

## An Exclusive Interview of a Brilliant Translator and Interpreter

### MARIE-EVE RACETTE, Ottawa, Canada

Interviewed by

**DR. SANGITA GHODKE**

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#### About Marie-Eve Racette

**Marie-Eve Racette** lives in Ottawa, Canada. She is an interpreter, erstwhile translator, entrepreneur, free-lance writer, an independent traveller and a gentle human being. She is a combination of sharp intellect and beautiful mind. Let me unravel a dynamic multifaceted personality through an interview.

#### About the Interviewer

**Dr. Sangita Ghodake** is an associate professor in English, PDEA's Baburaoji Gholap College, Sangvi, Pune, affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, India. She is a true academician and a sincere researcher.

Hello Marie-Eve Racette, It is indeed a great pleasure to know you as a translator through some questions related to translation studies. I have observed your mastery in many languages and crisp delivery too. Since Translation Studies is the need of the hour, our teachers, researchers, professionals, and students would like to seek your expertise in this field.

**Sangita: Tell us about your formal education in translation studies?**



**Marie:** I initially went into Translation Studies thinking it would be an easy degree - after all, I spoke fluent French and English - what more does one need? Lots more, as it turns out. Small wonder then that it is a three-year university program!

To make a short story long, I did a Bachelor's in Translation, Honors program, with internships alternating with classroom semesters. I cannot recommend the internship option enough. Yes, it prolongs your degree by six months or a year, but you gain experience that you can put on your CV once you graduate, giving you a leg up on the competition - assuming your internship employer doesn't hire you right out of school. When looking for a degree program, do try to find a university that offers an internship program, and go for that one if at all possible.

**Sangita: What made you to enter into translation studies?**

**Marie:** First of all, I realized (and all translation students realize this after their very first day of school) that I did not speak English or French as fluently as I thought - my English was heavily influenced by French, and my French was even more influenced by English. In short, I spoke more of a Frenglish than French or English.

Second, I realized that speaking a language is not at all the same as writing it. It's a different level, and a much higher level when it comes to writing a text. I often compare the craft of a translator to that of a copy editor: the language must hold no secrets for you, you must wield it like a virtuoso, but you have to do this in two different languages, not just one.

Third, and finally, once you have begun to truly master your two languages of work, you then have to learn the trade of transposing the ideas from one language to another. There is more to this than just plugging in words from the other language. There are techniques, tricks, rules and traps that one has to know about. And then, to top it all off, you have to learn the basics of the different fields of translation: legal, medical, administrative, general, literary, etc.

Finally, to kill two birds with one stone, i.e. learning translation at the same time as perfecting your "other" language, choose a program in the country of this language. For example, if your second language is English, go study in an English-speaking country. And I did say "English-speaking country", not "a country where English is spoken". These are two vastly different situations, and the latter will lead you astray.

**Sangita: Translation is a booming industry today. What kind of job opportunities do we have in this field?**



**Marie:** Of course, you can become a translator, either generalist or specialized (as per above examples, but there are others). Should you decide, however, that translation isn't for you after all, there are other related fields in which your studies will come in handy.

For example, anything having to do with writing. As part of your degree, you will learn how to write a grammatical, logical, well-organized, idiomatic text. This knowledge applies to copy-editing, revising, proof-reading, speech writing, precis writing, etc. In fact, I have been asked to do all of the above in the course of my career.

A related field is terminology, that is, the coining of new words or (more often) the compiling of new words and the finding of translations for them, often in the medical and scientific fields where discoveries and innovation require constant updating of the language. For example, IT brought us words such as “phishing”, “smishing”, “vishing”; do you know how to translate this into your other language? Do you even know if there is a translation out there already? If not, you may have to do some research, or ask a terminologist. But it's not just scientific fields that innovate; pop culture gave us vaping, twerking, sexting. The list is endless.

Another option is Interpreting. This profession requires further studies - interpreting is very different from translating - but they share the same prerequisite: mastery of two languages. I worked for several years as a translator, further enhancing my mastery of English and French, before embarking on my interpretation course, which was a Master's degree.

**Sangita: Translation is known as a second-hand experience and is closed to adaptation. What is your opinion?**

**Marie:** True, a translation cannot be 100% original. Not for nothing do the Italians have the saying, "Traduttore, traditore", or “Translator, traitor”. In other words, the very act of translating a text is betraying the author's thought and work. This is inevitable – a language is a reflection of a culture, and you cannot take a culture and drop it into another culture intact. In fact there are endless debates on how to translate – should you remain as faithful as possible to the original, at the risk of alienating or at least perplexing the audience in the target language? Or should you adapt the text so that your target audience will understand and appreciate it as if it had been written in that language in the first place, but at the risk of changing the original message? These are two different schools of thought, both of which have their points. I have no opinion on the subject – I just try to always read books in their original language, and I sit on the fence when it comes to translating.

**Sangita: What opportunities are there to English language and literature teachers, researchers and students in this area?**



**Marie:** Students and teachers of English language and literature are well-positioned to become literary translators. They are presumably avid readers, and so are the first to know about new releases, the latest up-and-coming author, new publishing houses, etc. They are in pole position to be asked to translate new books from English into their other language, or vice-versa. Especially if they are writers themselves, and even more so if they have the good fortune of being published authors themselves.

**Sangita: What would be maximum remunerations one can draw through translation?**

**Marie:** First of all, whatever I say hereafter will vary from country to country. The pay associated with translation will depend on a number of factors: cost of living in your particular country, the value the society places on literature, education and the arts in general, the amount of competition in your language combination, the amount of government subsidies and grants available for literary endeavours, etc. The same work can be paid at wildly different prices depending on your country of work.

