

TRANSLATION: The art of rewriting with idiomatic sensitivity

The need for a proficient and accurate translation occurs in any circumstance when written language that has been carefully crafted, with specific objectives and purpose, needs to be communicated in a different language and cultural context.

Anyone attempting to translate such content should, at the very least, be a college educated and fully bilingual person with above average writing skills. However, being able to write and speak a second language very well does not, by any means or measure, qualify a person as a proficient translator.

It is one of those cases where ‘fair’ or ‘good’ is just not enough – and where any and all deficiencies will always be noticeable to the reader. The greater challenge to achieve excellence in translation is, precisely, the number of complexities to overcome in order to successfully bridge denotative and connotative meanings, idioms and word choice, syntax and grammar, and yet other language subtleties and usage factors, to fully preserve the precise meaning, style and tone of the original. Only then will it read as though the material had never gone through a translation process, but rather, as if it had been originally ‘authored’ in that language.

This sets a higher standard; it is the level of ‘excellence’ that can be achieved only by professional writers who, in addition, are especially trained in bridging all linguistic and cultural nuances between two specific languages in a way that properly resolves every stylistic and structural challenge. This level of translation insures that professionally produced content, whether technical or other, remains as carefully crafted and clear in the new ‘target’ language, whereas anything less literally generates an ‘imperfect by-product’ of the original.

idiomatic *adj.* in accordance with the individual nature of a language.
Characteristic of, peculiar to, a particular language.

(Webster’s Dictionary)

Translation is without a doubt an ‘extended complication’ to the already complex process of specialized human communication. This is why it is ultimately so critical to utilize the services of a well-established translation company with professional translators plus the added value of project management and quality control processes. When needing a translation it is best to avoid disregarding the original as ‘really not that sensitive or complex’ and handing it over to a bilingual friend or employee. If you do so because you trust they can do a good job, make sure you still get a second opinion/proofreading from a professional translator!

In considering what you need and expect in a translation, remember there can be huge difference between “*saying it in the other language*” and “*achieving precise, effective and culturally appropriate communication in the other culture and language*”. Keep in mind that your message, your image and your prestige are on the line, and that only translators with specific training, abilities and practical experience can truly resolve all idiomatic issues and nuances.

After 25 years of performing translation work, I have no doubt that proficiency and excellence in translation is as much a technical skill acquired over time as it is *the art of rewriting with idiomatic sensitivity*.

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