

Languages of the Wider World

SOAS-UCL Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning

HOW TO TRANSLATE EFFICIENTLY

An essential requirement for a successful translation is a careful analysis of the Source Text.

Read the whole passage first and ask yourself the following questions:

- What type of text is it? (Letter, newspaper article, extract from a book, etc.)
- Is the author of the Source Text well-known? What are his/her views?
- What is the main topic and who is the intended readership? (This is going to affect your style and register.)
- What is the purpose of the Source Text?
- Are there any ambiguities or obvious mistakes?
- Are there any cultural issues?
- What is the purpose of the translation? Who is the readership of the Target Text (your translation)?

Use markers or felt tips. Circle important points or potential translation problems, such as idiomatic phrases or unknown words.

Document yourself before you start the translation (look up words, check any ambiguities, etc.). Do not limit yourself to bilingual dictionaries. There are many sources of documentation: monolingual dictionaries, glossaries, the internet, newspapers and magazines (these are known as "parallel texts"), professionals or native speakers.

If you usually translate in the same field (literature, business, etc.) or if you keep facing the same difficulties, think of building your own multilingual database. There are different ways of doing this:

- Sets of cardboard cards
- A word file
- A "proper" database using Access database software. Using Access gives you the opportunity to present terminological lists in different formats. You can also build up glossaries. Above all, whatever the format, do not forget to include a column to indicate the source of your finding for future reference.

Vocabulary and Spelling

Look up the spelling of proper names.

Be aware of false friends (if in doubt, circle them during the documentation phase and look them up).

Be aware of linguistic variations (British English/American English, Castellano/Latin American, French/Québec, etc.).

Pay attention to registers and levels of formality.

Correct and appropriate syntax/structures and tenses

Noun-verb agreement, singular-plural, word order, gender of nouns (where applicable), compound nouns which are not compounds in the other language, tenses (present, past, future ...)

Do not feel you have to keep to the exact structure of the original sentence. For example, you may need to split up sentences or change the word order.

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Naturalness

Translations should both sound natural and make sense.

In most cases, be consistent in terms of style and terminology.

Use language which keeps to the style and register (formal, informal, neutral) of the Source Text.

Appropriate use of Idioms or Culture-bound Terms

Idioms can rarely be translated word by word. Look them up or ask native speakers (be aware of regionalisms).

For culture-bound terms try to find the nearest equivalent in the target language. If this is not possible, use the original term but with a brief explanation in brackets. If an entire concept needs to be explained, do this through annotations and footnotes. Newspapers and magazines (parallel texts) are good sources of documentation.

Proofreading

Check that you have translated the whole text. Are you sure that you have not forgotten a sentence or a paragraph?

Check your translation for consistency in terms of register and terminology: are specific terms from the Source Text always translated the same way? (This is when terminological databases are useful).

Eliminate any typos and do not forget to run the spellchecker (if you translate using a computer).

Put your translation aside for a few days, if you can. Then, check it again. Make amendments. Then get someone else to check it again for you.

USEFUL LINKS

SOAS-UCL Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning Languages of the Wider World

<http://www.lww-cetl.ac.uk>

CETL Language Learning Workshops

http://www.lww-cetl.ac.uk/learners_workshops.htm

Institute of Translating and Interpreting

<http://www.iti.org.uk/indexMain.html>

The Chartered Institute of Linguists

<http://www.iol.org.uk>

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