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Final Reflection

This summer, from June 1st until August 6th, I interned as a Translation Project Manager at Global Wordsmiths. Global Wordsmiths is a social enterprise that provides language access services to refugees that live in Pittsburgh and its surrounding areas. Although the need for language access is societally ubiquitous in an increasingly globalized world, businesses and organizations often neglect access obligations. They either do not provide language services or misinterpret the goal of the services they provide. Language access is not speaking up for someone, or advocating on their behalf through language, but is when you use your language skills and cultural competencies so that someone may use their own voice. To adhere to this commendable goal, I shared my knowledge of translation and led a team of fifteen linguists as they translated documents for six different school districts and local organizations, ones that service large English learning populations. I was taught how to manage translation workflows within Memsource TMS and Phrase localization systems, how to manage and use over the phone (OPI) or virtual remote interpretation (VRI) through Boostlingo, and how Global Wordsmiths interacts with clients. Within the last ten weeks, at any time, I managed anywhere from twenty to forty different projects, projects that translators worked on at different paces because of their varying translation and CAT tool experience. Because of the varying experience levels, I was required to learn with the linguists. Their questions demanded that I intimately familiarize myself with both the linguist and PM memsource platforms. I found this useful, as many LSPs are switching to cloud-based CAT tools to cut costs and regulate the translation resources and environments accessed by their linguists. This is done for quality control and consolidation of anything produced by contract linguists.

Working as a PM, I was surprised by just how much you need to know. Typically, I have thought of PMs as technical paper pushers. However, in my current function, I recognize how advantageous it is that I have lived and experienced a variety of cultures. Although the environment I intern within is not comparable to that of an actual PM, I must familiarize myself with the documents before I assign them for translation, and I must recognize where these documents could confuse translators or clash culturally/linguistically. After I identify potential hiccups, I prepare explanations by combining translation theory and industry convention to thwart translation issues. Routinely, I must recall material that I learned in our translation theory, workshop, and technology courses. This is a larger component of the job than I expected. I thought that this was unique to my PM capacity, but after I researched translation project managers and spoke with Mary Jayne, I have discovered that this too, comprises much of their duties. I am essentially doing risk assessment and exercising content expertise, a large component of PM work. A PM must first review the translation files and know what questions to ask the client as to avoid project risks. After identifying the risks, they must convey it so that it makes sense to their contract linguists. They know which linguists are suitable for certain jobs, and which of those linguists can operate the tools required from the client, clients that require different tools and integrations depending on the industry in which they operate. I have also recognized the plight of consistency when dealing with client preference. We worked with school districts that all require different translation specifications, specifications that vary according to how they have structured their ELL or ESL handbooks. As the PM, I must ensure that the linguists adhere to their standards and that everything is consistent throughout the translations. Before assigning translations, I can restrict the translation resources that the linguists can access or apply specific resources so that everything is consistent. Since I did not

work with proofreaders and editors, this helped me with QA processes and provided me with experience in editing and proofreading.

Aside from these hard skills, I learned immeasurable soft people skills, ones that will further refine my application competitiveness. I managed a team of linguists that spoke a plethora of different languages and came from diverse cultural backgrounds. Because of these diverse cultural backgrounds, I quickly recognized that things like deadlines, work ethic, urgency, and communication workflows are culturally predetermined. Therefore, I liaised with translator interns to ensure the project deadlines and expectations of the LAP were met. I discovered that the hardest part of this PM-linguist relationship is recognizing cultural preconceptions and how they contribute to the way that linguists work and interact within the team. Apparently, this is a common problem with project managers and their linguists. I was told that while PMs must keep everyone on task, when someone needs a push, people with more authority usually act as the “bad guy”. This way, when reporting performance issues, localization or translation project managers can remain impartial and not imperil working relationships with linguists.

