



# THE ULTIMATE BUYER'S GUIDE TO TRANSLATION

Translation process, vendors, QA, DTP, tools, tips and more



# **The Ultimate Buyer's Guide to Translation**

*By Translators Family*



*Boutique translation agency: because specialisation matters*

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**Published by:** Translators Family

[www.translatorsfamily.com](http://www.translatorsfamily.com)

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**Ebook ISBN:** 978-83-947178-0-3

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Is your business thinking about translation? Don't do anything until you've read this book. The world of translation services is vast, complex and busy – and although many providers are reputable professionals, it's still easy for an unsuspecting business to be taken for a ride. Some translation providers will promise the world on a shoestring but fail to deliver the quality you need. Others may charge the earth for what turns out to be a fairly mediocre service.

Spotting the good guys requires a practised eye – which is exactly what *The Ultimate Buyers' Guide to Translation* helps you develop. As well as learning to tell the fly-by-night cowboys from the reliable pros, you'll gain an understanding of the translation process, your place in it, and why it's so important to get translation and localisation right.

Clearly written, engaging in tone and accessible to all, this essential guide produced by the experts at Translators Family will make you ready for the translation process and leave you eager to embark on your own localisation adventure.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Globalisation (noun): The process by which businesses or other organisations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.*

*(Source: The Oxford English Dictionary)*

Ours is the age of globalisation. At a time when air travel is cheap, communication is instantaneous irrespective of distance, and a spirit of international collaboration is the order of the day, national borders no longer present an impenetrable obstacle to business operations. From an economic perspective, a client in Warsaw looks no different from one in Paris, London or Moscow.

However, if you try to treat each client exactly the same, from a marketing or service perspective, you're liable to run into problems. Each of these clients may be equally likely to want to buy your product or service – but only if you're willing to treat them as individuals. National borders may be fading away, but cultural and linguistic ones remain alive and well – and these are the real barriers that businesses face today.

Clients want convenience – which means they want to access your services in a language with which they feel familiar and comfortable. They want to feel valued – which means that they want to see that you've put in the effort to adapt to their market. Moreover, they want to feel confident in making a purchase from you – which means that they want to buy from businesses that show professionalism and commitment.

All of this means just one thing: that businesses going global cannot simply copy and paste their existing content into a new market. A business expanding, say, from Germany into Ukraine cannot simply buy a web address ending in .ua, point it at their existing .de website, and call it a day.

What you actually need in cases like this is, in short, translation. Professional, thoughtful translation which, rather than simply converting content word for word, makes the effort to adapt it for a local market, adjusting to clients' expectations and the context in which the content will be seen. When done properly and holistically, this process is known as 'localisation'.

Professional translation and localisation require experience, skill and expert knowledge – but there are many translation providers out there, and some are more reliable than others. If you're unfamiliar with the world of translation, it can be hard to tell the

good guys from the bad. Who can I trust? What results should I expect? Is the deal I'm being offered too good to be true?

Luckily, help is at hand. Over the course of this book, we'll explore different translation and localisation services, define key terms, and offer pointers on how to find the reliable operators and get the best results. By the end, you'll have a much clearer picture of how the industry works and how your business can fit into it. You'll be ready to begin your own globalisation process – and hopefully, as well as becoming more informed, you'll have been entertained and engaged along the way.

Get ready to make the world your oyster. Enjoy!

## Types of translation and localisation services

Before we get into the finer details of how translation works, let's start with a big-picture overview. As we hinted in the introduction, translation is not the only service out there for an international business. There are in fact many different kinds of language and localisation services available, and each one can meet a different set of needs. In this chapter, we'll offer a brief introduction to some of the most common services, explaining how they work and when you might need them.

### Translation

This, of course, is the big one – it's probably why you're reading this book. However, its definition is narrower than you might expect. In the language services industry, the term 'translation' specifically refers to converting written text from one language to another.

Also, when we talk about translation in this book, we'll generally be referring to human translation unless specifically stated otherwise. As you probably already know, automatic machine translation systems do exist – but despite advances in the fields of machine learning and artificial intelligence, they are still completely unsuitable for professional purposes. We'll explain the hows and whys of that in a later chapter.

### Interpreting

Interpreting is commonly conflated with translation – but the nature of the process is quite different. Where a translator works with written text, an interpreter deals with the spoken word. The most obvious place you might have heard an interpreter is on the news, at an international event like a United Nations assembly or in the European Parliament, where an interpreter relays what a foreign politician is saying in real-time.

Many interpreters also work within the justice system, assisting with things like police interviews and court appearances if someone is involved in a case and isn't confident in the local language. Other interpreters assist with things like business negotiations, or even international treaties. In cases like these, you'll often see two-way interpreting happening: a single interpreter mediating between two speakers, working in both directions. This gives us another hint as to the differences between interpreters and translators.

Naturally, accuracy and comprehensibility are just as important to an interpreter as they are to a translator, but interpreters also have to balance a desire for flair and elegance with the need to keep up with the rapid pace of the spoken word. This means that the two roles involve very different skills and requirements – so it's important to be clear about which service you need when outsourcing language services.

### Proofreading, editing and reviewing

And so we move into the thickest, most impenetrable jargon-jungle of all. If you've ever felt confused about the distinction between these three services, don't despair. To be honest, it's rare to find any two providers who agree on the exact definition of each. That's not to say all hope of understanding is lost, however. The key is just to make sure, when

negotiating a deal involving any of these services, that both you and the service provider understand exactly what's required.

Broadly speaking, all three of these services fall under the category of 'making text better'; the difference is really just a matter of the context and scope of the services to be offered. It's generally understood that proofreading is a less extensive service than editing; different people draw the line in different places, but things like spelling, grammar and style checks fall towards the 'proofreader' end of the spectrum, while questions of terminology and content are considered more of an editor's job. A proofreader is handy for doing a final check on a document you're already pretty confident about, or maybe something for internal use only, while an editor is ideal for top-quality, highly visible texts which need to be absolutely perfect in every way. Editing can also be done by subject-matter experts. For example, a medical text can be edited by a medical specialist and a legal text by a lawyer. Technical texts are usually edited by technically trained translators or linguistically experienced engineers.

Reviewing, meanwhile, is a little bit of both of the above, with a few extra services on top. A reviewer might check someone else's translation, correcting things like spelling and readability issues while also confirming that the document is faithful to its original-language version. Alternatively, they might adapt a text for a different market – converting US English to UK English, for example, paying as much attention to cultural references as to putting the 'u' into 'colour'. Whatever their exact role, reviewers are – like proofreaders and editors – an important part of the quality control process when producing or localising documents.

## Copywriting

Don't let the name catch you off guard: copywriters don't *copy* others' *writing*, they *write copy*! 'Copy' in a publishing context means text created from scratch. In other words, if you want some brand new documents written, instead of translating something from a foreign language, a copywriter is the person you want. Maybe you're looking to launch a new product (or a new business entirely); maybe you're entering a new market and want to address your new clients in a style that suits their unique expectations. Whatever the case, if you need something completely fresh, a professional copywriter will produce it quickly and efficiently, with a style and flair that suits your business.

## Subtitling

Localising video for foreign language markets is tough work. In an ideal world, we'd translate every script, re-cast every actor, hire one film crew after another, and re-shoot every video for every language we want it to be seen in. But, of course, that tends not to be a realistic option once you factor in things like financial, logistical and time constraints. Instead, you can hire a translator to work through your video and provide text captions in the translator's native language.

Alternatively, you might want to add subtitles in the video's current language. This is called same-language captioning, and it can be used to improve the accessibility of your video or make it suitable for showing in places where people might not be able to hear the

audio. And once you have same-language subtitles, it's easy to produce a translated version of those subtitles at a later date.

In all of these cases, it's important to remember that subtitling is a specialist job. It's not enough to simply copy the script word for word. You also have to consider issues like the audience's reading speed and how much text will fit on the screen (without obscuring the view). As a result, it's important to make sure you work with someone who can do the job properly. A good agency will help you find a specialist who understands both the proper working method and your own subject matter.

### **Monolingual transcription**

Transcription is a little like subtitling, but in a different format and for a different purpose. To transcribe a video or audio clip is, in its simplest form, to write down the words exactly as they are spoken. The end result is a script that can be read entirely separately from the original clip while still making sense – and with no information missing. This stands in contrast to subtitling, where it's occasionally necessary to paraphrase a little for the sake of readability. Transcription can be used for a vast range of purposes by anyone who works with audio or video. Just to give two examples, it can be the first step in translating a video clip, or it can provide a text version of a live speaker's presentation, to be handed out as supplementary material during or after the speech. Transcripts can even be used in archiving. Just associate them with previously recorded audio or video clips in your database, and you have the makings of a machine-readable, searchable media library.

### **Transcreation**

Sometimes you want more than a simple translation job, especially if you're looking for top-quality marketing material with a local flair. But if hiring a copywriter doesn't sound quite what you need, you might be looking for something that isn't completely divorced from the original text. This is where transcreation specialists shine. They walk the fine line between preserving the style and content of the source material, and creating something for a new market with different standards. Transcreation is a creative and demanding job requiring the very best of translation and copywriting skills, and consequently it can often produce the very best results. Transcreation is ideal for front-line marketing material such as websites, product brochures and advertising campaigns.

### **Website and software localisation**

Localisation (or localization, depending on the locale) is defined as the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets. This means that website and software localisation is not simply translation, but rather a complex process that involves other tasks such as software engineering or web development, testing, transcreation, search engine optimisation (SEO), and desktop publishing. The content of the localised software or website must 'speak to' the end user.

This is a particularly tricky task. This isn't to say that translation is an easy job: quite the opposite. It's a highly skilled profession that takes years of training and experience to

master. However, projects such as these can add additional layers of complexity requiring an even broader skill set, and so they often demand an entire team of specialists to complete.

Giant multimedia projects are always a massive undertaking in their own right, so it's easy to see why adapting them into a new language can require just as much work as creating them in the first place. In fact, projects like these can involve all of the services we've mentioned above, and more besides. Unlike printed material, web and software translation doesn't end with a Word document or an InDesign file. At the very least, interface strings have to be updated, software must be recompiled, and some amount of testing is usually necessary as well. Sometimes more extensive work is needed. It may be necessary to overhaul software to support a new character set or reading direction, for example. This is why projects like these require everyone involved to give their very best. The time and effort involved can sometimes be enormous, but the end result – a shiny new software package, ready to impress a whole new market – can make it all worthwhile.

## **Multilingual SEO**

SEO – short for search engine optimisation – is the art of tweaking a website's content to ensure that search engine algorithms value the site more highly. This can involve changes to the 'visible' text on a site, like headers and body text, to make it more detailed and relevant. It can also involve updating a website's 'metadata': the hidden machine-readable text which describes information about a page, such as its subject and relevant keywords. Search engines and other computer programs use metadata to learn about a website and understand its purpose, so optimising a page's metadata is essential if you want to get the best possible results.

SEO is a key part of website localisation, but it requires a very different skillset from translation or web development. However, a professional, well-equipped translation agency may well offer SEO services alongside its other localisation options, saving you the effort of having to source another external provider for the job.

## **Desktop publishing**

While not strictly a localisation service in itself, desktop publishing (DTP) is a service offered by many translation agencies. A translated document can often look very different from its source – it might have a substantially longer or shorter word count, or an entirely different character set or even reading direction. Most texts therefore require a new DTP pass after translation – so why not include it in the overall translation service? Many businesses appreciate the convenience and cost-efficiency associated with this option.

## **PART 1 – TRANSLATION: THE BASICS**

Now that you understand some of the key terms a little better, let's move on to an overview of the translation industry. In this section, you'll learn why translation is so important and what skills are involved in making it work.

As you read, remember that you can always jump back to the introduction to the services to remind yourself of how a given service works. We've also scattered hyperlinks throughout some chapters so that if you find a particular subject especially interesting, you can tap or click to go to another chapter discussing it in more detail.

## Why is the translation industry booming and what does this mean for your business?

The world is shrinking. We live in a time when information can travel the world in the blink of an eye, flying between Hong Kong and New York, Sydney and Moscow in a matter of seconds. The biggest companies in each industry no longer dominate just a single market but the entire world. For any business with global aspirations, there is one major barrier to global success: communication. With so many languages being spoken, sometimes within a single company, it's a top priority for many businesses to find a way to bridge the language gap. Thanks to this increasing need, the global translation services industry is now a multi-billion-dollar market, helping businesses and other organisations around the globe communicate clearly and concisely. As long as communication remains a priority for governments, businesses, schools, hospitals, courtrooms and other organisations, the translation industry will continue to thrive. But what can other businesses learn from this huge boom in translation, and how can it benefit you?

### Opening borders, broadening horizons

If the growth of the translation industry shows us anything, it's that global is local nowadays. The traditional barriers that prevented many companies from expanding overseas are collapsing, with lightning-fast international communication, global logistics easier to manage than ever before, and more and more companies spreading their wings. The boom in the translation world merely reflects this growing trend towards increased globalisation in a whole range of industries. This has opened up exciting new possibilities in emerging markets such as China, Brazil or Russia, where huge populations are enjoying increased affluence and the purchasing power this affords, and where many companies are finding an ideal location for outsourcing manufacturing and production.

Increasing affluence has not just boosted demand for products and services. People travel more frequently and further than ever before thanks to cheaper transportation, particularly flights, and the population dispersal of the 21st century, where families are sometimes separated by continents thanks to increasing career mobility. In the last hundred years, long-distance travel has gone from being the preserve of the ultra-rich to an accessible service in many communities. Tourism is a huge industry, with many people choosing to take their holidays abroad, and many travelling to study or work far from their homes and families. In the transportation sector, engineering, manufacturing and logistics are thriving in response to this demand. But it's not only the travel and tourism industry that has benefited from such mobile populations. The oil and gas industry has benefited massively, and green energy solutions are growing in popularity. Dispersed communities now keep in touch online or by phone, benefiting the communications industry and the IT sector. Medical tourism is a big business, with people travelling to other countries to access medical treatment that is unavailable in their home country, or to take advantage of cheaper services. The legal sector has become increasingly complex, with a growth in demand for expertise in international law. All of these industries rely heavily on translation for the daily running of their businesses.

Political trends are also reflecting this increased sense of global community. With the EU's open borders policy, most Europeans are free to live and work in other member countries, increasing the diversity of many organisations. Indeed, the EU itself, along with other multinational organisations as varied as the WHO, the UN, NATO and plenty of other organisations such as NGOs have huge translation requirements even just among their own staff. Bilateral and multilateral free-trade agreements proliferate, facilitated by organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, meaning cross-cultural business exchanges are now standard.

### **Finding a partner**

It's clear that companies looking to expand operations overseas will find themselves in good company, and that there are plenty of translation agencies around to help with the details. If your business has the drive and imagination to succeed, the world is your oyster.

With this explosion in global business, particularly in the translation sector, companies now have a huge selection of translation agencies and teams to choose from, which means there are plenty of high-quality translation services vendors offering great prices – if you can navigate the pitfalls of finding them. Look for translation teams that offer other services on top of translation, including localisation or globalisation services, which are vital if you want to succeed abroad.

(As a reminder, localisation is the process of adapting a text to a specific foreign market, taking into account the cultural, linguistic and social customs of that market. As the name suggests, globalisation aims to modify texts so that they are appropriate for a global audience.)

There are lots of other useful bolt-ons offered by translation services companies, from copywriting and transcreation to web or graphic design, DTP and project management, which means companies can outsource more than just translation to a single vendor.

### **Faster and faster**

Another great change that the 20th century's technological boom has brought to business is speed. Not only do we now do business worldwide, we do it faster than ever before, mainly thanks to the power of the Internet. This means that you can grow your business more quickly than was once possible, using an online model to keep costs low. Websites are replacing print media, e-commerce is replacing brick and mortar shops, and social networking offers the opportunity to connect with clients in a highly personalised way. Many businesses are now based completely online, with negligible overheads meaning greater profits. Online businesses also have the upper hand when it comes to expanding overseas. For some businesses, expanding into foreign markets is as simple as translating your website, which means that there is much less risk to taking your enterprise overseas than there used to be.

Many translation services companies operate online, so you can manage the entire process, from sourcing a vendor to receiving completed translations, from the comfort of your office. With vast amounts of information just a click away, coupled with powerful

new translation software and speedy communications, companies can expect a quicker turnaround and exceptional levels of fluency and accuracy. There's nothing to lose and a whole world to gain when you invest in quality translation, which is why so many other businesses are doing it.

Investing in translation is a safe bet – but there's still the thorny issue of telling the good providers from the bad. Understanding which providers are trustworthy requires a little knowledge about how the translation process works, so before we show you how to find the right provider, let's talk a little more about why it matters so much that you do.

## The translation process: Art or science?

Translation is a creative process... isn't it? If you give two equally skilled translators the same text to work on, you'll get two very different results. Each will reflect the individual linguist's experience, professional philosophy and linguistic flair. But meanwhile, any translation agency (or any consultant in business process optimisation) will tell you that it's a process that can be systematised and standardised for maximum efficiency.

In terms of the jobs they do, then, it almost sounds like translators are 'artists' and project managers are 'scientists'. It would be easy for these two perspectives to conflict with each other – so is conflict an inevitable part of the business? Not at all. It would be easy to suggest that the translation industry is constantly engaged in an intractable battle, with translators and their delicate artistic temperaments fighting project managers who want to turn the whole thing into a production line – but the truth is that the two groups can and do work together very well, producing excellent results for end clients. A translation workflow is neither wholly art nor exclusively science – so where do those two categories overlap, and what can be done to make the process as seamless as possible?

### Staying on track

A lot of it comes down to project management. A good project manager will recognise that, while translation projects always share some similar features, no two jobs are ever exactly the same. A good project manager will therefore account for a project's unique characteristics when drawing up their expectations for time and budget. The simplest example, of course, is that the word count for a text will affect how long it takes to complete – but there are also questions like complexity of style and content, or whether the client needs extra services like desktop publishing or SEO. We'll look at these kinds of issues in more detail when we talk about the translator's role in making everything go smoothly.

Naturally, it's also important to pick a competent, professional translator. This is made easier by setting professional standards and ensuring that translators adhere to a strict code of conduct. Membership of one or more professional associations is usually a good sign, and of course you want to make sure that your translator has as much experience as possible, in the translation industry in general and in the project's field in particular.

Once we have a clear, comprehensive and realistic plan for a project – many parts of which can be quantified and measured objectively – it's easier for the project manager to organise what comes next. And what does come next? Well, it's all about giving the translator as much support as possible. The project manager should act as the 'middleman' between the translator and the end client, answering questions and passing messages between the two to facilitate clear and efficient communication. The project manager will have one eye on the client's needs – tracking the state of the project through the workflow to ensure on-time delivery, and carrying out quality control if necessary so that the final delivery is the best it can be – and one eye on the translator's needs, sourcing any reference material the client may be able to provide and taking care of all the backstage administrative tasks so the translator can focus on what they do best: translation.

## Linguists at work

So on that note, what exactly can the translator do to keep things running like clockwork? As with the project management side of things, a lot of it can be done before the first word of a translation hits the screen. Just as the project manager has a responsibility to set realistic deadlines and budgets, the translator has a responsibility to check those constraints and make sure they can be met. They should check over the document to be translated, identifying any potential issues before they start so that these can be flagged to the client, clarified and resolved by the project manager.

What sort of issues might these be? As we said earlier, it is of course important to consider the content and style of a text, especially if deadlines are tight. Word counts are often a decent guide to how long a translation will take, but they don't tell the whole story. Sometimes you have to take the extra time to get your terminology or phrasing exactly right. A particularly complex technical or legal project, for example, might take much longer to complete than a more general document of comparable size. Part of being a good translator is knowing that the objectively quantifiable elements of a text don't always tell the whole story – and using a combination of intuition, experience and reasoning to judge what kind of work is needed and how long it will take.

A professional translator will also check the source document carefully for potential errors, omissions or unclear wording. Translation is all about carrying over *meaning* from one language to another – so if the meaning is unclear in the original, the translation can hit a roadblock until the issue is resolved. Similarly, it's not unheard of for a source document to contain mistakes of one sort or another, be they anything from typographical errors to incorrect statements of fact – after all, everyone makes mistakes from time to time. Once again, a good translator will spot these and flag them up for the project manager to relay to the client. As a result, one nice side-effect of this process is that having a document translated into a new language will often also improve the quality of the source-language text!

In other words, dividing tasks up between different individuals lets them focus on the things they do best. The more space a translator has to do their job, the better they can do it. Rather than clashing over their respective philosophies, the artist and the scientist can complement one another – both of them working to your benefit.

## Why machine translation just doesn't cut it

If you ever want to irritate a translator, the first thing that you should know is that they're like sleeping bears: they may look cuddly and harmless, but they can be dangerous when they're roused. But if you feel like taking your life into your own hands one of these days, try asking one – a translator, that is, not a grizzly – whether they use machine translation.

Machine translation is in fact the bane of professional translators everywhere. Superficially, it can look like a tempting proposition to businesses who want to go global on the cheap. Machine translation is popular, ubiquitous and either cheap or entirely free these days – which can lead to companies rushing out machine-translated documents for the sake of speed and cost-efficiency, assuming they'll be 'good enough'.

Well, they won't. We're sorry to be so blunt about it, but machine translation is not even slightly adequate for commercial purposes yet – and there are good reasons to believe it never will be. Here's why.

