

# **Summary of ATA's Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey**

By Shawn Six

The recently released second edition of ATA's *Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey* should prove to be an invaluable benchmarking tool for nearly everyone in or affiliated with the translation and interpreting profession. The study is designed to allow an individual or company to easily compare their compensation levels to their peers. In addition, the study serves as a practical tool for a broader audience. Companies involved in translation and interpreting will commonly refer to this report when evaluating independent contractors or in-house staff, and determining their competitiveness with respect to compensation. It is also a useful tool for companies that are looking to establish compensation or hourly rate ranges. Students who are considering careers in the translation and interpreting profession can use this tool to steer their specific career decisions, and to gain insight about the potential compensation that they may earn.

The survey was compiled, tabulated, and prepared for ATA by Industry Insights, Inc., a professional research and consulting firm providing

management and marketing services to dealer organizations, individual membership organizations, and trade professional associations and their members. The company specializes in compensation and benefits studies, industry operating surveys, member needs studies, educational programs, and customized research activities.

An e-mail containing a link to an online questionnaire was distributed to approximately 12,000 ATA members and nonmembers in August

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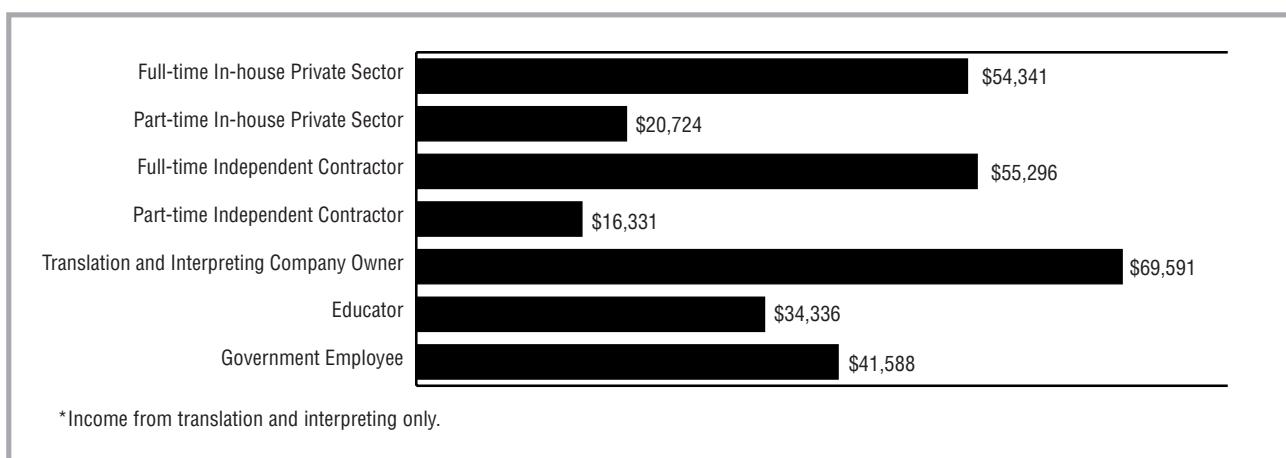
2002. In total, 1,621 completed and useable survey forms were submitted directly to Industry Insights, Inc. This represents a response rate of 14%. Forms received after the final

deadline and questionnaires with incomplete information were not included.

Upon receipt, all information was checked both manually and by a specially designed computer editing procedure. Strict confidence of survey responses was maintained throughout the course of the project. Final results were tabulated, and the report was completed in January 2003. In addition, ATA's attorney reviewed the final publication.

The seven employment classifications analyzed in this report include: full-time independent contractors; part-time independent contractors; full-time in-house private sector personnel; part-time in-house private sector personnel; company owners; educators; and government employees. For detailed analysis, responses were broken down by geographic region, education, years of employment, primary language combination, ATA membership status, and ATA accreditation status. This comprehensive survey allows users to compare their own income, hourly rates, and rates per word to individuals in similar situations. ➤

**Figure 1: 2001 Average Gross Income\* By Employment Classification (U.S.-Based Respondents)**



## Summary of ATA's Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey Continued

Some of the key findings of the survey follow:

**Income Varied by Employment Classification.** As Figure 1 on page 39 shows, 2001 gross income from translation and interpreting varied by employment classification. T&I company owners reported the highest average gross income, at \$69,591. The lowest income was reported by part-time independent contractors, at \$16,331.

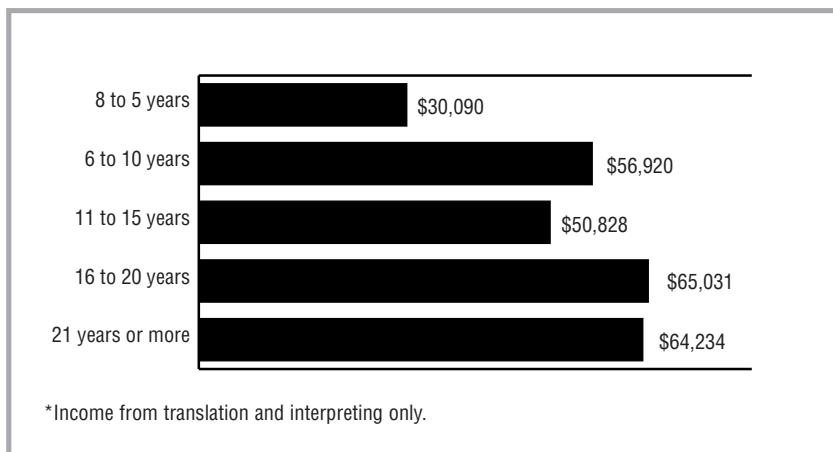
**Years of Employment Makes a Difference.** Gross 2001 income from

translation and interpreting showed a direct relationship with years of employment. In general, those with more experience earned more income. Using the full-time independent contractor as an example, Figure 2 shows the impact that years of experience had on gross income. For instance, full-time independent contractors with 0 to 5 years of experience earned an average gross income of \$30,090 in 2001, compared to \$64,234 for those with 21 or more years of experience. In general, this pattern existed in all of the employment classifications.

