# TRANSLATION ACES NEWS

**JUNE 2012**
or
**♦ VI.MMXII ♦**

We just can't wait till 12/12/12 to make another *hullabaloo* (see our OCTOBER 2011 newsletter feature story) about numbers and symbols, starting with the Romans who lent us more than their ears.
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*Roman* numerals, based on only seven letters of the Roman alphabet (**I, V, X, L, C, D** and **M**), were originally Etruscan symbols with no zero, and use was mostly abandoned in the 1300s in favor of Arabic numerals. Today, Roman numerals are still used in minor applications such as lists, outlines, clock and watch faces, page numberings in book forwards or prologues, names of successive political or religious leaders, such as royals or popes, or progeny of parents with identical names, chords in music, some copyright dates, numbering certain annual events, such as the Superbowl or the Olympics, movie sequels or building cornerstones.

**TRANSLATION ACES** WAS FOUNDED IN MCMXXXVII.

## MORE-OR-LESS CONFUSED ABOUT +/-?

If you find **nonplus** rather confusing, read on. Some think the "non" in **nonplus** means "not" and assume that to be **nonplussed** is to be calm or poised -- when just the opposite is true. In Latin, "*non plus*" means "no more." In French, it means "no more, no further, or neither" [as in "Me, neither"]; when **nonplus** appeared in English in the 1500s, it was used as a synonym for the noun **quandary**. If you were at a **nonplus,** you were at an impasse in an argument and could add no more. Ten years later, **nonplus** came to be used as a verb and today is often used in participial form, meaning **perplexed** or **bewildered.**

## THE ODDS ARE ONE IN A ...

How much is a **billion**? It may depend on whom you ask! **Billion** was borrowed from French in the late 1600s to indicate the number 1 million raised to the power of two, or a million million — a number represented by a 1 followed by 12 zeroes. However, the French later changed their naming structures so that a billion became a thousand million (in scientific notation, written $10^9$ or 1 followed by nine zeroes), and a trillion became a thousand thousand million (or a million million, the old **billion**). The French returned to the old system, but American speakers of English adopted the new one in the 1800s. And in Britain, the new system became popular in the 1950s, though the older sense is still sometimes used there as well. In some countries in South Asia, a **billion** is known as 100 *crore* (10 million rupees, e.g.). Our **billion** is called a *milliard* in Russia, while their billion is our trillion. In Germany, a billion is also a *Milliarde*. Greece may have a *myriad* (10,000) of financial problems while Norway and Sweden, a 10,000-meter mile is a *myriameter*, usually called a *mil*; land surveys in the UK may define a 10,000 $m^2$ area as a *myriad*, while China's system, each number may be increased by a *myriad* (萬 wàn), or 10,000.

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### ♦ THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHT ♦

We translated a community health center's informational brochures, forms and instructions for outpatient appointments, medical exams, procedures and preparation directions.

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◆ **FEATURE** ◆ **Lingua Quiz!**

1.    What's a **GOOGOL**?
(a)    A grotesque human or animal figure carved on a building's exterior
(b)    The digit 1 followed by 100 zeroes
(c)    The Internet company you wish you'd invented

2.    Which systems use alphabetic numerals?
(a)    Abjad (Arabic alphabet)
(b)    Armenia
(c)    Cyrillic
(d)    Greek
(e)    Georgian
(f)    Hebrew

3.    Where were **counting rods** used before the **abacus?**
(a)    China
(b)    Japan
(c)    Korea
(d)    Babylonia
(e)    Vietnam
(f)    Easter Island

**ANSWERS:**

3.    (a), (b), (c) and (e)
2.    All of them!
1.    (b): coined in 1938 by a 9-year-old nephew of mathematician Edward Kasner, it's also the number of subatomic particles in the visible universe, or the number of hypothetically possible chess moves.

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