### How the machines work

Machine translation systems tend to break down into one of two basic approaches, which for the purposes of this chapter we'll call 'rules-based' and 'experience-based'. A rules-based machine translation system knows the grammatical structure of the languages it works in, and has a (usually very large) bilingual dictionary which allows it to translate one word at a time, then rearrange the translated document into what it thinks are correct sentences. You might think that this approach would produce at least passable results, but in fact translations produced in this way are often all but unintelligible. Without an understanding of things like meaning or idiom – the way that language is actually used in practice – rather than the ways in which grammar books rigidly categorise it – the text they produce feels unnatural and is often simply inaccurate.

Experience-based systems take a different approach. They start by scanning a huge volume of bilingual material – usually websites and other online content – and use a sort of fuzzy matching system to see how a given word, phrase or sentence has been translated in the past. For short passages, this can sometimes work reasonably well. A reader looking at the translated document might get a general understanding of what it's trying to say, which makes systems like these moderately useful for the casual reader looking for basic information rather than high-quality content. Systems like this remain unreliable, though, because they still can't handle subtle nuances of language. In the end, experience-based systems are still translating blindly, without any understanding of what the original author actually meant. And as a result, they're still entirely vulnerable to the kinds of errors that a professional human translator would never make.

### How the professionals do it

Compare and contrast with human translators. A human translator, given a document to work on, will first read the document from start to finish, making an effort to understand and analyse not just each word, not just each isolated sentence, but the complete flow of

meaning throughout the document as a whole. They will think about tone, terminology, style and purpose. A professional will also then ask themselves, “Am I, personally, qualified to handle this specific document?” Provided the answer is “Yes”, they’ll get started.

A human translator pays attention to more than just literal meaning. They think about the different connotations that variations on a given sentence might have. They look for ways to phrase text elegantly. They ask themselves whether a target-language reader would fully understand what’s being said. Machine translation systems do none of these things. Even the best systems are utterly incapable of them, in fact, and to date no software program has ever been developed that can even try.

### **The proof of the pudding**

Ultimately, though, machine translation speaks for itself. Even aside from these arguments. Really, try it some time. If you’re ever tempted to use machine translation in your own business, take a few minutes to investigate it first. Pick one of the many free online services out there – we won’t dignify any of them by naming them, but we’re sure you already know of at least one or two – and try translating something from a foreign language website into your own native tongue. Make sure it’s more than a single sentence – use something realistically long and complex, like a news article or an in-depth product description. Click ‘Translate’.

My goodness, that was fast, wasn’t it? Now look at the results. Think about the way they read and how much sense they make (or don’t). If this text was on your company’s website, would you be happy for it to represent you? We suspect not.

So yes, machine translation may sound like a great idea on paper. Free, instant translation sounds too good to be true because, well, it *is* too good to be true. Whatever you save compared with the cost of professional human translation will be more than counteracted by lost clients, annoyed because they don’t trust such poorly written text. Your business deserves better than that – and as we’ll see throughout the rest of this book, the added value human translators offer can make localisation projects a downright pleasant experience. We’re sure you’ll agree that it’s much better than soulless, senseless computer-generated babble.

## Profiling the perfect translator

Now you understand how translation works and why it's so important to rely on human translators rather than machines. But even so, not all translators are created equal. Some are better suited to different types of translation work; a few simply manage to stand head and shoulders above the entire crowd. To round out our introduction to translation, let's learn a bit about the people who actually do this important job, by imagining the best translator in the world. What makes a truly perfect translator?

### More than just fluent

Our first criterion is by far the most important: a professional translator must be a native speaker of their target language. (As a reminder, this is the language that they translate *into*; the 'source' language is the language they translate *from*.) Why is this so important? Simple: being a native-level speaker is the only reliable way to guarantee proper spelling and grammar, a fluent style and more besides. Of course, there are different levels of linguistic skill even among native speakers, so the perfect translator should also be a first-class writer in every respect.

Next, of course, our translator needs to be fluent in their source language. They don't have to be at native level, necessarily, but at the very least we should ask for many years of study and experience, until the translator has perfect comprehension skills and can clearly communicate anything they need to say in that language. Aside from the obvious fact that you need to understand a text before you can translate it, these skills will also help maintain contact with the client, who may be much more comfortable discussing the project in their own native language.

And since we're profiling the *perfect* translator here, why don't we also look for someone with a second source language? There's obviously a limit to the number of possible languages one person can learn to an advanced level, if only because of the time commitment required, but in principle it's entirely possible for a professional translator to have two source languages, particularly if they're closely related. A Danish citizen, for example, might be familiar enough with both Swedish and Norwegian to translate from either.

### Knowing their stuff

The perfect translator should also have some kind of specialist subject knowledge. It's important for them to have the subject area skills to do a given text justice. There are many similarities in rules and approaches for technical texts, for instance, but you need to identify the relevant sub-topic. We can see the importance of this by looking at the example of the pitfalls that await a non-specialist English to Russian translator when translating one single term.

The English word 'tube' has over 20 translations in Russian, depending on context. It can be translated as *трубка* for the term 'display tube' or *лампа* for 'catkin tube', both IT and electronics terms. Another electronics term, 'drift tube', becomes *труба* or *пространство*, but in transportation the Tube becomes *метрополитен*. In the field of construction, *трубопровод* is the right term for a branch tube; while *шланг* is for the

type of rubber tube mentioned in automotive texts. If you're talking about oil and gas, 'soil-sampling tube' should be translated as *керноприёмник*, while the correct term in the domain of agriculture is *почвенный бур*.

It's the same story with most technical terms. The sheer variety of different translations can be baffling, so it's vital your translator knows exactly what they're talking about. However they pick up this kind of knowledge – from past professional experience, from academic training, or simply through their own independent learning – a modern translator is much more valuable if they understand a certain subject in depth. Popular specialist fields include medicine, science, law and technology – but there are as many possible specialisations as there are industries in the world. A translator who specialises in one very specific field with few competitors may be able to command a higher price for their expertise, but if they go too far into their niche, they may also limit themselves too much. The perfect translator, therefore, is someone with both breadth and depth of knowledge. A medical translator, for example, might have a broad understanding of the medical profession as a whole, but have a much deeper knowledge of something more specific, such as pharmaceutical manufacturing.

This, by the way, should tell you that in the real world, identifying your specific 'perfect' translator is a highly context-sensitive business. No single translator will ever be able to take care of every conceivable translation task – so just think about how valuable that makes organised translation teams. We'll talk more about them later in the book.

### **Advanced training**

So far we've talked a lot about knowledge and experience, but we haven't said much about how a translator might acquire them. What specific qualifications might we expect to see on the perfect translator's CV? A bachelor's degree is a good bet, either in a foreign language (presumably their source language) or in their specialist field. If it's the latter, then presumably they picked up the language through some non-academic route. Perhaps they were brought up bilingual by their parents, or else were born in one country and moved to another while still young. Perhaps they've spent some extended time in their source-language country later in life, although in that case we'd want to make sure their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target language is still up to scratch.

Professional experience in their specialist subject is always handy too, and some translators may also have some kind of postgraduate qualification in translation: a Master's degree, perhaps, or some form of professional accreditation from a reputable translators' association.

### **Past history**

Then there's actual translation experience. How experienced should a translator be, and what qualifies as experience? There's no hard and fast rule here, but as you might imagine, more is always better. Some agencies require their translators to have been working full-time for at least one whole year before adding them to their books; others demand three years, or even five. Some vary their standards depending on the type of service required. This sounds like it should create a catch-22 situation – if you don't already have the experience,

how can you acquire it? – but, in fact, there are plenty of ways for new translators to learn what they need to know to do their jobs. They might start off working in-house somewhere as a full-time employee, for example. They might also start getting some translation work from the word go, as some agencies will argue that it doesn't matter how long you've been in the job if you're just naturally talented.

## **Key skills**

And what about the kinds of skills that our translator will put to work on each project? Attention to detail is a big one, of course, both for identifying subtle nuances of meaning in the source text and for proofreading their own work. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, but a professional translator will spot their own mistakes whenever possible and correct them. The perfect translator should also be an independent thinker, able to research subjects in order to write about them authoritatively, and also capable of resolving problems for themselves – things like ambiguities in the source text, or potential factual errors that may need correction.

These last few things are important because the average freelance translator tends to work alone. Their contact with clients and agencies may be primarily by phone or by email, and time differences between different countries might mean that their working hours don't line up particularly well with their clients' hours of business. As such, a translator will sometimes only have themselves to rely upon. This also means that the perfect translator needs discipline. There's nobody looking over your shoulder when you work from home, no boss to watch exactly what time you clock in and out each day. The temptation, therefore, can be to procrastinate, to let yourself get distracted by things other than the task in front of you. But a disciplined professional translator will resist that temptation and ensure the job gets done promptly and effectively. They don't need peer pressure to get things done.

## **Take it seriously**

This leads us nicely into the next item on the list: the perfect translator needs a sense of professionalism. This is a difficult thing to nail down precisely. In part, it's the sum of all the qualities we've already mentioned, but it's also more than that. It's about respecting client confidentiality, since translators often work with sensitive or privileged information. It's about taking the job seriously, treating it as a career rather than a hobby. And ultimately, it's about respect: the perfect translator should respect themselves, their clients and the work that they do. So if you want to spot a real professional, by all means look for all the above qualifications and skills – but also look for translators who are open and honest with you, the ones who care as much about your business as you do. These are the translators that you can really count on when it matters.

## **PART 2 – CHOOSING A VENDOR**

So now you understand the basics. You know how the translation process works, why human translators are so important, and how to tell the good translators from the bad. Is it time to hire a translator and call it a day? Not quite – because in defining exactly what you need, you might find you need a lot more than a lone operator can provide. The next part of this book explains where you come into this process and how to find the providers that meet your own specific needs.

## Why it makes sense to outsource translation

For a business serving multiple target-language markets, it can seem like an endless debate. To outsource, or not to outsource? If you're expanding into a new market, it's one of the first decisions you have to make – after all, it will define your approach to the entire localisation process. But even if you already have a defined process in place for translation, somehow the question keeps coming back up. If you currently employ translators in-house, it can be tempting to restructure your approach for the sake of streamlining. If you currently use an external provider, you may well find yourself entertaining the notion of opening an internal translation division.

If you're getting tired of the constant back and forth, we have good news for you: there is a clear and simple answer to the question. In fact, there are strong reasons for every business to outsource its translation work – whether it involves large volumes or small, one language or dozens. Allow us to break it down for you and explain how your business can benefit from this approach.

### Documents on the move

First, let's compare the two potential workflows side by side. If your business employs in-house translators, the translation process might look something like this:

1. Your marketing team (or some other department) produces a new document for translation
2. The document is sent directly to an in-house translator, who converts the document into its target language
3. The document is sent back to the original department for publication

In contrast, outsourcing to a translation agency might look like this:

1. The marketing team produces a document
2. The document is sent to the translation agency
3. The agency selects a translator from its database and sends them the document
4. The translator converts the document and sends it back to the agency
5. The agency carries out proofreading, editing, and other quality control tasks (as well as additional services such as DTP if needed)
6. The document is sent back to the client for publication

At first glance, you may think that one of these workflows looks a bit more straightforward than the other. In the strictest sense, that's true, but don't be fooled – keeping things in-house is a false economy. What you gain in efficiency right away, you'll lose through complications down the line.

## Who's in your resource base?

The reason for this is simple: if you only work with in-house translators, then the pool of experts available to you is going to be very limited. That's assuming you're able to select the right experts in the first place. Hiring experts from abroad is never a straightforward task – and make no mistake, they may well need to come from another country. Since you will need people who are native speakers of the target language – a language that is presumably not local to your company – finding translators who are currently nearby could be a real struggle. On top of that, you then also need to invest significant time and effort vetting candidates in a field which has very little to do with your core business. What skills and qualifications are most relevant? How can the quality of these applicants' translations be assessed if you don't speak the target language yourselves?

Certainly, the hiring process will eventually be over. But at the end of it, you will still only have a fixed number of translators to work with. They'll be able to translate documents into their specific target languages, as long as the subject matter falls under these individuals' areas of expertise. Any translation job outside these narrow restrictions, however, is likely to suffer in terms of quality and readability.

At the same time, you had also better hope that you're constantly producing exactly the right amount of translation work to keep all of your translators busy. In the future, if your translation workload grows even a little bit, you'll have to go through the hiring process all over again. If it shrinks, you'll be paying your translators to sit idly at their desks. It's hardly an ideal situation.

## The alternative approach

Compare this with the experience of working with an external translation provider. A translation agency takes care of the recruitment and vetting process for you – with a few added bonuses. First, this means that – as far as you're concerned – the translation process can operate like a 'black-box' system. Documents go in, translations come out, and you don't need to worry about what goes on in-between because the experts are taking care of it for you. So as far as you're concerned, the translation process is actually simpler this way!

The second benefit is flexibility. Because a translation agency will tend to work primarily with freelance translators, they offer immense potential for growth but can also handle very small volumes of work. A typical translation agency can have hundreds or even thousands of translators on its books, offering experts in any number of languages and specialist subjects. The agency takes care of vetting their skills and contracting them for each individual job, allowing you to reap the benefits of expertise on tap whenever you need it. Translating something outside of your normal field? Not a problem – the agency will just engage a translator who handles this kind of content every day. Expanding into a new target market? There are all sorts of logistical and commercial factors to consider, but at least you don't even have to think about the linguistic side of things: for an external translation provider, adding an extra language is the easiest thing in the world.

The third benefit is the immense breadth of expertise that a translation agency can call upon. For any given job, the translator who works on it will be an expert in this

one project's specific field. Don't underestimate the value of subject-specific expertise: a professional translation agency knows how to handle every aspect of a translation job, both in terms of the translation itself and all the associated project management work.

Finally, there are the additional services that a translation agency can provide. Having all those names on call at any time means your translation partner can also find all kinds of other experts: proofreaders to check and correct work, subject-matter specialists to examine terminology and confirm that a text is factually accurate, and even other specialists such as subtitlers, copywriters, layout designers, IT engineers and web developers. Which means that no matter what kind of content you produce, a good agency will be able to keep up with you.

All of this goes to show that the greatest overall benefit of outsourcing translation is convenience. Yes, you could handle it yourself – but why bother? As we've seen, an in-house translation department can be a cumbersome, overcomplicated distraction. It's rarely a cost-effective strategy. By contrast, outsourcing the process means that a competent, experienced provider can take responsibility for everything, growing alongside you and leaving you free to concentrate on your core business. If you're looking for efficiency and adaptability, it really is a no-brainer.

## Boutique agencies – the new generation of translation solutions

There was a time when dinosaurs dominated the world of translation: huge great lumbering beasts of companies, with offices in every major world city and thousands of contractors at their fingertips. They offered every language pair, every specialism and every service under the sun, all overseen by huge teams of project managers in vast offices filled with piles of paperwork. But things don't stay the same forever, and with the rise of the Internet and a new focus on niche services, a very different kind of professional translation service is on the rise: the boutique translation agency. They may be small, but don't underestimate their appeal to translators and clients alike.

### Light on their feet

So what are boutique translation agencies? First of all, they're light on their feet. Boutique translation agencies take their cue from boutique advertising companies, the new form of PR that aims to offer something different from the behemoths of the ad world. Just like their forerunners in the marketing industry, boutique translation agencies are small, nimble and fast-paced. Unlike the larger firms that worry so much about economies of scale, boutique agencies offer specialised services with a high degree of personalisation and flexibility.

Boutique firms have staff that can react quickly and flexibly to any new challenge, because they aren't spending their time churning out huge amounts of repetitive work. They're free to follow opportunities, evolve and change rapidly through time, leaving big global corporations in their dust. They don't have a vast translation team of unknown and untested contractors; rather, they work with a small and trusted group of contacts, so the relationships within the agency tend to be closer. This means that quality control is not a matter of ticking boxes as it is with larger companies, but rather comes down to close working relationships where managers have in-depth, detailed knowledge of all their staff's skills and strengths, and can draw together the perfect team for each project.

### Exactly what you need

Specialisation is also one of the biggest strengths of these new and nimble agencies. Unlike massive international companies, they aren't jacks of all trades and masters of none. No-one can truly specialise in everything, and larger companies run the risk of spreading themselves too thin at the expense of quality. Boutique agencies are at the other end of the scale, offering very specific niche services. They know their strengths and they know their target market's needs, as well as having a comprehensive understanding of the language, culture or industry they specialise in.

Different firms have different ways of narrowing down to a specialisation. Some focus on a particular subject area or industry, for example medical, marketing or technical translations. These agencies focus on hiring translators who are experts within that industry, many of whom have had a previous career elsewhere before becoming translators. Other agencies specialise in particular languages – amassing a team of translators from different

languages into Russian, for example, but with a wide range of interests, knowledge and skills. Such agencies are called single language vendors. Some boutique agencies, so-called regional language vendors, specialise in the languages of one region, for example, Eastern Europe or Asia. These teams offer particular advantages because they have native knowledge of their market and can combine the different subject specialisms of their translators in line with the client's needs. Many of these agencies also offer specialised services such as localisation and DTP, or web services like SEO and web marketing, all in combination with translation. This allows a team of different professionals, all with a comprehensive understanding of your language pair or industry, to work together fluidly and produce an excellent finished product exactly to your specifications.

### **The personal touch**

In line with the fantastic opportunities for specialisation that boutique agencies offer, clients and staff alike also tend to find these firms much more personal than the big multinationals.

Smaller agencies can offer a highly tailored and personalised service built around your needs, rather than the company's 'way of doing things'. Instead of forcing you to fit their box, they will shape their work to suit your needs. You're likely to experience less bureaucracy and paper pushing, because a smaller team can find common sense solutions instead of having to rely on endless protocols. And you'll have access to the people that matter. Often a smaller translation agency will be directly managed by the CEO, who isn't a fat cat investor sitting in a board meeting or playing golf, but is more likely to be a translator themselves. At the very least, you'll have a regular, designated contact person within the company, so you'll have an opportunity to build a good working relationship with your own project manager. And with a smaller company, the team that wins your business is the exact one that will work on your project. Unlike some of the less scrupulous bigger companies, they won't impress you with the CVs of excellent translators and then farm your work out to untrained, poorly qualified individuals.

A by-product of all this is that boutique agencies tend to be more detail-oriented and creative than their larger cousins. Instead of being held back by pointless rules and procedures, they're free to offer the kind of personalised service that has clients returning year after year.

### **The client is king**

Big multinational corporations are bound by the bottom line, but to smaller companies, long-term relationships, reputation and old-fashioned business values mean everything. As they thrive by word of mouth and often keep their client list small, boutique agencies are heavily focused on client satisfaction and building trust. For smaller companies no account is too small to warrant their care and attention, and communication tends to be personal, efficient and meaningful.

Boutique agencies aren't staffed by managers from other sectors with no real understanding of translation, and they don't take on new translators with little evidence as to their skills and abilities. They tend to be run by passionate linguists who view their

business as a vocation, not just a moneymaking exercise. That's why you'll often spot all kinds of added extra value when working with a boutique agency, along with a willingness to source additional services or skills in accordance with your needs. In short, they will go the extra mile for your business, because they know that's how to win and keep custom.

Finally, you'll get more bang for your buck with a boutique agency, as many of these companies offer outstanding value for money with no compromise on quality – in fact, often providing a more specialised and personalised service than a big provider of 'off the peg' translation solutions. They will be able to offer flexibility over rates and often have much lower overheads than multinationals. Some are based in countries with low tax rates and rents, while others save by managing their team online instead of assembling them in an office. Bearing all this in mind, what is a small budget to a global firm can often be quite a substantial one to a small agency, meaning you can get more for your money.

It easy to see why these agencies are becoming more and more popular, and in some sectors are now starting to corner the translation market. Bigger companies are running scared and looking to find ways to streamline their service offerings, but savvy clients are still abandoning impersonal companies in their droves, looking for something different. In the battle of David and Goliath you'd be forgiven for betting on the big guy, but don't rule out the underdog. Putting meaning and value back at the heart of the translation process, it looks like these plucky contenders are here to stay – and they could be exactly what your business needs.

## How to choose the right translation vendor for you

The language services market is booming. It's a vibrant, competitive field, with a huge number of providers jostling for your custom. This is great news for everyone involved, since it means that every translation project has the perfect linguistic partner out there somewhere, just waiting to be found. In other words, there really is someone for everyone – in language services as in the rest of life.

With that said, there is a downside of sorts. For a business trying to sift through these huge numbers of agencies and individuals, finding the right provider for the job can seem like a daunting prospect. It's not so much like finding a needle in a haystack as finding one specific needle in the middle of a big pile of almost identical needles – and, if you'll allow the metaphor to get a little bit weird, all of the needles are shouting at you that they're the best.

Does that sound intimidating? Don't be put off – there are a few simple tricks to finding the right partner that will make your life much easier. It all comes down to knowing what to look for. If you have a better understanding of who you're dealing with and what they can do for you, sorting through a long list of potential partners becomes much, much easier.

