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# WHY TRANSLATION IS IMPORTANT

A Guide for the General Public

Natural Sciences  
 Management  
 Law  
 Education  
 History  
 Tourism and  
 Pulp and Paper  
 Urban Planning  
 Advertising  
 Automobile  
 ENERGY  
 Stock Market  
 E-commerce  
 Software





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why translation is important .....	2
What do translators translate? .....	3
Why not just use <i>Google Translate</i> or another of the many online translation programs? .....	3
Any bilingual person can translate, right? .....	3
Bad translations: joke or disaster? .....	4
Can professional translators translate into all the languages they know? .....	4
What training do I need if I want to be a translator?.....	4
Are translators regulated by a professional order? .....	5
Translation or interpretation—what's the difference? .....	5
What is OTTIAQ? .....	5
Why do business with a certified translator? .....	6

## Why translation is important

### For society in general

- ◆ **To facilitate COMMUNICATION among people who speak different languages**

In North America, English-, French-, and Spanish-speakers are the main beneficiaries of translation.

- ◆ **To safeguard REGIONAL IDENTITY**

Paradoxically, globalization reinforces regional identity. Although English dominates international trade, people want to continue speaking their own language and this applies to every social sphere. Translators therefore have a crucial role to play.

- ◆ **To ensure the QUALITY of the languages of communication**

Translation allows us to create clear, well-written versions of messages expressed in other languages.

- ◆ **TO ADAPT THE MESSAGE** to fit the local context and bridge any cultural gaps

In Québec, “football” doesn't mean the same thing as in France, so translators need to take this into account.

- ◆ Here in Québec, to help ensure compliance with **LANGUAGE LAWS**

Translation plays a key role in the application of the Official Languages Act and the French Language Charter.



### For business

- ◆ **To increase SALES**

By opening up new markets and expanding your client base.

By providing access to a broader range of suppliers.

- ◆ **To improve your BRAND IMAGE**

Communicating with customers in their own language and in proper written form shows respect for the people your business depends on.

- ◆ **To increase PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY**

Communicating clearly with your employees in their language, using just the right words that everyone understands, prevents miscommunications and lost time.

- ◆ **To expand your REACH**

Participating in national and international events and communicating with potential partners from coast to coast and abroad, strengthens your reputation and can make you the “go-to” reference outside your local market.



## What do translators translate?

Translators tend to focus on particular fields. We often hear about the translators of literary works. But most professional translators, freelancers or otherwise, work for private companies and government departments or agencies.

According to the most recent statistics, there are nearly 7,000 translators in Québec, 2,000 of whom are members of the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ).

## Why not just use *Google Translate* or another of the many online translation programs ?

“Although there are applications where machine translations are appropriate (skimming for the gist of a document’s content, for example), machine translation is not appropriate in situations that require complete accuracy. It is usually more efficient for a human to translate from scratch, rather than edit the output of a machine translation.”

- Randall Sutherland, *Machine Translation vs. Translation Memory*, TopTenReviews.com

Essentially, this type of software can give you a general idea of the content of a text and deliver a very rough translation in another language, but the text may well be full of mistakes and bizarre formulations in the end-user’s language.

To learn more about machine translation, read François Abraham’s article on the subject: *Automated Translation*.

[Part 1](#) | [Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#) | [Part 4](#)

## Any bilingual person can translate, right?

Anyone who speaks more than one language can understand messages written or broadcast in those languages. But this does not mean they can translate them properly—in written or oral form—into another language.

Speaking a foreign language does not necessarily mean someone is intimately acquainted with all the finer points of the language, and it can be easy to mix up the grammar, spelling and other rules of different languages.

Being bilingual does not mean someone can write well or has a talent for translation. And, as they say, “Just because you have two hands doesn't mean that you can play the piano.”



## Can professional translators translate into all the languages they know?

### Bad translations: joke or disaster?

When we read a bad translation, we tend to remember the mistakes more than the message.

This can be funny if the consequences are only minor. In fact, bad translations are an endless source of jokes (Croque-monsieur = Crunch-mister).

But when the information is essential to getting something done (operating instructions, news articles, working documents, travel guides, etc.), a bad translation can give rise to frustration, a sense of futility, an impression of lack of respect, and even legal action, if harm is caused.

Think of how many times you've struggled with mysterious assembly instructions or scratched your head over a sign:

French: 2ème Salon des Entreprises d'Économie Sociale

English: Two Living Rooms from Business Economy Companies

If you only had the English to go on, would you have known that the event was a trade fair for social economy enterprises?

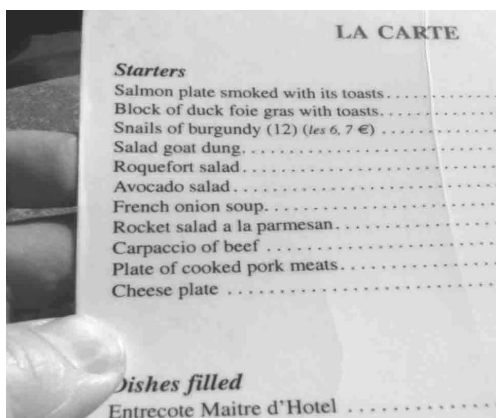
Professional translators usually translate into their native language.

