

Translator Identity Theft and Scams

Abstract This White Paper by Elanex reviews our experience with a recent surge in attempted identity theft and other scams against professional translators. Our experiences are shared to assist translators and other translation agencies to avoid potential financial and production quality issues. Topics covered include identifying common scams, recognizing scammers, prevention and managing translator recruitment.

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Background

A fundamental component of the Elanex production model is working directly with individual independent translation professionals. We constantly recruit, evaluate, train, and test translators to meet the growing demand for subject matter experts in every language pair.

In recent months we have observed a significant increase in the number of translator applications that are attempts at identity theft or scam emails. Current Elanex statistics show that on average up to 85% of incoming applications are false. Far too frequently we also see reports, often daily, on scams/identity theft logged on translators' forums such as ProZ.com or TranslatorsCafé.com.

This White Paper presents our findings, tips on identifying scammers, prevention, and managing translation recruitment.

Typical scams and scam processes

- Scammers **search** for translators that publish their details on translation portals.
- They **edit** the available resumes/CVs, often (though not always) removing the original translator details such as phone numbers, home address, photos, etc.
- They create a **fake email address** that is very similar to the original translator's name and/or email address – quite frequently a Hotmail address rerouted from a Gmail address.
- Scammers **send** the application with the edited resume to potential client or agency offering services with low rates. There are examples where the cover letter from the original translator was directly reused by the scammer.
- Once the scammer is sent a job, they typically **deliver** machine-translated text, or in some cases actually "hire" the real (scammed) translator to do the job. In the latter case, the real translator receives only a fraction of the actual amount due or doesn't receive any payment.

- When there is a quality complaint, the responsibility is on the scammed translator who in most cases is completely unaware of this practice. This can negatively affect his or her **reputation**.
- There are also companies contacting both freelancers and clients. To the freelancers they offer “marketing” of their resumes and promise regular work; to the clients they offer cheap, fast and high quality translations and other services. While many are legitimate, given the proliferation of websites promising low-cost translation, this is an area of recent concern.

Tips to recognize scammers

1. Email Subject Line
2. Email Address
3. Resume Document Properties

Email Subject Line

We commonly see the following patterns or keywords from scam translator applications:

- *XX <> YY... Excellent Translation Quality*
- *XX<>YY-Precise, Elegant and Timely Translation*
- *Perfect Translation Skills Available XX<>YY*
- *Excellent knowledge of XX, YY, ZZ*
- *~~ Quality work on time and on budget ~~*
- *XX<>YY Translator Application*
- *Reliability, Quality and Professionalism*

(where XX, YY, ZZ are languages)

Note that misspellings or awkward grammar in the subject line and/or body of the email is not unusual. Additionally, cover letters, unless directly stolen, are typically written in broken English (or other source language) and/or contain typos.

Email Address

- Emails are typically sent from Hotmail account on behalf of a Gmail account or other free providers such as:
 - *joesmith2010@gmail.com; on behalf of; Joe Smith <joesmith2@hotmail.com>*
 - *nancy1sample@gmail.com; on behalf of; Nancy Sample <nancy12sample@gmail.com>*
- Email addresses from more sophisticated scammers slightly modify the email address from a legitimate professional translator:
 - *joe.smith@gmail.com -> joesmith1@gmail.com*
 - *nancytranslator@gmail.com -> nanctransltor@gmail.com*
- Fake applications are most frequently being sent to Elanex email accounts not normally associated with translator applications, i.e. specific employees, internal support group alias, quotation or sales accounts.

Resume Document Properties

Resumes/CVs are typically sent in Word or PDF formats, most commonly in Word. Simply looking at the document properties, most often the author is not the applicant but has an Arabic, generic, or unusual name. Specific examples we have collected include:

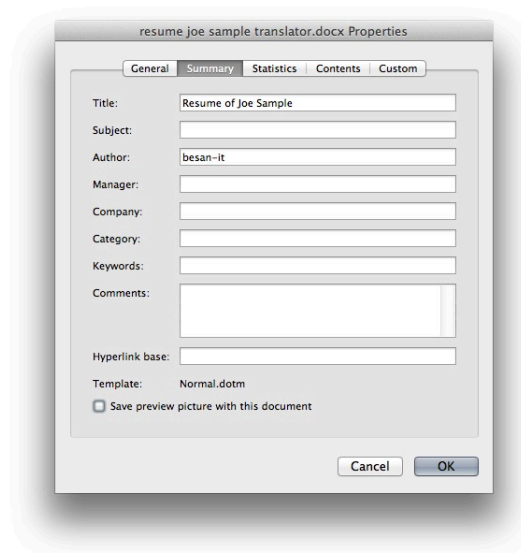
الأقصى (far)	Hala M
besan	besan-it
النور مركز (Noor Center)	احمد (Ahmed)
Ibrahim	ANAS BARAKAT
Gheed	Ahmed

and other words:

Dreams	MTC
Iskander	hp
Toshiba	Huda Center
dd	GoOgle

(please note the list is not exhaustive)

Example of document properties:



Prevention and management

Management of unsolicited translator applications when so many are now coming from untrustworthy sources can be quite time and cost consuming if done manually. For this reason Elanex utilizes a self-registration process for unsolicited applicants in addition to our standard recruitment process. Our recruitment and management processes include stand-alone and constant on-the-job testing and review by a certified editor to eliminate the possibility a scam translator could submit unacceptable work that is inadvertently delivered to a client.

In case of the fake applications sent in response to a particular recruitment drive, Elanex strives to research and contact the original translator and inform them about their compromised identity and provide them with suggestions on ways to prevent similar cases in the future.

Elanex also cooperates with Joao Roque Dias who runs a dedicated site <http://www.jrdias.com/jrd-translator-scammers.htm> to expose scammers and increase awareness of these scams.

For translators, some simple steps we advise are:

- Instead of publicly posting your resume or CV, make your resume available on request or alternatively publish only protected files.
- Exercise reasonable caution when accepting new assignments from unknown sources. Does the request come from a legitimate business or agency? Are payment details determined in advance?
- If contacted by an agency who wishes to market your CV, verify the agency and representative identity by checking translation forums, Joao's website, agency registration numbers, Google, and other services.
- A translation firm or direct business client will typically ask the translator to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) and the more professional organizations will often include a service level agreement (SLA).

For buyers of translation services, we advise:

- Be cautious in advance if accepting translators with word rates far below professional average. Professional translators should be fairly compensated for their skills.
- Promises of "perfect translation" should be met with healthy skepticism. Just as multiple authors can create content written in different ways that convey the same message, different translators can produce translations that faithfully represent the intent of the original author with different phrasing.

About the Author

Agnieszka (Aga) Ostrowska is the Global Practitioner Manager for Elanex. She is responsible for curating our database of over 34,000 practitioners and insuring we have a team of professional, subject-matter expert translators for any client need. Aga has over a decade of industry experience as a translator and project manager. Most recently, she was responsible for Vendor Management, Language Quality Standards and Supply Chain Management; Aga is a Six Sigma Greenbelt and a corporate quality champion. She is responsible for developing resources to meet capacity needs, improve translation quality, reduce costs and implement new technical solutions.

About Elanex

Elanex is a technology-enabled global language services company designed to consistently and efficiently deliver translation for the most demanding requirements. The Elanex difference is a result of a comprehensive technology platform connecting specialist translators and subject matter expert editors with a global production team to deliver 24x7 services – In any language, any format, anywhere, and anytime. For more information about Elanex visit: www.elanex.com.