### Safety in numbers

By now, you may have already worked out that no matter the size of your business, you probably want to work with a translation agency, not just a lone freelancer. Above all else, agencies have one advantage that freelancers will never be able to match: they have access to a larger pool of people, which means that they tend to be more reliable and able to offer a broader range of services. Both of these qualities are particularly important if you're looking for a long-term partnership, since your exact needs may change over time. (And you should be looking for a long-term arrangement whenever possible. We'll talk about why later in this book.)

Among the agencies that look promising, you'll want to pay particular attention to the language combinations they offer. Some may offer translation to or from any language in the world; this may sound impressive at first glance, but remember what we said about 'jack-of-all-trades' agencies before. Unless you really do want to translate your business content into literally every language on the planet, you might well get better results from an agency that offers a more focused set of languages. The benefits of specialisation shouldn't be overlooked. A company that focuses more precisely on a given region of the world could offer advantages in terms of local area knowledge, for example, or improved quality control through greater familiarity with their target languages.

### Tried and tested

In [Profiling the perfect translator](#), we covered all the factors that go into making up the perfect individual. Sounds like a pretty rigorous set of requirements, doesn't it? As a translation client, the great news for you is that, if you don't want to check all of this for yourself when sourcing a translation partner, you don't have to. A professional agency will

rigorously vet their translators before taking them on board – and when we say rigorously, we mean it. A translator applying to work with an agency will be asked to prove themselves in some way, possibly by showing their qualifications or discussing their past experience. They may be asked to provide references (as long as past clients are willing to provide them – confidentiality remains essential, after all). Very often, they'll be asked to complete a short translation test. By tailoring the test to the applicant's field of expertise, it can be used to assess their skills and specialist knowledge.

### **Ask the right questions**

Once you think you've found the right team, it's time to ask some revealing questions. Think about your needs right now and how these may change in the future. If you're looking at a number of markets with different languages, check if your agency has translators working in the other languages you're interested in. Find out what the company's maximum work capacity is. You might just have a small website to translate now, but if your business takes off you'll want to be sure that your company can cope with larger volumes. And consider bolt-on services, as well. If you anticipate needing your website to be translated into or promoted in other languages in the future, many translation companies offer localisation, web and graphic design, and SEO services alongside translation. It's worth planning ahead to avoid having to find new service providers as your needs evolve.

### **Answer the right questions too**

As well as grilling your potential partner on all these points, see if they have any questions to ask you. Good vendors will not only have answers to your queries, they will also want certain information from clients. When you send a text over, do they ask about the purpose of the text? Are they interested in knowing who the target audience are? Great translators will want to know if this is a printed brochure or a piece of web copy, and whether it's an internal memo or destined for publication. These pieces of information are vital in judging the tone, register and style of a translation.

Another hint that you've found a great partner is if they want to talk about resources. Professional translators are usually highly technically competent when it comes to using digital term bases, dictionaries, glossaries and translation memories. All of these resources can be fed into a computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool, helping translators to use your company's preferred terminology consistently across multiple documents and cutting down the amount of time they spend translating repeated text. Large translation buyers with a little budget to spare might consider investing in developing these resources, as they can be a huge time and money saver in the long run.

### **To err is human; to check, divine**

Make sure your translation provider offers an extensive editing service as standard. To guarantee the consistency and quality of translations, editing is vital. No matter how professional the translator is, we all slip up sometimes, which is why there should always be an editor or, better still, two editors: one technical and one linguistic.

The technical editor might be another translator or even an engineer or IT specialist. They check that the translation is correct and complete, that the terminology is spot on, and that the project's glossary and style guide have been followed to the letter.

The linguistic editor or proofreader then double-checks the spelling, grammar and style. They make improvements using their own specialist knowledge to make sure the text is appropriate for marketing or legal purposes if necessary.

Two-step editing is vital for IT or engineering documents, for example, containing both technical terminology and a marketing or legal function. Rarely is one person an expert at both marketing and engineering, or legal and IT, so two-step editing is a great way to make sure experts on both sides of the fence have had a good look at your text.

### **Find an agency with a DTP team who can handle any file type you throw at them**

Your business documentation may come in many different formats, including:

- Microsoft Office documents (.doc, .xls, .ppt), possibly involving graphics with text, tables, diagrams and other non-editable elements.
- Adobe Acrobat files (.pdf) with non-editable scanned text
- AutoCAD drawings (.dwg)
- Files created in professional DTP software (InDesign, Adobe FrameMaker, Quark and so on).
- HTML files, with a mix of editable text and code

The ever-growing variety of file formats and increasingly complicated layouts can cause difficulties for freelance translators, who might not know how to work with all of these file types. Working with an agency and making sure they also provide DTP services, ensures that the layout of translated documents is consistent with the layout of source documents.

### **Choose localisation services, not just document translation**

Usually, IT, marketing and technical projects require more than just translation from one language into another. From software, games and websites to legal documentation or business correspondence and advertisement materials – all require localisation services.

Localisation is a complex process aimed at adapting content to the linguistic, cultural and technical requirements of a target market. Russian business letters do not use the same conversational techniques as British business letters. Native German speakers and native Polish speakers are likely to find different product names appealing or offensive, often with a huge effect on the success of your product. And of course, contracts or terms and conditions are likely to take very different forms in two different countries.

The upshot of all this is that professional IT and technical translators should not only be translating your text, but also adapting it for the target market.

### **Settle deadlines and prices up front**

Finally, make sure you hash out the details up front. An experienced vendor will be able to give an accurate deadline and price for your job, because they will know their translators' availability and working speed. Expect to pay different rates for different tasks, though. Simple repetitive texts can be translated at low prices thanks to CAT tools, while highly specialised topics or texts destined for your clients might cost more as they require a more experienced translator. By arranging prices and deadlines up front, you take the guesswork out of your new partnership.

If you follow these simple tips, you'll find it much easier to identify your perfect partner. To use another haystack metaphor, you should now feel equipped to sort the wheat from the chaff. Above all else, trust your instincts: pick a partner you feel comfortable with, someone you trust to deliver the results. And if you're still at the beginning of your search, don't be intimidated by it all. Despite any stories you may have heard about fly-by-night scammers or unreliable operators who prove incapable of delivering what they've promised, the vast majority of language services providers are dependable, professional people whom you can count on to get the job done. Choose your translation partner wisely, and they'll take good care of you.

## Why long-term partnerships make all the difference

A good translation partner can be worth their weight in gold. If you're a business taking your first steps into the world of international commerce, having someone competent and reliable at your side will help to put your mind at ease as you prepare to open up those brand new markets. If all goes to plan, new clients will be introduced to your products and services, and you get to focus on your core business. If the localisation project goes smoothly, the experience can be downright pleasant. Everybody wins.

So if a good translation partner is that good, is it too obvious to mention that once you've found one, it's worth sticking with them? Maybe – but the rewards go deeper than you might first think. If you work well with a language services provider on your very first project, you'll be amazed at how much better it gets after ten, twenty or a hundred projects. This time, we'll be taking a look at the benefits of long-term partnerships, and how your relationship with a language services provider can benefit from cooperation over the course of many different projects.

For the purposes of this chapter, we'll be referring to 'a translator' as if they were an individual, but all of these benefits apply to working with agencies, as well. In fact, working with agencies can be even better – they'll make the effort to retain individual translators while relieving you of even more of the administrative burden.

### Rapid returns

So, long-term partnerships, then. What can they do for you? First, and most obviously, there are the immediately measurable benefits to your business. In principle, any given translator only needs to be trained on your company's needs once. They only need one copy of your reference materials, such as corporate messaging guides, glossaries, pre-existing documents and so on. And why go through the process of sourcing a partner over and over again for each individual project, if you only need to do it once? After all, nobody wants the hassle of researching suppliers and putting out calls to tender if they can avoid it. Less directly measurable (but no less valuable) is the continued peace of mind from knowing you're working with someone you trust, and the experience of what presumably will continue to be a pleasant, efficient collaboration as your business grows.

### Benefits over time

But as we've already suggested, that's not the half of it. You see, a translator who works regularly with the same business will get even better at what they do over time. In parallel with whatever reference material you've provided them with, they'll be developing their own resources: translation memories, notes about your preferences, a growing collection of research material and past experience to draw upon. This translates – if you'll pardon the pun – into increasingly faster, more effective work, producing texts that capture the meaning of the original language with laser precision.

In other words, what you'll see is a translator who is gaining a greater affinity for the way your specific business operates and communicates. Every company has its own unique personality, its own quirks and subtleties, and the longer a good translator works with

you, the better they'll be able to capture that intangible 'you-ness'. That may sound a little vague, so let's break it down into much more concrete terms.

The first element of your identity that we'll pick out is your company's linguistic style. It's very common for marketing departments to produce a corporate style guide – it's often essential, in fact. But how do you go about adapting one of these for another language? It's not as simple as just translating the guide itself. Elements of style don't always correspond precisely to other languages with different grammatical rules, and different cultures may also have different standards and expectations for your type of business. In other words, it's something of a messy, subjective affair – and the more experience an individual translator has of wrestling with these kinds of questions, the more closely they'll be able to approach the ideal of perfection. This idea of getting closer and closer to the ideal is important, so hold onto it: we'll be coming back to it shortly.

Other questions of identity include the specific niche of your business. Naturally, you'll want to work with a translator who's an expert in your particular subject matter from day one – but you can benefit from the fact that there's no limit to how much of an expert someone can become, and how tightly they can specialise. In other words, let's say you're a company producing power tools for building sites – so you might start working with a translator who's an expert in construction, manufacturing or some similar field. But if you haven't worked with a translation partner before, odds are there probably isn't a translator who's an expert in your business in particular. Not yet, anyway. You get to work with that person as they grow into one of the world's leading authorities on *you* – while assisting you with the usual translation services every step of the way.

### **Broader understanding**

Finally, there are the benefits that grow and grow as a translator gets to know not just your business, but your whole corner of the market. Every translation job requires research – not just into terminology, but into things like your competitors, your clients, and your industry's specialist press. Anything that might tell your translator how people communicate in your field, and that helps them learn more about the industry as a whole, will also benefit you in the long run. A good translator walks a tightrope between matching industry expectations and helping you stand out from the crowd – and the best, most experienced ones can do it with real flair.

That's what it comes down to, really: experience. Of course you want a translator who's already experienced when you start working with them. But experience isn't something that you pick up as a one-time deal. It's a process, and it never stops. It's something that develops over time. A good translator never stops learning, and you can reap huge rewards from that fact – as long as you maintain relationships over the long term.

## **PART 3 – PREPARING FOR TRANSLATION**

Once you've made the decision to go global and selected your translation partner, it's time to get ready for your very first translation project. Naturally, you'll want to make sure the process is as clean and straightforward as possible – so in this section, we'll explain what you and your business can do in advance of finally signing that work order and getting the ball rolling.

## What can businesses do to ensure a translation goes smoothly?

When you send a document to an agency for translation, there's a perfectly understandable desire for it to be a fire-and-forget process. After all, one of the major benefits of outsourcing translation work is that the translation agency offers its specialist expertise, while you concentrate on your core business. For its part, the agency will do everything in its power to make that possible: sourcing the right translator for the job, organising the workflow, taking care of QA (quality assurance) and much more besides. However, translation has always been more of an art than a science, and unexpected issues may therefore crop up from time to time over the course of the translation process. Resolving these issues can be a potentially time-consuming process if they're particularly complicated or if there is no established process for dealing with them. But there are a few things translation clients can do to keep such issues to a minimum and enable those that do arise to be resolved swiftly.

### A good texts make for a good translation

When writing a document in-house, it can be incredibly valuable to think about the translation to come, and what might be involved in adapting your text for another readership. The most important thing you can do is to try to write clear, unambiguous text that flows well and has a clear line of argument. A good translator can normally handle ambiguity, but it's rarely a desirable feature in a text. This is partly because one quirk of the translation process is that vagueness can sometimes be amplified. An idea simply left unfinished in one language might look like a hole in your argument in another – and since neither of these options is particularly desirable, it's definitely worth editing your writing carefully and making it as clear and focused as possible. There's a nice bonus here in that, in many ways, this is just good writing advice. Keeping your writing clear and precise will help the translators, but it will also help everyone who reads the source language version, as well. Everyone wins!

Incidentally, none of this is to suggest that you should 'dumb down' your document at all. If you think the language you're using might be unclear even to native speakers, then by all means, edit away – but you should resist the temptation to simplify your language or your argument just for the sake of non-native readers. It's not necessary, since a professional translator will always have perfect comprehension of their source language. After all, if any unclear sections do slip through, they can always ask you about them.

### On call when needed

On that note, it's always helpful to make the original author of a document available to answer any questions that translators might have. It's quite common for elements of a document to need clarification – sometimes to confirm the precise meaning of a particular section, but for other reasons too. For example, a translator might offer a few possible translations for a headline, to see which one the author prefers or which one best captures their original intent. Occasionally, a translator might find a potential error in the source text, in which case they can liaise with the original author in order to correct it and discuss

any implications for the translation. In general, having the original author on hand (rather than any other contact) makes it much easier for translators to understand something which might not be explicitly spelled out in the document itself, and which might potentially require highly specialist knowledge to answer.

Another useful form of specialist information is reference material. Style guides, glossaries, corporate messaging guidelines, translation memories, older editions of the same document, web links... anything and everything that provides context and linguistic precedent could be potentially useful to your translators. Even if it seems like it might be more material than is strictly necessary for any given job, it doesn't hurt to offer everything you can. A translator might not always have the time to go through every reference document line by line, but electronic documents are easy to search, which means that translators can quickly find out, for example, whether a given term or turn of phrase has been used before.

### **Forward planning**

Once the linguistic preparation is out of the way, it's also helpful to allow as much time as possible for the job to be done properly. Of course, the nature of business is that urgent rush jobs are sometimes unavoidable, but they're never ideal. Since it's impossible to know whether a given job might present more issues than are apparent at first glance, offering a little flexibility in a deadline can go a long way towards guaranteeing the very best results for a finished document. More time to complete the job means more time for QA, more time to get the phrasing just right, more time to find the perfect translator for the job – and all can have a big impact on the final product. There are always ways to make a translation happen faster, of course, such as splitting up a job across multiple linguists who work on a project in parallel, but the best results almost always come from a single translator or a small, tightly knit team working at their own pace.

All of these tips can go a long way towards improving the quality and reliability of the translations you receive – and the best thing about them is that they really don't require big changes to the way most businesses already work. A document is always inextricably linked to the business that originally produced it, so tweaking your internal processes slightly can produce impressive results. In short, it's a question of optimisation, not reinventing the wheel. So why not give it a go? If you try some of these little tricks yourself, we're sure you'll agree that the benefits are clear to see.

## How to choose a linguistic style for your business

“Who are you?” That, in essence, is the question potential clients will ask when they first encounter your business. You’ll answer this question in part through your basic nature: what you sell and how. You’ll also answer it through your sales and marketing efforts: through your name, your logo, your web design, the advertisements you place and the events you attend. And – consciously or unconsciously – it’s a question you’ll answer through the linguistic style you use to communicate with the world.

### Language and self

Whether as corporations or individuals, the language we use is a part of our identity. In a broad sense, of course, that means whether we speak English, German, Polish, Russian or whatever. But you can drill down deeper and it’s still true. Do we use a regional variant of that language? A dialect? A national standard? What tone do we strike when we speak to our clients and partners? What choice of vocabulary do we use? All of these factors have some bearing on the way people perceive you. Understanding their effect is, therefore, a critical part of controlling your identity and the public perception of your business.

Here’s the thing: in our day-to-day lives, most of us don’t think much about these issues. In casual conversation, we don’t tend to consciously modify the way we speak. But when you’re running a business, you can’t afford to be so relaxed. Whether developing a first marketing strategy, reworking an old one, or preparing to launch your business anew in another locale, linguistic style *must* be a component in your decision making. People will always make snap judgements about the way your business writes – but if you plan ahead, you can guide those judgements towards the kind of image you want to project.

### Guidance for all

Settling on a clear linguistic style will also help the translators and other linguists that you work with. A professional translator is one kind of person who really does think about style. Every word they use will be carefully selected to build a cohesive, coherent piece of writing. After all, translation isn’t just about preserving the message of a text, but also the way in which the message is delivered. If you have a style guide, a corporate messaging document, or other pre-built linguistic resources, you’ll make your translators’ lives much easier and get more consistent work back from them – and on top of all that, you might just save yourself some money, too. For more on this, see our [dedicated chapter](#) on resources such as term bases, glossaries and style guides.

### Stylistic examples

So much for the ‘why’ of choosing a style, then. What about the ‘how’? To answer that question, let’s take a look at some typical corporate styles, to see how they work and what kind of business might use them. This is the kind of research you should be doing when developing a corporate style guide: looking at other businesses out there, analysing the way they communicate, and understanding why they do it and how.

## **The Silicon Valley tech startup**

Tech startups love fun! They're small. They're punchy. They're on the cutting edge. They're not afraid to break the rules. Or even to write their own. Slip a little non-standard grammar into your writing? A few sentence fragments? Sure, why not. Another linguistic trick you might see from Silicon Valley companies is a little Californian swagger – even when marketing themselves outside of the United States. The prestige that comes with being based inside the beating heart of the IT industry can be a valuable thing. So kick back, relax, put on your shades and enjoy being incredibly, achingly cool.

## **The financial services firm**

Your money is important. Your future is important. At our company, we want you to know that we understand this, and that we take everything about our business incredibly seriously. Our linguistic style wears a conservative but very expensive dark suit. Our tone is calm, certain, self-assured. We don't ask questions; we give answers. Professionalism, formality and stability: these are our watchwords. We communicate in this way in order to give you the security of knowing that you are safe, important and worth investing in. Just like us.

## **The travel company**

What's your dream holiday? Maybe it's an adventure, a dramatic trek across one of the wildest places in the world. Maybe it's unadulterated luxury – five-star service, wellness treatments, a little designer shopping in the most exclusive boutiques. Or maybe it's a book on the beach by day and cocktails on the roof terrace by night. Whatever your dream, we're here to sell it to you. We're all about possibilities, excitement, the promise of something wonderful – so that's how we talk to you. We're the best at superlatives and the sharpest with our imagery. Once we've got you thinking about that gorgeous local restaurant on a quiet cobbled side-street, we've as good as got your booking.

One important thing to note about these examples is that they apply specifically to the English language. There's no guarantee that what works in one language will have the same effect in another, which is why it's important to go through the process of choosing a style every time you expand into a new market. A German tech company, for example, might take a much more serious, formal tone than a comparable American business.

Each of these different styles can be compared across a few different axes – the questions that we asked you before about things like tone and vocabulary. For the safe option, you can pick a style that's in general use across your industry, or – if you want to stand out from the crowd – you can look at what your competitors are doing and consciously choose to be

different. Mix and match features from other companies that follow patterns that you like, and try to throw in something that's distinctively yours, as well.

Ultimately, the choice of style is yours to make; after all, your identity is by definition a very personal thing. But the key is to make the decision consciously, and not simply to write in whatever style you or your contractors feel like that day. The bottom line is this: a strong, consistent writing style increases brand recognition and improves the public perception of your business. Choose wisely – and once you've written your style guide, stick to it.

## Is there anything that shouldn't be translated?

Is there anything that shouldn't be translated? All right, we'll admit it: it does sound like an odd question. Especially coming from a translation agency. After all, we do live in the age of information. With search engines and encyclopaedias and on-demand media just a mouse-click away, universal access to content is something that most people take for granted now. These days, everyone wants access to everything, all of the time.

So yes – in that context, the idea of consciously choosing not to translate something may seem a little counter-intuitive. And in fact, assuming unlimited time and budgets, we'd absolutely recommend that every business translate all of its materials into as many languages as possible. But if we drill down a little deeper into the details of each of those documents, we might find words or phrases – or sometimes even longer sections – that require a slightly different approach to just translating them word for word. If you receive a translated document and it retains some source-language words or phrases, or the content doesn't quite look identical to the original version, this might be the reason why.

### What's in a name?

Here's a particularly thorny example: proper nouns. For those of you who aren't particularly linguistically inclined, a proper noun is the name of a specific and unique 'thing' – such as the name of a person, organisation or place. Let's consider the example of a part of Germany which Germans call Bayern. The English speakers of the world know it as Bavaria – but it shouldn't always be translated as such. The football team Bayern München, for example, is almost always rendered as 'Bayern Munich' for English-speaking audiences. Looking at that name out of context, it's hard to find a reason to translate one proper noun but not the other. But however the trend got started, it's now common practice – and many English speakers are so used to seeing the name written this way that they probably wouldn't recognise a football team named 'Bavaria Munich'.

In the case of proper nouns, then, translators are guided by past precedent. They may translate a name, leave it alone, or put two versions of the name side by side, depending on what best suits the context. To a certain extent, translating proper nouns therefore requires making a judgement call – and those judgements can change over time. For example, several hundred years ago, an English translator might have felt free to render a Polish name like 'Piotr' as 'Peter'; today, we might not consider that acceptable.

### Witty banter

In other cases, translators need to rely less on precedent and more on creative flair. These are the times where each individual word or phrase has an equivalent in the target language, but where something would still be lost in translation. Here's a joke for you:

*"What do you think of Sandra's carpentry project?"*

*"It's great. She really nailed it."*

Many translators would despair at this exchange – and not just because it’s a terrible pun. On the one hand, Sandra literally nailed planks of wood together to complete her project, but on the other, she ‘nailed it’ in the sense of being very successful. This kind of double meaning rarely transfers well from one language to another, so a literal translation might not fulfil its real purpose (to make the reader groan out loud). To get around this problem, a linguist might invent a new pun – perhaps using a different woodwork-related idiom – or even tell a different, unrelated joke. It all depends on the broader context of the document.

