

Case study

Community Languages in London

Pearl Linguistics gets the capital's communities talking



Based in the City of London, and with a network of some 4,000 linguists offering 270 languages, Pearl Linguistics is a specialist provider of interpreting and translation services. Languages are central to their business. Even the small team at their city office come from many different backgrounds, including Turkish, Polish, Italian, German and Chinese, and many have lived in London for a number of years.

Some have worked in interpreting and translation – others haven't. But it is their ability to speak another language after English (which is the everyday language of business) which is a great benefit to the clients the team is working with. For example, a German-speaking member of staff led a recent campaign to win more business with German clients. Translation work always needs proof-reading, and having language skills in-house really helps in spotting problems, even before translations are formally read by specialists.

Demand for a variety of languages

Big contracts with over 20 public service organisations, the most recent example being Lewisham Borough Council, can mean covering a very broad range of languages and unusual dialects. Tamil, Vietnamese, Turkish, Mandarin, French and British Sign Language are probably the most commonly requested for interpreting and translation in London. Some languages are easier to find specialist linguists for than others. Polish is a common request although there are relatively large numbers of Polish speakers working as linguists.

However, interpreters and translators for languages such as Lingala (spoken by the Congolese community) and Somali are more difficult to find. Dialects can also present problems, especially in translation work – Kurdish for example has several – so it is important for freelance linguists to have this level of knowledge.



Pearl's clientele is extremely varied. They work for over 200 legal firms, major media businesses including the BBC and MTV, and a range of other clients including housing associations, primary care trusts and the police. So translators and interpreters they work with need more than just knowledge of the language – they need to know the industry they are working in too.

Supporting local communities

The community is very important to their business. For many years they have worked with various community interpreting courses such as the Mary Ward Centre, offering free training to aspiring interpreters from across the capital. Pearl even put up recruitment posters at the Oromo Association in London to help boost the numbers of speakers of this Ethiopian language they can call upon.



Reaching out to London's population will always be a feature of their work. Kit Lai, a Chinese Cantonese speaker and General Manager at Pearl Linguistics, summed up their approach: "Languages are at the core of our business. We rely on qualified and experienced people from London's diverse communities to support our work – given our clients' need to communicate with our city's multicultural population."

Jane Collis, Director of RLN London, added, "It's great to see Pearl Linguistics working so closely with people from a range of backgrounds in London – and opening up opportunities for those from even the smallest community groups."

Useful links



www.pearllinguistics.com

To see more case studies and information on Community Languages in London, visit www.rln-london.com/multilinguallondon

