

51 Types of Translation

(Courtesy of [PanTranz](#))

The 51 types of translation which we have identified fall neatly into **four distinct categories**.

Translation Category A:

15 types of translation based on the technical field or subject area of the text



Translation companies often define the various kinds of translation which they provide according to the subject area of the text.

This is a useful way of classifying translation types because specialist texts normally require translators with specialist knowledge.

Here are the most common types you will be likely to come across in this Category.

1. General Translation

What is it?

The translation of non-specialised text. That is to say, text which we can all understand without needing specialist knowledge in some area.

The text may still contain some technical terms and jargon, but these will either be widely understood, or easily researched.

What this means

The implication is that you do not need someone with specialist knowledge for this type of translation – any professional translator can handle them.

Translators who only do this kind of translation, i.e. those who do not have a specialist field, are sometimes referred to as 'generalist' or 'general purpose' translators.

Examples

Most business correspondence, website content, company and product/service info, non-technical reports.

Most of the rest of the translation types in this Category **do** require specialist translators.

Check out our video on 13 types of translation requiring special translator expertise:



2. Technical Translation

What is it?

We use the term 'technical translation' in two different ways:

Broad meaning: any translation where the translator needs specialist knowledge in some domain or area.

This definition would include almost all the translation types described in this section.

Narrow meaning: limited to the translation of engineering (in all its forms), IT and industrial texts



This narrower meaning would exclude legal, financial and medical translations for example, where these would be included in the broader definition.

What this means

Technical translations require [knowledge of the specialist field](#) or domain of the text.

That is because without it, translators will not completely understand the text and its implications. And this is essential if we want a fully accurate and appropriate translation.

Good to know

Many technical translation projects also have a [typesetting/Desk Top Publishing \(DTP\) requirement](#). Be sure your translation provider can handle this component, and that [you have allowed for it](#) in your project costings and time frames.

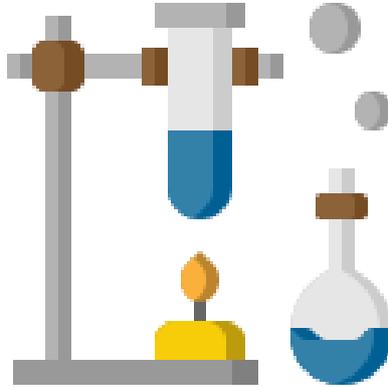
Examples

Manuals, specialist reports, product brochures

3. Scientific Translation

What is it?

The translation of scientific research or documents relating to it.



What this means

These texts invariably contain domain-specific terminology, and often involve cutting edge research.

Therefore, it is imperative the translator has the necessary knowledge of the field to fully understand the text. That is why scientific translators are typically either experts in the field who have turned to translation, or professionally qualified translators who also have qualifications and/or experience in that domain.

On occasion the translator may have to consult either with the author or other domain experts to fully comprehend the material and so translate it appropriately.

Examples

Research papers, journal articles, experiment/trial results.

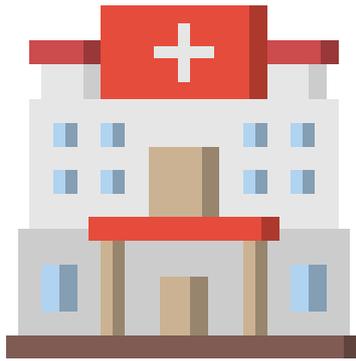
4. Medical Translation

What is it?

The translation of healthcare, medical product, pharmaceutical and biotechnology materials.

Medical translation is a very broad term covering a wide variety of specialist areas and materials – everything from patient information to regulatory, marketing and technical documents.

As a result, this translation type has numerous potential sub-categories – ‘medical device translations’ and ‘clinical trial translations’, for example.



What this means

As with any text, the translators need to fully understand the materials which they are translating. That means sound knowledge of medical terminology and they will often also need specific subject-matter expertise.

Good to know

Many countries have specific requirements governing the translation of medical device and pharmaceutical documentation. This includes both your client-facing and product-related materials.

Examples

Medical reports, product instructions, labelling, clinical trial documentation

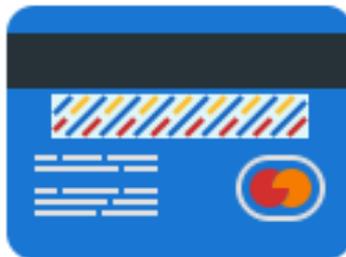
5. Financial Translation

What is it?

In broad terms, the translation of banking, stock exchange, forex, financing and financial reporting documents.

