

## Translator's Dementia (TD) – What It Is and How To Recognize the Signs<sup>1</sup>

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Translator's dementia (TD) is a relatively recent neurodegenerative disorder, believed to be caused by the environment in which freelance translators are forced to live, and by the conditions under which they have to perform various tasks required in their solitary occupation.

A typical freelance translator works in a "home office", which is usually located in a hot and dusty attic, in a converted garage, or in a cold, damp and dark basement because s/he cannot really afford a sunny room with a view on blue ocean in a gorgeous house, which does not help things much. True, some translators have one or several additional rooms in their apartment or house, but those are usually occupied by family members who obviously need a healthier living environment than a mere translator. However, partly as a result of their stressful occupation, many if not most translators have no family, which again does not help things much.

There are really only two types of work that translators can expect and need to get used to in their line of work: 1. rush work, or 2. no work. For rush work, some clients are willing to pay a rush rate which is about a cent or two higher than the usual rate, but not too many. But in return, translators are expected to produce around 10 thousand words per day if they even dare to be so greedy and disrespectful as to ask for a surcharge of 1 cent per word. During the periods when there is no work, which can last for weeks or months on end, translators have no income at all, which is why they feel that next time they will have to take on again rush translations necessitating the approximate output of around 10 thousand words per day for rush translations at their usual low, low rate.

Are you a translator who is suffering from TD? Do you even know which signs to look for in translators who are suffering from this modern disease which often remains undiagnosed?

Some of the signs and symptoms of TD are listed below.

### 1. Compulsive E-Mail Checking Disorder

This obsession is frequently aggravated during the "famine periods" when translators have no work. The translator often develops an obsession for checking e-mail every few minutes, although all s/he needs to do is check e-mail every few hours at the most.

However, translators suffering from TD feel that it is very important to diligently delete each spam message from their e-mail as soon as a new junk e-mail arrives, which is about every 2 minutes, because it could be a job. Some translators keep checking their e-mail for no reason even when they are working on an extremely tight deadline. This means that their TD is already in its more progressed form.

### 2. Compulsive-Obsessive Blogging Disorder

During the early stages of this disorder, which is another symptom of TD, translators usually only leave angry and incoherent messages on the blogs of other translators, often in several languages. Trivial differences of opinion, for instance on the proper use of a gerund instead of an infinitive, or the difference between "that" and "which", can drive translators literally insane.

During the later stage of TD, the translator usually launches his or her own "flaming" blog so that s/he could expose the corrupt and depraved practices prevalent in the translation industry. Once a TD sufferer has his or her own blog, s/he feels the need to check compulsively the blog view count every few minutes. If there is no work available and nobody seems to be interested in the TD sufferer's blog either, the translator inevitably succumbs to long bouts of depression, which can be cured only by the next onslaught of rush translations with extremely brutal deadlines.

### 3. Translator's Agoraphobia Panic Disorder

Agoraphobia means in Old Greek "fear of open spaces". In particular when translators have no work and nobody is reading their stupid blogs either, they are reluctant to leave their damp basement office or hot and dusty attic office where they are still able to experience a measure of safety in what is also known in professional literature as "translator's protective cocoon".

Although most translators are equipped these days with a cell phone and they could easily transfer their office line to their cell phone and keep compulsively checking the junk e-mails on the same cell phone while for example checking out the produce at the Farmers Market, or browsing in bookstores, they refuse to do that. The truth is, they feel that there is a purple sign on their forehead, which says "I am a total loser", and since everybody would be able to read that purple sign, they shun open spaces where other people could be present and prefer to stay in the darkness of their "safe cave".

### 4. The I-Need-To-Lower-My-Rates Symptom

Translators who are chronic TD sufferers often come to the conclusion expressed in the title of the symptom above once they realize that they are indeed total losers who are not worthy even the few cents that people used to be willing to

pay them for their translations. Since they also have to compete with free machine translation, the threshold for lowering the cost is pretty low in the case of freelance translators. Needless to say, this does not help things much either.

Translators who are obsessed with the thought that they need to lower their rates sometime ask for advice on blogs of other translators, but they believe that other translators are actively conspiring against them if they are advised to stick to their guns and demand a rate that actually enables economical survival.

**5. The I-Need-To-Find-A-Safe-Job Syndrome**

During the last stage of TD, some translators, usually the younger ones, create new resúms and start looking for another job. For most translators, this is an impossibility because, let's face it, most translators are able to do only one thing, namely translate, and some of them not very well. But there are a few among them who do have some other marketable skills, and if they can in fact find another job in this economy, any job at all, they can sometime snap out of their dementia once they realize that it's a big world out there, baby, and you can try doing other things.

But most of them have no other discernible marketable skills, and thus they have no choice but to keep doing what they have been doing for the last decade, or two, or three, or more.

Unfortunately, there is really no help for these poor people. There are drugs that one can take to control TD, but this only means that the disease is temporarily suppressed, and that it is only waiting to rear its ugly head again when the effects of the anti-TD medications have worn off.

