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Remaining a successful linguist in challenging times

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Introduction

After Brexit, the global Covid19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, stagnant rates, and a rampant inflation with the uprise of national strikes and demonstrations from various sectors of the industry across the UK, lamenting about deteriorating working conditions and demanding higher pay from the government, how do self-employed people score in the current climate? Especially, how do we, as freelance linguists, manage to survive, faced with the same economic recession but without job security and no employee benefits such as sick-leave, paid holidays or a pension?

In the past couple of years, we have all heard of a colleague who has sadly left the profession as they found it increasingly difficult to earn a decent living in such challenging circumstances and decided to change careers completely, seeking full time employment elsewhere or even returning to university to acquire new qualifications in different fields.

For those of us remaining freelance linguists, how do we manage to keep successful and profitable in this current climate?

We have asked four members of the CIOL Translating Division steering group to share their personal tips with us. We hope that you find these interesting and helpful to remain a successful freelance linguist.

Karine Chevalier-Watts MCIL CL
Coordinator of CIOL Translating Division Steering Group

Karine Chevalier-Watts MCIL CL



I have been working as a freelance linguist since April 2011. I set up my business at a time of deep recession when many new businesses folded within a couple of years. Despite the odds, I have survived the dreaded Brexit, the Covid19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, national inflation, and the development of machine-translation. How have I done it?

Firstly, before I set up my business, I did an exhaustive and objective stocktake of all my skills, qualifications and work experience to date and built my business around these. I had started my career as an English teacher in France and had worked as a French teacher in the UK in private schools and companies, so I chose to offer my teaching services on a freelance basis to private students, local schools and businesses.

Secondly, as I had gained a three-year Business Studies diploma from my local college and had consequently worked as an office manager in international companies, often translating internal commercial documents and occasionally interpreting for colleagues and clients, I added translation and interpreting to my list of skills.

Lastly, having worked for 10 years in managerial positions and notably as the office manager of a busy wine broking company, I knew that I would also be able to work as an agency offering more languages than my own and reach a bigger pool of clients. As they say, there is strength in numbers!

I joined CIOL as a Member in 2015 and gradually, through networking events, expanded my business by taking on several associates, all professional language teachers, translators, and interpreters in various languages. I redesigned my website and changed my business name to reflect this expansion. From "Karine's Languages & Administrative Services", which was too focused on myself only, I changed it to "KLAS Languages" which was more generic. This started attracting more clients, including some prestigious international companies, governmental organisations and NGOs as I was no longer considered a freelance translator with a limited language combination but as a general language services provider, able to cater for many linguistic needs. To confirm the transition, I became an Associate Member of the Association of Translation Companies in 2020. This shift from freelance linguist to language company owner, however daunting and challenging it has been, has certainly opened new avenues for me and has ensured my own survival as a linguist as it has increased my audience and revenues.

I have therefore been diversifying the range of my services as much as possible, always keeping myself updated on the latest trends in the language profession connected to new technology, world news and societal events to ensure my offering matches both the present and future needs of my clients.

Even if you do not envisage working as an agent, you could have a 'buddy system' with a few other translators working in similar language pairs as you but with different specialisms or working with the same languages but from a different source language to whom you could redirect work and vice versa. For instance, if like me you specialise in legal texts but only translate from English into French, you could allocate legal texts to someone else for French into English legal translations. If you specialise in translating tourism documents and a client approaches you for a technical translation, then you could pass it on to a colleague who specialises in technical texts etc.

This buddy system also works with translators working in the same fields and same language pairs as you when you need to divide a large text under a tight deadline or need your translation proofread before submitting it to the client.

It is also useful when you take time off for holiday or sickness, as a trusted colleague can cover for you in your absence on the understanding they would do the same for you next time they need



to take some leave. This way, you would not let your clients down and you would still be recouping any loss of work incurred when you were taking time off.

I would also recommend keeping yourself updated with linguistic trends, terminology, new technology and topical sectors of industry to ensure your offering remains relevant. This could also be done by asking your clients if they have any new priorities that you could help them with. For instance, one of my corporate clients who has been booking interpreters for years for their foreign employees, has recently enquired about providing them with Ukrainian interpreters due to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees since the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

With the arrival of AI, one client asked me to carry out the proofreading of a large PowerPoint Presentation that they had translated by machine as it was urgently needed for a meeting and they did not have the time to get it done by a human translator. Before their request, I had never used machine-translation, but I took their request as a challenge and an opportunity to learn a new skill. I spent two days doing this and found that I quite enjoyed it (it especially gave me quite a few laughs whenever the text had been translated completely out of context!). The client was delighted with the result and since then, I have added machine translation post-editing to my services.