However, the term is generally used only for the more technical of these documents which require translators with knowledge of the field.

Any competent translator could translate a bank statement, for example, so that would not typically be considered a financial translation.



What this means

You need translators with domain expertise to correctly understand and translate the financial terminology in these texts.

Examples

Company accounts, annual reports, fund or product prospectuses, audit reports, IPO documentation

6. Economic Translations

What are they?

1. Sometimes used as a synonym for financial translations.
2. Other times used somewhat loosely to refer to any area of economic activity – so combining business/commercial, financial and some types of technical translations.
3. More narrowly, the translation of documents relating specifically to the economy and the field of economics.



What this means

As always, you need translators with the relevant expertise and knowledge for this type of translation.

7. Legal Translation

What is it?

The translation of documents relating to the law and legal process.

What this means

Legal texts require [translators with a legal background](#).



That is because without it, a translator may not:

- fully understand the legal concepts
- write in legal style
- understand the differences between legal systems, and how best to translate concepts which do not correspond.

We need all that to produce professional quality legal translations – translations which are accurate, terminologically correct and stylistically appropriate.

Examples

Contracts, legal reports, court judgments, expert opinions, legislation

8. Juridical Translation

What is it?

1. Generally used as a synonym for legal translations.
2. Alternatively, can refer to translations requiring some form of legal verification, certification or notarisation which is common in many jurisdictions.



3.

9. Judicial Translation

What is it?

1. Most commonly a synonym for legal translations.
2. Rarely, used to refer specifically to the translation of court proceeding documentation – so judgments, minutes, testimonies, *etc.*

10. Patent Translation

What is it?

The translation of intellectual property and patent-related documents.



Key features

Patents have a specific structure, established terminology and a requirement for complete consistency throughout – [read more on this here](#). These are key aspects to patent translations which translators need to get right.

In addition, subject matter can be highly technical.

What this means

You need translators who have been trained in the specific requirements for translating patent documents. And with the domain expertise needed to handle any technical content.

Examples

Patent specifications, prior art documents, oppositions, opinions

11. Literary Translation

What is it?

The translation of literary works – novels, short stories, plays, essays, poems.



Key features

Literary translation is widely regarded as the most [difficult form of translation](#).

That is because it involves much more than simply conveying all meaning in an appropriate style. The translator's challenge is to also reproduce the character, subtlety and impact of the original – the essence of what makes that work unique.

This is a monumental task, and why it is often said that the translation of a literary work should be a literary work in its own right.

What this means

Literary translators must be talented wordsmiths with exceptional creative writing skills.

Because few translators have this skillset, you should only consider dedicated literary translators for this type of translation.

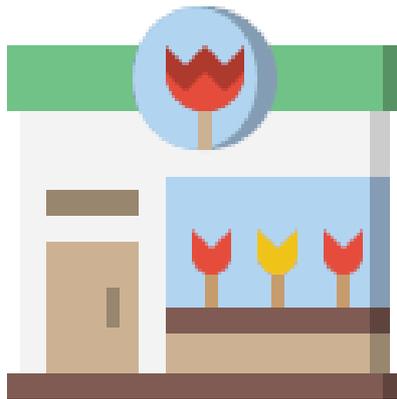
12. Commercial Translation

What is it?

The translation of documents relating to the world of business.

This is a very generic, wide-reaching translation type. It includes other more specialised forms of translation – legal, financial and technical, for example, and all types of more general business documentation.

Also, some documents will require familiarity with business jargon and an ability to write in that style.



What this means

Different translators will be required for different document types – specialists should handle materials involving technical and specialist fields, whereas generalist translators can translate non-specialist materials.

Examples

Business correspondence, reports, marketing and promotional materials, sales proposals

13. Business Translations

What are they?

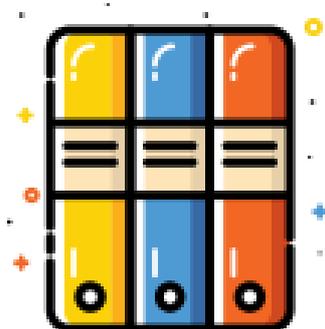
A synonym for Commercial Translations.

14. Administrative Translations

What are they?

The translation of business management and administration documents.

Therefore, it is a subset of Business / Commercial Translations



What this means

The implication is these documents will include business jargon and ‘management speak’, so require a translator familiar with, and practiced at, writing in that style.

Examples

Management reports and proposals



15. Marketing Translations

What are they?

The translation of advertising, [marketing and promotional materials](#).

This is a subset of business or Commercial Translations.

