

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE 01: TRANSLATION

Translation

The conversion of a written text into a second language.

Source Language

The language of the original text from which a translation is made.

Target Language

The language into which a text is translated.

Interpreting

Also known as “interpretation,” this is the translation of spoken language.



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It is often said that language is the last barrier in global business. Correct or not, this homily speaks to the unavoidable fact that to do business in a foreign country, or to address a market in a foreign language requires specialized linguistic and cultural knowledge.

To this end, translation is the essence of global business. In current parlance, those involved in global enterprises often speak of **localization**, which is the process of making any information product appropriate to a foreign locale. (See *Best Practices Guide 04: Web Localization*) However, at the heart of any such effort is the necessity of converting a text from one language to another.

Merely speaking a second language does not qualify anyone to be a professional translator. Translators work in what are known as **language pairs**, consisting of a source language and a target language. A translation that is done by someone who lacks native fluency in the target language is not reliable for anything but informational purposes—if that. Furthermore, translators tend to specialize in various subject matters rather than translating just anything. Beyond this, a professional translator has extensive training and experience in translating, which in essence requires the ability to think in two different languages. Translators don't translate words, they translate ideas in context.

A clear understanding of the translation process on the part of the client is extremely important. Translation agencies such as InterNation serve to facilitate the process as well as to educate their clients. Knowledge of the following steps will help you to ensure excellent results and save time and money. The steps outlined below describe an industry standard process used in the translation of larger texts. However, the process can be tailored to suit smaller projects.

Step 1. Preparation. The first step in any translation project is to prepare the source document and deliver it to the translation agency or translator for a **pre-translation review**. This essential step will allow the experts to familiarize themselves with the text and to identify any potential complications in advance. If you are preparing a new text for translation, note that you will obtain the best results by writing clear, simple sentences and refraining from using idioms or other expressions specific to the source language that may not translate clearly. Jokes, puns and figures of speech translate badly or not at all. In all instances, it is important to ensure that the source text is complete, and free of errors and omissions. While it is possible to make changes to the source text—known as author's alterations or “A.A.'s”—during the translation process, it is not advisable. Just as important, is a clear and thorough explanation of the intended use of the text. A translation for subtitles for instance, requires different treatment than one of a written text (See *Best Practices 03: Subtitles*). Samples of other translations are very useful, as is all available client-approved reference material in the target language.

Colors and Graphics

Just as the wrong words can be offensive, nonsensical or misleading, so can inappropriate graphics and design, including color. This is another reason to review your project completely with the appropriate experts.

Units of Measure

Conversions to and from the metric system must be undertaken for linear measurements, area, volume, weight, pressure, temperature, stress, power, energy, force, torque and any other units of measure.

Lose the Pork

In the Western world, the piggy bank is a sign of thriftiness. Alas, the same cannot be said of the Islamic world. A picture may be worth thousand words... but are they the right thousand words?



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Step 2. Scope of work/Cost estimation. Typically, translation costs are based on the word count of the target document. Thus, until the translation is complete, it is not possible to know the exact cost. A given English text will expand in many other languages. In Romance languages for instance, the expansion factor is typically between 20 and 30 percent. However, based upon an agreed upon per word rate, and an accurate word count for the source text, it is possible to give a fairly accurate estimate of the total cost. Editing and proofreading costs are typically based on an hourly rate, and their costs can usually be quoted accurately upon a review of the source and target texts. Finally, project management itself is a value addition. The subject matter will also have a tremendous effect on the price. Technical content requires specialized knowledge on the one hand, but use of repeated terminology and limited vocabulary may allow for some cost savings. Marketing language is perhaps the most deceptive with respect to apparent cost. As explained in Step 1 above, the use of idiomatic expressions is problematic. However, beyond this, some seemingly simple, non-idiomatic expressions just do not translate; “Just do it,” for example.

Step 3. Pre-translation. While a single translator and an editor can handle small projects, in the case of larger projects, InterNation will organize a team of pre-qualified linguists, consisting of multiple translators, at least one editor, and at least one proofreader. In all instances, projects are closely supervised by a project manager. The material will be carefully evaluated during a pre-translation review organized by the project manager. In such instances, pre-translation often includes implementation of **glossary management** or **terminology management** to provide for consistency and economy. In the case of large volume work with repetitive terminology, such efforts reduce the immediate project cost and the subsequent costs of repeat projects. Just as importantly, terminology management provides a legacy of knowledge that can be leveraged on subsequent projects, providing tremendous cost savings, as well as accuracy and consistency. InterNation can handle files of any type, and extract text to be translated from any native file format. Typically translators prefer to work in standard word processing formats such as Microsoft Word, or with translator desktop tools (See **translation memory** below). Finally, as explained above, marketing language poses a special problem and typically requires extensive cultural consulting and often the creation of original copy or a campaign that conforms to the material realities of a foreign locale and the sensibilities of its population. This kind of cultural sensitivity, which is essential to any successful marketing effort, can only be affected by people with native experience of the locale.

Step 4. Translation. Here is the heart of the matter in which the translator or translators do their work. If the work includes previously translated material, the translator or team may employ **translation memory** to speed the process and reduce cost. These specialized applications allow incorporation of terminology management data as well as for the leveraging of previously translated material when available. In some instances, **machine translation** may be employed as a first step, followed by a post-translation check by a qualified human translator. (See *Best Practices Guide 06: Computer Aided Translation.*)

Step 5. Editing. In all instances however, only by passing the material before multiple sets of eyes can one ensure an error-free product. If the text is relatively small, a single translator will execute the first draft.

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*Merek R. Press
Supervisor
Jaros, Baum & Bolles
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The translator or project manager passes the target text to an editor who reviews the text against its source for errors and omissions, and checks it for grammatical and stylistic errors. Having returned the marked-up text to the translator, the project manager or the editor him/herself then reviews the suggested changes with the translator, who implements the appropriate changes in the draft, creating a consensus of opinion between both parties.

Step 6. Client Review. Whenever possible, it is advisable for the client to review the edited draft in-house. Any suggested changes will be discussed with the editor and translator, and then implemented.

Step 7. Proofreading. It is always prudent for a third qualified linguist with a “fresh set of eyes” proof the final draft for typographical, spelling, punctuation and formatting errors. In the case of a translation that has been typeset or published for the Web, this step is imperative.

Post-translation

Many translation projects also require treatment of the text beyond translation. This can include electronic publishing for print or for the Web, subtitling, voice replacement or narration recording. Again, a consideration of the intended use of the text is imperative to a successful translation.

In the event that your document requires typesetting or other post-translation treatment, the text is passed on to a qualified typesetter or designer. The final output is checked once again by a qualified proofreader. When possible, it is always advisable for the client to provide a final, independent review.

Regional Dialects

There are at least twenty varieties of Spanish in common use today. A translation done specifically for Mexico will not likely be acceptable in Spain or Argentina. Other languages that require regional adaptation include French (France and Canada are the major locales, but there are others), Portuguese (Brazil and Portugal) and Chinese. The last requires that one distinguish between: Hong Kong, where Cantonese is spoken and where the traditional character set is used; Taiwan, where Mandarin is spoken and the traditional character set is used; and the People’s Republic (the PRC, or “mainland”) where Mandarin is spoken but the simplified character set is used.

InterNation, Inc. provides a full spectrum of foreign language services to a Fortune 1000 clientele. Services include translation, Web localization, electronic publishing, interpreting, subtitling and voice replacement for audio and video.

Our staff is dedicated to producing the highest quality work on time and on budget.

This guide is one of a series provided as a resource to current and prospective clients.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.