## Dispatches from another culture

Another case when it can be better to leave something untranslated is if it benefits the text as a whole. Sometimes, for example, the use of a foreign language can provide a sense of authenticity. The film *Lost In Translation* (appropriately enough) features multiple scenes in which Bill Murray’s character, feeling lost and alone in the middle of Tokyo, is unable to understand anything the people around him are saying because he doesn’t speak their language. Because the viewer doesn’t know what’s being said either (unless they happen to be bilingual), it becomes much easier to identify with Murray’s sense of isolation. Any translator in charge of dubbing or subtitling that film would have to think carefully about which lines really need to be translated.

## Guiding principles

Now that we’ve seen a few specific examples of things that shouldn’t be translated, what general conclusions can we draw? Is there a fixed set of rules for when a word, sentence or paragraph should be left in its original language – something that businesses can use to evaluate the translations they receive? Well, by its nature, this kind of judgement is highly dependent on context and individual circumstances, so we definitely recommend letting a professional translator make this judgement for you whenever possible. With that said, you can be assured that they’re probably paying attention to these rules of thumb:

### 1. Will this be understood if left in its original language?

Or, in very rare cases, does it matter if it isn't understood? It’s important to think carefully about this one, as it usually requires input and detailed consideration from someone who’s an expert in the target language.

### 2. Is there a precedent in other translations?

If they have access to an existing translation memory (TM) database, translators will check to see how it has been handled in the past. If they can’t find it there, they may look for it online or in print publications. The point of this research is that if your readers are used to seeing a term untranslated, then it might potentially be better to leave it alone.

### **3. Would translating have any negative impact?**

This is a very rare circumstance, but it's theoretically possible. A French restaurant, for example, benefits immensely from keeping its menu items in French. You can charge far more for 'foie gras' than you can for 'fatty liver', and many English diners wouldn't want to know where their 'gésiers' started life.

All of these rules have something in common – they are rooted in a key guiding principle that translators follow whenever possible. The principle is this: translation is important in and of itself, but wherever possible, it should be done in the service of localisation. The two terms aren't synonymous. Translation transfers the meaning of a text from one language to another, but localisation adapts that text to make it more suitable for use in a different local context. It's a smarter, more inclusive approach than simply translating irrespective of context. So perhaps the real answer to the question we originally asked is this: it's true that most things should be translated, but the really important thing is to make sure it's all properly localised, as well. If in doubt about whether to translate something, ask a professional translator for their opinion – they'll be sure to give you an honest, considered response.

# The checklist: Ten things to consider when preparing a text for translation

*So you've decided to outsource your translation needs, you've found a great translation vendor, and you're ready to start work. But before you send off that big job, go through the following checklist, to ensure that the job goes smoothly and everyone is happy.*

## **1. Check that your text hasn't already been translated**

This may sound like a no-brainer, but a surprising number of larger companies pay to have texts translated without checking if they already exist in translation. Most translators have had the experience of Googling a key term from a text, only to discover the entire text hidden somewhere on the client's website. Particularly for large multinational corporations, or any company with decentralised management, a quick check could save you a pretty penny.

## **2. Proofread your text carefully before you send it**

In order to make the translation process smoother, it's a great idea to check that the text is correct before you send it. As you read through, think about whether it is easy to understand, even for people outside of your company. Make sure that it uses simple, clear language with no unnecessarily long or obscure words. Texts should aim for short sentences, be organised clearly into paragraphs, and avoid repetition as much as possible. Now is also a good time to check that the formatting is consistent, if you want to save money. If you don't want to worry about formatting, find a translation vendor that will offer you this service in a package with translation.

## **3. Work out exactly what needs to be translated**

Before you fork out for your 120-page product catalogue to be translated, stop for a moment and think tactically about whether your new clients really need to see the entire thing. If you are not rolling out your full product range in your new market yet, perhaps you should only translate part of your catalogue. Or perhaps you're taking baby steps into a foreign market, in which case translating the entire website might be overkill, and it would be better to create and translate a basic version of the web page.

## **4. Think about making your text modular**

One way to save money on translation, as well as speeding up the process and making it easier to benefit from the diverse specialisms of different translators, is to create materials in a modular fashion. This simply means making it easy to split a document into separate parts. Perhaps it makes sense to have one page for each product, or to separate all the

legal information into one section, which can be sent to a translator specialising in legal documents. Maybe your website might have a functional 250-word introduction on each page, followed by further detail, so you can choose a basic or full translation for each new target language.

## **5. Maybe you don't even need translation**

Sometimes there might be an elegant solution to communicating a particular concept in many languages without resorting to translation. For example, many retailers create instructions on how to put together flat-pack furniture, using only diagrams. Images, videos and infographics are also commonly used in multilingual environments such as airports, so it's worth considering if these forms of communication are appropriate for you. But beware: sometimes an image that seem straightforward to you may not go over well in your new market, as one pharmaceutical company found out. Looking to advertise the benefits of their headache pills without resorting to translation, they hit upon using a simple diagram of a sad-faced stick man taking a tablet and becoming happy. Unfortunately for them, the fact that Arabic speakers read from right to left made their medicine look like poison. So even if you are thinking about representing information visually, it's a good idea to have a translation agency on board to advise you of any unfortunate unforeseen side effects.

## **6. Be absolutely sure that this is the final version**

Before you invest any amount of money in translating something, it's worth checking that it's not going to be changed significantly any time soon. This may be a challenge if the document relates to some changing situation, or is liable to be updated on a regular basis, but last-minute changes push up prices because translators have to rush to accommodate them. They really are best avoided wherever possible.

## **7. Think about format and save money**

For companies looking to spend as little as possible on translation, spending some time getting documents into a workable file format is a great way to cut costs. If you can provide all of your required text clearly laid out in a Word document (.doc or .docx), then this is ideal. If your text is in a scanned PDF, embedded in single-layer image files such as JPEGs or PNGs, or riddled with HTML tags, this can slow down the translation process, as it makes it harder for translators to get at the relevant information and export it to their specialist translation program. Of course, you might not have the time, the inclination or the skills to embark on large formatting jobs prior to outsourcing, which is why it's a great idea to find an agency that can take on DTP work for you. This way, you don't have to worry about finding yet another outsourcer to handle this work, and you can send the text off in any format, hassle-free.

## **8. Consider how you can help your translator to help you**

Translators tend to be excellent researchers, but they can't read minds. You will speed up the translation process considerably if you can provide extra information that will help your translator out. For example, see if there is any supplementary material that could help them understand the text quickly and clearly. Perhaps the document involves highly technical descriptions of machine parts, in which case providing diagrams or photographs could be a godsend. Maybe your company uses certain keywords or phrases consistently, in which case your translator should be made aware that only one fixed translation is to be used for these terms. Even providing a link to the company website can really help a translator get a good feel for what your business does, your company culture, image, and target market. For clients concerned about privacy issues, NDAs or 'non-disclosure agreements' are standard in the industry, which can give you peace of mind in providing sensitive information.

## **9. Know what you need**

It is worth thinking about the purpose of the final text before you agree to a quote. The main distinction here is between texts that are for information and texts that are for publication. The first category applies to more informal documents. Perhaps your company has found some interesting resources in another language that you might like to use. Maybe you regularly receive emails from clients who do not speak your language. Or perhaps you need to understand an article in a relevant publication. In all these instances, you don't need a perfect, polished translation, and so you should make this clear to your translation services vendor, who should offer you a lower rate. The second category, texts for publication, applies to the public face of your company. All marketing materials, consumer manuals, websites, legal documentation, and any other material destined for publication fall into this category. Naturally, these materials need to be prepared to the highest possible standard, and this is reflected in a more thorough translation process.

## **10. Keep the lines of communication open**

Finally, make sure that you communicate your needs clearly to your project manager. Let them know your priorities concerning the translation, make sure that you are clear about what stylistic requirements you have (modern? formal? fun?) and be available to answer questions if you can. Obviously, it's much better for everyone if problems can be resolved and help provided quickly with the minimum fuss, particularly when building a relationship.

With these ten tips in mind, preparing a text for translation should be straightforward, but if you encounter any problems then it's best to drop your translation vendor a quick line – after all, they are the experts and they've done it all before.

## **PART 4 – THE TRANSLATION PROCESS**

At last, your translation is under way. As a business, this is the part where you can hopefully just sit back, relax and wait for the final delivery. But if you've ever wondered what this process looks like from the inside out, this chapter is for you. Here's how translation actually happens.

## Tracing the life cycle of a translated document

Few people ever think about how translations find their way into the world. A text that begins its life in one language can eventually find itself written in another one – or two, or three, or even more. And yet, to the end reader, the process of producing a professional translation can be so opaque that many readers never realise how many of the documents they hold in their hands every day originated in another language entirely. In the spirit of demystifying that process, let's take a high-level look at the workflow that results in a finished translation landing on your desk.

### Document diversity

Documents come in all shapes and sizes, of course. Different formats, different subject matter, different origins and purposes. Documents are so diverse, in fact, that sometimes it can seem that the generic word 'document' is all but meaningless. So for the purposes of this chapter, we'll get specific. Let's imagine a technical manual that a major manufacturing firm is producing for a new product. They're based in one country – let's say, France – but want to localise their manual so that the product can be sold somewhere else – in this case, we'll go with Poland. The choice of document type is more or less arbitrary for our purposes, but every document type has its own requirements, and as we'll see, a technical manual has a few specific requirements which need to be taken into account on its journey.

The first step, of course, is to write the document in the source language. For our technical manual, we can assume that it will be produced in-house by one of the manufacturer's technical authors. This will be someone skilled at writing in French who also has in-depth knowledge of the specific product being developed. They might be a member of the product development team, or else be closely associated with them – but unless they happen to be perfectly bilingual in French and Polish (the two specific languages needed for this particular project) our author won't be qualified to translate the document into the required target language.

Instead, the manufacturer outsources the translation to an agency, and the manual makes its way to one of the agency's project managers. After completing negotiations with the client – something we'll cover in the next chapter – the project manager begins the process of choosing a qualified translator who can handle a project of this kind. Given the specific nature of this particular document, we know that the project manager will have a few key criteria:

1. The translator should be a native Polish speaker.
2. They should have a flawless comprehension of French.
3. They should have experience translating technical manuals – ideally, manuals for similar types of products as this one.

In addition, of course, the translator must have enough spare capacity for a reasonably quick turnaround time, and their rates must be in line with the client's expectations.

## The transformation begins

Once a suitable translator has been assigned and the job has been accepted, the manual makes its way to the translator, who does what they do best – transforming this French-language text into a Polish version that preserves all the content, meaning and nuance of the original version. This is an important step, to say the least, but here's the important thing to understand – even after the initial translation is done, the document's journey is far from over. Once it gets sent back to the project manager, our technical manual needs to go through a few more steps.

## Quality assurance

First, the project manager seeks out someone with similar qualifications to the translator, and the document wings its way across to this second linguist to start the quality control process. The exact role of this second linguist will vary depending on the manufacturer's exact requirements. They may be a proofreader, checking purely linguistic issues in order to catch things like spelling errors, grammatical mistakes and awkwardly worded sentences. Alternatively – since technical texts require a high degree of precision and terminological accuracy – they may be an editor specialising in exactly this kind of material. Such an editor is ideally qualified to spot mistranslations, inaccurate statements or misleading instructions that an inexperienced end user might not notice until they accidentally damage their new gadget. As a result, editors are extremely valuable professionals and come highly recommended when translating documents of this kind.

Once the text is confirmed to be free of errors, it gets handed back to the project manager. All done? Not quite! Converting a document from one language to another will almost inevitably lead to changes in the document's layout and formatting, since word lengths and even word counts will vary dramatically between languages. This is true even when working with relatively similar languages like French and Polish. Imagine the formatting complications that can arise when translating into a language with a right-to-left reading order, or a language like Mandarin Chinese where each character represents one word. This is therefore the ideal moment for another professional to step in – this time, an expert in desktop publishing. A DTP specialist will adjust the document so that its visual appearance, just like its linguistic content, is both beautiful and clear.

## There and back again

With that done, it's finally time for the document to head home. The DTP specialist sends it back to the agency's project manager, who sends it back to the manufacturer. From there, the document is ready to head to the printers and then begin a new journey entirely, packaged into boxes with the product it supports and shipped out to eager end clients across Poland, all of whom will be excited to learn all about their new purchase. Just as we suggested at the start of this chapter, many of them will never realise the manual was originally written in French – but that, paradoxically, is how the people behind the scenes know they've done a good job.

## The power of good translation project management

So far in this book, you've heard a lot about project managers, but not a lot about why they matter. Make no mistake: they're critical to the success of translation projects, especially large and complex ones. On the other hand, we've spent a lot of time praising the virtues of translators – and rightly so. If there were no translators, there would be no translation agencies – in fact, there would be no translation at all! The businesses of the world would be locked into a single language forever and ever. A terrifying thought, we're sure you'll agree.

But as important as translators are, their job simply wouldn't be possible without the support of another key role – the project manager. These are the people we want to talk about in this chapter.

Another theme we're going to focus on from this point onwards is the idea that translation is a business just like any other. Bearing that in mind, we can say with some confidence that if you've come from the business world to read this book, you probably already know the kinds of tasks that a project manager tends to be involved in. It's true that, whatever the industry, a PM's job will always cover a few general areas. They act as a bridge between the project team and the outside world, they prioritise tasks, allocate resources, manage scheduling and take care of other administrative and organisational issues. And if we're talking more specifically about the translation industry, yes, a project manager's job does meet all of these criteria – in the abstract. But in practice there's a little more to it than that, because the specifics of translation work mean that certain specialist skills are required. Without them – without a good project manager, in other words – a translation project could falter or even fail entirely.

### A day in the life

So what does a translation project manager (or PM) do? We can answer this question by working through another hypothetical project, this time exclusively from the PM's perspective. First, the PM receives an enquiry from a client in the engineering sector. There's a training manual that needs to be translated from English to Ukrainian. Can it be done? The PM discusses the situation with the client, identifying things like the available budget, the source and target language, and the expected deadline. If the agency is able to provide any additional services, such as layout and desktop publishing, or extra QA steps, the PM may also offer these to the client.

For this step, then, the PM needs a good mixture of soft skills such as sales and customer relations expertise, coupled with a deep understanding of the translation process that allows them to determine whether or not the client's expectations are realistic – and, if necessary, to work productively with the client to adjust those expectations as required.

### Resource hunting

Once the job is confirmed, the next step is to choose the right translator for the job. Remember that agencies often have huge contact books. Many PMs will likely have a database of hundreds or even thousands of freelance translators at their fingertips. Every

one of those translators will have their own specialist subjects and distinct qualifications, so the PM's job is to search the database to find the perfect match. In this case, our PM is looking for someone whose source language is English, whose target language is Ukrainian, and who has as much experience as possible with engineering-related texts. And if that perfect translator isn't in the database yet, the PM will need strong research skills to find them – and then they'll need to put those negotiation skills to work again, in order to agree a rate that suits both the translator and the client. At this point, the PM should also clearly communicate all of the client's expectations so that the translator understands exactly what's required. (In some agencies, PMs will instruct the agency's vendor or HR manager to find and test the new appropriate translators.)

### **Greasing the wheels**

Now the job has been assigned and the translator has started work – but the PM's role is far from over. The translator may need to ask the client a few questions over the course of a project, perhaps to clarify the meaning of one or two sentences or to establish the client's preferred terminology. In this case, the PM's role is to pass messages back and forth between the client and the translator, providing a single point of contact for both sides. And if either side fails to provide any necessary information in a timely fashion, the PM's job is to follow up and keep chasing after whatever details are needed to get the job done.

Speaking of timeliness, PMs also need to be proactive about monitoring the deadline for this project and all the others that they're currently managing. Few PMs have the luxury of only handling one job at a time. They have to juggle priorities as emails fly in and out, keeping track of all kinds of different requirements without letting anything else slip through their net. And if a project deadline passes without the translation coming in, the PM needs to be proactive about finding out why. This is a rare occurrence, of course: a good translator will make every effort to get every translation in on time, and proper time management is a core part of a freelancer's job description. But sometimes mistakes are made, and when that happens, it's the project manager's job to get the project back on track as quickly as possible. Client satisfaction is a top priority, so the PM will need to keep the lines of communication open on both ends, getting updates from the translator, and keeping the client appraised so that they know when they'll get their translations.

Once the translator has finished, the PM's next job is to organise the quality assurance process. Sometimes, they may even do the QA job themselves. You see, the most valuable project managers of all are those who have experience working on the other side of the coin – in other words, project managers who are also qualified translators. Many of the skills that make a good translator also make for a good translation project manager: clear communication skills, a strong business sense, an eye for detail... A PM who is also a qualified translator can make an ideal proofreader. As long as our hypothetical PM is a native Ukrainian speaker who is also fluent in English, they can judge whether this translation is both linguistically accurate and faithful to its source. Alternatively, if a subject-specific expert is required (or if the client simply wants more than one person to check and correct the document), the PM can use their extensive contact database to once again find the right

person for the job. As before, the PM should ensure that this phase of the job is completed on time and that any issues are resolved as quickly as possible.

Finally, the document is ready. It's been translated, checked, even double- or triple-checked where necessary. The project manager can breathe a sigh of relief and congratulate themselves on another job well done. It's taken a wide range of skills to get them to this point, and outstanding teamwork from everyone involved – with the PM leading the way from start to finish. Now, hopefully, you can see why good translation project management is so valuable. It really is the cement that holds the whole process together.

Before we end this chapter, here's one final thought: the example project we've described in this chapter has actually been a relatively simple one. PMs often need to handle urgent and large projects requiring several translators to work simultaneously on the same document. In cases like this, the PM's task is to split the project among a number of vendors and organise the process in order to both keep to the deadline and ensure that the translation is consistent and high quality. In the next chapter, we'll discuss in detail the issue of splitting a project.

## Splitting a project between translators? Here's what to think about.

Scheduling is key to the success of any project. In the case of translation, this means that deadlines are typically tight and pressure is high to deliver on time. After all, a translated text is usually a means to an end. Once you have a localised file, you're going to want to do something with it, whether that's putting your new website online, issuing a press release, or shipping user manuals out in time for a product launch. This means that translation clients typically demand very fast turnaround times. They want their translations as soon as humanly possible.

Translators and translation agencies, for their part, will do everything in their power to make this happen – and yet there are only so many hours in the day. Freelance translators in particular may be able to set their own hours and work late from time to time, but this is hardly conducive to a good work-life balance, and in the long run it's far from sustainable. Ultimately, most translators cannot produce good-quality work at a faster rate than about 2,000 words per day. So what's to be done when you have a 4,000 word document and you need it translated by tomorrow?

### Splitting: The difference

A common strategy in cases like this is to split a project across two or more translators. In the case of the 4,000-word project, the project manager would most likely split the file in two, giving each translator 2,000 words. Once both have completed their work, the project manager sends one joint file back to the client (after arranging any necessary quality control checks, of course).

Sounds great, doesn't it? In principle, this is a perfectly reasonable way to handle a large translation project with a short turnaround time. The benefits are obvious: splitting translation projects between multiple linguists improves delivery times, allowing your own business processes to run a little more smoothly. It can also help to adapt to freelancers' variable capacities. If your usual translator is backed up with other work and can only handle part of your latest project, you can send them as much as they can currently handle and then share the rest out among other professionals. And assuming that you're working with a translation agency, this means no extra work for you. As ever, the project manager will coordinate everything while you sit back and relax – or, perhaps, use the extra time to race to finish the rest of the project associated with the translation.

### To split or not to split

By this point, you might be feeling ready to split all of your projects into 2,000-word chunks and demand a 24-hour turnaround time on each of them. But slow down a second first, because this approach can also have significant drawbacks.

If two (or more) translators are working on different parts of the same file, it gets a lot harder for them to coordinate their work. Remember that translation is a creative discipline: give two translators the same sentence to translate and you would probably

get two completely different sentences back. Both could be completely accurate, but each would reflect that translator's unique personal style. It follows, then, that if you give two translators different parts of the same document, the two halves could be subtly different from one another. For example, there might be some inconsistency in the terminology used. This can be minimised if you have a well-maintained term base and translation memory, but no term base is ever 100% complete. Every project will add new terms and turns of phrase, so there will always be the risk that two translators working in parallel will translate the same word in different ways. Sometimes that's not a big deal. Other times – if it's a product name, say, or a new industry buzzword – it could be very important indeed. If the term is key to understanding the entire text, translating it in two different ways could be downright disastrous.

This problem can be resolved in part through intensive editing after the translation stage. If a single editor checks both parts of the file in order to unify things like terminology and phrasing, the biggest and most noticeable differences can be avoided. That's fine, but in-depth editing of this kind takes time – and weren't you trying to save time in the first place? An editor's job can take much longer if they have to make more corrections, so think carefully about the need to balance speed and quality.

### **Long-term effects**

In the long run, splitting projects can also lead to other kinds of consistency issues. Remember what we said about [long-term partnerships](#)? They're crucial if you want the very best translation services. Reusing translators across multiple projects allows them to grow familiar with your business and develop a powerful, consistent style. If you're constantly splitting projects between multiple linguists, however, it's going to be very difficult for any of them to really settle into a groove when translating for you.