To keep succeeding as a freelance linguist, I would consider everything you have achieved to date, where you have the most experience and what you have enjoyed doing the most and focus on developing these. For instance, I had taken a law module at college during my Business Studies course which I was very interested in, having worked as a legal secretary for a British law firm where I gained a lot of knowledge of legal terminology and text formatting. Therefore, naturally, I made Legal translation one of my specialisms, something that turned out to be an excellent move due to Brexit and all the legal issues that it entailed and the numerous documents that have had to be translated as a result between France and the UK since then.

Another piece of advice would be to have a good website, created professionally, where you can list all your skills, experience, what you feel you can confidently do in the field of languages; whether it might be

translating, interpreting, teaching, assessing, proofreading, transcribing, copy-editing, post-editing and what your areas of specialisms are, based on your own experience and personal interests. Mine are law, business, education, food and wine, tourism and fashion and I've become well known for these with clients and colleagues recommending me to others.

If you are a CIOL member or considering becoming one, polish your profile on the Find-a-Linguist directory. As an agent, I often check the directory to source translators and interpreters, and I am always attracted to the more detailed profiles rather than the ones listing only minimum information with no contact details other than an email address and no specialisms.

I would also strongly suggest aiming at becoming a Chartered Linguist to get proper professional recognition worldwide. As a Chartered Linguist myself, I tend to favour colleagues who have the same status as me as it indicates a high level of experience and commitment to the profession and is also generally considered a sign of quality.

To this day, I'm still very busy as a freelance linguist; apart from managing my agency, I still enjoy translating, teaching, and marking language exams for various educational organisations. I believe it is important to diversify one's range of services and areas of specialisms so as not to put all your eggs in the same basket and be able to maintain a steady flow of work and avoid dry periods due to haphazard fluctuations in the global economy.

Natalia Racheyskova MCIL CL



Having worked as a freelance translator/interpreter for more than 20 years, I would like to share with you some tips that have worked for me on successful freelancing:

1. Be curious and attend as many free CPD events on translation, interpreting, subtitling, machine translation, etc. as you can. You never know what turn your career might take.

2. Invest time and money in training sessions and workshops which are useful for developing your linguistic career in different directions. I attended several of CIOL's and ITI's in-person workshops on literary translation, transcreation, subtitling and voiceover, which cost me about £1000, but it was the money well spent. At the moment, I would recommend investing in an MT Post Editing course.

3. Be patient - In 2015, I attended in-person subtitling training, but it wasn't until 2022 that I did my first translation project with elements of subtitling. Similarly, I attended the on-site International Literary Translation and Creative Writing Summer School in 2016, but did

my first literary translation in 2022, since when I have translated 16 children's books, and counting!

4. Invest your time (not money) to download free programs such as:
Audacity - for audio recording
Subtitle Edit - for subtitling
DaVinci Resolve 18 - for voice-overs

When you have free time, explore them in order to be able to diversify with confidence. I had to master Audacity quickly, as I was unexpectedly asked to record my translations of children's books.

5. Re-adjust your red lines - topics which you never normally translate under any circumstances. Be brutally honest with yourself. Be able to distinguish between real conviction and a passing fashionable trend.

6. Become a CIOL Member because:

- a) the Find-a-Linguist directory **really** helps many new potential clients to find **YOU**.
- b) CIOL Members have access to CIOL's webinar library (more than 200 of them). I would recommend watching the following

webinars: “5 Essential Contract and Rate Tips for Translators and Interpreters”, “Negotiation Techniques for Freelancers”, “Translation and Transcreation: Diversifying your Services”, “Subtitling summarised”, “Get paid on time and protect your cash flow”, “The world of tour guiding” to name but a few.

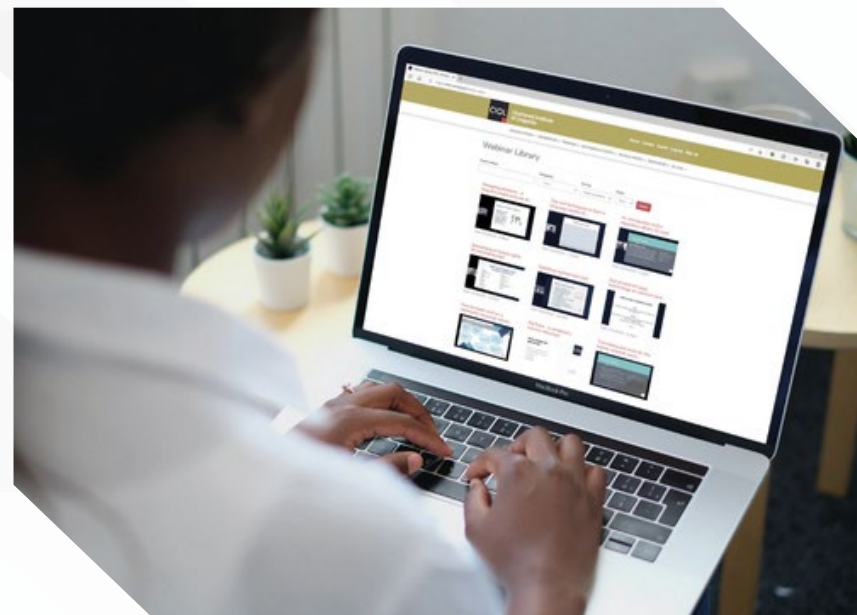
7. Look out for “what is hot” now, such as sustainability, human rights, immigration, and try to find organisations and companies working in these areas, then think about the possible ways of being useful or even indispensable to them as a language specialist.

