



Foreign languages for the media

A guide to commissioning creative translation for advertising, brochures, books, film and the Internet



The key to delivering effective foreign language materials lies in the planning.

More often than not, translation is seen as an afterthought, a bolt-on at the end of the communication process. Generally speaking, the earlier you consider the language and cultural elements of a piece of communication, the more likely you'll be to see your messages generate profit, and avoid costly mistakes.

Contents:

- 02 Introduction
- 04 Translating written media
- 05 Printed materials
- 06 Brand names
- 07 Advertising and press releases
- 08 Proofreading
- 09 Points to remember
- 11 Translating for film and video
- 12 Dubbing
- 12 Lipsync
- 13 Subtitling
- 14 Translating websites
- 15 Where to go next

Introduction

The production of foreign-language versions of sales literature, advertising, press releases, books and corporate videos requires special skills and understanding of how to adapt visual and written content to local culture (localisation). This booklet is intended to assist small and large companies in recognising when creative translation is necessary, what to look out for, and how to obtain specialist services.

Planning is key to getting it right. The following points will assist you in handling foreign language versions in any of the media dealt with in this booklet.

- Take time to familiarise yourself with the language and cultural expectations of your customers.
- Prepare everyone involved in the delivery of non-English communication as early as possible, including copywriters, designers, printers & translators.
- Choose your language service provider carefully - the more specialised your subject matter, the more important it is that the provider is familiar with it.
- Finalise 'English copy' before attempting to start the translation process.
- Allocate time in your plan for approving translated material, before publishing it.

Keep these things in mind and you'll learn from the mistakes made by others with their promotional materials.

**English brochure copy for a Tokyo car-hire firm:
“When passenger of foot heave in sight, tootle the
horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still
obstacles your passage then tootle him with vigour.”**

Translating written media

When translation is for print, rather than simply for information, greater care and creativity are needed. A professional translator will ensure that the translation is true and faithful, but that's a legal definition. For marketing purposes, making sure that what you're trying to get across is totally understood is a great deal more difficult. The golden rule is that if you have engaged the services of a copywriter to write the original version, you will certainly need a more creative translator to interpret the meaning behind the words - the sense, the feeling, the rhythm - in order to create a foreign-language version that truly reflects every cultural nuance of the original.

Expect to pay twice as much for translating hard-sell marketing material as you would for straight translation required for information-only purposes. This allows the translator more time to deal with creative aspects such as attention-catching headlines with clever wordplays or slick tag lines and strap lines.

Printed materials

Firstly, let the copywriter know that the copy will be translated. That way, the copywriter will avoid relying heavily on wordplays and puns or English jargon and idioms that simply will not translate easily. Ideally the text for brochures should be written before the design phase, so that the copy can be shown to your translation company or translator in advance. They can tell you if the English copy will transfer successfully into foreign languages. If there is a creative brief in writing, copy this to the translators too.

Then, tell your graphic designer or design studio that foreign-language versions will be involved. Designers need to know this so that their designs will work with different languages which vary in length. For instance, most European languages tend to run longer than English by as much as 20%. The easiest solution is to use a type size that can be reduced if necessary. To keep down production costs, ask your graphic designer or printer whether the translations can appear in a single colour when printing in colour lithography. This may not apply for digital printing.

Unlike fiction, for which publishers normally commission translations from freelance translators, multilingual promotional books are best handled by translation companies with experience of localisation. These companies can anticipate the length of translated copy and make the necessary adjustments to accommodate it.

Brand names

Generally speaking brand names should not be translated, but in all events they need to be checked by professionals operating in the local target market.

The first attempt to translate Coca-Cola for the Chinese market read as “Kekoukela”, meaning “bite the wax tadpole” or “female horse stuffed with wax” depending on the dialect. After researching 40,000 Chinese characters, Coke found a phonetic equivalent “kokou kole” translating as “happiness in the mouth”.

Vauxhall had to change the Nova model’s name in Spain because “no va” means “it doesn’t go”.

Advertising and press releases

Advertising and press releases in foreign languages need to take account of different accepted practices in the target market. For example, a good advertisement headline in English is short and ideally contains no more than five words. In foreign languages, expect headlines to run somewhat longer. The most difficult copy to translate is a tag line or pay-off line, usually appearing under a brand logo. More often than not, advertising copy can follow the accepted English-language formula of AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) whereby you first have to grab the reader’s attention, make them interested, turn that interest into desire for your product or service and finally prompt the reader to action - visit their supermarket, send the coupon or pick up the phone right now.

