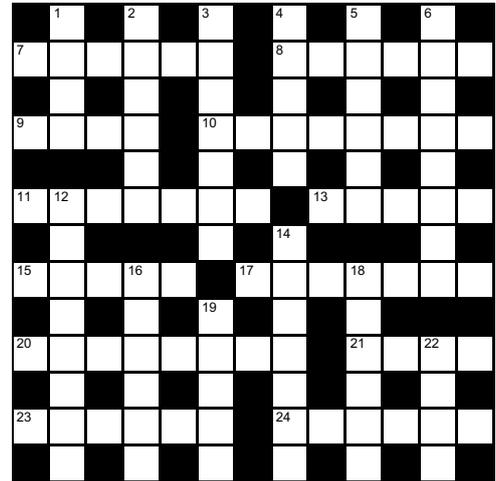
Today I am typing from my home office and looking back at the most incredible year of my professional life: my metamorphosis from non-specialist linguist to translator-marketer-accountant-web designer, and it certainly feels like a milestone. So where do I stand now? Well, I continue to work on my CPD, approaching translation agencies, warm-emailing potential direct clients, trying to gain visibility through social networks, fishing for ideas to write about on my new blog, and of course, working too.

There is still a lot to be done, but my recent accomplishments keep me going: translation projects in subjects I love; pro bono work for Translators without Borders, which has opened the door to a new field; colleagues who have made a difference, and have given me the chance to work with them; and, most importantly, the realisation that I have it in me to confront the possibility of failure and turn it in my favour. And although I have not arrived there yet, and the path ahead seems a bit windy, I can now clearly see my destination. And, let me tell you, that is some view!

**TL** Carolina Casado Parras CL MCIL is a freelance translator and founder of VibrantWords Translations.

## Crossword no.19

Solution, page 30



### Across

- 7. Spanish neighbourhood. (6)
- 8. Finno-ugric and Samoyedic are the two main branches of this language family. (6)
- 9. A hunger for French. (4)
- 10. 'Tölva' in Icelandic, from words meaning 'number' and 'prophetess'. (8)
- 11. A North Germanic language, like Icelandic. (7)
- 13. Perhaps Igpay Atinlay in pig \_\_\_\_\_. (5)
- 15. Dravidian language spoken in both India and Sri Lanka. (5)
- 17. The only official EU language related to Arabic. (7)
- 20. Skewered pickled herring, from German. (8)
- 21. Any predatory gull, from Old Norse. (4)
- 23. Birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen. (6)
- 24. Verdi's version of Shakespeare's Moorish tragedy. (6)

### Down

- 1. Originally a story from Nordic or Germanic history. (4)
- 2. In Norway, it's the world's third largest city north of the Arctic Circle. (6)
- 3. In Icelandic 'hlaðvarp', from words meaning 'load' and 'throw'. (7)
- 4. Finland in Finnish. (5)
- 5. In education theory, it is *rasa*. (6)
- 6. Composer who wrote *Finlandia*. (8)
- 12. Long boa snake, possibly from Sinhalese *henacandaya*. (8)
- 14. Surname of Stieg, Swedish author of *The Millennium Trilogy*. (7)
- 16. Iceland in Icelandic (appropriately!). (6)
- 18. Men hold dearly what the Romans called witnesses. (6)
- 19. Form of transport coined originally in Swedish in 1952. (5)
- 22. English rendition of the adjective in Hans Christian Andersen's *Den grimme aelling*. (4)