As with the issue of differences between translators' styles, this can be partly resolved with the help of good linguistic resources. Style guides in particular are very helpful, to keep a team of translators all pointed in the right direction, but there's no substitute for the intuitive understanding of a style that comes with extensive experience. The more work you entrust to one specific translator or a small, focused team, the faster you'll see these kinds of results.

### **Split in moderation**

With all of this said, there remains a strong case for splitting translation projects under certain circumstances. Sometimes tight deadlines can't be avoided: the modern world moves quickly, and businesses have to keep up with it. Translation agencies understand this – they're subject to the same pressure, after all – and they'll do everything they can to accommodate your needs.

The best times to split a project, then, are when one or more of the following criteria are met:

1. The translation requires an exceptionally fast turnaround due to external pressures (project deadlines, public perception, content for fast-moving outlets such as social media)
2. The translation consists of multiple documents or sections and it doesn't matter too much if there are some subtle differences between these
3. There's no need for the very strictest quality control processes (e.g. for less visible publications or documents for internal use)

If you don't recognise any of these criteria in your project, perhaps it's time to step back and take a deep breath. Do you *really* need the translation as quickly as absolutely possible? It's easy to get caught up in the rush of business and demand everything faster, faster, faster, but sometimes it's just not necessary. A translator who is able to take their time to deliver a polished, consistent translation will deliver the best results of all.

## The importance of quality assurance in the translation process

One of the keys to understanding the translation industry is realising that, on some fundamental level, it operates like any other.

Not what you expected to hear? That might be because translation is an often misunderstood business. On the other hand, if it sounds like a statement of the obvious, well, you have our apologies – but we should congratulate you as well for being so clear-sighted. Many people still see translation as either a rote administrative task or some quasi-mystical thing, utterly incomprehensible to those not trained in it.

The reality is quite different from either of these preconceptions – but then that’s why we’re here, to dispel the myths and clear up the misunderstandings. The fact is, yes, translation is a skilled discipline which requires a unique combination of skills and experience – but the translation industry can and does use many of the same techniques and processes as other industries to keep production on track, on time, and on budget. This is a big part of why translation agencies make such valuable partners on localisation projects – but hold on to that thought, we’ll come back to it later.

### In the workflow

For now, let’s go back to this idea of processes. Think about quality assurance, for example. Chances are, whatever your own industry, you’ll have some form of QA process in place to evaluate the things you do. Whether you’re in manufacturing, services, retail or some other sector entirely, someone in your business will be looking out to make sure your clients are satisfied with the product or service they’re receiving. Here’s the thing: translation businesses are no different – at least, the reputable ones aren’t. So what does QA look like in the translation industry, and how is it done?

It all starts with the original translator, of course. Any translator worth their salt will rigorously check and double-check their own work. They’ll check their spelling and grammar – not just using an automatic tool, which can be unreliable (a computer doesn’t know that horses don’t typically have reigns, for example, unless they’ve been appointed to government by some mad Roman emperor), but by actually manually checking for themselves that everything is correct and proper, referring to outside resources such as dictionaries and style manuals where necessary. Spelling is to some extent the simplest part of a linguistic QA analysis, since it’s basically a binary right-or-wrong issue, but it’s absolutely essential, and it requires real care and attention to detail. Then there are other issues such as factual accuracy, readability and the rather more nebulous sense of whether a text ‘feels’ right – and believe us, a good translator will know if it doesn’t. As a result, a translator will often take their work through several drafts before submitting it to their project manager.

This is far from the end of the QA process, though. In fact, it’s barely the beginning. Two heads really are better than one when it comes to the written word: nobody’s perfect, and even the very best translators can miss occasional errors just through over-familiarity

with their work. So getting at least one other person to take a fresh look at a text can make a huge difference to its quality.

### **Editors, proofreaders and experts**

Dedicated linguistic QA workers can take on a number of different roles. In theory, one person could do everything; in practice, more is better. Depending on the size, visibility and importance of a project, the QA chain could include a very large number of people. Two heads are better than one and three heads are better than two, but of course, you do have to balance the desire for rigorous testing against things like time and budget constraints, and sheer practicality. But let's assume money is no object. For our next example project, we'll imagine that our hypothetical translation is a big glossy brochure for a flagship product, and it needs to be the very best it can be. Who's going to make sure everything looks good?

First, we'll talk about the proofreader. Proofreaders check and correct typos, layout problems and so on: the simple binary issues that we talked about before (like spelling). They're the line of defence against those little things that sometimes slip under the radar.

Then there's the editor. Editors go a layer deeper, looking at linguistic issues like style and fluency – pinning down that all-important 'feel' that a good translation needs to get right – and technical issues like using the proper abbreviations and being consistent with terminology. An editor needs to be able to consider the more subjective side of writing and make considered decisions about whether and how to alter what the translation has written, which means they also need an excellent working knowledge of the translation process and of the text's subject matter. Good editing is crucial if a text is to be accepted within its own industry.

If you want yet another layer of reassurance, you can bring in a subject-matter expert: someone who's less of a pure linguist and more of a specialist in the area(s) covered by the translation. This is particularly useful in fields such as law and medicine, which require years of training. If you want to make sure an epidemiological report is factually accurate, for example, then nobody's going to know better than a practising epidemiologist.

### **Checking in-house**

At some point in the process, it's only natural for a client to want to do their own QA checks – they're the ones who have to live with the final product, after all. But if they don't speak the target language, how can they assess whether the translation is satisfactory? This is where back translation comes in. Here, a different translator – still a human, of course, rather than a machine translation service – converts the translated document back into its original language – without looking at the original text. The two source-language documents can then be compared to make sure they match closely enough, allowing people like the end client to participate in the assessment even if they aren't bilingual. This final step may be useful if you want to be confident of an absolutely perfect text, but it's rather an expensive one, because of course the work of the second translator should be paid for, just like that of the first.

Even once all of these people have checked the translation and corrected it wherever necessary, the QA process isn't quite done. It's essential to provide feedback to everyone involved, so that the translators and other professionals can identify areas for improvement in future – or just so that they can have the satisfaction of knowing they've done a good job. Relaying this information is often the job of the translation project manager, who will also ideally do their own final checks to make sure all the 'i's have been dotted and 't's crossed – literally.

All of this really does highlight once again why translation agencies are so valuable. A lone freelancer can be highly skilled, meticulously detailed and incredibly conscientious, but they can't compete with the peace of mind that you get from multi-stage linguistic QA. For that, you need an organised, well-connected network of multiple qualified experts – which is exactly what a good translation agency provides.

## **PART 5 – SPECIALIST TRANSLATION**

Not all translators are created equal. As you now know, there's something of a hierarchy starting from machine translation, rising up through haphazard fly-by-night operations, to professional human translation provided by genuine translation vendors. But even among the professionals, there are degrees of specialisation. Sometimes you need someone with a pinpoint focus on specific subjects – and this is exactly what specialist translators are for. Read on to learn why they're important and when you might need them.

## When do you really need a specialist translator?

Choosing a translator is a big decision. You're selecting the person (or the team) that will bring the voice of your organisation to an entirely new audience – to share your product with a foreign market or your ideas with a wider crowd. Taking the plunge and choosing a translation provider requires real trust, especially if you don't personally speak the language into which your text is being translated.

All of this means that once you've found a translator you can rely on, you'll probably want to stick with them for the foreseeable future. Not only will you have the peace of mind that comes with working with someone you trust, we know from [our chapter on long-term relationships](#) that a translator who knows you and your organisation well will be able to work more efficiently and effectively.

And with this in mind, one important criterion when selecting a translator for a given job is their specialist subject knowledge. Ideally, you'll always want to work with someone who knows the subject matter of each individual text inside and out. Most of the time, though, the need for an expert won't conflict with the desire to work with the same translator on a regular basis – especially if your organisation tends to produce documents focusing on a fairly narrow field. Inevitably, though, a multinational business will eventually produce at least one text requiring knowledge and experience that goes outside what their usual translator can offer. This is where specialist translators come in.

### Send in the specialists

These days, most translators have at least one specialist subject in which they market their expertise, but when language service providers talk about 'specialist translators', they often mean something a little more specific. Specialist translators make their living from focusing on one or two very demanding fields. They may be highly trained current or former practitioners of a profession, who also happen to have excellent translation skills, or they may have acquired their knowledge and expertise through some other route. But however they came to the job, the very best specialist translators tend to be very highly educated, with many years of practical experience in their field. So when might you need to hire one?

### Contracts that count

The first case, and one that most if not all international companies will encounter at some point, is the field of legal translation. You don't need us to tell you that it takes an expert to draft a legally binding document such as a contract or a set of terms and conditions. Well, the same applies to translating such documents. Naturally, you want to be absolutely certain that the text is comprehensible and unambiguous in the target language, but the reasons for hiring a specialist translator go deeper than that. Don't forget that two different countries can have very different legal systems, with corresponding differences in standards, protections and terminology. You need a translator who can take all of this into account in order to produce a text that will hold up in court, and that means finding someone who

knows the law of two different countries inside and out. Legal specialist translators are a rare and valuable resource, and sometimes they're exactly the person you need.

### **Doctor, doctor!**

Another example where specialist translators are needed might be the medical field. This is a demanding and tightly regulated sector, and with good reason: nothing is more important than a patient's safety and wellbeing. If you work for a pharmaceutical company, for example, or a biomedical engineering firm, then it's fairly obvious that your company will have a regular need for a specialist medical translator who fully understands how your products work. However, demand for these experts actually comes from a broader range of clients than you might expect. It's not just the medical firms themselves, but their suppliers and clients who might also need a specialist. It's the insurance firms who evaluate claims, the governments that regulate and provide medical services – and sometimes it's even your everyday employer, who gets a doctor's note in a language they don't speak from an employee who injured themselves while on holiday. Medical translators do all kinds of work, in other words, and you might well need one someday even if your organisation isn't directly associated with the medical sector.

### **Technical expertise**

Then there's the case of the technical translator. This is an exceptionally broad term – broad enough that we'll keep coming back to it in different forms over the course of this section – so bear in mind that a request to an agency for a 'technical' translator might be a little too vague unless you give additional information. One translator might be a real whizz with computers, for example, but know nothing about automotive design. Broadly, though, specialist technical translators tend to know a great deal about subjects like technology, engineering, applied sciences or heavy industry. One rule of thumb might be this: if it involves a hard hat, a screwdriver or computer code, you might well need a specialist technical translator. The reasons why are a little clearer if we look at a concrete example. Let's imagine a furniture factory looking to put together a new automated production line. They're looking to source some of the equipment from an overseas distributor, which means hiring a couple of translators to act as intermediaries, both to smooth out the negotiation process and to ensure everyone understands the product specifications and capabilities. Industrial equipment can be very expensive, to say nothing of the costs of delays and breakdowns. The figures involved can be absolutely astronomical, especially if legal staff gets involved at some point, so it's essential to get everything right first time. A specialist translator (perhaps someone who has worked for a similar business before) will know the ins and outs of the type of equipment needed, allowing them to communicate your needs accurately and helpfully to the supplier.

### **Academic interests**

One final interesting example where a specialist translator might be needed is in academia and research – specifically, in the publication of scientific papers. At the cutting edge of any discipline, only an expert will be able to communicate a team's latest findings to a broad international audience. And while it's true that English is the unofficial lingua franca

of the scientific community, and many researchers are competent English speakers even when it's not their first language, many readers still complain about unclear or awkwardly written publications that make what's being discussed more difficult to understand. As ever, there's no substitute for expertise: a specialist translator will be able to explain your latest research in another language without compromising on accuracy or readability.

So, now that we've laid out these case studies, what general conclusions can we draw? These are by no means the only occasions when you might need a specialist translator, just a sampling of some of the most common ones. There are some shared threads running through examples like these, though. In all cases, specialist translators deal with unusually complex subject matter and address a specific audience with a particular need for precision and accuracy. Their translations are often high-profile and in some cases a misleading or inaccurate translation can even risk exposing someone to legal action. Businesses can sink or soar based on jobs like these, which means – even more so than usual – that it's all about working with someone you can trust and rely on. And specialist translators are the ones you can count on when nothing but the best will do.

## Technical and marketing translation: Unstoppable force meets immovable object?

Translators and agencies alike have a tendency to break texts down into specialist fields. On paper, this is a great idea – and in practice, it's usually a helpful way for agencies to identify which translators are best-qualified for a given job and for translators to determine what kind of work is required from them. Some texts, however, don't fit into a single neat bracket. What happens then? And what can translators do to meet the requirements that come with different kinds of projects while still maintaining a consistent voice?

As an example, let's imagine that we're translating a website for an IT company – a business-to-business software developer, perhaps. The website contains some detailed product descriptions and specifications, so there's a strong technical element here. But it's also the company's public face to the world, so it definitely counts as marketing material, too. Marketing text traditionally needs to be engaging, accessible and positive. But technical writing, by its nature, is factual, in-depth and often requires some specialist knowledge. It sounds like a recipe for conflict: the irresistible pull to make marketing copy as exciting as possible, resisted by the danger of a technical text becoming dry and boring. Can we reconcile these two styles and produce something that's detailed, accurate and interesting all at once? Of course we can – provided that we know what we're doing.

So, if you'll pardon the phrasing, how do we know that we know what we're doing? Naturally a job like this requires proper qualifications, both an understanding of the specific technical field that the project covers, and the ability to write good marketing copy as well. If a single translator can handle both sides, great, but it's entirely possible to split the project between multiple professionals. There's always the possibility that the text will be too complex for any one person to handle, and at that point it might be worth sourcing multiple translators, each with their own specialisation. Assuming that you're working with an agency, this is where they'll come into their own. Their resource networks should be able to find you one or more dedicated specialists to divide up the work, including translators, proofreaders and linguistic editors, as well as subject-specific experts who can field questions and make sure everyone understands the material correctly. This kind of collaboration means that everyone gets to focus on their strengths, allowing a dual-natured text of this kind to get the expert attention it requires.

### Know your subject

The first step, as always, is to study the source text. In this case, one of the things we'll be looking for is occasions when one voice – technical or marketing – dominates over the other. The front page for the website is likely to be more about the business and less about the technical details, for example. On the other hand, if there's a developer support section, it will probably be full of jargon and specialist concepts – and it may well be somewhat drier in tone than the front page, as well. In other words, the intended audience and purpose of the text may vary even within a single project. We can use this fact to determine where to position the site as a whole along the marketing/technical spectrum, and to adjust the 'voice' of the translation from time to time if need be.

## Clear communication

Still, a website like this will likely never be entirely marketing or 100% technical, even on a page-by-page level. What, specifically, can be done to make these apparent polar-opposite styles of writing converge? There are a few tricks that translators can use, particularly when looking at the more technical sections of a project. The first is to be critical of the source text: to look for ways it could be improved upon. This may sound odd, considering that they've just been studying the source to learn its tricks, but bear in mind that technical documents are often written by technical experts within a company. Developers and engineers may be the best at what they do, but there's no guarantee that they're equally good communicators. A professional translator could very well be a much better writer than the source-language author, and as such, they may be able to spot places where the text could be clearer or more interesting to read.

Similarly, translators will try to avoid over-complex technical terms in a project of this kind. Industry jargon has its place, and an IT company might reasonably expect visitors to its site to be at least moderately IT-savvy, but it never hurts to keep the layman in mind when translating something that will be publicly visible. A translator – who will, after all, be an expert in their target language – should also be aware of whether certain terms would be as well-known to target-language readers as to the original audience. A national regulation or standard may need additional clarification in translation, for example, even if its existence is common knowledge in its country of origin.

Improving the technical side of things is a worthy goal, of course, but at the same time, we mustn't get overexcited. A translator's first duty is of course to preserve the meaning of the source text – which means they mustn't add detail that doesn't exist in the source text, and they mustn't over-embellish. If they want to significantly lighten the tone of a particularly dry section, for example, this should only be done after consultation with the client. If they think that a whole extra explanatory paragraph would go a long way towards improving the reader's experience, then once again, by all means they can suggest it to the client – but they certainly shouldn't add it without the client's permission.

## Learning from the past

Finally, we should remember that no text exists in isolation. Sticking with the idea of a company website, we can assume that the company would have other material that translators could use for reference: product brochures, press releases, perhaps even internal documents such as corporate messaging guides or glossaries. This kind of material is always worth providing, since it gives translators more source material to learn from and helps them understand more about the client's products – which should result in a better, more informed translation. And if these reference materials have already been translated, then the translators might even be able to pick up a few tricks by comparing the source and target versions to see how others have handled these kinds of mixed-style projects.

In short, a project that blurs the lines between different specialisations needn't be more challenging or intimidating than any other. The key is to understand that these kinds of projects exist, to be able identify them as such when you see them, and to tackle them

with a full toolkit of specialist approaches. With the right approach and the proper support, it's entirely possible to produce a translation that's a pleasure to read without skimping on detail.

## Sworn translation: What is it and when do you need it?

One of the interesting quirks about translation as a professional service is that if you need it there's a good chance that you, as the client, may find it difficult to verify whether or not a translator has done a good job. If you don't speak one of the languages involved, how can you be sure that the translation you've received is a faithful rendering of the original?

To an extent, this is something that has to be taken on trust. It's still not a matter of blind faith, however. As we've discussed throughout this book, there are plenty of ways for you to assess whether a translation agency is legitimate without even considering your own linguistic ability. However, many translation clients still – quite reasonably – want some kind of final guarantee of the quality of a translation. This can be a sensible precaution to take, particularly in the case of very high-value documents such as contracts and other legally sensitive communications. In cases like these, one option is to seek out something called 'sworn translation', sometimes also known as 'certified translation'.

In theory, sworn translation aims for 'legal equivalence' in a translation, a guarantee that the translation of a document will have the same legal effect, to the greatest possible extent, as the source version. That's the theory – but in practice, sworn translation can be a bit of a minefield. Part of the reason that the terms used to describe this service differ is because the exact function and nature of a sworn translation varies from country to country. There is no established international standard for a sworn translation; rather, each part of the world has its own rules and systems. This is true even across Europe, a continent which is normally known for establishing strong standards and regulations spanning national borders. But as the following examples show, different European countries can take very different approaches to sworn translation.

### Sworn translation in Poland

Poland is an example of a country with a well-regulated system of sworn translation. Polish translators can opt to be certified at state-approved certification centres, granting them the right to serve as sworn translators. Polish authorities will not recognise official documents such as birth certificates from foreign countries unless they have been translated by a certified sworn translator.

This type of system gives maximum peace of mind and allows sworn translators to clearly differentiate themselves from other members of their profession. Although it can result in additional layers of bureaucracy, and potentially increased costs to the client, it does at least guarantee that those who want this type of service can rely on the translator they work with.

### Sworn translation in Ukraine

In Ukraine, on the other hand, the situation is quite different. Here, there are no certification centres of any kind. As such, there are no sworn translators – or at least, the term 'sworn translator' has no real legal meaning. However, a common alternative option here is to send a translation for notarisisation. In this case, a notary certifies that a translation has been carried out by a translator with a translation diploma.

This system is less secure overall than the Polish model, but it still provides a few guarantees. Under this process, you can at least be confident that a notarised translation has been handled by someone with professional training who presumably understands the gravity and importance of a legal translation. Translation diplomas can differ in their stringency and quality standards, however, so follow-up checks may be needed in some cases to confirm a translator's skills and suitability.

### **Sworn translation in the United Kingdom**

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, the translation profession is barely regulated at all. In the UK, anyone can market themselves as a translator, no matter their qualifications.

Likewise, individual translations are not generally certified by any official body, nor can translators themselves certify a translation in any way. In fact, you could almost say sworn translation is a meaningless concept here. Some translators do provide 'sworn statements' witnessed by solicitors, which serve to confirm a translator's identity, but which have little legal force. This is because the wording of the statement typically looks something like this:

*"I, [translator's name here], confirm that I have translated the attached text and that it is correct and accurate to the best of my knowledge and abilities."*

This does nothing to actually certify the accuracy of the translation or the translator's own abilities – only that they themselves believe that they have done a good job. Needless to say, a business looking for a guarantee of quality and accuracy is probably in need of something a little more effective. In the United Kingdom, then, and in other countries which have no official standard for sworn translation, your money might be better spent on something like additional quality assurance measures instead.

### **The golden rule**

The overarching principle, then, is to understand how regulations governing sworn translation can differ from one country to another. If you're unfamiliar with your own country's rules, or those in a country you're considering working with, you can always ask your translation agency. As experts in localisation, they'll be sure to have the answers you need and will be able to advise you on how to get the best results and be as confident as possible about the translations you receive.

## The specialist skills needed for IT translation

We believe in demystifying the translation industry because it helps everyone involved. Clients, agencies and translators all benefit from a sector where everyone involved has a shared understanding of its processes, standards and requirements. We understand the frustration that can stem from a failure to understand an industry, because the language services sector is by no means the only subject that can feel opaque and confusing to outsiders. One discipline in particular springs to mind: computing.

To those in the know, computers seem like perfectly straightforward tools. To those who aren't, they can seem mysterious, if not vaguely troubling. Translators working in computing-related fields should, of course, always fall into the former camp. To close out this section, let's look at a specific category of specialist translation and think about what sort of skills are needed to handle it. Let's consider IT.