In the past, when I spoke with PMs, they often downplayed how much cultural competencies and the ability to interculturally communicate can help their team workflows and their role in the processes of proofreading, editing, or desktop publishing. Instead, they often emphasize their technical competencies. And while I believe that I seamlessly transitioned into this role because of my technical translation knowledge, I believe that I EXCELLED because of my cultural understanding. I discovered that this allowed me to extract more from the internship experience than others in my LAP cohort. In doing so, I ensured that the interns completed

pragmatic translations that adhered to the partner organizations' expectations. It was a great exercise in quality assurance for the translation and localization processes.

Initially, I recognized that the other interns - most of whom only received one four-hour translation training session- did not read the source text before starting translation. With gumption, they jumped right in without considering audience, medium, time/place of reception, function, register, terminological variance, trace referents, document style, and how neglecting these things can cause a pragmatic shift during translation. Perhaps the largest blunder that I noticed was how they superimpose regional dialects because they are all native speakers of their languages. Because I have lived in a multitude of Spanish locales, and have an extensive knowledge of Arabic culture, I have noticed this from my Spanish and Arabic linguists. They were raised in Mexican Spanish speaking households and contend that they are perfect in terms of grammatical and linguistic accuracy. While they indeed are very skilled, they frequently forego doing sufficient research, a mistake that has produced word-for-word or idiomatic renditions of documents. There seems to be no balance between the two. Therefore, I took it upon myself to share my education and proactively provide the interns with resources to assist them in producing more audience-oriented products.

While I shared my knowledge, I realized that I learn as much from the other linguists as I do when I translate documents or work with the technical side of project management. I discovered this because the language access project offers eleven languages to the surrounding school districts. Of these, only 2-3 are European languages. Therefore, when I answer questions about translation, I must answer them specifically for the language pair in which the linguist is working, and then disentangle their language specific question so that I can generally apply it for the rest of the group. I guess you could say that I must first localize my answer for the person

who asked, and then internationalize it so that the rest of the group can apply it to their work should they have the same problem. I have found this to be quite challenging because the linguist that asked the question often speaks a language that I have not studied and comes from a culture that I have not experienced. Consequently, yet unsurprisingly, before answering each question I must immerse myself in material from their language and culture, a process that proves to be tasking when considering the LAP offers languages like Kirundi.

On the technical side of things, I expanded my knowledge of how LSPs bill clients, and how the bill clients receive is determined by pre-translation analyses run by PMs. Although I was aware of this, I was unaware of how a nuanced and complicated corpora affected billing. A bill is determined by TM matches, internal fuzzies, non-translatables, MT matches, and numbers in the ST. The PM consolidates all of this information over time and determines how the CAT tool pre-populates linguist projects based on available corpora.

After two months of project management work, I have concluded that without budgetary constrictions, strict timelines, and adherence to QA standards, a lot of the PM stress disappears. While I find solace knowing that I can manage the imminent stress of a PM position (at least some of it), I wonder how I can leverage this internship position into an actual PM career. At this point, I question whether companies will hire a recent graduate that has not managed the most important aspects of the PM position - budgets, deadlines, and quality control. Although I will complete my graduate degree in translation/localization - a rarity in this industry - I still stress about my competency as an applicant when considering that I have little professional experience in the field and have not graduated with a degree specific to translation/localization project management (as would other applicants). Similarly, when considering other applicants to PM positions, I assume some would be linguists who have worked multiple years for these LSPs and

have familiarized themselves with the workings of their employer. Therefore, I believe that the language on my resume and the language that I use in interviews will be paramount in exhibiting my competencies. I am confident that I can do this but feel like I need even more experience working with LSPs.

Despite these thoughts, I believe that this internship experience was paramount in solidifying that I enjoy project management for translation and localization (even more than the actual linguist/localization work). Although there are horror stories about stress levels, chaotic schedules and deadlines, and the work pace, I enjoy the combination of both the technical and cultural and operate better in a fast-paced work environment. Project allows me to utilize many other interests besides purely the linguistic/cultural. Through this internship, I gained insight into the business side of LSPs, accrued industry specific tech knowledge, refined my ability to interculturally communicate for localization processes, and contributed to a more inclusive Pittsburgh through language access.