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Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is a translation?

A. A translation is the cultural and linguistically accurate rendering of materials into another language, breaking barriers to communication and providing a specific audience with an intended message.

Q. What does a translator actually do and why does he/she need to be educated and trained?

A. A translator must convey the original message accurately, in its entirety, into the language corresponding to the target audience. In order for this to take place, the individual must be highly skilled in both the source and target culture, language and dialect.

Q. What is the difference between interpretation and translation?

A. Interpretation is the verbal translation of a source language into the target language, whereas translation refers to the written form of conveying the message to a target audience in another language. Interpretation deals with consecutive (where the speaker finishes his idea and the interpreter then conveys the message in the target language) and simultaneous (where the speaker and the interpreter, in tandem, convey their message in the source and target language to their corresponding audiences). Translation deals with the changing of the written text from one language into another, maintaining the meaning, feeling and nuances of the original language.

Q. Do translators have to be certified?

A. Translators do not need to be certified if they have extensive education or professional experience (usually five years or more of full-time translation industry experience).

Q. Why not just use translation software?

A. Although translation was one of the reasons why computers were originally invented, the complexity of language and all its idiosyncrasies and dialects requires a certain degree of "human touch". Language-or rather-the meaning being conveyed is subjective both in its presentation and reception, something that a machine or program will never be able to do.

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Q. Can a bilingual individual translate on a professional basis?

A. Translation techniques are an acquired competence that is built on an understanding of complex language structures, acquired over many years of learning and practice. This is the most important factor in the translation equation. The understanding of a particular culture as well as the topic or idea needing to be conveyed is also imperative and makes up the second most important part of the professional translation equation.

Q. How is the cost of a translation determined?

A. In England, the United States and in Canada, translation costs are mainly based on a per word charge of either the source document or the target document. Costs are also associated with the rarity of the language (such as Hindi), the language combination (such as Japanese into Hindi), the complexity of the language contained in the document (such as legal, medical or technical), the format requirements (in MS Word format or in PageMaker and print-ready), the amount of words contained in the document (12, 000 words) and the turnaround time required (24 hours). The average charge you may be billed for can be between \$0.15-\$0.50/word, depending on the above mentioned factors.

In most European countries, costs are based on the number of characters that make up one line of a document (such as 80 characters per line, 30 lines per page). This can be from \$0.15-\$0.65 per word depending on the above mentioned factors.

Q. Does a higher fee mean a better service?

A. Higher fees are not always associated with quality but rather with the quantity of services provided. Some agencies will translate the material into only one format, regardless of the Client's need and will provide the finished product either by fax or mail. Some agencies will take it a step further and provide translation, typesetting, proofreading, editing, desktop publishing and print-ready formats of the Client's choice, with hard-copy and disc-copy back-ups along with electronic delivery, web site upload/download and facsimile and courier delivery. These services are most often included in the price of professional agencies, although they may also be available on an individual basis should you require, for example, solely the services of an editor.

The old adage still stands that you get what you pay for, so beware of cheap translations but don't automatically assume that a higher price reflects higher quality.



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Q. What can I do to assure that my translation will reflect the quality it should?

A. It is always wise to seek the services of a professional translation bureau that bases its professional practices on a comprehensive code of quality assurance policies. A professional agency will take the time to get to know its Client and their language needs, provide services accordingly and charge fair prices. It is wise to take the time to seek out a professional bureau whose reputation is based on friendliness, quality, timely results and the willingness to go one step beyond. A professional agency will provide you with a guarantee of satisfaction, to protect you and your company from errors and omissions.

Q. Can an agency provide translation services for a language it does not list as part of their language service?

A. Some agencies are restricted to the languages they list as they may only have translators specialized in those languages, while other agencies belong to networks and associations where languages that may not be listed among those provided can still be obtained. Keep in mind though that it may take an extra day or two for the agency to find a qualified translator for your specific language pairing or they may simply refer you to another reputable and professional agency if urgency is an issue.

Q. Should an agency be used for all our language needs or should we use a variety of agencies that specialize in only one or two languages?

A. When using one agency for all your translation needs, it can be cost and time-effective and will guarantee accuracy of terminology and coherent style across all your written materials. Each translation agency has their own style and if two or more agencies are used, the materials may convey the same message but will not follow grammatical or stylistic suit. This may reflect badly on a company. Your documents must all portray the same image as this will reflect an organized and professional business practice that is reputable and trustworthy.

Q. Can I contact the agency about my project whenever I want to?

A. You should have the name, telephone number, extension and e-mail address of the project manager (Team Coordinator) responsible for your project so that you may contact them at your discretion should you have any questions about the translation. A professional bureau should provide you with this information upon signing an Order Form.

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Q. Is it safe to use an internet-based translation service?

A. Every business you encounter, whether it is virtual or physical in nature, needs to be researched before you contract their services. Ask for references and be sure to check them all. If all else fails, stick to your personal instinct. Is the receptionist friendly and courteous when answering calls? Is your request processed immediately and have you received a quote within 24 hours of placing your order? Has the project manager (Team Coordinator) spoken directly with you to better understand your project needs and requirements so that the most qualified translator can be chosen for your translation? These are just some of the questions you should ask yourself before proceeding with a translation agency.