IT – standing, of course, for information technology – is one of the key driving forces of the twenty-first century. It's a global industry, not least because IT systems are the primary facilitators of instantaneous worldwide communication. It probably won't surprise you, then, to learn that IT-related translation is always in huge demand. But although IT has changed all of our lives quite dramatically, not all translators are equally qualified to handle IT-related work.

### Do you speak computer?

Perhaps it's beyond our power to explain why some people 'get' computers and others just don't. Perhaps it's beyond anyone's power. But there's no question that these two camps of people exist – you probably know at least a few people who fall into each category. IT translators, needless to say, need to be real computer whizzes.

On one level, this is about being comfortable working with computers on a day-to-day basis and having a strong knowledge of general computing principles. An IT translator should know the types of terms and language styles that software interfaces typically use. Can they tell the difference between a LAN and a WAN? Can they decode complex jargon? Can they grok the purpose of a given application – and do they know what 'grok' means?

(For the record, it's a term used by programmers and other IT specialists to describe that state when you understand a system perfectly and intuitively, without having to reach for the user manual every five minutes. Handy term, don't you think?)

### Global industry, local differences

Technical knowledge is a key skill, but it's not the only kind of knowledge IT translators need. Language matters, as always, and it's important to understand cultural differences – and to recognise that such differences exist even in this highly globalised industry.

For example, in the Anglosphere – the English-speaking world – IT businesses often take a casual, relaxed linguistic tone with their clients. This springs from the very

earliest days of IT, when the pioneers in the field were overwhelmingly university students, hippies and dreamers – clustered in particular in that hotspot of alternative culture, Silicon Valley. IT was seen as a great equalising force in culture, and we can say that that sense of idealism persists in the language used by IT firms today – as long as we're talking about the Anglosphere.

German-speaking companies, for example, tend to strike a different tone. As a rule, their voices are more conservative, more businesslike. Clients are still more likely to be addressed with the formal 'Sie' than the informal 'du'. A translator who fails to spot this kind of cultural nuance could cause an embarrassing *faux pas* for their client.

And since we slipped into French for a moment there, let's take a moment to acknowledge that while German-speaking companies are often quite happy to import English terms for newly coined IT-related concepts – 'ein Computer', 'downloaden' – in France, the population can be quite protective of their own language and will expect local terminology to be used. For example, the Académie Française (the official body which gallantly attempts to regulate use of the French language) recommends 'l'ordinateur' for 'the computer' and 'télécharger' meaning 'to download'.

### **Skills that make the job go smoothly**

Advanced IT skills can also be very handy for a translator working in this field. After all, it's a bonus to the client if you can fully localise their product for them, rather than just delivering a Word document with a mass of text that they then have to implement for themselves. Many IT translators therefore benefit from learning development techniques for themselves. Web design is a handy one if you translate websites, of course, while some basic programming skills can go a long way when translating software applications. Database management is also a handy all-round skill for a variety of project types, and the ability to get to grips with a new software package can help translators to participate in testing and quality control.

All of these skills and knowledge groups illustrate the kinds of qualifications you should look for in an IT translation specialist – but they also point the way towards identifying specialists in other fields, as well. We're moving on from specialist translation now, but there are nearly as many specialist translation subjects as there are businesses in the world, so if we haven't covered your industry in this section, you can still bear the same three key questions in mind. Does a translator have specialist industry knowledge? Do they understand varying local expectations and requirements? Do they have any relevant additional skills? If the answer to all of these is 'yes', you can be confident that you're working with a specialist.

## **PART 6 – TRANSLATION TOOLS**

How do translators do their jobs? Raw skill and linguistic knowledge play their part, of course, but every professional still needs a toolbox. In the case of translators, these tools come in the form of software applications, reference material, and more besides.

Understanding these tools will help you work more productively with your translation partner – both because you can spot a good agency by the tools they use, and because some of these resources can also be of direct benefit to you in your day-to-day work.

## How CAT tools can help deliver the best quality translations

For any company looking to outsource its translation needs in the most cost-effective way possible, a basic understanding of CAT tools is indispensable. Whether you've seen the term bandied about on translation agency websites but you're not quite sure what it means, or you want to learn more about how CAT tools can save you money, this chapter will explain how these innovative pieces of software work and what they can do for you.

### What are CAT tools and how do they work?

Simply put, CAT tools (short for computer-assisted translation tools) are software programs used by translators to automate part of the translation process. The basic principle is that the translator opens the source text in a CAT tool program in order to translate it. The CAT tool splits the text into segments – typically individual sentences – known as translation units (TUs). The segments are presented clearly in order to make translation quicker: typically, the software will show a two-column grid, with source text segments displayed on the left and a series of empty cells on the right where the translator enters the correct translation for each TU. Once a translation unit has been translated, the CAT tool saves the source segment and its translation together as a pair, and the translator can return to this pair at any time to make changes as needed. CAT tools make this kind of revision easy thanks to a number of features that help the translator navigate large texts to find exactly what they need.

CAT tools really come into their own as a tool for building translation memories (TMs). As a translator works, the CAT tool builds a database of all past translations for a given project, client or sector. The CAT tool can use this translation memory to search for matching translation units, inserting the correct translation for the segments in advance so that the translator only has to check them. Modern CAT tools can also search for partially matching segments, known as 'fuzzy matches', and offer them as an option to the translator when it thinks they might be useful for a new segment.

Another great feature of CAT tools is that translators can use them to look up words in a range of terminology databases, dictionaries and specialist encyclopaedias, which are increasingly available in electronic formats. The CAT tool will not only look up the word, but can also find the word in the correct dictionary. For example, if your text is legal in nature, you can tell the CAT tool this, so it will put results from legal dictionaries at the top of the list. The technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated, and industry specialists predict that soon CAT tools will be able to use algorithms to examine the source text and predict which translation will be correct with increasing degrees of accuracy.

Professional translators develop and hone the abilities of their CAT tools by importing term bases and glossaries – more on them in our next chapter – and for many, the hunt for high-quality material has become a priority in developing their services. The more quality information the CAT tool can access, the more likely it is to suggest the correct term. But no matter how clever these programs become, it is always important to remember that the CAT tool is just that, a tool. Just as owning an excellent tennis racket does not make you Roger Federer, and having a set of oil paints does not mean you'll create the Mona Lisa,

CAT tools will only create meaningful high-quality translations if they're in the hands of skilled professional translators.

### **What are the benefits of CAT tools for the client?**

In many ways, a CAT tool offers the same benefits to both translators and clients. After all, you both have the same goal: speedy, accurate and fluent translation. CAT tools can sometimes really speed things up with their segment-matching technology, acting as a personal typist for the translator, who no longer has to go to the trouble of retyping the same translation 20 times in a repetitive text. This benefit can be passed on to the client in the form of price discounts. In order to provide a quote, the project manager will analyse the text against the translation memory, and generate a report that lists the number of internal repetitions as well as the number of matches and fuzzy matches between the text and the TM. Translation agencies will offer discounts at various levels for them all based on the strength of the match. For highly repetitive texts, these discounts can stack up to a sizeable percentage of the total cost of the job, which means choosing an agency that uses CAT tools is the only way to go if you want to see huge savings on your translations.

The second great benefit of CAT tools is the way in which they improve the accuracy of the text. With the translation memory on hand, gone are the days when translators needed the memory of an elephant to translate large texts. Prior to the advent of CAT tools, translators would often need to remember vast amounts of terminology, which would change from job to job depending on the client's preferences, and they had to make sure huge texts of many thousands of words were perfectly consistent. It was a recipe for inaccuracy and inconsistency. Translation memories have made that a thing of the past. One of the few areas where computers consistently trump humans in terms of cognition is memory, so it makes complete sense to pass off this irksome job to our super-capable electronic friends. Editing, quality assurance, using indexing or concordance tools, applying formal rules or style guides, correcting formatting and standardising terminology are no longer a matter of scabbling around with long handwritten lists: the computer does the job of remembering for you. This is one reason why many clients now invest in creating term bases of company terminology. This involves making a list of the terms your company most often uses, with the help of special software, and then having this list translated carefully into your target languages by top-level translators so that you now have a resource to use for every translation.

### **What's the difference between machine translation and computer-assisted translation?**

It's important to establish that there is a massive difference between the CAT tools discussed here and machine translation. Machine translation, or MT, is simply a translation conducted entirely by computers using databases, dictionaries, or corpuses. In its most basic form, machine translation creates a 'translation' of the text you enter using word-by-word substitution. Algorithms are being developed to allow for other linguistic differences, such as syntax conventions, and many machine translation products now use statistical techniques and corpus analysis to inform the output. However, in almost all situations, machine translation is so vastly inferior to human translation as to be worthless for all practical purposes.

With CAT tools, on the other hand, the computer facilitates speed and terminological consistency by taking over the tasks that humans perform relatively poorly at, while not interfering with the skills that humans are exceptionally good at: deduction, reasoning, rational judgement and meaningful comprehension. In short, CAT tools help combine the strengths of both humans and machines, while mitigating the weaknesses of each.

## Why should you invest in term base creation, glossaries or style guides?

If you're interested in getting the very best out of your business translation service provider, then your next step might be to invest in creating resources for them to use. From linguistic style guides that help writers perfectly match your company tone, to glossaries detailing your preferred terminology, providing your language translation services team with extra guidance can really help improve the quality of the finished translation. Many translation agencies will be able to work with you in developing these resources. Creating top-quality term bases, glossaries or style guides is not an overnight job, but for companies that are serious about their foreign language markets, creating linguistic resources is a must for top-quality results. Read on to discover more about the benefits of developing translation resources for your company.

### Consistency and accuracy

One of the primary benefits of developing translation resources is that they can help you ensure the consistency and accuracy of the translations you receive. For example, if your company works in a highly technical area, it would be well worth your while to invest in glossary creation services. Here, you provide documentation such as user manuals, product descriptions or website texts to an expert in glossary creation who uses highly specialised software and their own expertise to determine the key terms for your business. You can specify how many key terms you wish the expert to find, and your project manager will be able to guide you in finding a suitable number. Once you have acquired the list of key terms and looked them over, the next step is to have them translated into your target language by the very best translators you can find. These primary translators will be establishing the foundations for all subsequent translation into this language, so you'll need qualified and experienced experts in your field to ensure that all the key terms are translated perfectly. These primary translators will use their expertise in your industry, the documents you provide and their exemplary research skills to ensure that everything is correct. You will receive the final glossary, listing the source-language and target-language terms next to each other, and can hand this to any future translators, to ensure that they are all calling a spade a spade.

This process is a great way of ensuring consistency in highly technical texts, and is extremely common in fields such as medical, legal, engineering, automotive, telecommunications and anything else with a high degree of specialised vocabulary. This approach can also be vital for companies that use set phrases, slogans or catchphrases in their marketing material. By defining the key phrases that reflect the ethos of your company and having them carefully translated by a gifted translator with a great deal of marketing knowledge and a flair for writing, you can then provide future translators with an excellent reference that will guide their work in the target language.

### Style

Even if your company does not deal with detailed technical vocabulary or slogan-based marketing, you might still benefit from investing in a style guide. Many of the world's

largest companies have built up a brand image that is embedded in everything they do. Think of the economy, stylishness and simplicity of Apple's branding or the trustworthy, dependable image of the BBC. For each of these organisations, their brand identity is carried through in every aspect of their presentation, from the language they use to their preferred design elements, from fonts and colours to logos and images. These companies understand that brand identity has a huge influence on clients' perceptions of and emotions towards a company, their gut feelings of loyalty and belonging, and what they say about the company to their friends. Exceptional brand identity taps into memories, desires, stories and relationships; it turns a product into a symbol of everything the client wants, and it turns a distant company into a close friend. Nowadays the phenomenon of memes going viral on the Internet is enough to demonstrate the importance of an instant connection with readers, and even though the majority of them will not be able to put their finger on why they love a particular brand, you can be sure that somewhere along the line somebody has thought very carefully about how to present the company image.

Perhaps you have already put a huge amount of thought into your brand identity, and developed ways of embedding it in your written materials, or perhaps your company wants to develop this aspect of its marketing strategy. In either case, developing and/or adapting a style guide for use abroad should be a priority. Attention to detail always pays off, in this case because it means that translators will have access to comprehensive guidelines on how you want to express yourself. Style guides offer rules on your preferred tone, vocabulary and sentence length, on your terminology, format of dates and measurement units, preferred grammatical phrases, use of abbreviations, symbols and layout features and more. A well-thought-out, well-translated style guide can help your company's written material to shine. It can improve your readers' perception of your company's professionalism, create a sense of reliability, dependability and trust, and ultimately increase your sales.

### **Thinking about future work**

In creating any resources to help your professional translators, you are building an architecture of support for the future. Over the years, you can refine, update or change these resources as your business grows, and whenever a new translator, copywriter or other professional comes on board you will have the resources to hand, ensuring that they get up to speed on your preferences with minimum fuss. Having excellent guidance documentation means that new translators can understand your company's image and your products in greater depth and more quickly. Pretty much every technical translator has a horror story or two about the time they were asked to translate a description of a new piece of machinery which they had never seen, and which the company did not provide any diagrams of. Marketing translators' hearts sink when they encounter a company who can't offer any guidance as to their brand identity or style preferences, because it makes it so much harder to produce convincing marketing texts. Even if your marketing translator does a great job, there are many ways to translate a text, and without guidelines different translators will take different approaches and all consistency of style will be lost. All this boils down to a simple point: even if your translator is an expert in your field and a writing whizz, they can't read minds, and any information you can pass their way will improve the quality of the finished product.

With translation, as with so many other fields which have been revolutionised by recent developments in software, resource development has become both easier and yet more necessary for success. As time goes on, companies can build up a bank of resources to use for new translations, increasing accuracy and speed and ensuring that inconsistencies are ironed out with ease.

## **PART 7 – MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS**

Translation is, sadly, an often-misunderstood industry. A good translation is invisible by nature, so when people think about it at all, their minds often first turn to the very worst examples of shoddy translation work.

In hopes of redressing the balance and explaining a little more about the industry, the next few chapters deal with common misconceptions about the industry and shine light into some of its more obscure corners.

# The most common misconceptions about the translation industry

With many companies still smarting from the effects of the global recession, while industries of all kinds face more competition than ever before thanks to global competition, it's not surprising that many businesses are looking to save money. Whenever a company analyses its outgoings, it's easier to justify cutbacks in certain areas, when in truth these areas are often providing incalculable value to a company. Investment in translation is just such an area, because it can be hard to track the monetary value of translation, and because in times of crisis businesses are reluctant to 'speculate to accumulate', preferring to play it safe. But misinformation and misconceptions are rife when it comes to translation, and the myths that surround this little-understood industry could be losing you money and ultimately weakening your business. Read on to discover the facts behind the fiction and learn why translation is a vital investment for any savvy company, which will pay for itself many times over.

## 1. Translation is too expensive

Many businesses are put off making even basic enquiries into translation because they believe it is too expensive. But this doesn't have to be true. Translators nowadays work with sophisticated software that can considerably cut costs, and many agencies offer discounts for bulk jobs or long-term contracts. Looking for a translation agency based outside of large international cities like London and New York, without huge offices and management overheads, can save you money without sacrificing quality. And an investment in high-quality translation can unlock hitherto untapped markets, making the service worth its weight in gold.

## 2. Translation is easy

Among the more pernicious myths about translation is the idea that anyone who speaks two languages can do it. Actually, this could not be further from the truth. Truly great translators are extremely hard to find, because translation demands a range of skills, including stylistic flair, a knack for research, a gimlet eye for accuracy and often in-depth knowledge of another industry, such as IT or engineering. Translators often hold postgraduate qualifications as well as their first degrees, and spend years investing in high-quality resources such as software, dictionaries and encyclopaedias in order to provide the very best service. So before you ask your bilingual colleague to translate your new website, make sure you're not missing out on a much better deal.

## 3. Machine translation will do the job

Another hopeful misconception about translation is that computers are already up to the task of replicating or even bettering human translation. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. While advancements in computer technology have led to all sorts of useful software that can automate part of the process in the hands of professional human translators, computers are still nowhere near to obtaining the skill level required to translate on their own. Automatic machine translation is usually a false investment, because only

a human has the necessary contextual intuition, understanding of nuance and subtlety to translate the text properly. Machines don't get jokes, understand idioms or comprehend connotations, whatever sci-fi films might suggest. Thankfully we're still a long way off from an uprising of robot translator overlords – see the [later chapter](#) on this very subject – so until that day comes, you're better off sticking with the flesh and blood kind.

#### **4. The translation process is too complicated**

The translation process can indeed be complicated if you're trying to do it yourself, which is why hiring a professional translation agency to handle the entire process from start to finish is the best way to go. Most professional translation services companies will offer DTP services, so even if your text needs to be extracted from your website, scans of paper documents or single-layer image files, the translation agency can take care of this for you. Look for an agency with a dedicated project manager for each client, so you'll have just one contact person who will be available whenever you are.

#### **5. Our company isn't ready for translation**

Many clients put off translation indefinitely because they feel that their company is not ready to move into foreign markets. The problem with this is that until you take that very first step you have no way of knowing if you're ready. One thing is for sure: if you don't try, you'll never know. Companies who aren't ready miss out on potential sales as well as the opportunity to learn, grow and adapt for the better. If you don't make the first move, it's likely that your company will end up stuck on a plateau, stunted and constrained by the natural boundaries of your home market, never getting the chance to really fly. Research shows that companies that invest in translation enjoy increased revenue. The process of expansion may seem overwhelming, but by breaking it down into small steps you'll pave the way to new opportunities and give your business the very best chance of success.

#### **6. I don't need a professional, specialised, native translator**

In fact, these are the three most important qualities you should look for in a translator or translation services team. Professional translators are well qualified and have access to all the resources they need to do a great job, as well as years of experience dealing with similar texts so that you don't have to worry about novice mistakes. A professional translation agency will provide all the editing, proofreading and checking that the text needs to shine. As well as looking for professional services, you should also seek out a translator who is highly specialised in your subject area and in the type of writing you need. Choosing a team is a great way to achieve this, so that your engineering website can be translated by an engineering specialist and then edited by someone with an in-depth knowledge of writing for the web. Finally, it's worth noting that only a native speaker will be able to produce texts that fit in perfectly in their new environment. No matter how talented a non-native speaker is as a writer, researcher and editor, their lower-level language skills will let them, and you, down in the end.

## **7. There's not much difference between translation agencies**

Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. There are a huge number of translation agencies, teams and companies out there, and just like any kind of other organisation, quality varies wildly. It pays to do your research before choosing a translation partner. How do their rates compare with market averages? Do they have testimonials or sample translations on their website for you to gauge the quality of their work? Do they work only with specialised native-speaking translators? Do they offer the other services you might need, such as DTP, web design, project management and localisation? Do they have an impressive editing and quality assurance process? Entrusting a company with your translation needs is a big investment, and it pays to get it right, so don't just go with the first agency you come across. Shop around until you find the team that's right for you.

## **8. Translation can be done overnight**

Alas, we haven't yet invented a time machine that allows us to translate thousands of words in a jiffy! Excellent translation takes time, and translators also have their personal lives, which is the reason why you can expect to pay a premium on last-minute rush jobs. That said, rush jobs can often be accommodated with a larger team of translators, although you'll likely pay a premium for this. The more time you can allow for a translation, the more likely it is that you will get a quality text in return, as well as save money.

We hope these tips will help you sort the wheat from the chaff and find the right translation services vendor for you.

## The biggest mistakes businesses make when getting texts translated

For companies at the start of their journey into an overseas market, procuring translation services can be a complicated and confusing business. With so much of the translation industry now based online, finding a translation agency or team that can meet your needs can be a tricky business, and there are plenty of pitfalls awaiting the unaware. That's why we've put together this guide to the biggest mistakes businesses make when getting texts translated, and how you can avoid them.

### False economies

It's only natural that companies look to minimise costs throughout their business dealings, including the cost of translation. However, companies sometimes go to extremes in looking for the best deal, and end up with a damp squib. A classic example of this is when companies settle for machine translation (MT), which is extremely cheap because the translation is conducted by a computer program rather than a human. Like most things, if it sounds too good to be true that's because it is. At best, a machine translation will result in nonsense, and at worse, dangerous nonsense, and many companies end up coming to a professional translation vendor asking them to fix the mess, paying twice over for the job. Until we reach the stage where machines' thought processes are indistinguishable from our own, it's best to avoid machine translation.

Cheap prices don't always mean computers are at work, of course, as there are plenty of unskilled charlatans out there who are happy to offer extremely low prices in order to win your business, simply because that's all they have to offer. Be extremely wary of very cheap rates, and make sure that your outsourcer has a consistent and coherent online presence. At the very least, any translation agency you work with should have a professional website written in clear, engaging language, with CVs, samples, testimonials and other supporting material for clients to view. Look for evidence that they are an established professional company and research them using a search engine. Ideally you should find the company connected with many other professionals on LinkedIn or other similar sites, discover that they are members of professional organisations, or see that staff members are contributing to publications elsewhere. Do they have an active blog with carefully written, in-depth articles? Are they engaged in Twitter discussions about the latest industry news? By doing just a small amount of research you can get a much better picture of your future partner.

