

Faculty of Letters, Foreign Languages and Arts

Department of Foreign Languages

2nd year English

Module: **Translation**

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Lesson:01

HOW TO TRANSLATE A TEXT?

Because translation is a surprisingly difficult task involving **complex mental processing**. Specifically, for each phrase or section of text to be translated a translator needs to:

1. read and understand the source text
2. keep the meaning or message of that text in mind
3. select the most appropriate vocabulary in the target language
4. use the grammatical structure of the target language
5. compose that meaning/message in the target language
6. make sure the new text is worded in a natural way

IMPORTANT STEPS OF TRANSLATION

Step 1: Scope out the text to be translated

The first step is to get a feel for the text you're going to translate. That is, the subject matter and content, how long it is, the writing style, if it's technical, the various sections, etc.

The translator will typically read or **skim read** parts of the text to get an overview of the content.

They may note key concepts or terminology they'll need to research, and will decide if any preliminary background reading is needed.

Sometimes they'll research and resolve how they'll translate key terms before beginning the translation.

Step 2: Initial translation

Now they systematically translate the document, typically in chunks of 5 – 10 words at a time.

Choosing the appropriate length of individual text chunks to deal with is important. Ideally each chunk will be a discrete and complete unit of meaning.

Each chunk also has to be short enough to retain in short term memory.

Anything over about 10 words can be a struggle.

Sentences are frequently longer than this, so will typically need to be split up into shorter units.

Working with chunks that are too short or not discrete meaning units tends to produce an unnatural and potentially unclear translation.

On the other hand, working with chunks that are too long to easily remember runs the risk of some meaning being missed in the translation.

Step 3: Review the accuracy of the translation

After the first draft is completed, the translator will then methodically work through the translation comparing each chunk of text with the original (source) text.

The primary goal here is to confirm they haven't missed any content or misinterpreted any meaning.

Most translators will also identify and improve any slightly unnatural or inelegant wording in this step.

Step 4: Take a break

The next step is very simple – put the translation aside and take a break.

Ideally this should be for a few hours or overnight.

The idea is purely to clear the mind to ensure a more effective fifth and final step.

Step 5: Refine translation wording

In the final step the translator re-reads the translation, this time without reference to the source document, looking solely at quality of expression.

They'll make final edits to further refine and "polish" the translated text.

As we've said, after the first attempt a translation will typically have some slightly clumsy or unnatural wording and some aspects of meaning may also have been missed. This is due to the mental processing involved generally being too demanding for the translator to master both full accuracy and excellent expression in one go.

So the first pass produces only a draft.

Unfortunately, inexperienced and untrained translators often don't appreciate this.

They will often deliver their initial translation without realising it may well be of substandard quality.

Steps 3 and 5 are therefore vital to firstly ensure all source text meaning has been carried over into the translation and nothing has been missed, and then to “polish” the wording so it reads naturally and well in the target language.

The break in **step 4** is sometimes omitted for shorter texts, but generally makes for a much more effective final review.

That’s because the initial translation (step 2) and checking process (step 3) both require considerable focus on the source text.

And after an extended period of intense concentration, this lingering focus can make it difficult for the translator to adjust and totally block out the source text to then assess the quality of their writing solely on its own merits.

A break clears the mind and lets the translator come back to the translation fresh and alert and so better able to take a new and critical look at how clear and natural the translation wording is.

The need for this process is spelled out (and actually specified as a requirement) in leading translation Standards. And it is precisely what we offer with our quality-assured translations.

In contrast, very few individual translators will include any form of independent review.

Thus the highest assurance of quality requires:

- the **right translator** (trained, experienced and with the required skillset)
- adherence to this 5-step language **translation process**
- a subsequent **peer review**