



# FIVE TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSLATION

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# TRANSLATION TIPS

When it comes to translating documents, you want to do it right. Any document that is important for your employees or customers to understand should be translated into their native language, so they understand it. There are several things to consider when translating a document. This e-book is going to help you understand some translation terminology and who the key players are, why you should include professional translators in the translation process, the legal requirements for translating documents, and who might need translation services.



## Terminology in Translation

In the language industry there are translators and interpreters. It is common for people to confuse the roles of translators and interpreters. For clarification, translators work with the written word and interpreters work with the spoken word. For example, if you are at a hospital and need language assistance to speak with your doctor, you would need an interpreter. If you are an HR manager and you want your employee manuals translated from English to Spanish, you would need a translator.

Many translators and interpreters are certified. The American Translator's Association (ATA) has certification for several language pairs. Interpreter certification can be done through the Certified Medical Interpreter (CMI) exam and state court certification procedures, among others. There are several languages, however, that do not have certifications because the languages are less common.

There are several helpful things to know about having a document translated. Translators usually charge per word or, in languages like German, where one word contains several "words," the translator would charge by character or page. If you are going to have a document translated, it is best to use editable documents, such as Microsoft (MS) Word, MS Excel, and MS Access for the source document (the document that you want translated). If the source document is a PDF or an image, typically the translator would charge per page or image, or wait until the translation is complete to give you a final word count and invoice. The translator would also charge for the time it took to convert the PDF or image file to an editable text, which is why it is in your best financial interest to have the source document be an editable one.

There are also a few good things to know about interpretation. On-site interpreters typically charge per hour plus round-trip mileage. Telephonic or video interpreters typically charge per hour. Most interpreters have a minimum number of hours they charge per appointment if they are a freelancer, because they have to make sure they have a certain amount of time available for the appointment, so they do not have to leave early so they can make it to their next appointment. This ensures that the client has the interpreter for the entire appointment, and the interpreter gets paid for a reasonable amount of time.

There are also Language Service Providers, or LSPs. LSPs are agencies that provide translation and interpretation services, but they are not all equal. There are low-rent LSPs, whose website might claim that they have “high quality” translators and interpreters, when in reality they are referring to anyone who claims to be bilingual, and who may not necessarily have any certifications, professional training, or even proficiency in the language pair they claim to speak and/or write.

There are several reliable LSPs in the market, such as ETS Translation Services. They only hire certified interpreters and translators when the language pair allows it and, at minimum, have a screening process as part of their onboarding process for new translators and interpreters. A good LSP also has a translation process that involves more than one translator working on a project.

The LSP will take the time to have one professional translator translate your document, another professional translator edit your document, and typically a third person who is fluent in the target language proofread the document to make sure there are no grammatical, formatting, or desktop publishing errors before final delivery. The majority of the translators and interpreters working for the quality LSPs have higher rates because their quality is so good that there is a high demand for their services.

## Why Hire a Professional Instead of Machine Translation or Your Neighbor who is Bilingual?

Being bilingual does not make someone qualified to be a translator. For example, it is common to know someone who was raised learning the English language who still confuses their, they're, and there. There are also extensive English grammatical rules and guidelines to follow, such as whether or not to use the Oxford (aka serial) comma. A professional translator knows common grammar rules, such as those established in the Chicago Manual of Style for the English language. Simply speaking a language does not make someone a professional translator in that language. Using machine translation (MT) to translate documents is even worse than using someone who is not a professional translator.

While MT is useful when you are looking up individual words, you still have to approach the translation with caution. It is best to use a website that is a bilingual dictionary, which gives definitions for the translations, to translate individual words. For example, at the time this e-book was written, a well-known search engine translated paper jam, where paper gets jammed in a printer, as mermelada de papel in Spanish, which literally translates as jam (fruit spread) made from paper. The translation errors get even worse when you add more words and make complete sentences. Asking machine translation to translate an entire sentence properly is like asking a second grader who struggles with double-digit addition to try to solve a calculus problem - it is not going to end well.



## Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prevents discrimination based on color, gender, national origin, and race. Because language discrimination is a form of national origin discrimination, the same body of law prohibits it. This type of discrimination generally makes it illegal to prefer one language over another. Therefore, the courts, medical providers, and employers are particularly obligated to translate documents and, on occasion, interpret hearings, medical visits, or meetings for those individuals who do not speak the same language as the court, medical provider, or employer.



## Diversity in the U.S.

There is a lot of talk about English being the official language of the U.S. The truth is that the U.S. does not have an official language. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2016, the most spoken languages in the United States were English, Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Arabic, and French. Below are some interesting statistics about the diversity of the US population in 2016:

- In the U.S., 229.7 million Americans speak only English in their homes; 40.5 million Americans speak Spanish at home.
- Worldwide, Spanish was the second-most-spoken language in 2018, with about 442 million speakers, beating the number of English speakers (378 million).
- The number of Americans who speak Chinese at home (both Cantonese and Mandarin) was close to 3.4 million. It ranks third in the U.S., but is the most spoken language in the world, with 1.3 billion who speak it at home.
- Tagalog is one of the official languages of the Philippine Islands. 1.7 million Americans speak Tagalog (and Filipino) at home.
- Vietnamese is spoken by 1.5 million Americans. Arabic is spoken by 1.2 million Americans.
- French is the seventh most spoken language in the U.S., with 1.2 million Americans who speak it at home.

As you can see, if you want to reach someone in a language they understand, English may not be your best choice. You may want to do some research on your target geographic area, client base, or group of employees; find out what the major languages are that they speak; and have your documents translated into those languages. This will guarantee that you are getting your message across.

## Preparing Your Document for Translation

Once you are ready to have your document translated, there are a few things you need to do to make sure that the translation process will be seamless. First, you need to make sure that your document is ready to be translated and no other changes need to be made to it. Once it goes to the translator, having changes made to the source document are burdensome to the translation team as well as the authors. If you know you will be making changes to the document throughout the process, make sure to time- and date-stamp each version and mark changes from one version to the next.

Second, when you receive the translation from your translation team, if you have questions about the translation, discuss it with the translation team, do not make changes to it on your own. Making changes to the translation without discussing it with the translators will cause issues with the quality of the translation and likely void any responsibility your translation team has for that translation. It is also important to know that a translator who asks questions is a good translator. No one reads your document closer than the translator, so a translator may, naturally, have questions.

Third, before your document goes to print, always have it proofread by someone who is a native of the target language. Between the translation process and the print process the document is likely to be manipulated for last-minute changes (headings, captions, word changes) which can affect the quality of the translation.

Fourth, think about creating an in-house glossary of terms that are important to your company and share it with the translation team so they can create a glossary of translation terms. This helps keep your documents more consistent. You'll also want to work with your translation team to ensure that your translations are consistent with regard to writing style (do we use the Oxford comma or not?) and glossary.

## Do It Right

Translating a document is a process that should be taken seriously and not taken for granted. Translate any document that is important for your employees and customers to understand, even though it may cost a little bit. Make sure that your translation team is qualified for the task; do not trust your message to machine translations or a person who is not a professional translator. Also, make sure your team and your document are prepared for the translation process so you can do it right the first time around.

**For professional translation services or more information, contact ETS Translation Services at [info@etstranslationservices.com](mailto:info@etstranslationservices.com).**

