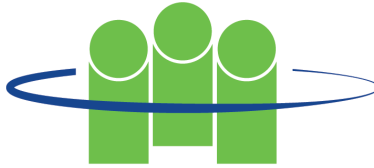


Kentucky Interpreter and Translator Association



Document Translation: Considerations in Choosing Services

The translation of documents can be an important element of any language access plan. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 talks about the need for vital documents to be translated by recipients of federal funds. Whether or not your organization is a federal fund recipient, this document can assist you in meeting the written document needs of your Limited-English proficient (LEP) population. For more information on Title VI, visit www.lep.gov

Translation is the process of rendering the meaning of words from one written language to another. Documents translated into the preferred languages of clients reduces risks of misunderstanding and increases satisfaction in every field: legal, medical, social services and educational. A translator should have advanced training or national certification in the working languages as well as knowledge in the target cultures and customs. However, not all translations require such a high level of expertise. Trained and experienced translators can also prove competence through certificates of completion, samples of translations, references, or a diploma in translation studies.

A document's length, Lexile, syntax, grammatical structure, idioms, and metaphors used affect the quality and rendition of the translation. Therefore, it is the content and not the number of words that determine the complexity of a document and will affect the turnaround time to complete the translation.

The type of document, whether it be a brochure, informational/educational document, or poster, also affects the final product. The translator must consider and be mindful of the target audience and cultural background in order to convey the message effectively. It is best to assign the work to a translator who is knowledgeable in the subject area in order to have a translation where content is clearly stated and is culturally appropriate. Many professional translators keep samples of their work and provide references. Some translators work with editors or proofreaders.

In order to facilitate a well-translated document, ideally, the original document should be clearly written, easy to read, contain facts in a logical order, and be long enough to convey or render the explanation in depth, and use exact or near exact words in order to avoid ambiguity of the meaning. The more precise the language, the less likely a translator will misunderstand and thus mistranslate the document. Ambiguous language can denote different

meanings in the source language. Ambiguous language also increases the probability of multiple meanings in the target language. Avoiding idioms, local references, and metaphors will help prevent losing meaning in translation. Although different cultures and inhabitants have idioms and metaphors comparable with the original written information, idioms and metaphors in the target language might not be a true representation of the message conveyed in the original written information.

Using simpler and shorter sentences are preferred since these lower the possibility of generating misunderstandings due to complex sentence structure that lead to mistranslations. A trained translator will be able to approach the requester and suggest how to improve the original document without editing the document. Therefore, before the document is sent for translation, the document must be read and reworded as necessary by the requester. The requester must carefully check the punctuation marks as their placement can affect the meaning of a sentence.

Some facilities prefer or require the translator to be certified or trained in translation services. Training in translation services ranges from obtaining a certificate of completion, to obtaining a diploma in translation, to having national certification specific to translations. For more information regarding certification of translators, see the American Translators Association website at www.atanet.org

Some best practices in providing translated documents include:

1. Request a quote for translation plus proofing/editing. This should be done by two individuals, at minimum, so that more than one set of eyes has been involved in the final product. Another option is to hire one vendor for translation and a second vendor for proofing and editing.
2. Know your audience. If the targeted readers are from communities with a 6th grade education, request a translation that is geared toward that reading level.
3. Be aware that written communication has its limitations. Although your organization may be required by law to translate vital documents, your language access budget could be better spent by not translating all of your documents or by picking and choosing documents that may have the most impact. Literacy rates vary by community so written documents may not be appropriate for all clients.
4. When a client/patient/consumer is illiterate, it will be essential to provide a qualified interpreter to interpret the explanation of any document that needs to be signed.