

Languages



I have worked in publishing for many years, in house with HarperCollins, Larousse, Taylor & Francis (Routledge) and now as a freelancer. I studied French and Italian at Glasgow University, which led me to working in the field of bilingual dictionaries, some of which you probably use at school. It's a job which has taken me to all sorts of places around the world, using my languages every day, and working with translators and editors of many nationalities. Don't let anyone tell you you'll never get a job if you choose to study languages...

I have spent over 20 years working in languages, and have been working mainly on bilingual dictionaries, some of which you may use in school, like Collins, Oxford or Larousse.

Background:

I went to a school outside Glasgow. I studied French and Spanish at Higher, and had an inspirational French teacher who suggested I might want to take a crash Higher in Italian in 6th year. The school was against it and wanted me to take Sciences, but my father and I persuaded them to let me take it.

In the summer I applied through an agency to be an Au Pair in Sicily. I was good at writing Italian, but realised it was a different matter to speak it. The children helped to teach me to speak, and I was totally immersed in Italian, as no-one spoke any English. By the end of 3 months, I was dreaming in Italian, so I was pretty fluent.

I then started an MA course in French and Italian language and literature at Glasgow University. It was a 5-year course. I also studied Theatre Studies and Psychology as extra subjects.

I spent a year abroad in my 3rd year, working in Toulon in France. I worked in a Lycee Technique as a French Language Assistant teaching the pupils English. It was a fantastic year, but I didn't speak much French as I became friends with other English-speakers there. I regret not speaking as much French as I could have. In my 4th year, I spent 3 months in Siena, in Italy, studying in a language school. Again, it was not the same immersive experience as being an Au Pair, but I had a brilliant time.

My career path:

I knew I didn't want to teach, and I had no money to travel. So after University, I applied for a job I saw in the newspaper, and started work with Collins on their bilingual dictionaries as Assistant Editor. I learnt the ropes on the job, as I hadn't any specific experience. We worked on the 3rd edition of the Collins Robert French Dictionary.

Most large Italian dictionaries at that time had been created for Italian speakers to learn English, so we published a large Collins Italian Dictionary. This required a lot of

Languages



project management to source Italian editors and translators, many of whom I still work with now.

I then took a job in London with Routledge working on bilingual technical dictionaries and other reference books for subjects like Engineering and Chemistry. I was an Editorial Manager and I learnt more about the publishing process.

I then got a job with Editions Larousse as a Publishing Manager. Larousse is an iconic French brand (Christian Lacroix designed the letter openers for their illustrated encyclopedia for free). I still lived in London but commuted to Paris. We created titles in France for the French Market. I was the publishing manager for the dictionaries produced for countries other than France, working on phrase books and dictionaries – from mini to large dictionaries. The job involved lots of travel.

We created a range of dictionaries for Italian. These were compact dictionaries (there had previously only been mini versions). I built up a framework and sourced contributors - as I had worked with many of the same people at Collins.

Travel:

Larousse set up an office in Brazil and we produced a range of bilingual dictionaries there. We were translating Brazilian Portuguese (which is different from European Portuguese) into English, French and Spanish and vice versa. It was difficult to find translators and editors as dictionary translation has to be very precise. I was coordinating, so travelling to Brazil often to oversee the project.

Larousse also worked on Polish/English and Polish/French dictionaries. Again I coordinated these projects. Even though I don't speak Polish or Portuguese, I was project managing those who did.

We also worked in Mexico and South America, but I didn't get to travel there myself.

Present Freelance Role:

After becoming a parent, I became self-employed. This means I can choose who I want to work for, what I want to work on and when I want to work.

I am doing some freelance work with Collins on Easy Learning dictionaries and other projects – project managing and also doing editorial work. I also do some translation and proofreading. I am also involved in project managing and copyediting for Leckie and Leckie (who produce books for National 5 and Higher subjects). I also work on digital versions of dictionaries.

5 things I have learnt in Languages:

- **Speak as much as you can**
- **Listen, read, watch, write**

Languages



(radio, newspapers - eg. El mundo, El Pais, tv, football, writing emails etc)

- **Immersion**

Take the opportunity to go abroad, try your best to stay away from other English speakers, it will transform your language skills. People are really kind and helpful.

- **Be versatile**

It is possible now to combine your degree with law, marketing or business. For employment, really good language skills will open doors.

There are lots of opportunities if you have the skills eg. Advertising agencies taking on work in Europe.

- **Be bold**

Try not to be intimidated by other people - they want to help so speak as much as you can to them in your chosen language.

Questions:

Did you travel with other people?

When I went to France and Italy, I went on my own but there were lots of other students there. As an Au Pair I went on my own, and therefore had the best learning experience there.

When I went to Brazil, I would travel with my boss which was helpful, as I didn't know anything about Brazil.

Do you have lots of dictionaries in your house?

I used to, but I have given a lot to Shelter. At first, it is great to see your name in print, but after a while, I couldn't keep all of the editions of the dictionaries that I had worked on.

December 2018