

WORD EXPRESS *WINTER 2009 QUICKNEWS*

Dear Client: In our **Winter QuickNews**, we would like to explain exactly how we ensure that you receive the highest possible quality translations.

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Today's Topic: **Bilingualism is NOT Enough!**

by Emanuela Giangregorio, Client Care Manager

Many people consider bilingualism a requirement for any good translator and to some degree, they are right. But the more important question is: **Is bilingualism alone sufficient to guarantee a good translation?** At WordExpress we know the answer to that question: **Absolutely not!** Bilingualism is a prerequisite for good translation but it is certainly not sufficient by itself in guaranteeing good or even passable translation work.

According to Frank Johnson of the American Translator's Association, a bilingual person is most loosely defined as someone "using or [...] able to use one of two languages with equal fluency" and most restrictively defined as someone who, "when among native speakers, [...] can 'pass' as a native speaker in either language." Regardless of how one defines it, however, translators must be 'more' than bilingual to do their job effectively.

In addition to being bilingual, translators must master the vocabulary of the area in which they specialize. A translator who claims to be a 'jack of all trades' is most likely rather a 'master of none'. Cursory knowledge of a few technical terms does not cut it! A translator who is an expert in the medical field, for instance, must be familiar with a whole host of vocabulary ranging from general practice terms to advanced and extremely specific cancer treatment technology, as well as with the cultural context. This range of terminology exceeds the reach of the average non-expert bilingual person. And even this acquisition of specific vocabulary and cultural understanding are not sufficient.

Bilingualism alone does not address communication between languages. According to Agnes Lam, author of "Bilingualism", "Bilingualism is usually defined in terms of communication *in* two languages, not as the ability to communicate *between* two languages." A bilingual person is able to express *his or her own ideas* in two languages. A translator on the other hand, has to take someone else's ideas, often expressed in terms he or she would not use, and relay those ideas effectively and in a manner that is faithful to the original message.

What's more, a good translator must be an excellent reader. This skill is not as commonplace as it may initially appear. People's reading comprehension level in their native tongue varies greatly and a translator must be far above average in this area in order to accurately capture nuances and shades of meaning.

Finally and most importantly , a translator must be an excellent and 'sleek' writer in the target language. Anyone who has ever tried his or her hand at writing professionally can appreciate what special skill it involves. **A translator must be able to express in words that correspond exactly to the meaning of the source text and that mimic its tone.** Even someone who is a competent writer in his or her own right, therefore, may not be skilled at this extremely particular task.

This combination, then, of expertise in the specific field of the document(s) in question, high-level reading skills and outstanding writing skills are necessary to turn a bilingual person into a good translator. At WordExpress we are acutely aware of all that is involved and it is for this reason that we so carefully screen our translators.

First, we screen them carefully according to their levels of bilingualism, reading comprehension skills in the source language and writing abilities in the target language. We also categorize them according to their specific field of knowledge (e.g. medical, legal, technical, etc.). But we do not stop there, we then keep detailed records of their strengths, educational and professional backgrounds and give elaborate feedback after every project we assign them. Over the years we have whittled down an enormous pool of translators the world over. **As a result of our meticulous efforts, we have acquired in-depth knowledge of the particular fields of expertise of our highly skilled professional translators, which is why when we assign your translation you can be certain that it will be done by the best person for your specific project.**

WordExpress is in compliance with the **stringent quality standards of ISO 9001.**
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