

Technical Translation Services – What it Takes

English is the native language of a large part of the developed world and it follows that most technical treatises, operating manuals and product literature have been written in English. In the last couple of decades, the world has changed almost beyond recognition, in terms of the extensive spread of knowledge and resources to the most remote of places, language barriers notwithstanding. There is widespread development of different types of software in many native languages, and user manuals have been written and translated into many different languages across the world.

Some of the most used languages are Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese, with the result that there is always high demand for technical translation services between English and these languages. However, sentence or phrase construction varies with different languages, and it is not appropriate for translators to merely provide literal translations of technical documents, as this may result in distorting the meaning in the target language.

It is interesting to note that even in English speaking countries like America, England and Ireland, the usage of certain words may differ between one country and another. In the US, a vehicle used to transport cargo will be called a freight car while the British may refer to it as a wagon. A British rail car is a DMU (Diesel Multiple Unit) in Ireland! When translators attempt a technical translation, they will have to be mindful of these differences and take care to use the appropriate word or phrase. Another important point for translators to be aware of when they undertake a technical translation is that the terminology for describing certain concepts, parts of machinery, etc., may vary in different fields of application. For instance, electrical fields and electro-magnetic fields are common parlance in electrical engineering, but when the same is used when keying in data into a computer, the word 'field' takes on a completely different meaning!

Providing effective translation services for technical documents thus calls for special skills and expertise. Even so, there are innumerable instances where words and phrases have been borrowed liberally from other languages by word-for-word translation or *verbum pro verbo*, and with the passage of time these phrases have gained acceptance in the target language. These are referred to as *calques*:

Suprageleider (Dutch) for superconductor

Gratte-ciel (French) for skyscraper

Tappajasovellus (Finnish) for 'killer application.' The literal translation of *tappajasovellus* is 'an application that kills.'

In order to be able to deliver an effective translation of technical documents, the translator must be very conscientious, possess a high degree of skill, knowledge of the two languages as well as the cultural contexts, and in addition must be aware of the usage of specific words and phrases in different industries and areas of technology. Some agencies go the extra mile by using two translators to ensure error-free technical translation services: the first performs the initial translation, and a second, independent translator proof-reads, reviews and edits the translation to check for completeness, accuracy, and appropriateness. This conscientious approach helps eliminate errors to a substantial extent. The nature and complexity of the document may sometimes warrant a "back translation" effort too, where a third translator translates the text back into the original/source language, to check for any possible mistranslation. The final product should indeed be as perfect as it can possibly get.

High quality services come at a price, but it may be well worth the cost especially when the documents are of sensitive nature and have a high intrinsic value. Whether it is a matter of translating an operating or installation manual, product literature or a simple letter to place an order, it is crucial to the success of your business to have your technical translation services work handled by qualified professionals.

About the Author

Armando Riquier is an independent expert translator and writer and member of the Tectrad control team. The Tectrad group comprises various agencies delivering high quality translation in the area of finance, legal, and business writings. Use of their professional [translation services](#) to communicate a positive image of your company to foreign customers.

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