

What Makes a Good Translation?

Many people think that any bilingual person can do a good translation. Therefore, often a very complicated, well-written document ends up in the hands of someone with absolutely no translation experience. Translation can be an intricate process. It goes far beyond a simplistic word-for-word exchange. A good translation needs to carry the meaning and the tone of the original, while still being culturally

sensitive to the target audience. Poor translations abound and it is such translations that people tend to remember. There is nothing funny about a bad translation if it affects your company or product. No one wants to be the butt of a bad joke because a translation has failed to hit its mark.

So, what are the qualities that make a translation good? A translation needs to meet several criteria in



If it sounds like a translation, it's not good!

order to be considered "good." The first criterion of a good translation is obvious—it has to be accurate.

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Language Spotlight: Hawaiian

What better language to focus on in winter than Hawaiian? It is a melodic and flowing Polynesian language



Only 0.1% of Hawaiians are native speakers

that mirrors the natural beauty of the islands. It has only twelve letters in its alphabet; five vowels (A, E, I, O and U) and seven consonants (H, K, L, M, N, P and W) making it easy to pronounce. There was no written language until missionaries came to the island in the 19th Century to translate the Bible into Hawaiian.

For many years the language was not widely spoken or encouraged, but in the last 30 years this has been

changing. In 1978, it was made an official language in the state of Hawaii. Additionally, there are two immersion schools in the state where about 1,400 students learn all their subjects in Hawaiian. There are also about 4,000 students learning Hawaiian as a second language since it became a required course in Hawaii's public schools. The majority of streets and place names in the state are Hawaiian. 🌐

Welcome Back!

After a hiatus of several years, our newsletter, the Language Ledger, is back with a new look. We will be providing regular articles on languages, translation, interpretation and all aspects of language learning. We welcome your ideas or suggestions. Please email editor@indytranslations.com. You can also join Indy Translations and Indy Foreign Language Academy on Facebook. 🌐



Class Registration Deadline

Our summer class registration deadline is May 23, 2011. We are offering group classes at all levels in Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, American Sign Language and English as a Second Language at both our Carmel and Indianapolis offices. Children's classes are also available. You can register at www.indyfla.com. 🌐

A different language is a different vision of life.
—Federico Fellini

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Examples of where this often fails are mistranslations, missing sentences and bad grammar. This point accentuates the need to use translators with a thorough knowledge of both languages, not merely two years of a high school language. Mistranslations and missing words or sentences can have devastating consequences. Additionally, if a translation is fraught with bad grammar or spelling errors, the reader tends to lose confidence in not only the document, but also the company that produced it.

Clarity is another important factor. A document needs to be easily comprehensible and well written, regardless of how poor the

original may be. Good translations commonly read much better than do the originals. Many writers tend to write in rather long and complicated sentences; this is especially true in legal documents. However, a translation should present all the information of the source text in a clear and uncluttered fashion.

