



TRANSLATION QUALITY HANDBOOK

Most times when we provide translated materials for the public, we are working with languages we don't understand and aren't familiar with. Still, just like with English communications, we must act intentionally to make sure our communications are accurate, clear, respectful and accessible.

This guidance packet contains five sections for public facing organizations to improve translation quality:

1. A pre-translation guide for preparing an English-language document for translation.
2. A translation review checklist that can help identify issues in a translated document, even when you are unfamiliar with the language.
3. Best practices on when to use AI, machine translation, Google Translate, and other digital tools.
4. Special notes for Arabic- and Chinese-script translations.

This checklist is adapted from the City of Philadelphia Translation Style Guide. You can check there for more guidance and reasoning behind this guidance.

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PRE-TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSURANCE CHECKLIST

Review this checklist **before** you send your English-language document to your translation vendor

- Check that your document uses the plainest language possible
 - For specialized text, like healthcare or legal documents, consult your vendor to find the most qualified translator.
 - Puns, wordplay etc.
- Double check all key information, like phone numbers, links, dates and times.
 - **Best practice:** Use a month's name (March 5 or 5 Mar) rather than a numeral (3/5) to avoid confusion.
 - **Best practice:** Make sure links lead to translated content and staff are equipped to use interpreters in person or over the phone.
 - **Best practice:** If you choose to translate an agency name (*example: Oficina de Asuntos del Inmigrante*), consider also providing the English name or acronym (*ex.: Office of Immigrant Affairs or OIA*) so the audience can web search or ask for directions.
- Add any extra information for your NELP community members to the source document.
 - Mention any language services or barriers they can expect.
 - Provide instructions for requesting further language assistance if necessary
- Include a context statement to your translator that describes the purpose of the document, the audience, and any other information that can help orient their work.
 - Remember, your translator may be totally unfamiliar with your community and/or operations in your organization.

TRANSLATION QUALITY REVIEW CHECKLIST

Review this checklist **after** you receive a translation and it has been added into your poster, website, brochure or other final form.

- Are all addresses, neighborhoods, and names the same as the original?
- Are all numbers, including phone numbers, the same as the original?
- Are measurements and units the same as the original (e.g. miles, feet, dollars, etc.)?
- Are there any words or boxes that are cut off by margins, graphics, etc.?
- Do you see any mis-rendered symbols or text?
 - Examples can include:
 - Issues that happen when copy-pasting the text, like:
 - Garbled text: 6a MsDp4Letyy J0I74fdi
 - Unexpected symbols: Tran½lation exa@ple
 - Issues with a bad font, like:
 - Placeholder circles: 〇〇〇〇
 - Missing font squares: □□□□
 - Overlapping lines, accents or diacritics: သင်ကလေး၊ သင်မိသားစုနှင့် အခြားသူများကို ကာကွယ်ရာတွင် အကူအညီပေးပါ။
 - Font is too tiny to comfortably read: 모든 죽어가는 것을 사랑해야지
- If there are links in the document, do they work?
 - Is the website translated and accessible?
- If there are phone numbers or addresses in the document, are they up to date?
 - Are staff there equipped and ready to provide multilingual services?
- BONUS!** Ask a multilingual employee close to your program if they are comfortable checking the work.
 - Language skills are professional skills! Multilingual employees can be great translation quality experts for your program, as they understand both the local community and the institutional work of your program.
 - Being multilingual does not necessarily mean you are proficient and comfortable in all situations. Ask your colleagues about how they would like to use their skills and respect their wishes.
 - Small, occasional multilingual tasks are great ways to engage community and multilingual staff. However, ongoing tasks or large projects that go beyond an employee's job description can be burdensome or even rise to the level of discrimination. Consider a compensation plan for staff whose multilingual work goes beyond their regular duties.

LANGUAGE ACCESS GUIDANCE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND MACHINE TRANSLATION (MT)

This guide will help you determine if using artificial intelligence (AI) and/or machine translation (MT) is appropriate for your multilingual outreach situation.

