Interpreters talk, translators write - right? But variety is in our blood.

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What on earth possessed me to take on this translation? Interpreting is my day job!

Maybe it sounded interesting at the time, could be that I'm doing a friend a favor, there's a chance it's for a potentially big interpreting customer - but almost inevitably I will ask myself this question sometime between the middle and the end of any translation.

After checking Webster's and the OED for “stye” vs. “sty” and the Chicago, Oxford and AMA Style Manuals for “uses of quotation marks” and “citation style to use when the source is a deleted Facebook comment posted in a secret group”, I'm ready to throw in the towel. Interpreting only requires somewhat consistent terminology, translation demands far more. And I have to keep rewriting, too. That last sentence I wrote just doesn't work in writing, though if I read it out loud in context everyone gets it.

Why do I keep accepting translation work despite the backache and RSI symptoms I inevitably develop and the stress of looming deadlines? Is it about having something to show for my efforts—unlike gone-with-the-wind interpreting? is it about having the time to dig deep and the exhilaration of nailing the phrase to convey a precisely researched meaning?

Interpreting flow feels like a perfect drive over a mountain road when you're trying to get to the next town before sunset. Translation is more likely to resemble rearranging furniture or redecorating—exhausting but fun, as long as I can keep a clear picture of the outcome in my mind. And I can enjoy the result every time I come home.

How does translation feel to you, compared to interpreting?

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