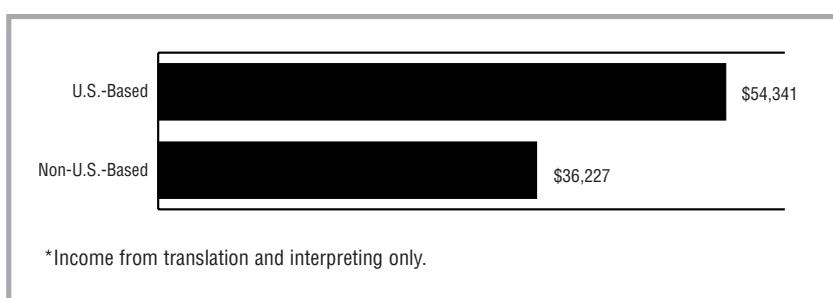
**U.S.-Based Respondents Earned More Than Those Based Outside the U.S.** For example, full-time in-house private sector personnel based in the U.S. earned an average gross 2001 income from translation and interpreting of \$54,341, compared to only \$36,227 for those based outside the U.S. (see Figure 3).

**ATA Accreditation Counts.** Respondents who were ATA-accredited earned significantly more gross income than those who were not ATA-accredited. Using the full-time independent contractor as an example, Figure 4 shows the impact that ATA accreditation had on gross income. Those with ATA accreditation earned nearly 16% more than their non-accredited counterparts (\$59,760 vs. \$51,609).

**Figure 2: Full-Time Independent Contractor 2001 Average Gross Income\* By Years of Employment (U.S.-Based Respondents)**



**Figure 3: Full-Time In-House Private Sector Personnel Average Gross Income\* By U.S. vs. Non-U.S.-Based Respondents (U.S. Dollars)**



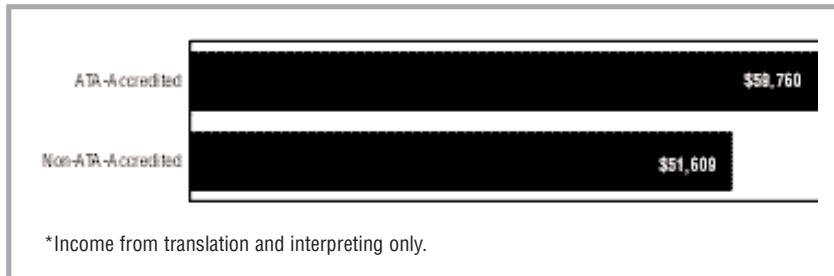
**Rates Per Word and Hourly Rates.** At an average of \$0.23 per word, the language combination commanding the highest rate per word was English into Chinese. Other language combinations commanding higher than average rates were Chinese into English (\$0.19), English into Japanese (\$0.18), and English into Arabic (\$0.17).

Similarly, the highest average hourly rates by language combination were English into Chinese (\$59.15), Chinese into English (\$57.68), Japanese into English (\$53.37), and English into Japanese (\$49.59).

**Trends.** Half of the respondents reported that their 2001 gross income from translation and interpreting increased when compared to 2000. The remaining 50% were closely split between those reporting a decrease (26%) and those reporting no change (24%).

**Education and Experience.** Three out of four respondents had achieved

**Figure 4: Full-Time Independent Contractor 2001 Average Gross Income\*  
By Accreditation Status (U.S.-Based Respondents)**



either a master's degree (41%) or a bachelor's degree (34%). Nearly one-fifth reported having a degree in translation, while nearly 10% reported having a degree in interpreting. Thirty percent reported having a non-degree certification in translation, while 19% reported having a non-degree certification in interpreting. Other credentials reported included court certification (12%), passing the State Department exam (8%), and passing the UN exam (1%).

**Areas of Specialization.** The most common areas of specialization reported were business/finance (56%), law (47%), entertainment (47%), and industry and technology (40%). Non-common areas of specialization included pure sciences (10%), natural sciences (16%), and engineering (17%).

**Translation Speed.** The average respondent reported a translation speed in target words per hour at 510. Average translation speeds ranged

from 382 to 618, depending on the employment classification.

**Ordering Information.** ATA's 48-page *Translation and Interpreting Compensation Survey* presents the survey results in much greater detail than is possible in this summary article. The complete report includes charts and tables that provide a detailed profile of each of the seven employment classifications mentioned in this article. It is important to remember that the statistics published by ATA should be regarded as merely the results of the survey rather than absolute standards. ATA intends for the survey to reveal general tendencies in the industry, not exact amounts.

The full report is available to ATA members for \$45 and \$60 to nonmembers. Please contact ATA to order your copy: ATA, 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590, Alexandria, VA 22314; Tel: (703) 683-6100; Fax: (703) 683-6122, e-mail: [ata@atanet.org](mailto:ata@atanet.org).