



*A word from the President of
Esprit International Communications...*

***Are you Lost in Translation? Do you have the control you need?
And just who exactly is doing your company's translations?***

After some 35 years of translating, revising and training other translators and revisors, as owner of a translation bureau (Esprit), and teaching translation at university level, I think I've seen just about everything that can happen to clients' translation projects! Unfortunately I've seen many substandard translations in French and other languages and have had the dubious honour of having to clean them up for my clients. I'll use French for the Quebec market as an example to make my point.

Clients will oftentimes ask Esprit to proof older materials they had complaints about - or that their Quebec staff flatly refuse to use - and "just touch them up" where necessary. Our translators find out quickly that "proofing" often becomes a total rewrite of the material. Although we may have an idea from glancing over a few sample files, it is only in the actual cleanup process, working closely against the English text that the full extent of the problem becomes apparent. A proofreader cannot possibly perform the level of correction needed when the original translation has been very badly done; only senior translators with solid revision experience can tackle this work. And no doubt the production timetable has to be revised, often a number of times over the duration allocated to the project.

This is when we have to stop and report our findings back to the client, before incurring any major costs or lengthening the approved schedule for the commissioned work. Our job is to inform the client of the real work involved, explaining quality problems, and giving some examples, often using a back-translation process to illustrate our point in their language. This puts our client in a position to assess the situation, re-establish a budget and rework the timeframe according to their means and needs.

In their haste to make a low-paid job somewhat cost-effective, an ineffective translator will just gloss over parts that they don't understand - either leaving in English elements like abbreviations or titles they don't know, eliminating sentences or sections from the French version, or worse, writing a nice story all around the subject area that may make sense in their language but has nothing to do with the original English meaning!

In an unprofessional, substandard translation, misinterpretation is piled upon mistranslation, with words switching places and reversing in the grammatical structure, that jumble the original meaning, and this can even be found for everyday words, ideas and expressions that are known to any French-speaking person. Often, while in the throes of this type of work, we wonder if such a slap-dash job could ever have been produced by real Francophones or even real humans, given the multiplicity of errors. More than likely, much of the work was performed by less-than-competent translators for whom the French language is their second or third language, or who do not come from the target language market. Or perhaps a basic text was created by machine

translation (Reverso, Babel or any of the "free" online translator tools). Yikes! Key words or phrases were supplied by a more senior person who then entrusted junior translators (or non-translators) with filling in the remaining parts. This leaves a cut-and-paste patchwork quilt where you may find several language levels, several different writing styles, a total lack of homogeneity or control of vocabulary, and little understanding of the industry or client culture. It is an amalgamation effort by isolated participants working in a vacuum.

The client has a responsibility in all of this as well. You wouldn't hire an employee without screening them first, would you? Have you actually interviewed the person selling you translation services or who handles your foreign language projects? What are their professional qualifications? Do they honestly disclose their personal information and can they prove it? Is the owner of the translation company a professional translator themselves, with proper relevant university education, and does he/she speak fluently several languages - or is this a case of the reseller? (*More about resellers on the About Us page of the Esprit website at www.espritint.com : Professional Excellence since 1979*).

Clients need to know who exactly is doing their translations and if these people are properly qualified, rather than just react to the bad news of a disastrous translation after they have paid good money for services rendered.

Rather than picking out a supplier from the largest yellow pages ad offering *The Best Prices!*, a client's best bet is a smaller boutique-type translation company with a solid history, that is managed and staffed by real, human translators who have acquired over a number of years the professional experience needed to help their clients as colleagues.

The owner of a *reseller* translation company will NOT be a professional translator, just someone who has some vague notions of a couple of languages or, if you are lucky, can actually speak a couple of languages. But they are rarely educated in the precise and demanding skills to write professionally as translators must be.

Worse, companies run by non-translators will use automated tools or the "free" online translators you see on the Web, in order to boost profits and eliminate the human effort. After millions of dollars invested by the federal government since the 1970's to probe the options of "machine translation" and incursions made into the market by software companies hoping to take over and control the translation process for big profits, NO-ONE has yet been able to replace the brain of a human translation professional with artificial intelligence. And it is a long, long way off and perhaps never really attainable. If it hasn't happened in English writing, why would you expect it to be feasible in any foreign language?

Anyone with a website can write up pleasant, user-friendly promotional text to sell to the market or have a professional writer do it for them, but this has little to do with a lifetime of skills that professional translators must acquire. In print ads and on the Internet, you can read their wonderful claims of TLC treatment applied to translation work, caring about clients, taking this difficult profession seriously and especially claims of the lowest price in town! But *buyer beware - caveat emptor!*

Esprit translators are your language allies - real people with real human skills developed over time, from years of struggling with difficult linguistic challenges in demanding work conditions. Let us help put you back in control! Don't get [Lost in Translation](#) like the examples on our [bloopers webpage](#). As we say in our own advertising: Anyone makes promises ... but Esprit delivers!

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