As a general rule, literary translators are free-lancers and make a pittance. While authors work for free in the hopes of being published and eventually making it big on reprints and follow-up novels, their translators are usually paid a fixed amount regardless of how many or few copies of the book end up being printed. And a novel is usually a research-intensive, painstaking undertaking that will drag on for far longer than financially worthwhile. Literary translation is a labour of love – you’d better have a nice spouse ready to support you, or you’ll have to do it in your spare time, after your income-earning activity.

Free-lance generalist translators can expect to make a decent living if they are good, fast, and have a network of colleagues able and willing to swap work (more on this below). As translation is usually paid by the word, the faster you can work, the better. Speed can be increased with special translation software, though sometimes at the price of personal satisfaction and quality of the finished product. Until about ten years ago, generalist free-lance translators could expect to charge some 20 cents a word in Canada, more if they have an unusual language combination. U.S. translators earn far less, due to increased competition – 10 cents a word is more likely. And of course, with globalization and offshoring, clients can use translators from the other side of the world without missing a beat. This increased, world-wide competition is driving prices down.

Free-lance specialized translators can expect to charge more, especially if their field of specialization is unusual or hard to come by. However, these translators usually come to their field from a different profession: medical translators tend to be former doctors, nurses or pharmacists; legal translators are usually lawyers; scientific translators have a degree in sciences; etc.



I mentioned earlier that “Free-lance ... translators can expect to make a decent living if they ... have a network of colleagues able and willing to swap work”. Let me explain. As a free-lance translator, you will find that work comes in waves. It seems that all your clients (assuming you have “established” yourself as a translator and have several faithful clients) will collude to send you no work at all for days or weeks, then all send you work on the same day. Which, means that for nine days you get no work at all, and on the tenth, you get ten new jobs, only one of which you can undertake within the deadline. What do to with the other nine? You can’t turn the work away – first of all, you can’t afford to, second of all, you can’t let down your client, and third of all, you don’t want them to turn to another translator, only to find that they like this one better. This is when you phone or email your network of trusted fellow free-lance translators and ask them if they can take on your excess work. You “farm out” those nine jobs to your colleagues for a few cents a word less than you charge your client, the difference being what you pay yourself for revising your colleagues and coordinating the work. Sure, you’ve only made 2 or 4 cents a word on those jobs, but that’s still more than if you had turned down the work in the first place. And your colleagues are doing the same for you – remember those nine days when you got no work of your own? Hopefully you were still working, but on your colleagues’ overload. It goes both ways. And of course, it is very poor form to “poach” a colleague’s client; in fact, it’s professional suicide.

Staff translators, i.e. in-house translators at translation companies or large international companies with their own translation department, can expect to make anywhere from 20,000\$ to 100,000\$ in Canada, depending on their level of experience, their language combination, their field of specialization, the financial capacity of their employer, etc.

**Sangita: Would you like to share some of the links and websites that can guide students to go for it?**

**Marie:** I am ill-informed on the existence or availability of websites for aspiring translators, as I have been out of the field for too long already. But as a general rule, aspiring translators should look up their national or provincial (or territorial, or state, etc.) translators’ association, which will be rife with useful tips, tools, guidelines, etc. For example, the United States has the American Translators’ Association; Quebec has the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec; Ontario has the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario; I know Australia has a national association. Another lead would be to look up the web sites of the university translation programs. They may have links to professional organizations.

**Sangita: Who is your role model in this field?**



**Marie:** Actually, I don't know who my idol actually is. All I know is that he or she translates Air Canada's "En Route" magazine, i.e. the magazine you find in the seat pocket in front of you on the plane. His or her French translation is supremely elegant, delightfully idiomatic and deliciously witty. I always read the two versions side-by-side (original English, French translation) just to savour the clever translation. I aspire to be like him or her one day.

**Sangita: State in brief about the importance of translation in the era of globalization.**

**Marie:** Globalization is translation. Translation is globalization. They are one and the same.

**Sangita: What are the barriers in translating texts from regional languages into an international one?**

**Marie:** I see no particular barriers that wouldn't apply to any translation: adapting expressions or finding their equivalent in the other language, explaining or adapting a local reality to make it internationally understandable, etc. All this is part of a translator's training and what makes translation an interesting intellectual exercise.

**Sangita: What care should be taken to do truthful or good translation?**

**Marie:** As I mentioned above, pursue your studies in a country of that language. If it's English, study in England, Canada, the US or Australia-New-Zealand – but be aware of regionalisms! For example, Brits use the word "nought" for "zero". This would be incomprehensible to a North American. If your language is French, study in France, Belgium, Switzerland, or Quebec. Once again, beware of regionalisms, especially in Quebec. If you can't afford to study abroad, read only in that language, including the news. Get your news from google that language, and read actively, which means with a pen in hand, writing down the expressions you either don't know or wouldn't have thought of using. Then find their equivalent in your language. This will help you to "activate" your second language. Do the same for TV shows. Watch all your movies in your second language. Stream TED talks and other content in that language. Happily, in this day and age, it is ever easier to find content in foreign languages. No excuses!

**To conclude, Marie is continuously working and updating herself in this field. She is an innovative translator, writer, interpreter, mediator and a passionate traveller. She influences others in positive way. We are proud of you. I wish you all the very best for your future endeavors.**