idem
translations, inc.

Is your English content on the brink of disaster?

Let us save you from the stumbling blocks.

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Top Ten Simple Stumbling Blocks in Translation (and How to Fix Them)

Founded in 1983, Idem Translations, Inc. is a full-service provider of translation and localization services. Idem specializes in certified translations for medical device, biomedical, and pharmaceutical companies, as well as other organizations and entities working in the life sciences sector, such as contract research organizations (CROs), healthcare research centers, and institutional review boards (IRBs). The company is a WBENC-certified woman-owned business and holds certifications to ISO 9001:2008, ISO 13485:2003, and EN 15038:2006

Like most of your vendors, translation providers use special tools and processes to serve you. Documents sent for translation can, of course, be optimized to interact better with these tools. Over time, this saves you money and shortens your translation timelines.

1. Date Format

07/09/2015
September 7 or July 9?

Dates are presented differently around the world:

United States:	month	day	year
Europe:	day	month	year
Asia:	year	month	day

This can lead to confusion when translating documents from one region to another, as it may not be immediately clear which format is used.

Fix It

When creating your own files, use an unambiguous convention (such as 01 May 2016). If the documents are coming from a third party (such as a clinical site), establish conventions with both the people who create the original documents and with your translation provider. This way everyone is on the same page.

2. Images with Embedded Text

Translation software can save you money by allowing translators to re-use repetitive text. When text is embedded inside an image, however, translation software cannot "see" it. This means the translation team must handle the embedded text separately, which increases costs and extends the project timeline.

Fix It

Whenever possible, build all translatable text directly into the main file. For example, use a base image without text and add any explanatory text directly in MS Word (using textboxes) or InDesign (using text frames). When translatable text cannot be moved into the main file, give your translation provider the original image files (such as Adobe Illustrator or PhotoShop files), which contain modifiable text. Otherwise, you will have to rebuild the image from scratch or add unsightly translation tables to your document.

3. American Units of Measurement

Inches, feet, and ounces...oh my!

Fix It
Always include metric units, which puts you in charge of the conversion. If you need to include an American system measurement as well, add it in parentheses after the metric units.

Many of the standard units of measurement in the United States are uncommon abroad:

- inches (")
- feet (')
- ounces (oz)
- pounds (lb)
- teaspoons (t)
- degrees Farenheit (°F)

During the translation process, these will need to be converted for an international audience that typically uses metric units and the Celsius scale.

4. Using Tabs for Layout

English	Finnish
Name: →| →| Super Acme Company	**Nimi**: →| →| Super Acme Company
Address: →| 1 Looney Toons Lane	**Osoite**: →| 1 Looney Toons Lane
Tel: →| →| (123) 456-7890	**Puhelin**: →| →| (123) 456-7890

Need your text in multiple columns? Many document authors use the "tab" key to ensure a clean alignment of text in the English version. Unfortunately, if the translation is a couple of letters longer or shorter (and many languages can expand up to 30% over the English text), the translation starts to look, well, crazy.

Fix It
Insert a table with invisible borders or plan a multi-column layout. It not only ensures a cleaner layout in translation, it also makes it easier to update your English file with new content in the future.

5. Hard and Soft Returns

Remote Interlock Plug = 1 "remote interlock plug"	Remote¶ Interlock Plug = 1 "remote" and 1 "interlock plug"

Fix It
Resize the text frame (Adobe products) or modify the indents (the ruler at the top of Microsoft Word) to achieve the right word wrap. This keeps your English content in a clean flow for translation and helps your translation provider reduce translation risk.

Sometimes you can't get text to wrap the way you want. Hit the [Enter] key and problem solved, right? Not so fast. To build your translation memory (TM) database, your translation provider uses industry-specific software called "Computer-Assisted Translation", or CAT tools. (If you aren't yet familiar with TM, check out our executive brief on TM Best Practices.) Hard returns in the middle of a thought can lead to confusion, such as the example above. Is this one item (a remote interlock plug) or two items (a remote and an interlock plug)?

