

language la langue idioma word to the wise 五言 Sprache

MBA grad translates love of language
into business venture

by Keith Norbury

BY THE TIME she was four, Ottawa-born-and-raised Catherine Bedeski, MBA '05, was already fluent in Mandarin and English. So naturally, her Taiwanese mother and American father decided to enroll her in French immersion.

"Languages have always come easily to me. My parents instilled the importance of being multi-lingual and multi-cultural," says Bedeski. "Hearing English and Chinese at home, I absorbed its rhythms and meanings before I could speak them. I don't even remember becoming fluent in French because I was so young when I started." She has since picked up perfect fluency in Spanish and Japanese, as well.

The surprise, therefore, is not that Bedeski would eventually become a professional translator and start her own burgeoning translation company in Seattle, but that her route to the career would meander through other interests before landing on this first passion.

Despite Bedeski's language proficiency, becoming a translator was not her original career ambition. She studied electrical and computer engineering at UVic, earning a degree in 2003. But after a few co-op placements, she realized that she wanted to look beyond engineering.

"Going in, I was focused on the technology side of things," Bedeski recalls. "I didn't realize that a company was made up of so many different areas — like the finance and the marketing. That's when I decided that I wanted to go into business."

So she enrolled in UVic's MBA program, citing its non-traditional specializations and small class sizes as determining factors, and knowing these would allow her to define her own career rather than the other way around.

Shortly after earning her MBA in 2005, Bedeski moved to Seattle to work for Microsoft as a business analyst and ultimately a senior financial analyst. Then in 2010, she went on maternity leave, and began looking for a way to support herself while caring for her daughter at home.

After stints teaching violin and editing from home, she took the leap in 2012 and founded her own translation company, Progengo LLC, which is where she really applied what she learned at UVic's business school. Today she matches her clients — which include Microsoft, Amazon and Washington State government agencies — with about 100 translation contractors.

While Bedeski herself has certifications from Washington

State's Department of Health and Social Services to interpret French and Spanish, her company's roster of contractors provides translation services for many other languages, including Russian, German, Korean and certain Indian dialects. Services include translating written documents but also interpreting spoken language.

Her work in the social services sector, which is primarily interpretation, is particularly important to her. Her day-to-day work often involves non-English speakers who rely on these services to survive in the US. Bedeski's past work and reputation has gained her clients in Seattle and around the world. Her work has taken her into medical facilities and schools, as well as the entertainment industry and high-tech sector, where she has served as a conference interpreter for visiting delegations and teams at Fortune 500 companies. (A personal highlight: Bedeski was also a simultaneous interpreter for music legends Amadou & Mariam when they performed in Seattle.)

"One challenge that applies to all industries is to keep up with all the terminology, because language is constantly evolving," Bedeski says. "I try my best to keep up in my languages by continuing to travel, constantly reading to learn new words and



Photo: Guoxin Gong

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idioms and listening to the radio in French, Spanish, Chinese, English and Japanese any chance that I can."

Much of Bedeski's time now is spent on the business end instead of actual translation, work that involves vetting the interpreters, including personal interviews, to ensure their credentials and abilities are up to snuff.

For the most part, she has received rave reviews — on Yelp.com, often the bane of an entrepreneur's existence, and elsewhere. She even received a People Love Us on Yelp Award in 2016, an honour she didn't know was coming.

"I'm particularly proud about that," she says.

More than pride, her business provides her with a good income and the feeling that she's empowering people to communicate effectively.

"I get a lot of work," she says. "Sometimes it comes in waves. But I'm comfortable and I'm happy. And I never knew I could do that while running my own business." ■