### One versus many

Many companies look to cut costs by hiring a freelance translator rather than a translation agency. While there are plenty of talented freelancers out there, choosing an agency or team means that you have access to a wider range of skills and knowledge. If you are an engineering company, you might find a freelancer with excellent engineering knowledge, but that same freelancer may be useless when it comes to marketing. With a well-organised team of translators, there's bound to be a marketing specialist on hand to check that the text is just right. A translation agency or team can also offer a range of other skills, including DTP, localisation, copywriting and SEO, so you don't have to worry

about finding individual outsourcers for all of these aspects of your text. And you needn't pay through the nose for a high-quality agency – see the chapter on [boutique agencies](#), and elsewhere in this book, to see how you can find the best savings.

### **Qualifications matter**

Another cost-cutting measure that often doesn't pay off is asking a bilingual in-house staff member to translate texts. Simply put, translation is not just a matter of speaking two languages adequately, otherwise everybody would be doing it. Professional translators undergo years of training, honing their writing, editing and research skills, building up vast banks of linguistic resources and constantly improving their translation skills. Translation is both an art and a science, deeply technical yet requiring tremendous sensitivity, and the very best translators have an incredibly subtle understanding of the differences between their languages and cultures that informs everything they do. Alex in accounts might speak pretty good Russian, but does he keep up with the very latest developments in Russian business and commerce? Is his writing stylish and accurate? Does he have years of experience translating similar texts? Does he use the latest translation industry software for accuracy and efficiency? And do you really consider him an Italian native speaker, or just very fluent? Choosing a professional, native-speaking translator means that your text will be professional and of native-speaker standard, and if you want your business to succeed, nothing else will do.

Once companies decide to look for a translation services provider, there are still plenty of ways to go wrong. Find an agency or team that provides full management support, with translators working in a range of in-depth specialisms. Be very wary of any company broadly claiming to be experts in everything, and look for specifics. If a translation vendor makes vague claims about their impressive engineering expertise, ask them what kind: mechanical, materials, electrical, design? Can they cite specific past projects in your field? Do they have testimonials to back this up? Any professional translation agency will offer proofreading and editing as standard, understanding that this is the only way to ensure the best quality texts, and many will be able to handle some of your other current or future needs, from copywriting to DTP. You should also make sure any translation team you choose works with CAT tools. These 'computer assisted translation' tools are now industry standard, and work by automating some repetitive aspects of the translation process. These are not to be confused with machine translation, as CAT tools are used by skilled human linguists to improve accuracy and efficiency, and pass on financial savings to the end client.

Once companies have chosen a translation services vendor, other hazards must still be avoided. Be careful to plan ahead with your projects, leaving adequate time for translation, as large texts simply cannot be done overnight. Make sure that you prepare texts to the best of your ability, or find a translation agency that can prepare them for you. Texts need to be in an accessible, commonly used file format such as .doc or .docx, and should be free from errors and unnecessary repetition, so make sure you give them a good read-through before you send them off.

Finally, make sure that you communicate exactly what you want to your translation vendor. If they understand exactly who you are and what you need, they'll be able to produce a translation which is perfectly tailored to you and which meets your exact expectations.

## Summary and selective translations: Are they worth your attention?

The translation industry can seem large and confusing sometimes, can't it? With so many different services offered by so many different providers, it can be hard to keep track of what you want and what you need. On top of that, if you're responsible for purchasing such services, you have to make judgement calls that require you to balance cost and effectiveness. 'That flashy new cut-price translation service looks interesting', you might say to yourself, 'but is it just a false economy?'

When it comes to translation services that offer huge savings, you'd be forgiven for being sceptical – especially after all the warnings we've driven into you over the course of this book. Consider the way machine translation is sometimes marketed: as a faster, cheaper alternative to full professional translation by humans. And yet it never seems to live up to the hype. In practice, the results it delivers tend to be patchy at best and incomprehensible at worst. So given this context, when you see surprisingly low rates for services like 'summary translation' and 'selective translation', it can be difficult to assess their value and utility.

### What does it all mean?

For starters, let's ask a very simple question: what are summary and selective translations, exactly? Although they share common features, these are in fact two quite different services. Let's look at summary translations first. Whereas a full translation is intended to perfectly capture every bit of content and meaning in the original text, including more abstract features such as its tone and style, a summary translation is more about conveying the general idea of a text. Think of it like the difference between watching a football game live on TV, and catching the edited highlights later in the day. Where a full translation might produce, say, a long essay on the results of an agricultural study, a summary translation might condense these results down into bullet points so that they can be digested more quickly. All the key information is there, but the detail has been cut out.

Selective translation takes a different approach. Instead of boiling everything down to the essentials, it identifies and translates only the most important parts of a text. Sticking with the above example of an agricultural study, you might perhaps translate just the table of contents, the abstract, the conclusion and any graphs or tables provided. Each of these selected sections would be fully translated to the same standard as a full translation – but everything else in the text would either remain in its source language or be removed entirely, leaving its meaning unknown.

### Counting costs

How valuable are these sorts of translations? Well, it's hard to give a clear-cut answer to that. The short version is that it depends on your individual needs, budget and time constraints. Certainly, both of these abbreviated styles of translation have their benefits: they're faster to produce, easier to read and usually cost at least a little less to commission than full translations.

Summary translations are a great way to understand what a document is about in the broadest sense, which makes them a good fit for occasions when you have a large volume of information, you're not sure how much of it is important or useful, and you want to make that determination for yourself. In that case, a summary translation will give you the overview of it all, possibly letting you go back and have specific sections fully translated later on.

A selective translation, on the other hand, is great if you have a large document and no idea what it means. You want to understand what it's saying, but also get more than just the bare bones of the most important parts. A translator can pick out the key sections for you and translate these in full, leaving you with an understanding of both the core facts and what the text would be like to read in its original source format. It can also be potentially handy in cases where – for example – you want to publish extracts from a translated document as part of a larger document which you have produced yourself.

### **Pros and cons**

For all their benefits, however, these types of translations also have drawbacks. It's important to understand that selective and summary translations are not suited to every occasion. They may be cheaper than full translations but, as always, you get what you pay for. Neither type of translation is likely to be suitable for public consumption, for example, without some heavy subsequent editing or additional translation. Similarly, if you need the full detail of a document, any kind of abbreviated translation is likely to miss some facts and features. And in the case of a selective translation, a translator can make their best guess about what's likely to be important to you – but at the end of the day, only you will be able to say for sure what matters, and only a full, professional translation is going to allow you to make that judgement for certain.

Instead, the best way to think of selective and summary translations is as initial guides that you can use to help you decide what to do next. For internal use and high-level analyses, especially when handling exceptionally high word counts (think millions or more), short-form translations might be exactly what you need. If you're operating under strict time constraints and just need the basic information as fast as possible, they'll give you a quick digest of what's going on with the document.

On the other hand, if you plan on ever sharing these translations with people such as business partners or the general public – in short, anyone who might struggle to understand the document without the full context – a full translation is probably the safer option. It's the only approach that guarantees total access to information, top quality and absolute clarity.

Finally, remember that the worst possible result would be to receive a translation that's less complete or less well-written than you expect. With that in mind, the best advice we can offer is to make sure you fully understand what type of service you're ordering from a translation agency – and if in doubt, to err on the side of caution and commission a top-quality full translation that covers absolutely everything.

## **PART 8 – THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE TRANSLATION INDUSTRY**

Congratulations – you’re now fully informed and ready to embark on your own globalisation process. We’ve taken you through the ins and outs of translation and your place in it, offering hints, tips and examples to help you benefit the most from of your chosen translation partner – and to help you find one in the first place.

To close out this book, our final section will take a lighter look at the translation industry – where it’s come from, where it’s going to, and what the hottest topics right now are. Whether you’re looking for some coffee-break reading or just interested in learning as much as possible about translation, this section is your reward for making it all this way.

## Connection, communication and culture: A history of translation

Translation today is a high-tech, high-speed affair. Businesses as far-flung as New York, Hong Kong, London and Moscow need lightning-fast communication at affordable prices without sacrificing quality, and the translation industry has experienced a huge boom in technological aids in order to provide this. But how did translation first develop, and how did we get to where we are today? Examining these questions might shed some light on the nature of translation, as well as give us some clues about where translation might go in the future.

### Translation: shouting over a great divide

The word translation derives from a Latin phrase, meaning ‘to carry across’. The earlier ancient Greek term, ‘metaphrasis’, means ‘to speak across’. In both of these terms there is the sense of a gap, a gulf, and it is this disconnect in human communication that is at the heart of the myth of the Biblical Tower of Babel, in which human speech was shattered into a thousand tongues to punish the united peoples of the Earth for their hubris in building a tower to reach the heavens. As long as humans speaking different languages have gathered, the need for someone to reach over the divide and ‘to carry across’ meaning must have been pressing. Anthropologists can only speculate at what point our ancestors first developed language, but it is not hard to imagine these early humans meeting other tribes and needing to break the language barrier in order to trade, intermarry or go to war.

### The first translation: a story so good it had to be shared

It’s not until the advent of writing systems that translation really comes into its own. Archaeological records tell us that writing most likely first evolved in ancient Mesopotamia, specifically in Ancient Sumeria, around 3,200 BCE. Clay tokens, used to represent goods during trade, were originally marked with simple symbols, which gradually grew into a system of pictographic writing, and thence into an abstract alphabet known as cuneiform, printed into damp clay with a reed and then set to dry in the sun. Lists of Sumerian deities, monumental inscriptions and inventories of goods have all been discovered, and by 2,000 BCE we have our first example of written translation, with partial renderings of the Sumerian epic poem ‘Gilgamesh’ into Southwest Asian languages. The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the earliest surviving works of literature, a ripping tale of a warrior-king, a wild man and a quest for immortality that inspired the Greek poet Homer and parallels parts of the Bible, which says much for its enduring appeal. Far from being a stuffy old scroll, Gilgamesh was the Hollywood blockbuster of its day, rendered into foreign languages so that everyone could experience the magic of a good story well told.

### The word of God in every language

Yet the yearning for a good yarn was not the only reason people started to translate texts into other languages, as another early translation attests. Sometime in between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE, the Septuagint, a collection of Jewish Scriptures, was translated into early Koine Greek in the city of Alexandria, a Greek settlement in what is now modern

Egypt. The motive here wasn't to share a riveting story round the fire at night, but rather to give dispersed Jews, who had forgotten their ancestral Hebrew language, access to their religious materials in their everyday language, Greek. This might also be the first example we have of a translation team working together on the text. As the name Septuagint hints, the scriptures were supposedly translated by 70 learned Jewish scholars, who no doubt spent hours hotly debating the minutiae of their translation – just as teams of translators do today.

In Asia, the spread of Buddhism also brought with it a demand for translation, as monks translated the earliest Indian sutras concerning the life of the wise Buddha, Siddhartha, into Chinese. Religious concerns motivated a lot of translation in the Islamic world too, as the Arabs conquered much of the Greek world and assimilated their philosophical and scientific works. Ninth century ruler of Baghdad, Caliph Al-Mamun, awoke one night from a prophetic dream in which Aristotle appeared to him and told him that the knowledge of the Greeks and the teachings of Islam were not irreconcilable. Under Al-Mamun and the leaders that came after him, the Arabic world enjoyed a cultural renaissance that Europe would not experience for another 600 years, all thanks to the doors opened by translation.

### **Medieval monasteries: The very first translation agencies?**

Religion continued to be a vital driving force for written translation in the medieval period, when Latin became the 'lingua franca' – or language of communication – across Europe, in much the same way that English dominates the business world today. Christian monks across the continent were all educated in reading, writing and speaking Latin, and monasteries became great repositories of knowledge, with monks often being sent to far-flung abbeys to spend decades copying out texts to bring home to their own cloisters. Many of these texts were in fact already translations, by Roman authors, of Greek poetry and philosophy or Arab medicine and maths, further developing the shared identity of these cultures. This large-scale international translation effort laid the groundwork for both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to follow, and no doubt has a lot to do with the close ties between European cultures, even today.

### **Geoffrey Chaucer, the Father of English Poetry**

In the ninth century, the English king Alfred the Great commissioned the first vernacular Anglo-Saxon translations of two Latin texts. This was an act far ahead of its time, as it recognised how much there is to be gained by reading texts in your mother tongue, and it angered the Christian church, who believed that all Christian texts should be published in 'holy' Latin rather than unclean Anglo-Saxon. But he wasn't the only one who believed in the vehicle of the vernacular. In the later medieval period, Geoffrey Chaucer, the 'Father of English Poetry', probably did more than any other writer to popularise unfashionable English, by not only making translations of fashionable and elegant Italian poetry but also writing his own wonderful stories, all in the vernacular. He founded a long-standing English poetic tradition based on wordplay, adaptations of earlier stories and translation, which still thrives today.

It took some centuries for English to find its feet as an appropriate tongue for the educated classes, but by Shakespeare's day it was a rich and colourful language flavoured with influence from across Europe and beyond, and so the great playwright wrote in his own language rather than courtly French or classical Latin. It's no coincidence that Shakespeare based many of his own plays on the works of Chaucer, whose efforts to translate and innovate sparked one of the richest literary traditions of any language.

### **Victorian theories of translation**

As literary trends came and went, so too did trends in translation. The Victorians' interest in all things exotic, coupled with their exacting standards of accuracy and obsession with categorisation meant that new standards of precision became the norm. The goal here was to 'metaphrase', make a literal translation, rather than to 'paraphrase', making a translation 'in other words'. Whereas Chaucer and Shakespeare were paraphrasers, tinkering with older texts, changing the plot, adding characters or otherwise 'bettering' their source material, Victorian translation held scrupulous accuracy and 'metaphrase' to be of prime importance.

These two forms of translation still provide an interesting dynamic tension within the industry. After all, instant machine translation services translate texts word for word (metaphrase) and yet they often make no sense. A balance must be struck between faithfulness to the original and finding parallel ways of expressing its ideas in the target language, and much of the translator's skill is in finding ways to harness these two opposing forces. Interestingly enough, even the Victorians were not immune to the charms of a translation that took wild liberties with the original. Perhaps the most famous translated work of literature from this period is most definitely more a work of paraphrase than metaphrase. Edward Fitzgerald's version of the Persian poem 'The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam' first appeared in English in 1859, and it wowed England with its opulent, evocative and exotic images. However, this Rubaiyat owed more to the orientalist 'improvements' of Fitzgerald than the original text, as the translation bore strikingly little resemblance to the original Persian poem.

### **Twentieth-century developments**

Translation as we know it today, in which accurate representation of content is valued above stylistic flair and artistic expression, only really came into being in the 20th century, when many great intellectuals began to turn their attention to the nature of translation. Increasing industrialisation and globalisation, not to mention the multinational alliances of the first-ever truly global wars, meant that cross-cultural communication became increasingly important. In the 1950s and 1960s, universities began to systematically develop theories of translation, and this was accompanied by a growing academic interest in language acquisition, psychology and anthropology. Sparked by the cultural dynamite of the Internet, the late twentieth century saw an explosion in communications, with translation becoming a gigantic industry all of its own. Technological advancements have allowed translators to access vast resources including dictionaries, corpuses and encyclopaedias at the click of a mouse, and CAT (computer assisted translation) tools now make modern translation quicker and more consistent than ever before.

So what does this paddle through the backwaters of translation have to teach us? From the start, translation has been driven by the need to communicate in the areas we think are most important: religions and ideologies, scientific or technical information, trade and finance, and stories that capture our hearts. Even today, most translation occurs in these domains, so it seems like the conversation hasn't changed much in the last 4,000 years. Secondly, the question of whether to translate literally or with a little bit of poetic licence is still as valid as it ever was, and no doubt debates on this topic will continue. Finally, we can see that throughout its history, translation has been instrumental in effecting social, economic and cultural change and development. When two cultures can communicate, they can exchange ideas, inspire each other, discover common ground and innovate for the future. In a world where almost 7,000 languages are spoken every day, translation serves to help us set aside our differences and bring us closer together as one global human family.

## The continuing importance of translation in a globalised world

Looking at the modern world, it's easy to believe that everything is becoming, well, a little more homogenous. Over the last century or two, with the rise of air travel, industrial power and lightning-fast communication, it definitely feels like our planet has become a bit smaller. These days, we're all pretty multicultural, businesses span all kinds of national and cultural borders, and everyone speaks the same language... right?

Wrong. Because even as economies integrate and business deals cross borders, as education levels rise and more and more people speak foreign languages, there remains an urgent need for translation – not in spite of these things, but because of them. Now more than ever, it's simply not good enough to offer a product in English, or any other single language, and be done with it.

Here in a nutshell is what you need to understand if you're a business reaching out to the world: multilingual marketing and customer support are absolutely crucial to your success in foreign markets. The process of globalisation has made it easier to get your message out to the world, but rather than eliminating the need to localise, it's brought that need into sharper focus.

### By the numbers

Let's get concrete and look at the statistics of the matter. If you want to talk about a global lingua franca, the obvious place to start would be the English language. Sure, it's widely spoken, at least compared to many other languages. If you're a tourist on holiday, the English language gives you a pretty good chance of being understood by someone in most parts of the world. But does everyone in the world speak English? Nope. Do, say, half of the people in the world speak English? Not even close. In fact, the current best estimates suggest that around 840 million people worldwide speak English either as a native or a foreign language. In other words, if your business only speaks English, you're cutting yourself off from about 88% of the population of planet Earth. So much for going global, right?

But hey, maybe we're being too Anglo-centric. Is there another language that can reach a broader base? The United Nations, surely the most prominent global institution in the world, has six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. How do they stack up?

### Further afield

Arabic and Spanish are official languages in many countries and have prominent unofficial roles in many others, but each language is still only spoken by under 500 million people each. If you're targeting specific parts of the world, then you might get part of the way with either of these, but if you're targeting multiple countries, some people still won't understand you. Spanish is widely spoken in South America, but Brazil – the largest and most populous country in the region – has Portuguese as its only official language. Spanish

won't get you very far there. Modern Standard Arabic, meanwhile, can be understood across much of North Africa and parts of the Middle East, but individual national dialects of Arabic can almost be considered distinct languages in their own right – and there are still plenty of countries even in this part of the world where Arabic is a minority language at best.

Mandarin Chinese has the broadest reach of the UN's big six, with total speakers numbering just over one billion, but if globalisation is your goal then it turns out not to be such a great option. Mandarin is not a universal language even in China (Hong Kong, for example, has historically been a primarily Cantonese-speaking city) and relatively few people outside of the country speak Chinese. Russian, meanwhile, has a fair number of speakers across the Commonwealth of Independent States and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, but it's a minority language in most of these places and you won't find very many Russian speakers at all outside of what used to be described as the Eastern Bloc.

In other words, no single language can reach anything close to the whole planet. So the only conclusion is that global businesses must diversify their language portfolios if they want to reach as broad an audience as possible. In fact, if we add together the total number of native and foreign-language speakers of the UN's six official languages, we get a measly 3.42 billion, still less than half of the global population. And this is based on the very generous and very unrealistic assumption that there is no overlap whatsoever between these languages; that nobody who speaks English would also speak Spanish, for example. You don't need us to tell you that this simply isn't the case in reality – so the real figure, whatever it is, must be considerably lower even than that.

With all that said, maybe you aren't trying to address the whole world. That's fair enough – target markets and business strategies can vary dramatically even between neighbouring countries, and there's no harm in specialising in a few locations in particular. But these statistics do highlight something really important even when trading between nearby nations: if you restrict yourself to only one language while addressing more than one national market, then in the very best scenario you'll be speaking to half or more of your clients in a language that is not their own.

### **The danger of overgeneralising**

To illustrate this, let's go back to the example of speaking Russian to people in countries such as Poland, Ukraine or Romania. These are distinct countries with strong individual identities and national histories, and to assume that everyone here can understand your message in Russian (or would want to) would be patronising, bordering on offensive in some cases.

So even if these second-language customers can more or less understand you, this isn't necessarily good news for your brand image and customer loyalty. Understanding what's said to you in a second language takes more effort than the innate understanding that comes with hearing or reading your native tongue. So why would customers choose to buy from a company that demands that kind of effort, when there are probably plenty of local businesses that don't demand so much from them? On top of that, there's the

potential for customers to misunderstand or fail to comprehend what you tell them, and the risk that these second-language customers start to feel like second-class customers because you didn't make the effort to make things easy for them – or to take account of local sensitivities. And in a globalised world, in the age of product review sites and social media, it's easy for frustrated customers to make their feelings known to anyone and everyone out there. It's a recipe for disaster.

The good news is that it's a disaster that can easily be avoided. All it takes is a willingness to properly localise your business for each of your target markets. And if you ask us, we think that it's wonderful to see so many languages still alive and flourishing. Yes, it means that internationalisation requires a little more effort and expertise than it might do in a perfectly globalised world – but it also means that all the variety and flavour of the world is still available for businesses to make use of. Local colour remains alive and well, proving that the ongoing march of globalisation doesn't necessarily mean that everyone has to end up identical to everyone else. And when you put it that way, that's really quite a reassuring thought.

## How has modern technology changed the translation industry?

The silicon revolution has changed just about every industry in the world. With the rise of information technology, and the corresponding surge of developments in telecommunications and data processing, the way we all live and work has changed almost beyond recognition.

The translation industry is no exception – and the benefits are real, for translators and their clients alike. So what are those benefits, and where exactly are they coming from? That's what we'll be looking at in this chapter.