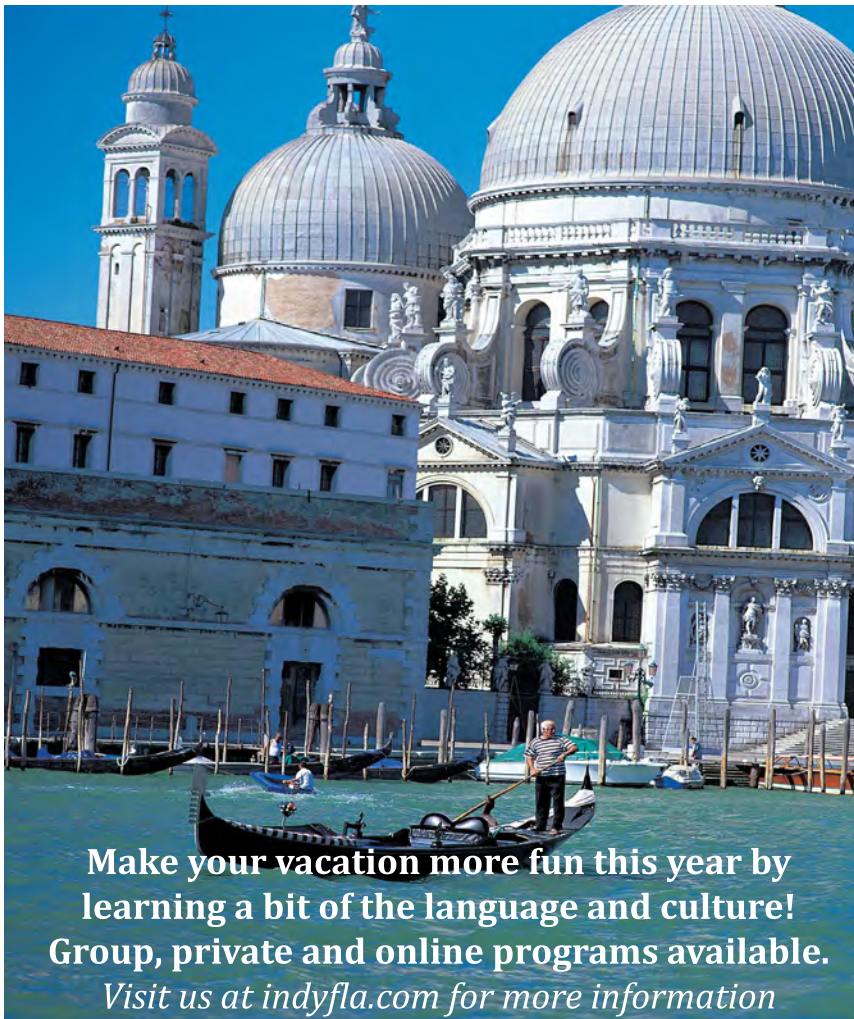
Naturalness of the translation is one of the key factors in helping prevent a translation from sounding like one. Typically, after a translation has been proofread for accuracy and completeness, an editor will go through the document and make sure it sounds as if it were originally written in the target language.

An easily overlooked feature of a

good translation is mirroring the mood of the author. In general texts, there is often not a definitive tone, but in editorial and literary documents there always is a clear attitude of the author. For a translation to convey the same feeling to the reader, it must use words and expressions which can transmit a similar spirit. Failure to express this accurately can easily mislead the reader as to the writer's true feelings and attitudes.

Next, a translation must be culturally appropriate. References to religious figures, sports or country-specific items may confuse or offend the end users. Such items either need to be excluded in the source document before translation begins, or be culturally readapted into the target language.

Lastly, consider the audience. Before a translation is begun, the end user of the document needs to be taken into account. Sometimes this is a broad group of people, but more often, it is a narrow, targeted audience. A text written for a group of scientists needs to be translated at a much higher reading level than would consent forms for newly-arrived immigrants. Moreover, if a document is destined for a certain country, it is usually best that the translation be performed by a native translator of that country to be sure that only terms and expressions of that country are used. Metric conversions, spelling changes and idiomatic expressions may need to be made to ensure that the translation is acceptable in the country. This is just a brief look at what makes a good translation. We hope this article will help you to judge the quality of your translations better in the future. ☺



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IFLA Gets New Education Director

Whitney Ramsay has returned to Indy Translations & Indy Foreign Language Academy as its new Education Director, taking over the position formerly held by long-time director, Jenna Porter-Jacek, who moved to Tennessee this past fall.



Whitney Ramsay

Whitney started with Indy Translations in the summer of 2005 as an intern. Upon receiving her B.A. in Spanish and Sociology from DePauw University, she returned as a project manager and later moved into the position of Spanish reviewer. After a brief hiatus, she's back as the Education Director, managing both our public and private classes. She also teaches some ESL and Spanish classes.

In 2005 she studied in Grenada, Spain as part of DePauw's study abroad program. She has also studied French, Italian and Arabic. Her exceptional communication and organization skills, as well as her linguistic and cultural knowledge, make her a valuable asset to the company. Please feel free to contact her to learn more about any of our classes. wramsay@indyfla.com

What Language is the Hardest to Learn?

The answer depends on your age and your native language. A child will not have the same challenges in learning a language as an adult learner will. For adults, languages that are the most difficult to learn are those that are most different from their first language in terms of structure, sounds and grammar. For example, an American might find learning Russian to be quite a challenge, yet Ukrainian would

find it to be extremely simple due to the similarity in vocabulary and grammar. Viewing this question from the perspective of an English speaker, the *Foreign Service Institute* regards Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Cantonese and Arabic as the most difficult languages in which to have students achieve fluency.

Language learners should not be discouraged by this. Anyone can learn any language with the right

motivation and plenty of study. You've already done it once!



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