What are Artificial Intelligence and Machine Translation?

In a language access context, AI and MT are largely the same type of program. You may be familiar with MT apps like Google Translate. These applications compare millions of translations and bilingual dictionaries to build their own translation algorithms, then they take chunks of text in one language and process them into another. These tools might include digital translation, live captioning/subtitling, and live AI translations.

Note: “Generative AI” (or “Gen AI”) is a new experimental technology that uses these algorithms for creative writing, much like predictive text on a cell phone. You may be familiar with Gen AI apps like ChatGPT. Gen AI are not reliable translation services and should be avoided.

What are the Benefits of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Translation?

- **Availability:** Digital tools can be available in almost any place, 24 hours a day, every day. They can reliably help meet many unexpected language needs in moments. The tools are highly scalable and deliver almost immediate results.
- **Range of languages:** Digital tools can be offered in many languages. Some services offer dozens of languages.
- **Range of subjects:** The dictionaries and data these tools use include a wide range of topics. The data is not always deep and detailed for every topic, but there is a broad range of what AI and MT can reference.
- **Cost:** Digital tools are typically much cheaper to use than human services.

What are the Drawbacks of Artificial Intelligence and machine Translation?

- **Limits on content knowledge:** AI algorithms and MT dictionaries take time to evolve and build. They can be up to a decade or more out of date or may not have adequate training data on certain topics.
- **Limits on accuracy:** Digital tools struggle when they encounter unfamiliar or unclear input. This can mean certain accents, phrases or terms, misspellings or spoken flubs, or creative language or technical terms can produce errors.
- **Limits on cultural competency:** AI and MT are not capable of complex communication that considers things like overall tone, gestures, wordplay, humor, local terms, sarcasm, implication and innuendo, dialects and regional variations, cultural considerations, taboos or other nuances.
- **Data sensitivity:** Many digital applications keep records of all the processes they perform. These records are saved and analyzed later for data training. They may also be sold to third parties, depending on the company and their policies. This can be a data safety issue, especially relating to legal information, health information, or other confidential communications.
- **No self-correction:** Humans use many “repair” strategies in daily communication to clarify, ask for, or give more information when a miscommunication happens. Digital tools cannot tell when or why they have made a mistake or a miscommunication has happened. Finding and fixing a digital translation error requires human intervention.

FLOWCHART: IS AI / MT RIGHT FOR MY MULTILINGUAL OUTREACH?

To decide if you should rely on artificial intelligence or other machine translation tools for your project, use the considerations in this flowchart.

1. **Is this a low-risk encounter/engagement?**

AI works best when risks and ethical concerns are minimal. Legal, medical or financial materials where small details can have critical impact should be done by human professionals.

I If yes, proceed to step 2

IF NO, CONSIDER A HUMAN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

2. **Is this a low-complexity encounter/engagement?**

AI is best used for routine, simple services in common languages. Situations that call for more complex skills—like describing technical details, navigating cultural sensitivity or institutional complexities—are all best done by humans.

I If yes, proceed to step 3

IF NO, CONSIDER A HUMAN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

3. **Is the technology accessible, adequate and secure?**

Consider technical set-up: will use be easy and efficient for staff and for users? Is the platform/service compliant with all confidentiality needs, HIPAA, IT security policies, etc.?

I If yes, proceed to step 4

IF NO, CONSIDER A HUMAN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

4. **Are you using a common language?**

AI services are trained on data libraries: languages with less representation in these libraries tend to be less accurate as target languages. Human translators deliver much better accuracy in the case of languages with smaller populations and data representation.

I If yes, proceed to step 5

IF NO, CONSIDER A HUMAN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

5. **Is this a vital service or document?**

Many AI services struggle to understand the complexities of forms, registries, tests and exams, and other service documents that go beyond basic routine information. Human translators can better analyze context and intention to make sure the translation reflects the original intention.