### CAT tools

If there's one piece of software that has done the most to change how translators work, it's the computer assisted translation tool – or CAT tool, for short. CAT tools are designed to speed up the process of translation, making it easier for translators to track their work, maintain consistency and preserve the formatting and structure of the original document – and more besides. They also include 'translation memory' functionality: an automatic record of how the translator has previously handled specific words and phrases, or even entire sentences. These databases can be shared with the client, or among large translation teams, to make future projects even faster and more cost-effective.

CAT tools work by displaying two versions of the document side by side. At first glance, they can look a bit like a spreadsheet interface: two columns of text, with rows and rows each containing a 'segment' of writing. The source text (the document's original language) appears in the left-hand column, and the translator fills in the target text (the new language after translation) on the right. Each row – each 'segment' – is typically one sentence long, although the translator can always split or merge these segments as required in order to create a piece of writing that flows well in the new language. Once you understand the layout, working in a CAT tool is as easy as using a word processor, but with all the extra benefits that come with having a piece of software designed especially for translators.

Of course, the word processor itself is a relatively recent invention in the long and noble history of translation. Even the ability to instantly rewrite, reformat and copy a document, as well as features like change tracking, have made a big improvement to translators' quality of life. Heaven forbid we should ever have to go back to the days of manual typewriters or – shudder – handwriting!

### Term bases and digital dictionaries

This is a big field, to say the least. While a term base isn't quite the same thing as a dictionary, the two tools share some similar features and are useful for the same reasons. A term base is a collection of words and phrases, their definitions and any other related linguistic information that may be relevant. They're meant to ensure consistency in the way terminology is used. A bilingual dictionary, of course, is a resource showing how individual words can be translated to and from another language.

Both of these types of resources have always existed in some form or another, but historically they've always been on paper (or, if we go back far enough, literally carved in stone!). Digitisation has made them so much easier to use. A particularly obscure piece of terminology could once have taken minutes or even hours to look up, forcing a translator to dig through one weighty reference book after another in search of the perfect phrasing. Now, you can search for it in a web browser or an offline database and have your answer within seconds, barely breaking the flow of translation.

### **Online research**

And on the subject of web browsers – how did we ever live without search engines? Plenty of translation projects require in-depth research on a subject, or sometimes just a quick bit of fact-checking. And now all of the world's information is instantly available to us, whenever we need it. Naturally, a bit of common sense and good judgement is required to sort the good information from the bad, and sifting through it all can require strong research skills – but all of this is just part and parcel of what being a good translator means in this day and age. It certainly beats walking to the library with a long list of questions to spend the whole day answering.

### **New kinds of translation jobs**

Hypertext – the ability to embed links to other digital locations within a piece of writing – is one of the simplest, cleverest inventions of the digital age. These days, everyone needs a website, and you'll want to get it translated if you're growing into a new market. So, to keep up, translators have had to learn the fundamentals of web design and the peculiarities of the ways we use language online. And, of course, this is just one example of new types of translation work. Before software, there were no software translators; before machine learning, there were no translation algorithm developers. In short, the scope and variety of tasks that translators perform nowadays has increased dramatically.

### **Faster communication**

An industry whose entire purpose is to help companies cross borders: that's the translation business. No wonder it's so important for translators to be able to communicate quickly and effectively between different countries. Once again, this is where the Internet comes in. The likes of email, cloud storage and Voice over IP (VoIP) telephone services mean that fast international communication is now possible at little to no cost.

For businesses who work with language service providers, this has immediate and lasting benefits. Think about how much easier it is now to source an expert individual or company located outside your country – something that may be essential when you need to get hold of a native speaker of your target language. Consider how much more quickly and efficiently their questions can be asked and answered than in the days of snail-mail and pricey international phone calls.

There are implications for translation project managers as well – the people who work for translation agencies to ensure jobs get done on time, and get done well. With communication made so much quicker and easier (and cheaper), deadlines can be tightened

up and costs can be cut accordingly. And this is all to say nothing of the benefits that come from computer-based project management systems: automatic workflow tracking, time management systems and resource databases are just a few of the ways translation agencies and their clients get added value from the digital age.

With all these developments in the recent past, it's exciting to wonder what will come next. No-one can say for certain, of course, but our guess is it'll be less about automatic translation and more to do with empowering translators to work faster and more effectively than ever before. The likes of cloud storage, mobile apps and big data are bound to have benefits for translators just like everyone else. And that will mean top-quality translations, delivered sooner, at lower costs for everyone. What could be better?

## Where will the translation industry be in five years' time?

The translation industry is a bit of a dark horse, really. For many years, translation was a fairly quiet and stuffy domain, populated by grey-bearded grammar fiends with a love of language. But the globalisation of the late 20th century, coupled with the technological advancements of the Internet, has changed all of that. Statistics from Common Sense Advisory (CSA) show that the market for outsourced language services was worth an incredible USD 40 billion in 2015 (*Common Sense Advisory, 'Global Market Study: 2015'*). Unlike many other sectors, translation has breezed through the recession with ease, and continues to expand. A recent report by the CSA (*Common Sense Advisory, 'Top 100 Language Service Providers: 2016'*) estimates that the translation industry will have grown to USD 45 billion by 2020.

So what other changes await us in the next five years and beyond? Will the translation agency of the future be run by robots? Will we all have translation microchips implanted in our brains at birth? Or perhaps we'll wear glasses that provide subtitles whenever someone speaks another language? From the serious to the silly, let's take a look at translation trends, exciting evolutions and future forecasts within the industry.

### Robot translators of the future

It's fair to say that as the Internet has grown, machine translation, also known as MT, has become increasingly common. These programs automatically translate text using databases, without the aid of human hand, and most of us are familiar with them. Big names in machine translation such as Google Translate and Microsoft Translator appear all over the Internet, and it might be that these services become even more integrated with our online experience. The talk now is that many search engines will soon automatically translate foreign language web pages if you don't provide multilingual options.

Within the translation industry proper, machine translation isn't so highly thought of. It's widely recognised that machine translation is still nowhere near the standard of human translation, partly because computers are so very bad at many of the skills that make a great translator, for example handling idioms, jokes, innuendo or nuance. Nonetheless, many clients do choose to use machine translation for getting the gist of information in a foreign language, and one increasing trend is to combine machine translation with a service known as post-editing, in which a human translator is provided with the MT output and checks it against the source text to ensure it is correct. In practice, post-editing is still the Wild West of the translation industry. As anyone who has used MT knows, its output is quite often nonsensical, and post-editing commands a much lower rate than translation, while often being just as time-consuming as translating from scratch, so the very best translators avoid it. Perhaps the machine translation/post-editing combination might replace some low-level translation services as time goes on, but it's clear that for companies looking for publishable standard translations, the only way is going to be to hire a skilled professional human translator.

This is not to say that machine translation doesn't have its place. Many of the programs that professional linguists use to translate texts are now beginning to integrate

online machine translation output, often in widget form alongside data from dictionaries, term bases and glossaries. Here, machine translation is just one weapon in an ever-growing arsenal of translation resources, but just like any other weapon, it needs to be handled with care, preferably by a trained professional, so that nobody loses an eye.

### **Kissing a lot of frogs to find your prince**

If there's one thing that characterises Web 2.0, it's proliferation. As new platforms pop up in every industry, including social software, wikis, blogs and aggregators, there's more information available than ever before. For a skilled translator, this increasing availability of information is great news. Now you can sign up to newsletters on the most obscure topics, become online friends with other experts in your field and receive updates via RSS feeds, content aggregators and dashboard applications such as TweetDeck and HootSuite. It's never been so easy to access vast amounts of information, and now there are plenty of clever solutions for sifting through the dross to find the gold.

However, proliferation is not all good. This new abundance of information, much of it generated by your average Joe rather than a specialist, is not necessarily all of the highest quality. When finding information online, we all need to develop exceptional judgement, in order to avoid muddlesome misinformation, outdated data and erroneous evidence. This requires research skills, patience and knowledge of where to find reliable resources, and translators need to keep their wits about them in the online jungle.

With this proliferation of information also comes the proliferation of service providers. Recently, translation has been notably recession-proof, and many skilled individuals previously employed in other industries are moving over to become freelance translators. But it's not just skilled professionals looking for a career change who are now marketing themselves as translators. With so many resources available online, almost anybody can set themselves up as a 'translator'. These shady operators may claim to speak ten languages perfectly, but in fact they often use machine translation and online resources to cobble together terrible texts, surviving only because they offer rock-bottom rates and disappearing into the murk of the Internet as soon as they're done. Many old salts in the translation world will tell you that, sadly, rogue dealers are becoming more common, and so clients need to exercise caution when choosing a partner for their translation needs. The good news is that many young, up-and-coming translators are investing in translation qualifications, with more and more universities and other educational institutions offering brilliant programmes to get bright young things off to a good start.

Knowing what you want is the first step to getting it.

Thanks to the rising profile of translation, more and more companies and individuals are educating themselves about how the translation industry works, to everyone's advantage. We predict that as the translation industry continues to boom, clients will become increasingly well informed about how the translation process works (and, of course, we hope that books like this one will help). Clients will be much more willing to invest in resource creation for translation, knowing that high-quality style guides, glossaries and term bases will result in

high-quality translations. Companies will also ask for a greater range of services from their translation team, from SEO and web design to copywriting, DTP services to localisation.

We are already starting to see shifts in working practices thanks to this growing understanding of the inner workings of the industry. Ten years ago many companies still kept their records on paper, and seasoned translators well remember the days of illegible faxes, lost documents and weighty dictionaries. Most modern companies have now moved online, and so now translations are delivered in a range of digital file formats, including Word, PDF and Excel. So far, so good. However, these formats are also becoming outdated, as new formats take over. XML, or Extensible Markup Language, is a system for annotating texts with tags, so that texts can be read by both humans and machines. XML texts contain instructions that can be used for a variety of purposes, and users can generate their own sets of instructions, making it a system with a wide range of applications. Unlike HTML and other languages, XML uses human language so even a novice can read and understand it, and yet it's still compatible with a range of other programming languages including HTML, Java, Ajax and others. As clients and translators get wise to the potential of XML-tagged files, these formats are growing increasingly popular within the translation industry, and we expect this to continue.

### **To boldly go where no translator has gone before**

So perhaps super-smart robot translators and multilingual 'Babel Fish' ear implants aren't on the cards for the next few years. But this hasn't stopped researchers from trying. Scientists at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh have been hard at work on new translation technology that might one day revolutionise the way we communicate. They have developed a system that uses electrodes to read the facial muscles of the speaker, then deciphers the words being spoken, translates them into the target language and speaks them aloud. As an example, the speaker only needs to mouth the words in Chinese, and the synthesiser will read them in English. Sounds too good to be true? For the time being, it probably is. The researchers say that they have achieved 80% accuracy, but only in conversations involving 100 to 200 words, while average human vocabularies are often upwards of 10,000 words.

But although sci-fi breakthroughs, brainy robots and a life of perfect linguistic ease are still a long way off, we humans are nothing if not persistent. After all, we once thought the world was flat, the moon was beyond our reach and we'd never find a way to make cheese into strings. Maybe we translators aren't out of a job just yet but, as the Chinese say, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. We're certainly looking forward to the ride.

## Will machine translation ever fully replace human translators?

We are living through an age of technological revolution. That's a dramatic statement, but it's absolutely true. The invention of computing, and everything that has spun off from it, has irrevocably changed the way we live and work. And life – and work – just keeps on changing. Think of the way the rise of smartphones and the Internet has made it possible for people to work remotely, and to communicate more effectively than ever, including across international boundaries. So far, this revolution has been pretty good for translators, bringing productivity boosters like CAT tools and digital dictionaries, and making remote working and long-distance networking easier than ever.

And yet some say the real revolution in translation is yet to happen. To hear some commentators tell it, we're on the brink of achieving a real breakthrough in machine translation. Soon, they say, human translators will become obsolete, as computer software accomplishes in seconds what has until now taken hours or days to do – without sacrificing quality. Understandably, this tends to cause a little consternation among translators themselves.

### In context

It's not the first time in history that fears like this have been raised. As technology moves forward, there's always a risk some people will be left behind. Just look at the last great technological leap in human history, the Industrial Revolution. Then, groups such as the Luddites protested against the rise of labour-saving technologies in the textile industry which threatened to put them out of a job. Nobody's suggesting translators should start going out *en masse* and smashing up server farms the way the Luddites burnt down textile mills – but is the fear of being replaced a justified one?

By now, you know full well that MT (machine translation) isn't currently suitable for commercial purposes. We covered the reasons in detail in [a previous chapter](#), but the basic explanation is that machine translation systems use a very different approach from human translators. This means that, as much as every business wants to save money, using a machine translation system simply isn't a viable option right now. But what about the future – could it be possible ten, twenty or fifty years from now?

### Looking forwards

There are still an awful lot of obstacles to overcome. The problem, as we've previously suggested, is that machine translation systems don't really *understand* what they're reading. Their grammatical knowledge might be perfect, and their vocabulary might be far larger than any human's, but in many ways those aren't the hardest parts of translation.

Any linguist will tell you that language isn't a fixed, unambiguous set of rules. It's messy, it's full of exceptions, and it's always changing. Machine translation misses the all-important context-dependent cues. It can't spot things like sarcasm, or puns, or turns of phrase that mean more than their component words. We can say “machine translation

systems are ten a penny”, and unless such a system has come across that specific little idiom before, it’ll have no clue how to render it in a way that a non-English-speaking reader can understand. “Ten a penny”? Where do you even start? ‘Ten’ is a number, ‘a’ is either an indefinite article or a substitute for ‘one’, and a ‘penny’ is an English unit of currency. None of those facts tell you that what we really mean by “ten a penny” is “cheap and plentiful”. To work that out, you need context, or someone to explain it to you, or a little creative thinking.

In other words, a machine translation system that could really rival a human translator would have to actually think like a human – or be able to do such a good imitation of a human that we wouldn’t be able to tell the difference. If that idea sounds familiar to you, you’re probably thinking of the famous Turing test, one of the oldest and most important standards for testing artificial intelligence. To date, no piece of software has passed unambiguously – and scientists don’t yet know how they might manage to build one that can.

### **A singular possibility**

A machine that passes the Turing test is the ultimate goal of artificial intelligence (AI) researchers around the world, but for now it remains nothing more than science fiction. But since we’ve come this far with the idea, we may as well go a little further. How would a true artificial intelligence affect the language services industry? Would it want to be paid for its time? If so, wouldn’t it be well within its rights to charge far more for its vastly superior service than we weak, mortal, slow-paced humans could charge? And for that matter, if the AI were *that* good, couldn’t it run everyone’s businesses for them? Would we see that mythical Singularity, as artificial intelligence suddenly takes over all spheres of human activity in the blink of an eye? Will we all end up as slaves to our new machine overlords? Will the translation industry usher in *the very end of the world*?

Well... probably not, no. Like we say: science fiction. The more likely scenario is that machine translation systems will keep getting incrementally better over time, as they have done for the last decade or two, without ever really surpassing the very human skills that professional translators offer. They might become a useful tool for translators, to help them work better and faster, but on current evidence it’s hard to see how machine translation will ever be able to replace humans entirely.

And if MT ever does become a true replacement, well, it might not just be translators who’ll have to start looking for a new job. It might mean some big changes for all of society – changes that science fiction has most certainly warned us about. Say what you like about human translators, but they’re creative, intelligent people who probably won’t trap you in a virtual-reality prison and use you as a biological battery to power planet-sized computing engines.

In other words, maybe the rise of the machines should wait a little longer.

## Will we ever all speak the same language?

[Earlier in this section](#), we looked at whether any single language would let you speak to everyone on the planet. The conclusion was pretty definitive: even in the age of telecommunications and international trade, there is no such thing as a universal language right now. But what about the future? If machine translation is out, could there ever, conceivably, be a non-technological way for everyone to understand everyone else – no matter where they live?

If there's one thing we learned in that chapter, it's that there are an awful lot of people on planet Earth and they speak an awful lot of different languages. Getting all seven billion people – or however many people there will be in the world fifty or a hundred years from now – to all speak one language does seem like it might be a bit tricky. So let's be generous this time around; let's look at the chances of ending up with a language that's spoken by about half of the global population. Enough people, presumably clustered together tightly enough that businesses can make it their primary business language. What do the prospects look like?

### Has it happened before?

No-one can be certain what the future holds, but we can look at past precedent. History is full of examples of 'trade languages' or other lingua franca used to communicate across cultural borders. Just think of the pan-European power of Latin throughout Roman times and even well into the Middle Ages. Or the astonishing reach of Mandarin Chinese across most of China. The term 'lingua franca' is itself named after a trading language that was used all around the Mediterranean Sea for about 800 years. But each of these languages was ultimately limited. Travel far enough and you'd eventually reach someone who couldn't understand a word you were saying. This pattern holds true no matter how far back through history you go: there has never been a universal human language. Even when our very first human ancestors started to use language, different tribes probably still used different words and different grammatical rules to describe the world around them.

That's not to say there haven't been attempts to introduce a universal language. Conquering empires have a habit of imposing their language on the people they rule, of course, but there have also been peaceful projects to promote universal languages. Perhaps the most famous of these is Esperanto, a 'constructed' language whose inventor, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, dreamed of world peace through mutual understanding. Esperanto is quite easy to learn, at least if you're a native speaker of a European language. At a glance, you could almost mistake it for a natural Romance language such as Spanish or Italian. But therein lies a problem as well: Esperanto looks a lot less familiar if you're used to a different vocabulary, character set or grammatical structure from most European languages. As a result, although Esperanto is a very well-meaning language, it's hard to imagine it will ever gain global prominence. It's simply too local.

## Practical problems

Another drawback of constructed languages is so simple, so fundamental, that it might be fatal to any attempt at creating a universal language from scratch. Think about it: when a language is first invented, nobody speaks it but its creators. That makes it incredibly hard for these languages to gain traction. Would an existing language make a better candidate, then? Well, of course some businesses do already try to use English as a universal language. The problem, as we already know, is that the number of speakers is still too few right now. English simply isn't ready for that role.

But could it get to that point in the future? Well, if there's one big problem with the idea of English – or any other language, for that matter – assuming some sort of planet-wide universal status one day, it's these two words: linguistic drift. Languages have a tendency to change and adapt over time. You can see this tendency just by reading a book in your own language from a hundred or two hundred years ago. The language used will be different from that used in the same country today. Read something even older, and you might struggle to understand what the author actually meant to say. That's linguistic drift in action, and it works on populations separated by time – but also those separated by geographical distance. It can potentially cause one language to split into two. When two populations become isolated from one another, their languages will drift apart, even if they originally understand each other perfectly.

That might not sound like a problem, now that we can communicate online and over the phone and do business with people halfway around the world from us. But when we talk about 'isolation', it doesn't have to be total. No matter how well-connected we are to the wider world, the language we speak is always going to be most heavily influenced by the people who are physically close to us: the people we live with, socialise with, and share an office with. So linguistic drift would likely prevent any single universal language from ever coming about. And if any language ever did become a universal standard, it would still probably split up into multiple different varieties soon afterwards. Which, in fact, is exactly what has happened in the past, on a smaller scale, to the likes of Mandarin and Latin. Maybe the past really can tell us a lot about the future.

All in all, then, it doesn't look like we'll be seeing a global standard language any time soon – or maybe ever. In fact, you could probably argue that some sort of instantaneous machine translation is a more likely option for letting everyone in the world understand each other. But, like the Universal Translator in *Star Trek*, such a concept may itself remain science fiction. After all, machine translation still has a long, long way to go before it can match the skill of a human translator or interpreter.

## So much for world peace?

The odds look stacked against Dr Zamenhof's dream of universal mutual understanding – but we think his hopes for world peace can remain alive and well. Because as long as we have competent, professional linguists to help break down these language barriers, the wheels of communication will keep turning, and we'll all be able to keep talking

to one another. Because here's the surprise answer to the question we asked at the start of this chapter: thanks to translators, we can already understand each other and communicate everything we need to. The future is now!

## ABOUT US

**Translators Family** is a boutique translation agency specialising in Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, with expertise in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and other European languages. Our mission is to deliver a wide range of top-quality translation and localisation services at affordable prices.

With its registered office in Warsaw, Poland, the company is based on the resources and experience of a team of translators from Ukraine who originally operated under the same name. The team was formed in 2006 and has since been successfully providing translation services exclusively to corporate clients from various countries around the world.

With a presence in both Poland and Ukraine, we offer invaluable local knowledge of Eastern European markets. By specialising in a limited number of languages and subject areas, we are able to provide a focused range of services that let our team's unique talents shine through. However, for multilingual projects extending beyond our standard scope, we are also used to working with additional freelancers and translation teams.

Aside from translation, we offer a number of related services designed to maximise value and convenience for our clients. These include desktop publishing (DTP), website and software localisation, multilingual search engine optimisation (SEO), copywriting, transcreation, transcription, subtitling, and more.

We set great store by our quality assurance processes, which involve 2-step proofreading as standard and a 5-step extended QA process for very demanding projects.

Most importantly of all, we believe in only ever relying on professional-quality human translation. All of our linguists are carefully vetted and tested before they work with us, and we never use machine translation systems. We believe that quality and professional standards are worth defending, and we work tirelessly to champion the right kind of translation.

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