Key features

Marketing copy is designed to have a specific impact on the audience – to appeal and persuade.

Therefore, the translated copy must do this as well.

But a direct translation will seldom achieve this – so translators need to adapt their wording to produce the impact the text is seeking.

And sometimes a completely new message might be needed – see [transcreation](#) in our next Category of translation types.

What this means

Marketing translations require translators who are skilled writers with a flair for producing persuasive, impactful copy.

As relatively few translators have these skills, engaging the right translator is key.

Good to know

This type of translation often comes with a [typesetting or DTP requirement](#) – particularly for adverts, posters, brochures, *etc.*

Its best for your translation provider to handle this component. That is because multilingual typesetters understand the design and aesthetic conventions in other languages/cultures.

These are essential to ensure your materials have the desired impact and appeal in your target markets.

Examples

Advertising, brochures, some website/social media text.

Translation Category B:

14 types of translation based on the end product or use of the translation

This Category is all about how the translation is going to be **used** or the **end product** which is produced.

Most of these types involve either adapting or processing a completed translation in some way or converting or incorporating it into another program or format.

You will see that some are very specialised, and complex.

It is another way translation-providers refer to the range of services which they provide.

Check out our video of the most specialised of these types of translation:



16. Document Translations

What are they?

The translation of documents of all sorts.



Here the translation itself is the end product and needs no further processing beyond standard formatting and layout.

17. Text Translations

What are they?

A synonym for document translation.

18. Certified Translations

What are they?

A translation with some form of certification.

Key features

The certification can take many forms. It can be a statement by the translation company, signed and dated, and optionally with their company seal. Or a similar certification by the translator.

The exact format and wording will depend on what clients and authorities require.

19. Official Translations

What are they?

1. Generally used as a synonym for certified translations.
2. Can also refer to the translation of 'official' documents issued by the authorities in a foreign country. These will almost always need to be certified.

20. Software Localisation

What is it?

Adapting software for another language/culture.



Key features

The goal of software localisation is not just to make the program or product available in other languages. It is also about ensuring the user experience in those languages is as natural and effective as possible.

Translating the user interface, messaging, documentation, *etc* is a major part of the process.

Also, key is a customisation process to ensure everything matches the conventions, norms and expectations of the target cultures.

Adjusting time, date and currency formats are examples of simple customisations. Others might involve adapting symbols, graphics, colours and even concepts and ideas.

Localisation is often preceded by [internationalisation](#) – a review process to ensure the software is optimally designed to handle other languages.

It is almost always followed by **thorough testing** – to ensure all text is in the correct place and fits the space, and that everything makes sense, functions as intended and is culturally appropriate.

Localisation is often abbreviated to L10N, internationalisation to i18n.

What this means

Software localisation is a specialised kind of translation, and you should always engage a company which specialises in it.

They will have the systems, tools, personnel and experience needed to achieve top quality outcomes for your product.

21. Game Localisation

What is it?

Adapting games for other languages and markets.

It is a subset of software localisation



Key features

The [goal of game localisation](#) is to provide an **engaging and fun** gaming experience for speakers of other languages.

It involves translating all text and recording any required foreign language audio. But also adapting anything which would clash with the target culture's customs, sensibilities and regulations.

For example, content involving alcohol, violence or gambling may either be censored or inappropriate in the target market.

And at a more basic level, anything which makes users feel uncomfortable or awkward will detract from their experience and thus the success of the game in that market. Therefore, portions of the game may have to be removed, added to or re-worked.

Game localisation involves at least the steps of **translation**, **adaptation**, **integrating** the translations and adaptations into the game, and **testing**.

What this means

Game localisation is a very specialised type of translation best left to those with specific expertise and experience in this area.

22. Multimedia Localisation

What is it?

Adapting multimedia for other languages and cultures.

Multimedia refers to any material which combines visual, audio and/or interactive elements, such as videos and movies, on-line presentations, e-Learning courses, *etc.*



Key features

Anything a user can see or hear may need localising.

That means the audio and any text appearing on screen or in images and animations. Plus, it can mean reviewing and adapting the visuals and/or script if these are not suitable for the target culture.

The localisation process will typically involve:

- **Translation**
- **Modifying** the translation for cultural reasons and/or to meet technical requirements
- **Producing** the other language versions

Audio output may be **voice-overs**, dubbing or **subtitling**.

And output for visuals can involve re-creating elements or supplying the translated text for the designers/engineers to incorporate.

What this means

Multimedia localisation projects vary hugely, and it is essential your translation providers have the specific expertise needed for your materials.

23. Script Translations

What are they?

