



## **The Client from Hell: No Time, Not in the Mood - You Name it**

by Anne Bartz

When I recently picked up the phone in my office, there was a Mr Q from company Z on the line asking for my husband. I politely asked whether I could be of any assistance, since I am not married and hence there is no such thing as a husband. Well then, he said, then put me through to your boss. Again, I politely apologised and asked him whether he would like to tell me what he wanted and we could then figure out whether I could help to solve his problem. There is no boss, I said, I am – if he does not mind – the boss. Well, he told me reluctantly that he had a very difficult medical translation, a TECHNICAL one about a laser procedure used for eye surgery and therefore wanted to talk to THE TRANSLATOR and not be held up by the secretary. When asked how he came to call me, he answered that he got my name from the newsletter of the Translator's Association in North Germany. Yet, although my name and my address were plainly listed there, to him it obviously was somewhat incorrect. And, of course, it WAS a technical translation . . . I felt a slight hint of irritation.

Although this is not an everyday occurrence, it is unfortunately not that unusual. The following conversation – also on the phone – speaks volumes and rather unflatteringly for a potential new client who, one would innocently assume, called because he wanted something: "Hello, this is Mr X and I want to tell you right away, I work exclusively with men, also with regard to translations, but I don't have a choice at this time because my usual translator is on vacation and the whole thing is damn urgent". "Good opening", I thought, "and what a nice and well-educated man". What else is there to say? My answer: "Well, good luck for your search for a male translator".

The thing is that the language profession, in whatever form, is frequently called "a woman's job" and contemptuously used to be called (or perhaps still is called) an "orchid subject" in German (which is to say, "neither fish nor fowl"). Thus, a high percentage of translators are women and this client's search might prove somewhat difficult. Still, given his outstanding sensitivity and interpersonal skills, not to mention his nice way of asking for help, he should have no trouble finding the famous needle in the haystack.

---

***"Hello, this is Mr X and I want to tell you right away, I work exclusively with men, also with regard to translations, but I don't have a choice at this time because my usual translator is on vacation and the whole thing is damn urgent."***

---



### ***The Client from Hell***

When I started as a freelance translator, I had no idea whatsoever what was awaiting me regarding professional conversations with clients. To me the whole thing is a kind of deal: I offer a service that is used and paid for by others. I offer something because I think I am good at it and to help those who are not so good at it or not good at it at all – living in a highly specialised and compartmentalised world. Why I so often get to hear clients – particularly where English translations are concerned – say something to the effect of "well, actually I could also do it myself, but I don't have the time, I am not in the mood or - you name it", is still a mystery to me. Certainly, a professional reaction would be a polite and smashing "Don't worry. That is what I am here for". Something you do not want to repeat for ever and ever. Perhaps it is the widespread idea that everybody has or wants to know English and does not want to admit that it is maybe not quite enough for special tasks.

Whenever the pipes, for example, in my bathroom are broken, I call a plumber and ask him to come around and have a look at it. And I most certainly would not add that I can well fix the pipes myself, but you know, I just do not have the time or I am not in the mood or - you name it. I am glad that there are people who come to my house in such situations. When I buy bread at the bakery, I would not tell the baker that actually I love to bake bread myself and usually do so but, as it were, do not have the time, or am not in the mood or - you name it. Why, I wonder, are some people keen to apologise or justify themselves for the fact that they need the service offered by a translator and in doing so belittle the service of the latter? Anybody can do that, but sometimes one does not have the time, is not in the mood or - you name it.

---

***When I go and buy bread at the bakery, I would not tell the baker that I love to bake bread myself and usually do so but, as it were, I do not have the time, or am not in the mood or - you name it.***

---

Anne Bartz - Freelance Medical Translator  
Parkallee 12  
D-20144 Hamburg, Germany  
Tel.: (+49) 40 44 28 79 Fax: (+49) 40 44 28 05  
anne\_bartz@compuserve.com

### ***NEWSFLASH***

#### ***British regulatory authority (MCA) seeks Medical Writer***

Yes, at long last, the dream of all medical writers working in the pharmaceutical industry is coming true: the British drug regulatory authority (the Medicines Control Agency) is seeking to hire a medical writer to "assist in the production of assessment reports for European regulatory procedures and other administrative aspects of these procedures". Does this mean that we'll finally get some clear and readable guidelines??

From an advertisement in the 16 Sep 2000 issue of New Scientist (page 73).