

# Houston, we need an interpreter

**Jost Zetzsche and Nataly Kelly's lively and entertaining new book proves that language changes everything, says an impressed Judy Jenner**



Judy A. Jenner MBA is a Spanish and German business and legal translator and court interpreter in Las Vegas. She runs Twin Translations with her sister, who works from Vienna. She's the co-author of *The Entrepreneurial Linguist: The Business-School Approach to Freelance Translation*, writes a popular blog, *Translation Times*, and has given presentations on marketing and entrepreneurship at conferences around the world.

Every few years or so, something comes along that changes either our profession or the way we or others perceive it. It could be CAT tools, the advent of Google Translate, or the renewed interest in interpreting because of misinterpreting mishaps in high-profile international situations. As of October 2012, we will have something that will touch each and every one of us, including our customers and non-linguist family members: *Found in Translation*, to be released by Perigee/Penguin in the US and Turnaround in the UK, by my esteemed colleagues Nataly Kelly and Jost Zetzsche.

When I first heard about this book, on a balmy spring day in Las Vegas, I was over the moon. Finally, a book that's not intended necessarily for linguists, but for the general public? One that will shed light on what we actually do, so you don't have to explain your job to parents any more, who still think you translate literature in your spare time while you apply for real jobs? And all this in a handy book format published by a major publisher? This could be the best thing to happen to the profession since computers.

It's quite a thrill to read a book about our industry that has the names of two friends (which does not prevent me from giving the book an honest review) on the cover. It's a reminder that what we do is important enough to be picked up by

a major publisher in New York. It includes a foreword by David Crystal, who's perhaps the most important writer on language around. Nataly and Jost have set the bar very high for themselves, and the book exceeded all my expectations.

*Found in Translation's* subtitle is *How Language Shapes our Lives and Transforms the World*, and while this is a big statement, the authors eloquently substantiate it and do indeed prove that language changes everything. Those of us in the profession already know this, but the general public doesn't. If I had a pound for every time a customer tells me they've never thought about language until they needed such-and-such (a contract translated, a website localised, a language-related fire put out, language assistance in a foreign country), I'd be rich.

## Entertaining stories

The book is subdivided into seven chapters that revolve around specific areas of translation and interpreting, such as business, arts, entertainment, etc. Each chapter is full of entertaining stories about the people who make and shape our world through

**'The book successfully debunks some long-held translation and interpreting myths'**

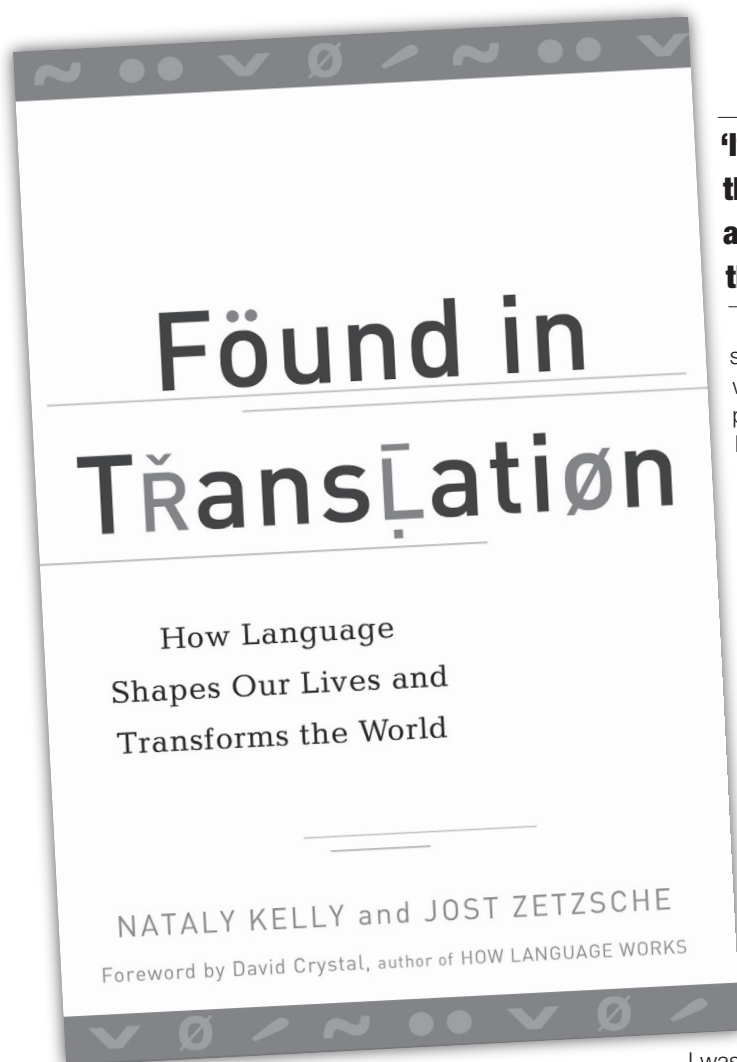
language, and you will meet some fascinating people. One of my favourite stories was the one about Peter Less, one of the interpreters at the Nuremberg trials, which were organised by the Americans, British and French to prosecute many of the leaders of Nazi Germany. I had the pleasure of meeting the great and humble Mr Less at a conference many years ago, and he left a lasting impression. If you think you are having a hard day interpreting in court, try interpreting for the people who murdered your entire family, which is exactly what Mr Less, now a retired 91-year-old attorney, did.