Preparing the text of recorded material for recording in other languages.



Key features

There are several issues with script translation.

One is that translations typically end up **longer** than the original script. Therefore, voicing the translation would take up more space/time on the video than the original language.

Sometimes that space will be available and this will be OK.

But generally, it will not be so. The translation has therefore to be **edited back** until it can be comfortably voiced within the time available on the video.

Another challenge is the translation may have to **synchronise** with specific actions, animations or text on screen.

Also, some scripts also deal with **technical subject areas** involving specialist technical terminology.

Finally, some scripts may be very **culture-specific** – featuring humour, customs or activities which will work well in another language. Here the script, and sometimes also the associated visuals, may need to be adjusted before beginning the translation process.

It goes without saying that a script translation must be done well. If it is not, there will be problems producing a good foreign language audio, which will compromise the effectiveness of the video.

Translators typically work from a **time-coded transcript**. This is the original script marked to show the time available for each section of the translation.

What this means

There are several potential pitfalls in script translations. Therefore, it is vital that your translation provider is practiced at this type of translation and able to handle any technical content.

24. Voice-over and Dubbing Projects

What are they?

Translation and recording of scripts in other languages.

Voice-overs vs dubbing

There is a technical difference.

A voice-over adds a new track to the production, dubbing replaces an existing one.

Key features

These projects involve two parts:

- a **script translation** (as described above), and
- **producing the audio**

Therefore, they involve the combined efforts of translators and voice artists.



The task for the voice artist is to produce a high quality read. That is one which matches the style, tone and richness of the original.

Often each section of the new audio will need to be the same length as the original.

But sometimes the segments will need to be shorter – for example where the voice-over lags the original by a second or two. This is common in interviews *etc*, where the original voice is heard initially then drops out.

The most difficult form of dubbing is **lip-syncing** – where the new audio needs to synchronise with the original speaker's lip movements, gestures and actions.

Lip-syncing requires an **exceptionally skilled voice talent** and considerable time spent rehearsing and fine tuning the translation.

What this means

You need to use experienced professionals every step of the way in this type of project. That is to ensure first and foremost that your foreign-language scripts are first class, then at the voicing is of high professional standard.

Anything less will mean your foreign language versions will be way less effective and appealing to your target audience.

25. Subtitle Translations

What are they?

Producing foreign language captions for subtitles or [surtitles](#).



Key features

The goal with subtitling is to produce captions which viewers can comfortably read in the time available and still follow what is happening on the video.

To achieve this, languages have 'rules' governing the number of characters per line and the minimum time each subtitle should display.

Sticking to these guidelines is essential if your subtitles are to be effective.

But this is no easy task – it requires **simple language**, **short words**, and a very **succinct** style. Translators will spend considerable time mulling over and re-working their translation to get it just right.

Most subtitle translators use specialised software which will output the captions in the format sound engineers need for incorporation into the video.

What this means

As with other specialised types of translation, you should only use translators with specific expertise and experience in subtitling.

26. Website Localisation

What is it?

The **translation** and **adapting** of relevant content on a website to best suit the target language and culture.

Note: Many providers use the term [website translation](#) as a synonym for localisation. Strictly speaking though, translation is just one part of localisation.



Key features

- Not all pages on a website may need to be localised – clients should review their content to identify what is relevant for the other language versions.
- Some content may need specialist translators – legal and technical pages for example.
- There may also be videos, linked documents, and text or captions in graphics to translate.
- Adaptation can mean changing date, time, currency and number formats, units of measure, *etc.*
- But also, images, colours and even the overall site design and style if these are to have the desired impact in the target culture.
- Translated files can be supplied in a wide range of formats – translators usually coordinate output with the site webmasters.
- New language versions are normally thoroughly **reviewed and tested** before going live to confirm everything is displaying correctly, works as intended and is cultural appropriate.

What this means

The first step should be to review your content and identify what needs to be translated. This might lead you to modify some pages for the foreign language versions.

In choosing your translation providers be sure they can:

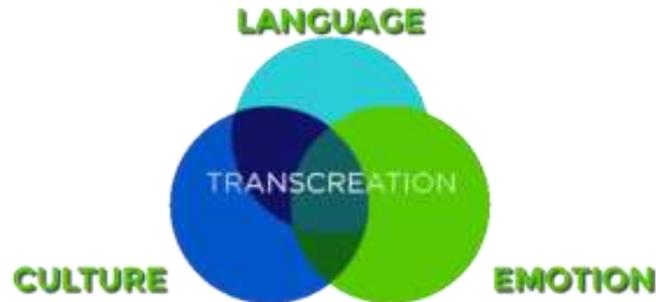
- handle any technical or legal content,
- provide your webmaster with the file types they want.

