

FAQ for translation buyers

What is translation? Is it the same as interpreting?

Translation is converting written texts from one language (source) to another (target). Interpreting is converting spoken language. Both translators & interpreters are language professionals, however the education, training and skills required for each are different, and only few people can offer both services.

What constitutes a good translator?

First of all, it's not a hobby. Not everybody familiar with a foreign language can do it. A good and professional translator needs the following:

- Ability to read and write well in both source and target languages
- Knowledge of and/or experience in the field of the text to be translated
- Extensive knowledge of syntax/grammar/spelling rules in both source and target languages
- References, i.e. translation agencies or direct clients who have cooperated with the translator in the past and can offer feedback as to their cooperation.
- A professional translator either has a strong technical background (e.g. a medical translator might have a medical degree) combined with linguistic experience or has a strong linguistic background (e.g. a degree in Languages or Translation) combined with technical experience (specialization in a specific field of interest).

What constitutes a good translation?

- A good translation is easily understood.
- A good translation is fluent and smooth.
- A good translation conveys the meaning of the source text.
- A good translation fits the purpose that it was intended to fit.

Is there a difference between technical translation and literary translation?

Of course there is. Most translators can either the one or the other, very few can do both. Literary translation concerns literary works (novels, short stories, plays, poems, etc.), whereas technical translation concerns texts that relate to specialized, technological, or scientific subject areas. Medical, legal, automotive, marketing etc. translators belong to the second category.

Which tools are used by translators?

The following tools can be found in print format, software or online.

- Monolingual dictionaries to check the meaning of unknown words in the source text
- Bilingual dictionaries to find the appropriate translation of a term
- Encyclopedias and glossaries for specialized terms
- Specialized magazines and journals to familiarize with the field
- **Computer-aided translation (CAT) tools.** They help translators work better and faster by combining glossaries and translation memories (databases used by translators that contain previously translated words, phrases and paragraphs) to ensure consistent terminology.



- Professional translators **DO NOT use** Machine Translation (MT) tools, which automatically offer a computer-generated translation and cannot be relied upon to produce a publication-ready text. The technology is still in its infancy and the result cannot be used for anything else than a rough understanding of source text's content (most of the times, you don't even get that).

What is the difference between a freelance translator and a translation agency?

A freelance translator is typically able to handle translations from one or more source languages into their native language. A translation agency might be a **Single-language vendor (SLV)** [offers translation services into one language pair (English-Greek, for example)] or a **Multi-language vendor (MLV)** [offers translation services into several language pairs (e.g. English-Greek, French-German etc.)].

How many words per day can a translator translate?

An average translator translates 2000 words per day in total. That can go up to 3000 words per day for specialized translators working on a subject that is very familiar to them. Also, translators have to allow time to proofread their work before delivering it to their client.

Should I choose a translator or a translation agency for my project?

Reasons to choose a translation agency:

1. Your text has very complex formatting.
2. You need the text translated into many different languages.
3. You need additional services (such as desktop publishing, voiceover etc.). Agencies can act as one-stop shops, thus covering whatever linguistic needs you might have.
4. You have a very large document to translate and need within the next few hours or days, plus quality is not an important factor. Agencies usually have hundreds of translators in their databases, so they can find several translators to split your text and get it translated very fast.

Reasons to choose a translator:

1. You have direct communication with the person translating your documents (for questions, alterations in text etc.).
2. In cases of long-term cooperation, there is consistency in terminology and the translator is well familiarized with your products/services, as well as your preferences as to the style of the text.
3. The cost is usually much lower (30-50%), because there is no intermediary (agency) or project manager involved, even if you need third-party proofreading (most translators cooperate with colleagues who can provide the additional service).
4. It's easier to check the translator's references than the agency's, plus even if you are satisfied with the agency's references, you still can't be sure which translators are going to work on your project.

There are free translations tools online, why can't I just use one of those?

If you need a quick translation of your text to understand the gist (although even that isn't possible most of the times), then sure you can. [Google Translate](#) is one of the top online tools, you can give it a try. However, if your text is intended for publication for whatever reason (marketing material, user manual, product leaflet etc.), then you shouldn't consider using a Machine Translation (MT) tool. A quick look on the Internet at some of the machine-translated websites will give you an idea what your text will look like.