Style, grammar, terminology, spelling, typography, and other rules are so numerous and different from one language to another that if a translator tries to apply them correctly in all the languages they know, they will end up applying the rule of one language to another without even realizing it. Such a mistake could be viewed as negligence—not what people are looking for in a professional. And of course, it would affect the reputations of both the client and the translator.

There are exceptions, but these are rare. In such cases, ask the translator to translate a sample of the work and then check it carefully, or better still, ask a native speaker of the target language to read over it. If they like the work, and the translator can promise the same quality for the rest of your document, go right ahead!

### What training do I need if I want to be a translator?

In Québec, certified translators have one of the following qualifications: a bachelor's degree in translation, an equivalent diploma, or relevant experience that is equivalent to a diploma recognized by the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologies et interprètes agréés du Québec.





## Are translators regulated by a professional order?

Yes, by the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ), which was created in 1992. Roughly one-third of translators in Québec are certified members.

OTTIAQ's mission, like that of all professional orders, is to protect the public. To this end, it has produced a guide on the standards of professional practice in translation, a professional inspection system, and a code of ethics. It also provides continuing education activities.

Independent members of OTTIAQ are required to obtain professional liability insurance. In fact, it is in everyone's interests (individuals and companies) to protect themselves by doing business with a translator who has this type of insurance.

## Translation or interpretation — what's the difference?

Translators translate written texts.

Interpreters translate spoken communications.

For spoken communications with people who speak another language, you need an interpreter.

To have a document translated, you need a translator.

## What is OTTIAQ?

The Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec, or OTTIAQ, is the only association of professional translators, terminologists, and interpreters recognized by the Office des professions du Québec.

Because of its status as a reserved-title professional order, OTTIAQ has the exclusive right to grant its members the titles of Certified Translator (C. Tr.), Certified Terminologist (C. Term.), and Certified Interpreter (C. Int.).

OTTIAQ's principal mission, like that of all professional orders, is to ensure the protection of the public. The Order does so through its admission policy, Code of Ethics, and Rules of Professional Practice; by administering a professional liability insurance policy; and operating a continuing education program for its members.

OTTIAQ also seeks to promote the visibility of the language professions it represents by fostering an appreciation of their roles and contributions in specific target groups, highlighting the skills of its members, and encouraging public and private agencies, companies, and individuals to use their services.



## Why do business with a certified translator?

Because a certified translator's training and skills have been recognized by the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ). When you do business with a certified translator, you benefit from the protection of Quebec's professional system, which exists first and foremost to protect the public. Professionalism is also a key factor, of course.

- ◆ **Certified translators have excellent knowledge of the language or languages they translate from**

This is one of their most important skills.

- ◆ **Certified translators have expert knowledge of the language they translate into**

They are thoroughly familiar with all the rules of the language and can adapt the vocabulary and style to every audience.

- ◆ **Certified translators know how to write**

Their mastery of the language provides them with excellent writing skills.

- ◆ **Certified translators know the translation process inside out and use the proper tools**

There is a specific method to the translation process. Certified translators also use many industry-specific tools, such as translation memories, and others, such as word processing/publishing, database, and spreadsheet software, etc.

- ◆ **Certified translators know the area in which they specialize**

They understand the basics, comprehend subtle nuances, and, if they are unsure about anything, know where to look and what questions to ask.

- ◆ **Certified translators have a university education or equivalent experience**

Many universities offer translation programs. In Québec, members of the Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés (OTTIAQ) hold a bachelor's degree in translation or equivalent diploma, or relevant training/experience that corresponds to a diploma recognized by the Order.

- ◆ **Certified translators have strong communication skills**

By virtue of their profession, certified translators know what communication is all about and play an important role in the chain of communication.



## Why do business with a certified translator? (cont'd)

### ◆ Certified translators have a broad general knowledge and are lifelong learners

They are interested in everything to do with language and their fields of work and constantly seek to improve their skills through classes, lectures, and other activities. Certified translators are open to change and opportunities to learn new things.

### ◆ Certified translators have strong research skills

Translation involves ongoing research—in language manuals, specialized works, databases, and, of course, the Web. Translators are trained to exercise great discernment in assessing the reliability of their reference documents.

### ◆ Certified translators pay attention to detail

Thoroughness and attention to detail are essential qualities for all translators—and all the more so if they are certified.

### ◆ Certified translators can advise you on language and communication issues

Because of their training, knowledge, and skills, certified translators are references on the art of communication. They can help you plan a communications project, determine the right terminology, answer any language-related questions, help you draft texts, and much more.

### ◆ Certified translators are responsible

Certified translators are accountable for their professional acts based on their skills and knowledge. They work independently and creatively within the guidelines imposed by OTTIAQ's Code of Ethics and Rules of Professional Conduct. In addition, they are bound by professional secrecy.

### ◆ Certified translators have leadership skills

Because of their training, knowledge, skills, and abilities, certified translators can take on a leadership role on language and communication issues. They can guide, influence, and inspire others. They are qualified to help you develop a linguistic vision and strategy. Their linguistic knowledge gives them the power to come up with the right words for any situation.





## Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec

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### **In this series:**

- ◆ A Guide for Translation Clients
- ◆ A Guide for Members