

Seven Steps: Part 1:

Guidelines for health staff checking translations¹

NSW Multicultural Health Communication (MHCS) has produced these guidelines for checking translation work, to assist health staff in ensuring the quality of written translated health information. Part 1 of these guidelines is for health staff, where we discuss the process and rationale for checking health translations, and suggest steps to follow for anyone organising and costing a checking project. Part 2 is for checkers and outlines seven steps to follow when checkers are asked to review and report on a translation.

Health information written in English for the public should be clearly expressed in language that can be generally understood, and the same applies for information translated into other languages. For all translation projects intended to reach a wide audience, we recommend that health staff ask a qualified translator to check the quality of the translation. Translation is a complex process and even the best translator can inadvertently make mistakes, especially working to tight deadlines, or if the original English is unclear. Checking may add to project costs in the short term but in the long term often saves money, as any mistakes found can be corrected before funds have been spent on printing and distribution. It can also be used to ensure that a text, and any illustrations, are clearly laid out and appropriately presented to match the needs of the intended readers.

If the original English text was written in a medical register (in language at a level used by health professionals when discussing medical matters with each other), it will be translated into medical language. If checkers find that a translated text is written in medical jargon which will not be familiar to people who speak the other language, they can bring it to the attention of the project coordinator. In these circumstances it may well be that the English will need to be revised (then retranslated) to ensure it is understandable to average readers.

What do we mean by checking?

Checking involves review by a qualified translator of a translation for the accurate, appropriate transfer of meaning from one language to another. It involves a lot more than just proofreading for spelling, accents (diacritics) and punctuation. The task of the checker is to check that the meaning of all that the author wrote in English has been clearly conveyed by the original translator in the other language in the same register (level of language), and to report any translation errors that they consider must be corrected.

¹ **Seven Steps** is the second in a series of translation guidelines developed by Multicultural Communication. Also available is **Guidelines for health staff producing multilingual resources** with advice on how to handle a translation project. Copies may be downloaded from the NSW Multicultural Health Communication website.

What is the checker's role?

- to check that the meaning is clear, not to make changes just to alter the translator's style.
- to check for overall accuracy - whether all the information in the English is included in the translation
- to identify any mistranslations – whether there are serious mistakes which distort or cloud the meaning of any part of the text, or any inappropriate omissions or additions
- to find and correct any grammatical or typographical errors
- to provide a short report, typewritten in English, with explanations in English, of comments and corrections (with examples in other language as needed)
- if requested, to comment on the presentation of the text and illustrations in the language version: whether it is appropriate, or is of a different quality from the English version.
- to alert the project coordinator to anything which may be culturally unacceptable, or may even cause offence, and to suggest how it could be expressed more appropriately for the readership.

What is the project coordinator's role?

To supervise the checking process, contact checkers, negotiate tasks to be done, follow up on corrections suggested, negotiate fees and arrange payments.

Steps to follow at the start of the project:

- establish whether the translation is available on paper only, or in an electronic format (word processing file, pdf, etc). If so, obtain the file and eventually details of software and hardware used by the translator in each language
- decide exactly what you want the checker to check (e.g. content only, or presentation as well, or any illustrations)
- decide what further steps you will take once you have the checker's report
- do you have funds set aside to pay for changes, retranslation or retypesetting?²
- will you ask the checker to discuss corrections with the translator?
- if the translation is on paper, will you ask the checker or the original translator to retype?
- if in an electronic format, that can easily be amended (e.g. word processing file), will you ask the checker or the original translator to make changes?
- count the number of words in the English text on which the translation is based (this is the usual basis on which fees are calculated for translation, checking, retranslating and typesetting)
- identify who wrote the English and how they can be contacted if necessary
- find out whether the translator was asked to leave some terms or titles in English
- calculate the checking fee per language (varies among agencies)
- factor in possible costs of retranslation or new typesetting or formatting
- locate checkers: contact a professional translator for each language – asking if they have the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters

² The original translator should accept responsibility for mistakes and should not charge for retyping corrections. But if you ask the checker to retype and lay out part or all of the text because of a translator's errors, you should be prepared to pay the checker for the extra work.

accreditation at the professional level (former Level 3) **into** the language(s) concerned

- agree with the checker on procedures to follow (see Seven Steps below), fees and timetable
- establish that the checker is available to discuss proposed changes with the original translator and ask the checker for a contact telephone number
- if checkers prefer to remain anonymous they should inform the project coordinator **before the work begins**
- confirm details in writing: details of the job, fee to be paid, deadlines and associated conditions
- contact the original translator to discuss the checker's report

NSW Multicultural Health Communication (MHCS) can advise on suitable translators and recommended fees or can manage the whole project. Contact NSW Multicultural Health Communication, email mhcs@sesiahs.nsw.gov.au or Tel. (02) 9816 0347 if you have comments or would like further information.

Acknowledgments and References

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Seven Steps: Part 2:

GUIDELINES FOR CHECKERS REVIEWING TRANSLATIONS

NSW Multicultural Health Communication (MHCS) has produced this checklist for checkers to follow when reviewing a translation on a health-related topic. The task of the checker is to check that the translator has accurately transferred into the other language, in the same register, the meaning of all that the author wrote in English, and to report on any shortcomings of the translation. Health information should be understandable to the general public, and if you find that a translated text reads like medical information that the public would not understand you should bring this to the attention of the project coordinator. It is not your role to change the level of language (register) or the translator's style.