Don’t concentrate exclusively on translation. Sometimes I do Public Service remote interpreting on Zoom, Skype and MS Teams.

You can also become a Cambridge examiner (CIOL’s The Linguist magazine regularly publishes their recruitment ads) as a first stepping-stone to becoming an assessor or an examiner.

Think about the possibility of becoming a full-time or part-time tour guide in your spare time (www.itg.org.uk/). It pays relatively well and gives you a chance to get out and about, to enjoy the fresh air (or a soft bus seat), and to meet plenty of interesting people.

I hope my tips are useful for sustaining and further developing your freelancing career.



“ Being a CIOL member will give you access to over 200 of CIOL’s Library of webinars ”

Danielle Coleman MCIL CL



It's impossible to deny the pressures on freelance linguists at the moment: stagnant or decreasing rates of pay, AI and machine translation, globalisation and a reduction in the volume of work, particularly translation work into English. Sometimes it feels difficult to remain optimistic, but we can take an approach that maximises our chances of remaining successful.

In my view, the single best thing you can do to maintain a viable business is to keep connected. Whether you use LinkedIn, CIOL networking and training opportunities or other ways of being in touch with the linguist community, you'll hear about new ideas or ways of working that you wouldn't otherwise know about.

For example, I have recently started doing some tutoring in French, one of my source languages, having had reservations about this for some time. One reason for my reluctance was a fear I might not be sufficiently qualified, but discussions with others revealed this was a worry that had no foundation, as long as I was not setting out to teach at degree level. So far I've just had one online student, and I'm very much enjoying the work.

It provides not only a diversified income source but also provides human interaction in my professional life. One student won't build me a healthy bank balance, but I believe a positive review and increased experience and confidence will lead to more work in time.

Apart from diversification, another route to remaining successful as a freelancer is to become more efficient in your working methods. Here, there is a wealth of training available. I may look to explore dictation as a way to speed up and therefore increase my output. Other possibilities include smarter use of translation tools.

My third top tip: track your time! Take a look at the free tools out there, such as Toggl. Once you get in the habit of tracking the time you spend on different tasks, both billable and non-billable, you'll be able to calculate how much you earn from different types of work, different clients, and also how many billable hours you work each week. This kind of information is invaluable in setting your pricing strategy and taking back control over your time. And that in turn will enable you to run a business that provides you with the income you need to live on. In my case, I've become more ruthless about focusing on work in working hours, and stopped agreeing to many requests to help out with other projects as a volunteer. Try it - you may be surprised at what you find.

Rosa Insua-Salgueiro MCIL CL



As a Spanish translator and interpreter helping legal firms, agencies, and other bodies in the public sector to communicate effectively with their audience, for me, one of the key aspects of being a successful linguist and running a growing business in the current climate or any other climate for that purpose, is having a roadmap to growth.

This roadmap illustrates how my business will scale in the next, let's say, 12 months, and what milestones I would like to achieve in the next 90 days. For example, if I am planning to have an annual growth of £10k, one of my goals for the next 90 days will be to acquire at least 2-3 higher paying clients.

I am convinced that remaining focused and being consistent is very important, even if sometimes it's hard when you get side-tracked by projects, you have a busy schedule or life just gets in the way. Even if you devote 10 minutes a day to pitch to a new client or to nudge a dormant client, you will see the results at the end of the month and you will notice a cumulative growth by the end of the year.

I truly believe that achieving those big annual goals and remaining successful really comes down to carrying out small and consistent everyday tasks.

Of course, it goes without saying that if you want to offer high quality work to your clients you have to be a top linguist, and that means that you need a high command of your working languages and, ideally, you would be an expert on the subject matter.

I believe that nowadays with the threat of automation, machine translation and AI, to name but a few, it's more important than ever to specialise in a particular field. At the same time this will allow you to demand higher rates, which I think is very important in the current climate and on the path to growth.

Having a steady flow of clients will lead to an increasingly steady income and will ensure that you are successful for the years to come, regardless of the challenging climate which is currently prevailing.

And how about you, how do you remain a successful linguist in the current climate?



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About CIOL

CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) is the leading professional body for people using foreign language skills at work, setting the standard for linguists worldwide. Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership, recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, publicly understood as a badge of quality and competence. We offer many benefits and services, such as mentoring and access to networks. Our awarding organisation, CIOL Qualifications, delivers fully regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, the Certificate in Translation and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, business and universities.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit [ciol.org.uk](https://www.ciol.org.uk)

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