6. Field Codes and Hyperlinks

Figure 1	**Рисунок 1**
See **Figure 1**	Смотри **рисунок 1**
As shown in **Figure 1**	Как показано на **рисунке 1**
Refer to **Figure 1**	Обратитесь к **рисунку 1**

Fix It

Only use field codes or hyperlinks for numbers (e.g. the "1" in "Figure 1") or for main navigation elements (e.g., the headers that feed a table of contents). If other connections are absolutely necessary, have a pre-flight meeting with your translation provider to establish a plan for how to handle potential issues.

Field codes and hyperlinks are often used to connect text with a particular section of a document. But when the grammar of the target language works differently than English grammar, these connections don't always work smoothly. For instance, Russian declensions affect the form of the word "figure" in the example above. If "рисунок" were used in all four examples, the second two would be grammatically incorrect.

7. Ad Hoc Headers and Footers

Headers and footers are often an afterthought in document creation, but they can be crucial (especially when they include the official part number). When building a document, you can control whether it has one footer for the whole document or one footer per page. Imagine a 100-page document where each page has its own, separate footer that contains the part number. If you revise the part number, each page must be updated independently!

Fix It

Check headers and footers carefully in your documentation. In MS Word, ensure there is only one header/footer for the main content and that all pages are properly linked to it. In InDesign or FrameMaker, place the header and footer information in the master page. In PowerPoint, use a Slide Master.

8. Using String Concatenation in Software

Don't	Do
String 1: "An error has occcurred at " String 2a: "logoff" String 2b: "shutdown"	String 1: "An error has occcurred while performing the following action: " String 2a: "logging off the user." String 2b: "shutting down the system."

When software is translated, the translator handles each string independently. If your software concatenates these strings to create messages for the user, it probably does so based on English grammar. This can make it difficult (or impossible) to create a grammatically correct sentence in the translated language.

Fix It

Store strings as full thoughts, even though you may need to create more independent strings in the programming as a result. If you absolutely need to concatenate strings, try to use colons or periods to avoid grammatical links between them. Most importantly, always give your translation provider ample context for each string so they understand which strings are interrelated.

9. Too Many Variables in Software

English	Spanish
You have %1$d left.	
You have 1 minute left.	Le queda 1 minuto.
You have 2 minutes left.	Le quedan 2 minutos.

Fix It
Limit variable use in strings as much as possible. When adding a variable inside a string, plan for both a singular and a plural option, even if the English will be identical. And, of course, give your translation provider context so they know which strings are intended for singular versus plural use.

Compared to many of today's commercial languages, English is not highly inflected. English words tend to have fewer noun or verb endings as compared to, say, German or Spanish. One of the biggest complications in software localization occurs when English can use the same string for singular or plural statements, but a translated language cannot. For example, the verb in the Spanish above has to change to match the plural "minutos."

10. Reference Materials

What do French physicians call my product?

No document is an island. Your user manual, your patient brochure, and your informed consents all use shared terminology to explain how your product works. If you are switching translation providers, you should plan for a knowledge transfer…or face serious terminological inconsistencies.

Fix It
Send any and all reference materials to your new provider. For example: any previous translations you have (including user guides, marketing collateral, etc.), glossaries, style guides, and your translation memories. These are key assets that give you the freedom to add or switch translation providers seamlessly without the risk of inconsistencies or loss of savings.

These represent the top ten, easily fixed issues that we see on a daily basis. By addressing them in advance, you can:

- decrease the risk of incorrect or inconsistent translations,
- reduce project costs over the long term,
- shorten translation timelines, and
- make your translation project manager very happy.

If you have a strong relationship with your translation provider, they may be willing to review your English documentation to help you fix these issues before translation even begins.

Get Help

For more information about how we can take the risk out of translations for you and your team, please visit us online:

WEBSITE
www.idemtranslations.com

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