One should always get the translators to systematically review the foreign language versions before going live.

27. Transcreation

What is it?

Adapting a message to elicit the same **emotional response** in another language and culture.



Translation is all about conveying the **message or meaning** of a text in another language. But sometimes that message or meaning will not have the desired effect in the target culture.

This is where transcreation comes in. Transcreation creates a **new message** which will get the desired emotional response in that culture, while preserving the style and tone of the original.

Therefore, it is a sort of creative translation – which is where the word comes from, a combination of ‘translation’ and ‘creation’.

At one level transcreation may be as simple as choosing an appropriate idiom to convey the same intent in the target language – something translators do all the time.

But mostly the term is used to refer to adapting key **advertising and marketing** messaging. Which requires copywriting skills, cultural awareness and an excellent knowledge of the target market.

Who does it?

Some translation companies have suitably skilled personnel and offer transcreation services.

Often though it is done in the target country by specialist copywriters or an advertising or marketing agency – particularly for significant campaigns and to establish a brand in the target marketplace.

What this means

Most general marketing and promotional texts will not need transcreation – they can be handled by a translator with excellent creative writing skills.

But slogans, by-lines, advertising copy and branding statements often do.

Whether you should opt for a translation company or an in-market agency will depend on the nature and importance of the material, and of course your budget.

28. Audio Translations

What are they?

Broad meaning: the translation of any type of recorded material into another language.

More commonly: the translation of a foreign language video or audio recording into your own language. Therefore, this is where you want to know and document what a recording says



Key features

The first challenge with audio translations is it is often impossible to pick up every word which is said. That is because audio quality, speech clarity and speaking speed can all vary enormously.

It is also a mentally challenging task to listen to an audio and translate it directly into another language. It is easy to miss a word or an aspect of meaning.

Therefore, best practice is to first transcribe the audio (type up exactly what is said in the language it is spoken in), then translate that transcription.

However, this is time consuming and therefore costly, and there are [other options](#) if lesser precision is acceptable.

What this means

It is best to discuss your requirements for this kind of translation with your translation provider who will be able to suggest the best translation process for your needs.

Examples

Interviews, product videos, police recordings, social media videos.

29. Translations with Desk Top Publishing (DTP)

What are they?

Translation incorporated into **graphic design files**.



Key features

Graphic design programs are used by professional designers and graphic artists to combine text and images to create brochures, books, posters, packaging, *etc.*

Translation plus DTP projects involve three steps – **translation, typesetting, output**.

The typesetting component requires **specific expertise and resources** – software and fonts, typesetting know-how, an appreciation of foreign language display conventions and aesthetics.

What this means

Make sure your translation company has the required multilingual typesetting/desktop publishing expertise whenever you are translating a document created in a graphic design program.

Translation Category C:

13 types of translation based on the translation method employed

This Category has two sub-groups:

- the **practical methods** translation providers use to produce their translations, and
- the translation strategies/methods identified and discussed within **academia**.

The translation methods translation providers use

There are four main methods used in the translation industry today. We have an overview of each below, but for more detail, including when to use each one, see our [comprehensive blog article](#).

Or watch our video.

Important: If you are a client, you need to understand these four methods – choose the wrong one and the translation you end up with may not meet your needs!



30. Machine Translation (MT)

What is it?

A translation produced entirely by a software program with no human intervention.

A widely used, and free, example is Google Translate. And there are also commercial MT engines, generally tailored to specific domains, languages and/or clients.

Pros and cons

There are two limitations to MT:

- they make **mistakes** (incorrect translations), and
- **quality of wording** is patchy (some parts good, others unnatural or even nonsensical)

On the positive side, they are virtually **instantaneous** and many are **free**.

Best suited for:

Getting the general idea of what a text says.

This method should never be relied on when high accuracy and/or good quality wording is needed.

31. Machine Translation plus Human Editing

What is it?

A Machine Translation subsequently edited by a human translator or editor, often called Post-editing Machine Translation (PEMT).

The editing process is designed to rectify some of the deficiencies of a Machine Translation.

This process can take different forms, with different desired outcomes. Probably most common is a 'light editing' process where the editor ensures the text is understandable, without trying to fix quality of expression.

Pros and cons

This method will not necessarily eliminate all translation **mistakes**. That is because the program may have chosen a wrong word (meaning) which was not obvious to the editor.

Wording will not generally be as good as a professional human translator would produce.

