

## VI. Translation: Finding, Selecting, and Briefing Translators

### Introduction

The following guidelines describe how to find and select translators for a team translation effort, and present an outline briefing for survey translators. The strategies used to select translators can also be used to train them in the unique aspects of survey translation.

### Guidelines

**Goal:** To locate potential candidates for a team translation effort and to select the most suitable from among these; to brief selected translators on general features of relevance for survey translation and on specific features of the study.

- 1. Search for translators in contexts in which they are likely to work, advertise, or acquire translation training.**

#### *Rationale*

At the selection stage it is important, whenever possible, to have multiple candidates from which to choose. A team effort requires more than one translator. Organizations that employ or train translators and associations with which translators register or advertise are potential places for recruiting translators for the language(s) required.

#### *Procedural steps*

- Identify any likely organizations, associations and places where translators advertise. Local options may vary greatly: search the internet and telephone directories, newspapers, and trade journals, and contact any local chambers of commerce, publishers, medical institutions, international firms, advertising companies, and places of higher education, as available, for help in making contact.
- Compose and write a job description. Post this at any place identified as potentially successful and also send it to any contacts made in organizations. If appropriate, include in the advertisement a request for help in locating suitable people.
- Explore your own organizational and personal networks. Post the advertisement within your own institution, and ask people you know whether they have any contacts to suggest.

### ***Lessons learned***

- In some locations it may be difficult to find trained translators, either in general or for a language you require. Although language competence in the [source](#) and [target languages](#) does not guarantee that someone can translate, it is a prerequisite. If bilingual individuals possess the highest level of expertise available, select from these, using the materials described in [Guideline 2](#), and work intensively on training them.

## **2. Require candidates to submit application materials prior to the job interview.**

### ***Rationale***

In order to determine whether a candidate who answers an advertisement merits further exploration, it helps to have information about his or her experience and training, as well as specimens of previous translation work. If there are many applicants, these materials can be the basis for selecting people to interview.

### ***Procedural steps***

- Identify required application materials in the advertisement. If contact is not made via an advertisement, provide candidates with the job description and request that the application materials be delivered.
- Ask applicants to provide the following:
  - An outline of their training and experience in translation for the languages involved ([source](#) and [target](#)). This should include the kind of translations the applicant has worked on.
  - Specimens of any recent work if possible
  - Recent references relevant to the job application
  - Details of their computer skills and access to computer technology
  - Details of their work experience
  - Details of their education in general
  - Details of how, when, and where they acquired competence in the source and target languages

### ***Lessons learned***

- Application materials only tell part of the story; avoid hiring on the basis of these alone. Translations delivered for inspection are, for example, not produced under team translation conditions. It is important to identify whether a candidate is currently working in the source and target languages, or whether exposure and use of one or the other lies

in the past. Translators should ideally be embedded in the target culture and language, as well as fully conversant with the [source language](#) and, as relevant, the culture from which it springs. It is also important to ensure that applicants are competent in both speaking and writing the target and source languages. Avoid hiring someone simply on the basis of recommendations. If there are people with whom, for whatever reasons, the project team is expected to work, still interview and test these people in order to ascertain proficiency and expertise. In looking for translators you may also find suitable candidates for back-up personnel and possibly for the job of reviewer. Special considerations apply for languages that do not have a standardized written form (see Oral Translation and Interpreting).

**3. If working with translation agencies, require reference materials and specifications for both the agency and the translators.**

***Rationale***

The professionalism of the agency needs to be verified, as well as the suitability of translators employed for the survey project. Team translation requires the translators to be available for meetings. Direct interaction between client and translators is not always expected, or accepted, by translator agencies, and the procedures required may well be new to the agency.

***Procedural steps***

- Ask agencies to provide the following information about themselves:
  - A list of clients and contact options
  - A list of projects (agency experience record)
  - References (from recent representative clients)
  - Years of operation
  - Information about the decision-makers in the agency (for example, does the owner or manager have a translation background?) and whether or not translation is a central part of the agency's activities
  - Any sub-contracting relevant for your project
  - The agency's procedures for hiring and training translators
    - How they find and select translators
    - How they train, if they do so
    - How they monitor translation performance (who monitors, and how)
  - How they intend to accommodate team translation requirements (meetings, repeated access to the same translators, etc.)
- Ask agencies to provide the translator materials outlined in [Guideline 2](#) in preparation for the selection interview(s).