Press releases in English, with the bones of a story in the headline and first paragraph, becoming more detailed and less important in subsequent paragraphs, are designed for sub-editing by cutting from the bottom if necessary. This does not always apply in foreign-language newspapers that are often written in essay-style, with a beginning, a middle and ending on a crescendo. At the end of the day, a ‘one size fits all’ approach to press releases for different markets is likely to be less effective. So it is worth ensuring that your translator or translation company is familiar with editorial styles reflecting local differences.

Proofreading

Creative translations that appear in print should always be double-checked. If possible, this can be done by a client's local office before typesetting, and then after typesetting by your translator (if a single language is involved) or a translation company for multilingual projects. Reckon to pay around 30% of the cost of translation for foreign-language proofreading.

Points to remember

Different languages present a range of challenges when you are producing translation for print. The key points below illustrate why it is important to work with experienced professionals who will ensure that your translated materials read just as well and look just as good in translation as they do in the original.

- For languages that contain many compound words - such as the German *Rindfleischetikettierungsüberwachungsaufgabenübertragungsgesetz* (a law relating to the transfer of authority over the supervision of the labelling of beef) - it is best to use wide columns and ranged rather than justified type, to avoid a series of hyphens down the right-hand side. This applies particularly to German, Dutch, Scandinavian and Eastern European languages.
- If languages that are not written in the Roman alphabet are involved, e.g. Russian, Arabic or most Asian languages, it is important to know which programme your design studio will be working in, so that the translation company or translator produces the translation in a compatible format.
- Where languages run from right to left, e.g. Arabic, Urdu or Hebrew, keep in mind that the whole layout will need to switch from right to left, especially if it includes sequences of pictures or 'before and after' photographs with captions that will have to be reversed.

- Graphic designers should be asked to keep it simple in their choice of typefaces as less common fonts may not extend to special characters, for example in Czech, or accents in Polish. For Chinese or Japanese, you may be better off asking a translation company to organise the typesetting and work with your design studio.
- Bear in mind that there is a risk of breaching confidentiality if a freelance copywriter is working for the ad agency employed by your competitors in the foreign territory involved.
- Localisation of copy should also include illustrations and symbols. Standards vary about the acceptability of suggestive imagery, which may cause extreme offence in some cultures. Similarly, symbols and gestures may be interpreted quite differently in different cultures.
- It is also important to avoid reference to animals regarded as unclean or unlucky numbers and colours. For example, the number 4 is considered unlucky in some countries in the Far East to the extent that it is avoided for seat numbers on certain airlines, and the colour black is considered unlucky in Japan.

A baby food range was introduced in Africa with the same advertising used in the United States, showing a cute baby on the label. The company was not aware that the practice at the time was for images on food products in certain parts of Africa with low literacy levels to show the contents on the label. Needless to say, the products were withdrawn and relaunched with appropriate labelling.

Translating for film and video

Translating for film and video is a highly specialised and technical field where it is essential to use the services of experienced translation companies. Increasingly, companies produce corporate videos for training purposes and in order to explain technical processes as well as for marketing their products or services. Foreign-language versions may be either dubbed or subtitled.

The first part of the process, in either case, is to translate the final, post-production script. Just like printed material, it is important to remember that most European languages run longer than English: translation companies that specialise in film and video work understand the necessity of working to length.

If a large amount of foreign-language footage needs to be prepared for the editing suite, it must first be transcribed by a mother-tongue translator and then translated which is a very lengthy process. For this reason, the cost can sometimes be substantially reduced by engaging the services of a simultaneous interpreter for the edit suite.

Bally Shoes produced two training videos: one to show the technical side of manufacture and the other to show staff how to sell the products effectively. The videos were translated into French, German, Italian and Spanish and used for training in a range of European markets. The company was delighted with the impact of the videos.

Dubbing

Experienced, mother-tongue, foreign-language voice-over artistes (VO's) are best cast by specialist translation companies with extensive foreign voice banks. Most corporate videos need one VO to act as narrator and then one female (FVO) and one male (MVO) to play all the parts of vox pop or short interviewees. You will need to provide a VHS video with BITC (burnt-in time-codes which mark the running time on the film) so that they can be added to the script translation. If a number of languages are involved, it is best to engage the services of an experienced foreign-language voicing director to ensure that studio time is not excessive. It normally takes four times the running time of an average production to dub to picture and keep within the timecodes, for most languages. Some languages take longer to voice than others, notably German and Italian among European languages. However, French and Spanish, for example, can be speeded up more easily.