Its advantage is it is generally **quicker** and a little **cheaper** than a full translation by a professional translator.

Best suited for:

Translations for information purposes only.

Again, this method should not be used when full accuracy and/or consistent, natural wording is needed.

32. Human Translation

What is it?

Translation by a professional human translator.



Pros and cons

Professional translators should produce translations which are **fully accurate** and **well-worded**.

That said, there is always the possibility of 'human error', which is why translation companies like us typically offer an [additional review process](#) – see next method.

This method will take a little **longer** and likely **cost more** than the PEMT method.

Best suited for:

Most if not all translation purposes.

33. Human Translation + Revision

What is it?

A human translation with an additional review by a second translator.

The review is essentially a **safety check** – designed to pick up any translation errors and refine wording if need be.

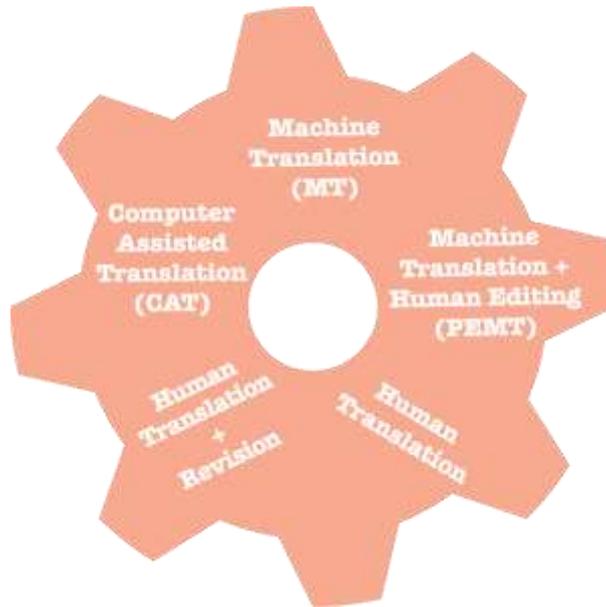
Pros and cons

This produces the **highest level** of [translation quality](#).

It is also the **most expensive** of the four methods and takes the **longest**.

Best suited for:

All translation purposes.



There is also one other common term used by practitioners and academics alike to describe a type (method) of translation:

34. Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT)

What is it?

A human translator using computer tools to aid the translation process.

Key features

Virtually all translators use such tools these days.

The most prevalent tool is [Translation Memory](#) (TM) software. This creates a database of previous translations which can be accessed for future work.

TM software is particularly useful when dealing with repeated and closely-matching text, and for ensuring consistency of terminology. For certain projects it can speed up the translation process.

The translation methods described by academia

A great deal has been written within academia analysing how human translators go about their craft.

Seminal has been the [work of Newmark](#), and the following methods of translation attributed to him are widely discussed in the literature.



These methods are **approaches** and **strategies** for translating the **text as a whole**, not techniques for handling smaller text units, which we discuss in our final translation Category.

35. Word-for-word Translation

This method translates each word into the other language using its **most common meaning** and **keeping the word order** of the original language.

Therefore, the translator deliberately ignores context and target language grammar and syntax.

Its main purpose is to help understand the source language structure and word use.

Often the translation will be placed below the original text to aid comparison.

36. Literal Translation

Words are again translated independently using their **most common meanings** and out of context, but word order changed to the closest **acceptable target language grammatical structure** to the original.

Its main suggested purpose is to help someone read the original text.

37. Faithful Translation

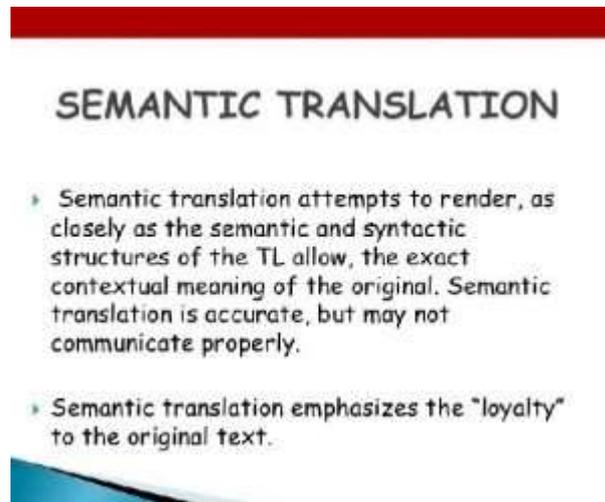
Faithful translation focuses on the intention of the author and seeks to convey the **precise meaning** of the original text.

It uses correct target language structures, but structure is less important than meaning.