### ***Lessons learned***

- The cost differential between translators working as self-employed professionals and those provided by agencies very much depends on the individual context. The same holds with regard to quality. In general, agencies pay translators less than independent translators may be able to earn. Competent translators may nonetheless work with agencies because, for example, agencies deliver clients and provide a more steady flow of work. Agencies which are initially reluctant to cooperate on requirements for team translation may later develop into useful and reliable partners.

#### **4. Select translators on the basis of submitted materials and their performance in the interview.**

##### ***Rationale***

The interview is the opportunity to explore and verify information provided in the application and to test performance in tasks needed for a team translation effort.

##### ***Procedural steps***

- Appoint one or more people with expertise in survey translation and the languages in question to conduct the interview (typically, senior [translation reviewers](#)).
- Organize the interview in such a way that candidates demonstrate their competence on the spot, including their ability to produce translations, review existing translations, and accept critiquing of their translations, as well as their knowledge of relevant tools, etc.
- Use the following indicators as the basis of evaluation criteria for selecting any given translator for details):
  - Knowledge of and competence in the languages of interest and the source and target cultures
  - Translation and review performance on test materials
  - Experience and expertise in translation
  - Knowledge of translation tools
  - Team suitability
  - Computer skills and access to computer technology
  - Knowledge of and experience with translating surveys
  - Availability and salary/payment requirements

### ***Lessons learned***

- Extensive translation experience in one very specialized field may be a drawback for working on survey translations. Someone with years of experience in legal translation may be unused to the everyday language and tone often aimed for in survey translation. In addition, experience in producing survey translations should not be taken as proof of suitability, as many survey translations are poor. Not all survey projects adopt a team procedure, and all candidates should be tested and briefed. Without briefing, translators unfamiliar with surveys may not recognize key measurement features. At the interview, therefore, assessment should focus on the demonstrated ability to understand the source text and render it fluently in the target language, as well as the ability to identify problems for translation or adaptation and ask relevant questions. Another important assessment is whether the individual can successfully work as a member of a team.

### **5. Brief translators on general features of surveys relevant for survey translation, as well as on specific features of the given study.**

#### ***Rationale***

Briefing translators helps them to read and understand questionnaires as instruments of measurement. Translators need to be able to recognize the design features and various components of surveys in order to handle them appropriately. For example, survey questions have special vocabulary and syntactical features that may run counter to normal written language; instruments have sections addressed to different audiences (interviewer, respondent, programmer, etc.); and questions and answer scales reflect measurement goals that an untrained reader might not perceive for what they are.

#### ***Procedural steps***

- Use specially developed materials or real questionnaires in source and target languages to brief translators on the following:
  - Different components of a questionnaire
    - Questions, instructions, explanations, answer scales, fills, annotations, sections for official use, programmer instructions, formatting conventions, house-style requirements, etc.
    - Vocabulary requirements for the target population
    - Level of vocabulary, as well as regional vocabulary considerations (see [Harmonization and Shared Languages](#))
  - How questionnaires are implemented (as interviews or self-completion, for example)

- Mode differences relevant for translation (oral/written presentation for example, covert and overt response options)
- Answer scale designs and their purposes
- [Surveyspeak](#): the special features of survey language as found in source and target language questionnaires
- Adaptation and any feedback procedures to be followed
- Translation documentation and the procedures to be followed
- The notions of response styles and social desirability, as well as any feedback required from translators in these situations
- The purpose and procedures of any pretesting planned

### ***Lessons learned***

- Careful briefing is important in the adjustment of a translator's perception of questionnaires, in order to ensure consideration of both respondent needs from a translation and designers' needs from their instruments. Without such a briefing, translators will translate according to the text models and text types with which they are already familiar. Unless they are reminded that the instrument is intended for oral presentation, for example, they may produce one more suited for processing as a written text. Briefings should include motivating information to encourage translator commitment and care. Survey translation may call on translators to work repeatedly on the same questions, and this deliberative process may run counter to work procedures with which they are familiar. If translators are informed, for example, about the high-stakes nature of a survey, as well as the survey costs involved if questions go wrong, they may handle better repetitive aspects of team procedures.

## Glossary

<b>Source language</b>	The language in which a questionnaire is available from which a translation is made. This is usually but not always the language in which the questionnaire was designed.
<b>Surveyspeak</b>	The special features of survey language (lower pronominal anaphor, for example) as found in source and target language questionnaires.
<b>Target language</b>	The language a questionnaire is translated into.
<b>Translation reviewer</b>	In a team translation procedure, the person knowledgeable about surveys and also translation who leads and coordinates the review sessions held to refine draft translations.