Lipsync

For TV commercials where only one or two lines are to be spoken, the actor can be trained by a dialogue coach to deliver the lines in the foreign language with a script in phonetics, making use of downtime at the shoot. It doesn't matter if an actor can roll the letter "r" in French because this is not seen on screen and it will be dubbed afterwards by a mother-tongue VO. The result will be seamless 'lipsync'.

Tip

Remember to take the Master video on DigiBeta or BetaSP (your video production company will be familiar with the formats) to the studio and make sure there is an extra M&E (music and effects) track to take the foreign-language voicing. For dubbing TV commercials (often only 30 seconds long), allow much more time to deliver the message within the tight timescale - allow four hours per foreign-language version.

Subtitling

Ask your subtitling company how they want your material presented. For example, if on VHS it needs to have vertical interval timecodes (VITC) as well as BITC, they will need an accurate post-production script translation. The first part of the process is to produce a 'spotting' list; this process determines how many titles are needed and exactly where they will appear. Then the subtitling company will shorten the script translation to length and key the subtitles into their subtitling system. Finally, the disk of the subtitles is run to produce a viewing VHS for approval, and then copied to a new Master from the original.

Tip

Subtitling is rarely used on television and is less acceptable culturally in large population countries, e.g. France, Germany, Spain, Italy or the UK. However, in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, for example, subtitling is preferred to dubbing because viewers like to hear the original English.

Translating websites

It is astounding how few English language websites are translated into foreign languages. Surprisingly, even the busiest websites contain far fewer words than you might imagine. And although there are other factors involved - not least the application of technology and consideration of menus and layout - evidence strongly favours multilingual web access. Internet users are three times more likely to buy from a site that communicates in their language. (Forrester Research)

You will need the services of a translator or translation company able to return their translations in HTML format, or any other format used by your website designers. Inputting the translation into your website is best left to the web design company or your own webmaster. Remember to signpost a selection of languages from your home page, either with flags or in words. For example, if your website is in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish, offer the selection as: English/Français/Deutsch/ Italiano/ Español or use flag symbols. A website that is only in English is missing out on a vast worldwide market for its products or services. Find out more about website localisation in the guide from this series.

A strong case for the need to translate and localise websites has been made by German nationals working for the VisitBritain website in Germany. They claim that hits to pages with German language content on www.schottland.de, which links to a range of Scottish tourism websites, are seven times as high as for those with English-only content. German visitors to the site particularly want to be able to see terms and conditions in their own language.

Where to go next

English may be the world's leading marketing language, but that doesn't preclude the translation of marketing-speak or sparkling copywriting. If the UK is to maintain its position in the global market, companies should be encouraged to localise corporate brochures, point-of-sale materials, advertising, film and video, CDs and websites. Find out more about how to access specialist expertise in this section.

Association of Translation Companies

Professional association representing the interests of translation companies. www.atc.org.uk

BLIS Facilities

A directory of business language support services, including specialists for the media industry. www.blis.org.uk/facilities

BLIS Professionals

A quality-assured database of language professionals with specialism in a range of services. Supported by CILT, the National Centre for Languages and its Regional Language Networks. www.blis.org.uk/professionals

Skillset

The Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries. Skillset's website contains a wealth of information on skills development and training in the audio-visual industries including a range of support available for individuals and companies. www.skillset.org

Solvit

An on-line tool designed to help businesses overcome barriers in international communication. Dedicated sections target written communication and published materials. www.solvit.org.uk

“Communication across languages and cultures is key to operating in today’s global market. This guide gives sound advice to anyone who needs to ensure that their media communications are successfully localised and translated.”

Dinah Caine, Chief Executive, Skillset

(Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries)

skillset

“This guide should be on the desk of everyone involved in creative writing for advertising, brochures, books, film and the Internet.

Too many think that turning one language into another is something that anyone with a passing knowledge of the target tongue can achieve with ease. Some even think that technology can handle it at the push of a button. Both notions are wrong. This guide points to the need to involve translation professionals at the earliest possible moment in the process. I thoroughly recommend it.”

Geoffrey Bowden

General Secretary

Association of Translation Companies



Other publications in this series

Basic International Communications

Business Interpreting

Conference Interpreting

How to work with British Sign Language/English interpreters

International Communications

Intercultural Skills

Foreign Language Training

Website localisation

Recruiting people with languages

Also available

Translation, Getting it Right

All publications are available from:

Regional Language Networks

www.cilt.org.uk/rln

CILT, the National Centre for Languages

www.cilt.org.uk