38. Semantic Translation

Semantic translation is also author-focused and seeks to convey the **exact meaning**. Where it differs from faithful translation is that it places equal **emphasis on aesthetics**, *i.e.* the 'sounds' of the text – repetition, word play, assonance, *etc.*

In this method form is as important as meaning as it seeks to '*recreate the precise flavour and tone of the original*' (Newmark).



39. Communicative Translation

Seeks to communicate the message and meaning of the text in a **natural** and **easily understood** way.

It is described as reader-focused, seeking to produce the same effect on the reader as the original text.

A good comparison of Communicative and Semantic translation can be found [here](#).

40. Free Translation

Here conveying the **meaning** and **effect** of the original are all important.

There are no constraints on grammatical form or word choice to achieve this.

Often the translation will **paraphrase**, so may be of markedly different length to the original.

41. Adaptation

Mainly used for poetry and plays, this method involves **re-writing the text** where the translation would otherwise lack the same resonance and impact on the audience.

Themes, storylines and characters will generally be retained, but cultural references, acts and situations adapted to relevant target culture ones.

Therefore, this is effectively a **re-creation** of the work for the target culture.

42. Idiomatic Translation

Reproduces the meaning or message of the text using **idioms** and **colloquial expressions** and language wherever possible.

The goal is to produce a translation with language which is as **natural** as possible.

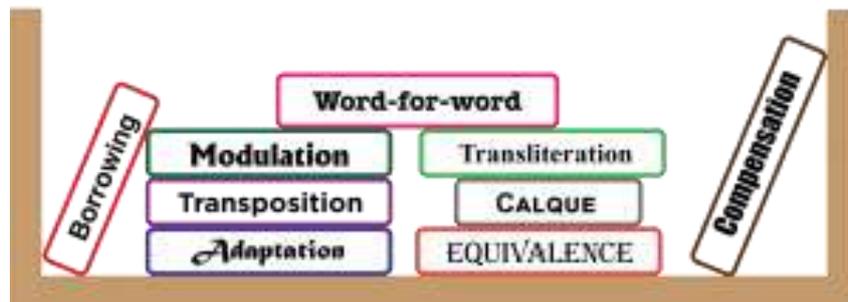
Translation Category D:

9 types of translation based on the translation technique used

These translation types are specific **strategies, techniques** and **procedures** for dealing with short **chunks of text** – generally words or phrases.

They are often thought of as techniques for **solving translation problems**.

They differ from the translation methods of the previous Category which deal with the text as a whole.



43. Borrowing

What is it?

Using a word or phrase from the original text **unchanged** in the translation.

Key features

With this procedure we do not translate the word or phrase at all, we simply 'borrow' it from the source language.

Borrowing is a very common strategy across languages. Initially, borrowed words seem clearly 'foreign', but as they become more familiar, they can lose that 'foreignness'.

Translators use this technique:

- when it is the **best word** to use – either because it has become the standard, or it is the most precise term, or
- for **stylist effect** – borrowings can add a prestigious or scholarly flavour.

Borrowed words or phrases are often italicised in English.

Examples of borrowings in English

grand prix, kindergarten, tango, perestroika, barista, sampan, karaoke, tofu

44. Transliteration

What is it?

Reproducing the **approximate sounds** of a name or term from a language with a different writing system.

Key features

In English, we use the Roman (Latin) alphabet in common with many other languages including almost all European languages.

Other writing systems include Arabic, Cyrillic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and the Indian languages.

Transliteration from such systems into the Roman alphabet is also called **romanisation**.

There are accepted systems for how individual letters/sounds should be Romanised from most other languages – there are **three common systems for Chinese**, for example.

English borrowings from languages using non-Roman writing systems also require transliteration – *perestroika*, *sampan*, *karaoke*, *tofu* are examples from the above list.

Translators mostly use transliteration as a procedure for **translating proper names**.



Examples

毛泽东	Mao Tse-Tung / Mao Zedong
Владимир Путин	Vladimir Putin
서울	Seoul
ភ្នំពេញ	Phnom Penh

45. Calque or Loan Translation

What is it?

A literal translation of a foreign word or phrase to create a new term with the same meaning in the target language.

Therefore, a calque is a **borrowing with translation** if you like. The new term may be changed slightly to reflect target language structures.

Examples

German '*Kindergarten*' has been calqued as *детский сад* in Russian, literally 'children garden' in both languages.

Chinese 洗腦 'wash' + 'brain' is the origin of 'brainwash' in English.

English skyscraper is calqued as *gratte-ciel* in French and *rascacielos* in Spanish, literally 'scratches sky' in both languages.

