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Parklane Africa's Guide to Quality Translations

"Translating is the process of crafting language to create parallel and equivalent mental structures. The question for the translator is not "how do you say that in...?", but, rather, "how would it have been said, had it been said originally in...?"

- Sonia Barinas

"Translation is not a matter of words only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture." - Anthony Burgess

Translating

This is a brief guide to the main principles of buying quality translations that was written for busy executives who are faced with 'the need to contract translation or interpretation services.

Sonia Barinas, the founder and president of Barinas, is a translator and simultaneous interpreter with more than 30 years of experience. She was educated at Rutgers and the Sorbonne, and has worked in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, as well as the US. In the 80's she pioneered the concept of applying quality management principles to the translation process, and has lectured and written on the subject widely.

This Guide is an abridged version of Barinas's presentation to the 1986 World Conference on the Economics of Language Use, Center for Research and Documentation on World Language Problems, United Nations, New York.

It gives an overview of the translation services, describes the steps we take to ensure accurate and timely delivery.

1. How to Set Requirements for Quality Translations

Quality becomes a manageable factor when we define it as conformance to requirements. The quality of a translation must be defined by how well it meets the objectives we set for it, before the translation began. It is these objectives that must form the basis for formulating our requirements.

The 5 steps are

1. Define 6 key areas 2. Set requirements 3. Identify & hire the translator 4. Monitor the process 5. Evaluate results

Step 1: Define 6 Key Areas

Translations, as is also true of other professional services your company contracts, can be most effectively managed when you are prepared to give the supplier clear and precise directives. In the

case of translations, there are 6 key areas that must be defined, and their requirements formulated, before the translation begins. I call these the 6 keys to translation management:

1. What?

First, gather all the elements that make up the complete translation project and define how they relate to the whole. For example, when translating a technical manual make sure to include the binder cover, index tabs, registration cards, or any other items that will be used together.

The translator must understand the interaction between all the elements and translate them as a unified whole. Otherwise, you may end up with a manual whose chapter headings do not quite match the language of the binder's index tabs, a CD whose graphics do not quite match the language used in dubbing the dialogue, and a brochure that matches neither.

2. Who?

Know your audience.

Do not assume that the target readership for your translation is the same as for the original. Adapt your translation to fit the income, class background, political orientation, etc. of the international market you are trying to reach.

Keep in mind that translating competence is much more than simple language competence. Above all, keep in mind that a translation must communicate to the target audience in terms of their own culture. Culture can never be separated from language.

We routinely blame some of the most famous blunders in the history of international business on ignorance of cultural differences. However, keep in mind that it is through poor translations that we expose our ignorance to public ridicule. Remember: Disastrous translations are much more frequently the result of cultural, rather than of technical ignorance.

3. Why?

Define the translation's purpose.

Why are you having it translated? What are your objectives? What do you expect the translation to accomplish? Sell? Teach? Persuade? Your objectives should form the basis for defining the translation style.

For example, a technical video translated for the purpose of teaching factory workers how to operate equipment, requires a style quite different from that of a video to be used to persuade CEO's of the technical superiority of the very same equipment. In the first instance, it is obvious that the style must be clear, simple, and straightforward. In the latter, however, the language must not only be at a much higher reading level, but also have a certain refinement and polish.

4. Where?

It is a common misconception that languages, such as Spanish, require translations into the various local dialects. This is not so. There is no valid reason for using dialect in business communications or

when translating professional or technical documents, such as contracts, research, or financial reports.

Business communications, in any major language, require the same standards of clarity, precision, and professionalism. Translators must have a thorough knowledge of the countries, regions, and dialects represented by the target audience, not in order to translate into dialect, but, on the contrary, to translate into universal standard language and to avoid particular words that may offend or lead to misunderstandings because of their different meanings in various dialects.

5. When?

Plan ahead in order to establish a realistic and cost-effective translation schedule. Keep in mind that quality, cost, and schedule are the three pillars on which a translation project is developed.

As a rule of thumb, allow one day for every 20 pages of text and one week for every 20 minutes of video, or 3 weeks for a 300-page manual or a 60-minute video. Add to this timetable any time some of your field or staff people may want to spend revising first and second drafts of the translation.

Whenever possible, do not start translating a manual or video until the entire original production is completed. Nine times out of ten, there will be last-minute changes to the original, and it can be very costly to make changes to the translation. In any case, no competent translator would dream of doing a dubbing script without the final video, since each word of the translation must match the lip movements of the original.

6. Cost?

How much should a translation cost? There can be huge variations in fees charged by translators and, as is true in other areas, high fees are no guarantee of quality. Quality of translations should dictate the fees, competence is a huge determiner of the output as it is an indicator of the scope of competence.

When formulating a budget, ensure that you make an accurate comparison of the quality of the service to be provided. What are they offering you for the money? Does the fee include certification? The main point to keep in mind is that the actual text or script translation represents a very small fraction of your total budget, compared to production and distribution costs. While you will often pay less for a translation by going to a friend or local university for small, simple jobs, in a major project, a full-service translation company, run by a qualified translator who knows the ins and outs of the business can save you money. A big part of the service provided by reputable translation companies is putting together a comprehensive package.

Step 2: Set Requirements

You can begin to set the requirements for your translation. Product Requirements Sample:

(What)- Define the nature of the translation e.g a presentation, video etc

(Who) - The language must correspond to the language currently in use

(Why) – Reason for the translation

(Where) - The presentation must be adaptable to formal and informal settings, for both small and large audiences.

(When) The completed package must be ready by _____.

(How Much) The total project must stay within a budget of \$_____.

In addition to the above, you will need to define format requirements for the finished product. For example, in the case of text you may need to specify a style sheet, any artwork, etc. In the case of a video, you will need to specify the size and format of the master, etc.

Step 3: Identify the Translator

Once you have set your requirements for the product, you will be ready to set requirements for the translator, based on what the translator must accomplish.

- Translator must be familiar with the subject matter
- Translator must have the project completed by _____.
- Translator must be able to work within the budget.
- Translator must deliver the finished product in the format stated.

Step 4: Monitor the Process

In translations, this is the one step that is most often neglected, and it is also the most complex. Monitoring the translation process is much more than staying on schedule. It can be divided into 6 main areas:

1. Task Definition

(Defining each individual task that makes up the total project)

2. Task Sequencing

(Determining the order in which tasks must be completed)

3. Task Scheduling

(Determining the time required to complete each task, as well as the date when each task must be begun and the date when it must be completed)

4. Task Evaluation

(Determining what milestones will define each task and, at each milestone, whether the task is being carried out according to the requirements)

5. Task Approval

(Determining at what point each task can be defined as completed and ready to be integrated into the next step in the process)

6. Task Integration

(Determining when and how each task is integrated into the next step in the process. Evaluating whether the integration has been carried out according to requirements)

When translating simple text, process monitoring can be extremely simple, since there are such few

Step 5: Evaluate Results

Evaluating the quality of a translation should be the easy part.

Once the translation is completed, check it against the requirements that you set for it. Then, determine whether or not it conforms to these requirements. It is to be hoped that, if all the steps have been followed correctly, the translation will, consequently, conform to all the requirements and, therefore, will be a quality translation.

If it does not conform, then go back and determine which part of the translation caused the nonconformance, and make the needed changes to this part of your process to prevent the same error in the future.

At Parklane Africa, we have defined all these steps for our clients to ensure that we deliver quality translations on time.



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