I **IF NO, AI or Machine Translation may be right for your project.**

IF YES, CONSIDER A HUMAN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

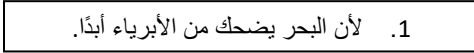
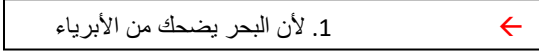
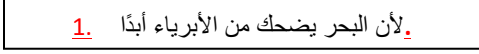
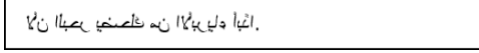
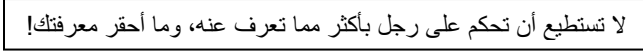
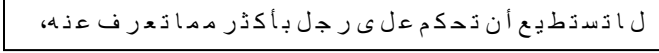
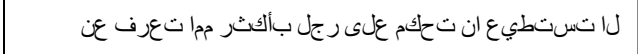
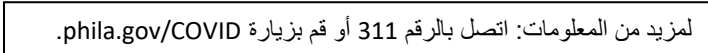
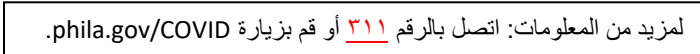
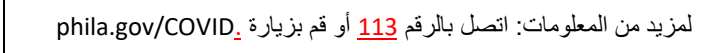
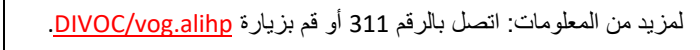
This flowchart was adapted and expanded from a version by BoostLingo, a language service provider who promotes AI use. Their full blog post is available at <https://boostlingo.com/blog/when-is-it-safe-to-use-ai-for-live-language-translation-captioning/>.

Some alternative uses for AI in your language could include:

- Using AI tools to rewrite some or all of your original source document in plain language can improve your human translator's efficacy.
- Some vendors offer AI tools that can help your staff identify a speaker's language and connect them to a human interpreter.

VISUAL GUIDANCE FOR ARABIC FONT QUALITY

This guide offers visual guidance you can use before publishing communications in languages using the Arabic script (including Arabic, Azerbaijani, Dari, Farsi/Persian, Pashto, Urdu, and more).

- Make sure Arabic text and punctuation (like periods or bullet points) are *right-justified* and written *right to left* (opposite of English).
 - Correct:

 - Incorrect:



- Make sure text is fluid (like cursive), not broken. There will only be small spaces between words and a few letters. Most letters are connected.
 - Correct:

 - Incorrect:


- Make sure numerals, phone numbers, and links read *left to right* (like in English). Only use “European numerals” (0123456789) and *not* “(West) Arabic numerals” (٠١٢٣٤٥٦٧٨٩).
 - Correct:

 - Incorrect:




VISUAL GUIDANCE FOR CHINESE TEXT QUALITY

Chinese text is written in one of two styles: **Simplified Chinese** and **Traditional Chinese**.

Simplified Chinese is the standard written Chinese in mainland China. It typically uses fewer lines or strokes per character.

唯之与阿，相去几何？善之与恶，相去若何？

Traditional Chinese is the standard written Chinese in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and many diaspora communities.

唯之與阿，相去幾何？善之與惡，相去若何？

Both styles of writing are common in the United States. Discuss with members of your Chinese community which are most used.

Note that varieties of Chinese like Mandarin, Cantonese, Taishanese, Fuzhounese, Hakka and Hmong are spoken, not written, languages. Chinese dialects are not normally written. All Chinese speakers use one standard written Chinese, in one of the two scripts above.

Chinese characters can be styled in **brush script** (“song ti”) or **block script** (“hei ti”). Use only one style per text block.

Brush Script (Song Ti)	Block Script (Hei Ti)	Mixed Script Error
唯之與阿，相去幾何？ 善之與惡，相去若何？	唯之與阿，相去幾何？ 善之與惡，相去若何？	唯之與阿，相去幾何？ 善之與惡，相去若何？
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More formal• Decorative and flowy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less decoration• More readable	

