

Executive Director's Report

My Role in ALC's Future

"So who is this Bob guy, what's an association management company and why do we need them?"

I'm sure those questions were on the minds of many ALC members in February when the board announced my selection as your new executive director. In this article I want to introduce myself and my company and tell you some of our goals for the coming months.

For the past 16 years I've been involved in associations. My first work involved editing magazines and newsletters and representing the association's membership on Capitol Hill. In 1996, I opened my firm and began working as a consultant to several associations. I became an association management company, or AMC, when an association client asked us to take over all of their operations. This work had previously been handled by the board or individual members, much like the ALC's situation when it began looking for an AMC.

A self-managed association typically hires an AMC because it either lacks needed expertise or the time to implement their plans for developing the services envisioned when they first formed the association. That's certainly the case with ALC, where you have a talented and dedicated group of leaders and members; however, these people also have businesses to run, and so must limit the time they contribute to the association.

To help ALC achieve its goals, my role initially will involve both developing a long-term strategic plan and implementing some of the tactics the plan contains. We began this process in February with a day-and-a-half-long strategic planning session in Arizona. The product was a first draft of a strategic plan, a document that will undergo many revisions in the coming year. As members ask for new programs and benefits, the strategic plan will serve as our guide map for determining where we will spend the board's time and the members' money, and whether a proposed idea or an expense will help us achieve a strategic objective.

As for more routine activities, we will also handle most of the association's day-to-day tasks, including serving as the ALC's headquarters (answering calls, emails and letters), overseeing its finances and coordinating meetings. Committee activities, including most of the work for the upcoming annual conference, will remain member driven. Our hope is that as the ALC's membership and budget increase, more work can become staff driven.

Having worked our way through an 18-page transition plan
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Managing Chinese

Don Shin, I-Stop Translation USA

One day we received an order from another translation company for a Chinese translation of a company brochure. When I asked, "Should it be simplified or traditional?" the client answered, "Mandarin, simplified."

A week later, this poor client delivered a beautifully translated brochure to her client, who was going to Taiwan for an exhibition. The problem was, it was in simplified Chinese, not used in Taiwan. They did not know anything was wrong until the brochure was displayed at an exhibition.

I do not know what happened to the client after that, but I continue to see many clients attempting to sell Chinese translations without knowing the ABC's of Chinese or, for that matter, without knowing that Chinese does not really begin with the ABC's.

Stories abound in regard to the Chinese language but, since space is limited, I'll proceed to a few points that should help the translator "sell" this "best-selling" language to a growing clientele.

I. Simplified Chinese /Traditional Chinese Versus Cantonese/ Mandarin

The terms "Mandarin" and "Cantonese" are bound to confuse most Americans or non-Chinese. The main thing to remember is that Mandarin is the official language of mainland China, taught throughout the country, and is understood by more than a billion people. Cantonese, on the other hand, is one of many dialects within the realm of Chinese language. The characteristics of this dialect would be relatively familiar to Americans, given that the majority of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. are originally from China's eastern coastal region, where the Cantonese dialect is spoken.

"Simplified" and "traditional" Chinese are not languages, but different writing systems containing sets of characters, which are used to express the same language, Mandarin. Historically, traditional Chinese was the only writing system of this mostly spoken language. In recent years--from 1956 to 1986--the government of China's Communist Party tried to "simplify" the traditional writing system. Accordingly, 2,235 characters were simplified, and the resulting simplified Chinese is used in mainland China and Singapore.

The interpreter, therefore, needs to always ask whether the
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Managing Chinese – continued from page 2

requirement is Mandarin or Cantonese. The translator, however, must ascertain whether a document is to be done in simplified or traditional Chinese. Unfortunately, most end clients are not at all sure what they need, so it is our job to help them choose the right form. This is best answered by determining the target market. All that is needed is a simple table to do that. So, print this one out and keep it handy at your desk. When the time comes, you will be glad you have it.

Target Market	Spoken (Interpreting)	Written (Translation)
Mainland China	Mandarin	Simplified
Taiwan	Mandarin or Taiwanese*	Traditional
Hong Kong	Cantonese**	Traditional
Singapore	Mandarin	Simplified
Chinese Community within USA or other foreign countries	Mandarin/ Cantonese***	Traditional

*Mandarin is the official language in school and broadcasting, but Southern Min--often called "Taiwanese"--is commonly used in conversation. So, if an interpreting client is a businessperson going to Taiwan, he or she will need a Mandarin interpreter, but if your client is an elderly person from Taiwan, you should confirm whether he/she speaks Mandarin or Taiwanese.

** Mandarin is increasingly prevalent, subsequent to Hong Kong's return to Chinese control.

*** As mentioned above, a large percentage of Chinese immigrants came from a region where Cantonese is the spoken dialect. Still, Mandarin is regarded as "standard." However, one should not send materials for the American market to translators in China, since they will not understand the idioms and common expressions that are used only in the USA. This is particularly true in the context of insurance, social security and education.

2. Characters Versus Words

Words mean money in our business. Yes, we charge by the word, but can you imagine charging a client by the character instead of the word? It is a matter of fact when one translates from Chinese into English. Chinese does not have an alphabet, but instead uses thousands of different characters. Each and every character has its own subtle distinctions and intricacy of meaning. And because there are no spaces between characters, word counting is impossible. (Try convincing MS Word of that, since it counts words from Chinese Word files anyway.)

When you get a request to translate Chinese into English, therefore, you should make it clear that the charge is per character rather than by the word. Otherwise, you might find you are being paid a lot less than the project is really worth. For the occasional project that demands charging per target English word, we estimate an English content of about 0.4 times that of the Chinese counterpart. For example, a thousand Chinese characters will usually produce four hundred or so words in the English translation. The can vary, however, from 200 to 600. So, if you must charge your client by the English word, the best way is to pay the translator is on the basis of English words.

3. Something called a "two-byte language," and the problem with it

Given the huge number of characters available, Chinese consumes more than twice the space in computer memory. This creates many problems, e.g., if the English software has space for ten characters, the Chinese translation should be less than five characters. So, when you receive an unusual inquiry or application, it is always better to call a specialist.

4. Translating proper names

One thing seldom understood by clients is that we cannot simply "transliterate" an English name into Chinese. The common assumption is, if we are native Chinese, we can simply write down the name of the client's Chinese partner in Chinese. Actually, we can write any English name in Chinese. The problem is, there is simply too broad a choice, and each choice carries a slightly different meaning. So, selecting the right Chinese name for a product becomes an art.

Moreover, it's an art that can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars, instead of 15 cents. Again, the reason is simple: the right name can determine the strength of a company's image. Likewise, when the client knows their Chinese partner or employee's name in English, we cannot write them in Chinese. This is true for most proper names like places, products and schools, regardless of the target document.

Chinese certainly has its fair share of challenges, but no one can deny that it is one the most popular products in our business these days. So, it is a good idea to move Chinese onto the "first-call" shelf. After all, with this brief lesson and the help of experienced colleagues in ALC, there is nothing to worry about, and everything to gain.

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