46. Word-For-word Translation

What is it?

A **literal translation** which is **natural** and **correct** in the target language.

Alternative names are 'literal translation' or 'metaphrase'.

Note: this technique is different to the translation *method* of the same name, which does not produce correct and natural text and has a different purpose.

Key features

This translation strategy will only work between languages which have very similar grammatical structures.

And even then, only sometimes.

For example, standard word order in Turkish is Subject-Object-Verb whereas in English it is Subject-Verb-Object. Therefore, a literal translation between these two will seldom work:

– *Yusuf elmayı yedi* is literally 'Joseph the apple ate'.

When word-for-word translations do not produce natural and correct text, translators have to resort to some of the other techniques described below.

Examples

French '*Quelle heure est-il?*' works into English as 'What time is it?'.

Russian 'Он хочет что-нибудь поесть' is 'He wants something to eat'.



47. Transposition

What is it?

Translation with a **change of grammatical structure**.

This technique gives the translation more natural wording and/or makes it grammatically correct.

Examples

A change in **word order**:

- Our Turkish example *Yusuf elmayı yedi* (literally 'Joseph the apple ate') → *Joseph ate the apple*.
- Spanish *La Casa Blanca* (literally 'The House White') → *The White House*.

A change in **grammatical category**:

- German *Er hört gerne Musik* (literally 'he listens gladly [to] music')
- = subject pronoun + verb + **adverb** + noun
- becomes Spanish *Le gusta escuchar música* (literally '[to] him [it] pleases to listen [to] music')
- = indirect object pronoun + verb + **infinitive** + noun
- and English *He likes listening to music*
- = subject pronoun + verb + **gerund** + noun.

48. Modulation

What is it?

Translation with a **change of focus** or point of view in the target language.

This technique makes the translation more idiomatic – how people would normally say it in the language.

Examples

English talks of the 'top floor' of a building, French the *dernier étage* = last floor. 'Last floor' would be unnatural in English, so too 'top floor' in French.

German uses the term *Lebensgefahr* (literally 'danger to life') where in English we would be more likely to say 'risk of death'.



In English, we would say 'I dropped the key', in Spanish, *se me cayó la llave*, literally 'the key fell from me'. The English perspective is that I did something (dropped the key), whereas in Spanish something happened to me, *i.e.* I am the recipient of the action.

49. Equivalence or Reformulation

What is it?

Translating the underlying concept or meaning using a **totally different expression**.

This technique is widely used when translating **idioms** and **proverbs**.

And it is common in titles and **advertising slogans**.

It is a common strategy where a direct translation either would not make sense or would not resonate in the same way.

Examples

Here are some equivalents of the English saying 'Pigs may fly', meaning something will never happen, or 'you are being unrealistic':

- Thai: ชาดึกหน้าตอนม่าย ๆ – literally, 'One afternoon in your next reincarnation'.
- French: *Quand les poules auront des dents* – literally, 'When hens have teeth.'
- Russian: Когда рак на горе свистнет – literally, 'When a lobster whistles on top of a mountain.'
- Dutch: *Als de koeien op het ijs dansen* – literally, 'When the cows dance on the ice'.
- Chinese: 除非太陽從西邊出來! – literally, 'Only if the sun rises in the west.'

50. Adaptation

What is it?

A translation which substitutes a **culturally-specific reference** with something which is more relevant or meaningful in the target language.

It is also known as cultural substitution or cultural equivalence.

It is a useful technique when a reference would not be understood at all, or the associated nuances or connotations would be lost in the target language.

Note: the translation method of the same name is a similar concept but applied to the text as a whole.

Examples

Different cultures celebrate different coming of age birthdays – 21 in many cultures, 20, 15 or 16 in others. A translator might consider changing the age to the target culture custom where the coming of age implications were important in the original text.



Animals have different connotations across languages and cultures. Owls for example are associated with wisdom in English but are a bad omen to Vietnamese. A translator might want to remove or amend an animal reference where this would create a different image in the target language.

51. Compensation

What is it?

A meaning or nuance which cannot be directly translated is **expressed in another way** in the text.

Example

Many languages have ways of expressing social status (honorifics) encoded into their grammatical structures.

Therefore, you can convey different levels of respect, politeness, humility, *etc* simply by choosing different forms of words or grammatical elements.

But these nuances will be lost when translating into languages which do not have these structures.

Therefore, a translator might use this strategy to express (compensate for) them in another way, perhaps by using a different register (vocabulary which is more formal or informal) or by adding something not in the original.