Before you accept a checking assignment, it is important to agree on exactly what you are being asked to do, and the fee to be paid for the checking work. If at any stage you think that extra work is required, such as retranslation or extra typesetting or layout, inform the project coordinator and agree on any extra payment, before you do the work, to avoid any misunderstanding.

If, after you start checking, you find the translation is of a very low standard, contact your project coordinator immediately, for instructions on whether you should complete the checking.

The project coordinator will usually contact the original translator to discuss your report, so please provide a contact telephone number, and make yourself available to discuss proposed changes with the project coordinator, or with the original translator, depending on the circumstances. If you prefer not to talk to the translator, or to remain anonymous, you must inform the project coordinator at the beginning.

Following is a standard procedure for checkers to follow, consisting of seven steps. The first stage (Steps 1 – 3) involves careful perusal of the full text in the other language and then a meticulous comparison with the original English. The second stage (Steps 4 – 7) entails preparing a brief report in which details of your suggested corrections are provided. Both the English and language version should contain clearly marked details of errors or proposed corrections.

An example of how to prepare your report is provided at the end of this document.

Step 1:

Firstly, **do not read the English version.** (put it aside to read later). **Read the translation** right through to assess the quality and suitability of the language version. By reading only the language version at first, you should gain a general impression of the ideas expressed in the other language, without your judgment being affected by what the English version says.

Step 2:

As you read, **make a mental note** of where you have to pause to “get the meaning”, or if any part of the translation is not possible to comprehend.

Step 3:

Now **read the English version** right through, and compare the translation with the English. If you think the translation is not a high enough standard to be published as health information for members of the public, please inform the project coordinator immediately to discuss whether you should continue the checking process.

Step 4

Does the translated document convey the same meaning as the original English? Does it contain all, and only, the essential messages that were in the English original, and is it easy to follow? Are medical terms accurately translated into language that will be understood by the intended reader? Would the readers of the translated version, who only speak the other language, understand everything and be comfortable with the way it is expressed? **Comment in your report** (see Step 6).

Are there any mis-translations, additions or omissions, or unclear messages? Are there any serious mistakes which distort or cloud the meaning of any part of the text? **Identify and mark any significant inaccuracies** and write on your copy of the translation what you think it should say in your language. Also include brief explanatory comments in your report (see Step 6).

Use the following symbols as you mark the language version.

Mistranslations

On the language version use wavy underlining to **indicate any single words or phrases which you consider have been mistranslated**, or where you consider the meaning is not clear. If there are several items, mark the section with a vertical wavy line in the margin

On the English version, use the same wavy underlining to **indicate the corresponding words or phrases** that you marked in the language version as mistranslated.

Omissions

If there is information that was in the English text but which the translator has unjustifiably left out in the target language:

- **indicate** in the language version with ^ at the beginning and end ^ of where information (words or concepts) has been left out
- **indicate** if any headings or punctuation have been left out and provide details in your report
- **underline** on the English version the words or sections which the translator omitted to translate, and write 'omitted' in the margin.

Additions

If any extra information has been added that was not in the English original **indicate** with + and + at beginning and end of what has been added and give details in your report.

Grammatical, punctuation and typographical errors

Please **indicate and correct** any grammatical errors, incorrect gender usage, mistakes in spelling, punctuation, script, accents, incorrect or inconsistent capitalisation, or hyphenation

- **Underline** with a straight line any grammatical mistakes, or incorrect word order
- **Indicate** any missing punctuation or accents
- **Put a slash through** spelling or typing mistakes [/] and correct in margin.

Step 5

Are there any problems with general presentation, format and layout, font size, spacing or alignment of text? Proofread carefully to make sure that all dates and times are correct, also the format of postal addresses, codes etc., that titles and headings (including any in English) are consistent and complete. It is important to check that any English words or information included in the translated text have been spelt and inserted correctly. If there are mistakes please make corrections on your copy and provide details in your report.

Step 6: First part of checker's report: general comments

Start your typewritten report in English (see example at end) with general comments in one or two paragraphs on the quality of the translation. In these paragraphs say whether you think the translation is satisfactory overall. Comment, for example, if it has been translated "word for word" in a way that makes the meaning unclear. If you feel that the way the English original was written has led to problems for the translator, please make this clear. Remember that the project coordinator may not speak the language concerned, and is relying on you to explain why you consider the translation unsatisfactory.

Suitability of language: Are the forms of address and genders used appropriate to the language concerned? If in your opinion there is anything in the translation which may not be culturally appropriate, or may offend some readers, please explain in your report.

Step 7: Second part of checker's report: essential corrections recommended

Please provide comments and back-translations where needed (see example below).

Go through the corrections that you marked on the language and English versions in Step 4 and **give each correction a number** in the margin (in order, one for each correction). **Insert the same numbers to correspond** on the English version.

Provide your comments as shown in the table below:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| column 1: | include the number of the correction concerned |
| column 2: | type in the relevant English word or phrase, |
| column 3: | include back-translation into English of the relevant word, phrase or passage |
| column 4: | provide comments to explain the nature of the mistake |

Example of report

Title of document:
General comments

Example

marked on text	English source text (word or phrase)	Back-translation into English of what was translated	comments (type of mistake and why correction needed).
1	If asthma occurs suddenly and severely	Since asthma occurs suddenly	mis-translation
2	...like catching a cold or flu	0	omitted
3	AND SO ON...		