

Role of the Translator

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The translator works with the written word, meaning-fully re-assembling the fragments of communication from the source language to the target language. The translator provides their own view of the meaning of the original text.

It is important to see the translation as more than a simple operation of swapping one word for another into the target language. The finished article needs to be meaningful to the reader.

There are a number of circumstances that can challenge the skills and expertise of the translator. These include:

ambiguities,
abbreviations, jargon or colloquialism, puns, word play and sayings or proverbs;
where
there is no direct equivalent of an English term in the target language,
for example, there is no direct equivalent of "Council/Local Authority" in Urdu.

This is often dealt with through the creation of vocabulary banks to ensure a uniform approach, taking into account developments in client's home languages and the fact that many of their local speakers may be unaware of such developments;
where the
layout of the target language version is likely to differ significantly from that of the source version. This is likely to arise due to differences in the length of text, from the fact that, in the case of Urdu and Arabic; and
where
queries will be followed up by an agency without the capacity to use the target language.

Sometimes either the source or the target language is in a non-written format ie audio-tape, Braille, video or just personal dictation or reading. Agencies using these will need to consider how best they should be handled in the target language(s). The production of these alternative formats is often called transcription but "translation" is used to cover all such approaches in this guidance note unless otherwise stated.

Public authorities should develop their own translation guidelines. These can either be in the form of a policy or a procedure and, among other things, should cover:

the use of plain, grammatically correct and idiomatically simple English in all documents that require translation;

the recognising that translation should be seen as a supplement to interpreting and other communication services, not a substitute;

an indication of the costs of translation at the very outset of any document being prepared for public use;

an assessment of the benefit of translating documents against using an interpreter or an audio tape;

an assessment of the need for a document to be translated in full, as against a shortened version or summary;

provision for the proof reading of all documents for accuracy, readability and appropriateness;

consideration of the target audience, how they will be reached and the best format for their needs, for example, audio information may, in some cases, be preferable to a written format.

The thirty nine steps for use of translation is available in the Publications section.