



# Why **Quality** is Critical for Technical Translations



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## Introduction

Translating is one of those disciplines for which a slapdash approach and a belief that good enough will do is never going to work. Translating a word into another language so you have not only the same meaning, but the same understanding of that word is crucial.

In English, we have words called homophones that sound the same but are spelled differently and have very different meanings. To translate a homophone accurately, you must understand the context and use the correct spelling. For example:

- The weather is sunny
- Whether you want to go or not, you have to!
- The wether was going to market on Friday

They all sound the same, but the first is about climate, the second is an option, and the third is talking about what will happen to a castrated sheep.

That level of precision is vital in all translations, but in technical translation, it is especially crucial. One small error in the placement of a decimal point or mistaking a milligram with a microgram can have disastrous consequences.

As manufacturing companies expand their operations globally, they have an increasing need for technical translations. Providing user manuals, product descriptions, labeling, and operating instructions in multiple languages better caters to the needs of these new markets.

A single error can have unforeseen implications in your processes, or change how customers perceive or use your product. On the other hand, high-quality technical translations can ensure risk mitigation, offer consistency throughout your materials, and lead to an improved user experience. Quality of translation – not just the content itself – is critical.

Our eBook will illustrate why quality technical translations are crucial for your company's success when you expand into global markets or start manufacturing overseas. We will help you assess overall translation quality and cover the risks of using cheaper, less thorough translation services.

If you have any questions about technical translations after reading this eBook, please [contact us](#) at Protranslating. We're always happy to help.

## Let's begin with gaining a better understanding of technical translations.

- What Is Technical Translation?
- Appreciating Quality in Translations
- Why Quality is Crucial for Technical Translations
- Risks of Poor Quality Technical Translations
- What Manufacturers Should Know When Choosing an LSP
- Choose the Best LSP for Technical Translations



## What Is Technical Translation?

**Technical translation** is the translation of materials dealing with scientific, engineering or technical content. The translator needs to understand the subject matter and be fluent in the specialized terms specific to the field they are working in for both the source and target languages.

The documents are generally produced by a technical writer who is a subject matter expert in a particular specialist area, such as engineering, industrial chemistry, computer-aided manufacturing, or textiles.

Subject matter expertise in the field is crucial to ensure that the technical translation is accurate and easy to understand in the target language.

## These are some of the most common document types in technical translation:

- Product Packaging
- Engineering Specifications
- Safety Data Sheets
- Electronic Manuals and Guides
- User Manuals
- Operating Instructions
- Marketing Materials
- Contracts & Agreements
- Training Materials

Manufacturers worldwide rely on technical translations to expand their global reach and ensure that their manuals and specifications are understood by the technicians, engineers, and end-users in the country their new facility is in. Inaccurate translations or translations that are not country-specific, e.g., using Castilian Spanish for use in South America or European Portuguese instead of Brazilian Portuguese for Brazil, could cause misunderstandings in technical documents or end-user literature.

How do you assess quality when it comes to technical translations?

## Assessing Quality in Technical Translations

Assessing the quality of a technical translation can be difficult for those outside the language industry. Finding practical information on how to quantify and evaluate a translation is often challenging.

**Rule of thumb:** A high-quality translation should be consistent without any errors. It should capture the meaning of the original text, using appropriate wording in the target language.

Quality in translations is typically determined by considering these four key aspects:



Terminology



Mistranslations



Localization



Grammar





Keeping these essential elements of quality in mind, ask yourself the following question when assessing a translation:

### **Does your Language Service Provider (LSP) use a glossary?**

Your LSP must create a translation glossary for your company. Glossaries are a valuable asset that include specific technical terms, including acronyms, trademarks, and the complex terminology used in manufacturing processes. These glossaries are business-specific and will help you achieve translations that are more accurate, consistent, and cost-effective translations.

### **Does it capture the meaning of the original text?**

The translation should capture the meaning of the source text without any information getting lost in translation. The translator of the text needs to consider local language and cultural nuances to ensure an appropriate rendering of the source document in the target language

### **Does it read as it should?**

The translation should be easily readable and understandable. This means using the correct wording and appropriate expressions in the target language. It should feel as if it was originally written in the target language, not translated.

### **Are there any grammatical mistakes?**

Any grammatical errors in a translation signal low-quality work and have the potential to endanger your brand reputation, especially in technical translations for the manufacturing industry. Misplacing decimal points or missing subscript numbers in formulas could change a product's formula or strength, rendering it dangerous and unusable.

### **Are there any grammatical mistakes?**

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### **Has it handled everything consistently?**

Brands often find themselves challenged when evaluating the effectiveness and consistency of the content. The best way around this is to request an unbiased analysis of the translation. At Protranslating, we offer Independent Language Assessment services that measure the quality and effectiveness of your translation.

Get in touch to obtain a detailed assessment that will give you peace of mind when moving forward with your translated content.

## Why Quality Crucial for Technical Translations?

Having imprecise or misleading product packaging, instruction manuals, or standard operating procedures (SOPs) can have devastating consequences.

What does quality mean when it comes to technical translations? Three factors determine the quality of a technical translation:

### 1. Accuracy

Accuracy is one of the central components of quality for all translations and especially so for technical translations. An inaccurate translation is behind some of the most costly mistakes.

- First, the translation must communicate precisely the same message as the source language (SL). An inaccurate translation can lead to frightening consequences for companies in the manufacturing, medical, or other related industries.

For example, imagine using the wrong terms when translating medical exam results – it could be disastrous for the patient's health, safety, and mental well-being.

- Second, the translation needs to be clear and precise, leaving no room for interpretation. Standard Operating Procedures, or other learning materials, need to convey each process as precisely as possible.