I'm particularly fond of the hilarious subsection titles that introduce individual stories inside the chapters. How about: Houston, We Need an Interpreter, which revolves around interpreters at NASA, and the International Space Station. Oddly, it never occurred to me that the ISS would have a substantial need for interpreters to allow communication, mainly between Russian and American crew members. It's a fascinating insight into a world that few of us have access to. Then there's Ice(landic), Ice(landic), Baby, which is a story about the Icelandic language, including language-learning programmes on Icelandair's flights, where language is their competitive advantage. Want to know what It's Raining Falafel is all about? How about The Spirit is Willing but the Translation is Weak? You will have to read the book. There are also break-out boxes with short anecdotes and an interesting tidbit of trivia about languages in every chapter. These grey boxes are a fun read and provide much food for thought.

## High-level access

The book successfully debunks some long-held translation and interpreting myths, such as Kennedy's infamous *'Ich bin ein Berliner'* blunder, which really wasn't a mistake. Another excellent point about language is that adding new words to the vocabulary, such as defriend, will make languages richer and will prevent their extinction, even if language purists object. The world's languages are dying at an alarming rate, so adding words is a good thing.

How did the authors get access to



**Found in Translation will be published in October by Turnaround, at £11.99. See [www.xl8book.com](http://www.xl8book.com) for the latest updates.**

the hallowed halls of Google, Twitter, multibillion dollar companies and hard-to-track-down executives? Well, they have many strong connections, and saying that you are writing a book for Penguin surely opens many doors. Having the translation and interpreting pedigrees that they do and the connections they have doesn't hurt. Nataly is the Chief Research Officer at Common Sense Advisory, an independent market research firm that focuses exclusively on T&I, while Jost is a well-known and widely published English-to-German translator and all-around CAT tool and general technology guru who's hard to miss at any conference (all six foot seven of him).

The book is cleverly structured in such a way that you can read a chapter or even a story at a time. To give you an idea of how diverse and well researched this book is, here's a short overview of some of my favourite stories: a chill-inducing story about a telephone interpreter (Nataly) in an emergency situation, which opens the book; a highly talented

**'It's amazing how much there is to be learned about languages and their impact'**

sign language interpreter for the world's most famous Deaf person; Harley-Davidson's language-based success in Japan; a story set in China involving a German surgeon, an interpreter (Jost) and a tourist in search of Chinese healing methods; why Saint Jerome was universally unpopular; cringe-inducing product-name translations; why EUR 2.30 a day per citizen is a great deal for interpreting services at the European Union; how an interpreter became the most important success factor for a Chinese basketball player; how translation fits into the world of, yes, adult entertainment; the impact of interpreters in wars, and much, much more.

**Talking technology**

I was particularly drawn to the last chapter, Connecting the World and Advancing Technology in Translation. Here, you will find in-depth stories about some of the world's most important technologies, such as Google, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, and how translation fits into them. Nataly and Jost feature interviews with some of the most important folks in Silicon Valley, from Franz Ochs of Google to the director of internationalisation at Facebook. What about the need for translation in the age of machine translation? *Found in Translation* summarises it nicely: 'As long as human beings speak different languages, the need for translation will continue. And as long as translation exists – even if it someday becomes more automated – it will always require the skills, talent and expertise of human specialists.'

To my great delight, some stories are set in my home town of Las Vegas, while many others span the globe from outer space to New Zealand and the Roma, or Romani, communities around the world. Just like watching the Olympics, part of

the pleasure of this book is finding out about other languages and their impact beyond the languages that one personally translates. I'll be the first to admit that I don't spend much time reading about non-European languages, and this book provides a window into hundreds of aspects of linguistics and languages that made me mentally travel to faraway places.

**Two voices speaking as one**

Many of you already know both Nataly and Jost as prolific writers who often donate their time to write for industry publications. Jost's long-running Toolkit, the newsletter about translation technology, is not only an invaluable resource, but also a great read. Nataly is the accomplished author of the only book on telephone interpreting available on the market, and a blogger for the *Huffington Post*. Her Interpreter's Launch Pad newsletter is a fantastic free resource that's full of invaluable information, and she's the author of most of the top-notch marketing studies in our industry through her work at Common Sense Advisory. Even though this book has two authors, it doesn't feel like it has two different voices. On the contrary: the stories flow so well that it's almost impossible to distinguish who wrote what.

This book is intended for the general market rather than specifically for linguists, but every linguist should own it. It's amazing how much there is to be learned about languages and their impact. One of the most important lessons for me was the preservation of lesser-known languages, insight into dialects and Creoles and things I never thought of, such as how to create a keyboard for languages like Yorùbá, which is one of the 510 languages spoken in Nigeria, and when crowdsourcing for translations is a good idea (think Haiti). If you only read one work of non-fiction this year, I suggest you make it *Found in Translation*.

Don't forget to pick up copies for Christmas presents for your family and friends who might not completely understand what you do and why it matters. This smart book will make it obvious why translation, and thus linguists like us, matter to the world we inhabit and the approximately 6,000 languages we speak. 