### Subject Matter Expertise

Subject matter expertise is crucial for technical translations, as it helps the translator choose the correct terminology to use in a given document.

A team of expert technical translators will always have a person with extensive subject knowledge review the translation. This ensures that the translation is linguistically correct, well researched, and technically accurate. This will eliminate the majority of errors in technical texts with specialized terminology.

## 2. Consistency

Consistency is also essential for the translation's accuracy. Experts identify two main types of consistency issues:

- Translating the same key term from the source language with different words in the target language. The word will be translated in various ways throughout the text, making it confusing for the reader.
- Not using a translation glossary to ensure consistency across all the documents that require translation. Translation glossaries are a database of industry-approved substitutions of phrases, words, and technical terminology to improve accuracy and consistency across all translated documents.

Both are important aspects of a translation's quality.

Mistranslated content can be a serious issue when it comes to technical information. Let's take the translation of a product manual as an example. An inadequate translation can result in incomprehensible instructions. A single error in a product manual is enough to cause the customer to misuse the product, damaging and ruining their experience, and the reputation of the company that manufactured it. Additionally, mistranslation can result in expensive legal consequences for both the manufacturer, who may be sued by a consumer, and the LSP who may be liable if their work is found to be at fault.



Accuracy and ease of comprehension are also vital for translated safety instructions in the manufacturing space. You can't afford to leave anything to chance when it comes to your employees' health and safety.



Choosing a translation agency that specializes in technical translations is essential. They'll have the necessary subject matter expertise and linguistic ability to reproduce the source text with the same nuances and intentions.

You can have confidence that your translated materials are accurate and precise. The quality won't harm your company or cause problems for users.

## Risks of Poor Quality Technical Translations

It's easy to overlook excellence in translated texts. If the text is accurate, understandable, and reads well, you're happy; it's what you expected.

Poor quality, on the other hand, can be spotted a mile away. We've all seen some funny instances of mistranslations of foreign signs or commercials, especially when the reader can't understand the message. But translation errors are less funny when it comes to technical texts. Mistakes can have significant consequences on your operations, business interactions, and brand communications. One of the most notorious examples was [HSBC's failed international marketing campaign](#). A translation error forced the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) to spend millions on rebranding in 2009. HSBC's slogan "Assume Nothing" was translated to "Do Nothing" in numerous global markets. HSBC had to trash their original campaign and spend \$10 million to change their slogan to "The world's private bank" instead.

Poor quality technical translations are especially critical for manufacturing companies. For example, a single error such as a misplaced decimal can have catastrophic consequences, causing manufacturing errors or incorrect safety instructions.

### **Some of the most common repercussions of poor translations in the manufacturing industry can include:**

- Lawsuits
- Monetary losses
- Inefficient resource delegation
- Health and safety risks due to malpractice
- Delay in product and campaign launches
- Ruined marketing campaigns
- Business decisions based on misinformation

Cheap translation services, or machine translations without post translation editing by a subject matter expert, might seem like a cost-effective alternative, but they should generally be avoided for technical translations of manufacturing processes. [Human driven translation services](#) should be included as part of your projected budget both for the translation and post translation editing by an appropriately qualified expert. They'll more than pay for themselves in time saved and embarrassment or worse avoided.

This isn't just another insignificant expense, but one of the best investments you can make in future-proofing your company from any legal, manufacturing, or health- and safety-related problems. A professional translation company will have subject matter experts to handle your translations and a Quality Management System in place that eliminates the risk of significant translation errors.

What else should you be looking for when choosing a technical translation provider for the manufacturing sector?

## What Manufacturers Should Know When Choosing an LSP

When you begin considering professional translation companies or freelance translators for your technical translation needs, don't use price and turnaround time as your only criteria. Opting for quick and cheap will almost certainly end up being slow and expensive if you need to have the work redone.

Turnaround time for technical translations should be longer than other translations given the amount of specialized terminology involved and the need to use subject matter experts as part of the translation process to check that complex information is translated correctly. Choosing the quickest translation provider may result in a poorly produced end manual or user guide.



### Agency Experience

How experienced is your LSP in technical translations? Do they specialize in technical translation, or are they an excellent LSP with strong technical translation experience backed by evidence of their abilities?

Experience is one of the most reliable indicators of the translation quality you can expect. Translation service providers should ideally have a solid track record, supported by numerous client testimonials and case studies, along with specific manufacturing sector experience.



### Industry Experience

Your LSP must have access to top industry experts like architects, engineers, and chemists to verify the translation's accuracy and guarantee fluency and usability. This will ensure that your translated texts will have accurate and consistent terminology.

Subject matter expertise is as necessary, if not more so, than linguistic skills in technical translations. However, translating the source documents thoroughly and accurately takes a talented linguist with excellent subject matter experience.



### Terminology Management

As a manufacturer, you will use a great deal of industry-specific terminology, which has to be translated accurately and consistently so the employees in your overseas plants can work as effectively as your home-based employees. Working in partnership with your LSP will help you achieve an accurate and nuanced translation that will assist, not hinder your employees.

Look for providers who leverage glossaries and other reference materials that help with the accuracy and consistency of industry-specific terms. They should also have a client portal and other translation memory tools to increase efficiency and lower translation costs.

## Choose the Best LSP for Technical Translations

To achieve the quality and consistency you require, you'll need a reputable LSP specializing in technical translations for the manufacturing industry to ensure that your translation is of the highest standard. This includes making sure that the service provider has the necessary subject matter expertise to handle your requirements.

**At Protranslating, we specialize in technical translations for the manufacturing industry and have case studies that show our success with companies in that sector.**

We've been serving global manufacturing brands for over 40 years with precise and accurate translations assisted by industry-leading Quality Management Systems and intelligent technology.

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