

THEME ARTICLE

Lost in Translation: The Vital Role of Medical Translation in Global Medical Communication

Amanda Xiaoqing Mao, PhD, CMPP¹ and Ishani Thakkar, PhD / ¹Acurit Medical Communications, Melbourne, Australia; ²Boston, MA

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, translating scientific and medical content is vital to bridging language barriers and facilitating communication among diverse audiences. This article dives deep into the importance of medical translation and provides key best practices to ensure accurate and high-quality translations.

Effective medical translators must possess strong writing skills in both the source and target languages to accurately convey the intended message while maintaining the tone and style of the original document. Developing and finalizing content in one language before translation streamlines the process and enhances the quality of the translation.

Translators should seek clarification and ask questions during the translation process to deliver an error-free final version. Understanding medical terminology in both source and target languages is crucial, and staying updated with the latest terminology is essential for accurate translations. Utilizing a bilingual glossary or creating one in collaboration with the client helps ensure translation accuracy.

Although machine translations have limitations, computer-assisted translation tools like Trados, memoQ, Wordfast, and OmegaT improve efficiency and consistency. These tools, equipped with translation memory and terminology management features, support human translators in their work.

Medical translation plays a significant role in global medical communication, alongside regulatory writing, scientific publications, health communication, professional education, promotional writing, and grant writing. It is essential for effective communication and accurate information exchange in the scientific community.

In conclusion, accurate medical translation is crucial for effective communication and collaboration in the global scientific community. Adhering to best practices ensures precise and high-quality translations, facilitating the sharing of scientific knowledge across languages.

In today's globalized world, the need for accessible scientific and medical content is more important than ever before. In order to ensure that this information is available to a wider audience, including those who do not speak the same language as the original content, it is crucial to translate it. This can help bridge language barriers and facilitate communication among scientists, medical professionals, policymakers, educators, and the general public. Translating scientific content would be needed by individuals or organizations who want to communicate scientific and/or medical information to a diverse audience that speaks different languages. Some specific examples include

1. Researchers or scientists who want to publish their research findings in international journals or conferences and want to make their research accessible to a wider audience.
2. Science communicators who want to disseminate scientific information to the general public through various media channels such as websites, blogs, podcasts, or social media, and want to reach a broader audience.
3. Science-based industries or organizations such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, or environmental consulting firms who need to communicate scientific information to clients, stakeholders, or regulatory bodies in different regions of the world and want to provide multilingual content to facilitate understanding and compliance.

Hence, medical translation is an essential component of global health care communication.¹ However, Dr Mao, who is a bilingual Chinese medical communicator leading Acurit Medical Communications, believes that it is not as straightforward as it may seem. Acurit is focused on medical translations between English and Chinese, therefore Dr Mao led her team to translate the "AMWA-EMWA-ISMPP joint position statement on medical publications, preprints, and peer review" from English to Chinese. Dr Mao, who also serves on the executive board of the Australia China Business Council, believes that medical translators must adhere to

several best practices to produce accurate, high-quality translations.

Medical translation may involve the translation of various medical documents, including clinical trial protocols, patient information leaflets, regulatory documents, medical device manuals, and research papers, among others. Although the types of documents to be translated are as diverse as those in medical writing, this article focuses mainly on medical translations targeting professional audiences.

A GOOD TRANSLATOR IS ALSO A GOOD WRITER

If a project requires translation, a translator must be good not only at writing in the target language but also comprehending the source language. If they are required to translate in both directions, then they should be good writers in both languages. They must be able to convey the intended message accurately while maintaining the tone and style of the original document. The aim is for the translated document to flow naturally, and for a third person to not be able to tell if it is a translation or original writing. This is only possible if the translator can produce good writing independently. Translators should actively work on their nonnative languages, and writing helps strengthen their language skills.

FINALIZING CONTENT IN ONE LANGUAGE FIRST

In order to ensure high-quality medical translations, it is best to develop and finalize content in one language before translating it into another language. This streamlines the process and ensures quality. Avoid developing content in both languages simultaneously. The choice of language for developing original content should depend on available medical writing resources and reviewer language preferences. A highly competent translator can ensure effective translation of complex messages such that the translated content appears to be produced in the target language.

TIMING YOUR QUERIES APPROPRIATELY

Indeed, the translation process is very distinct from manuscript writing or any other kind of medical writing. Translators are expected to deliver one and only one translation, so they must prioritize delivering a final version that is ready for immediate use instead of taking the multiple-draft approach. In order to deliver an error-free translation that meets the client's expectations, the translator should seek clarification and ask questions during the translation process, and not bombard the client with questions when the final translation is expected. Questions regarding individual word choices are expected during translation, unlike in other kinds of medical communication in which the entire document may need to be reviewed for context

before further clarification. The mark of a good translation is minimal corrections at the end from the client's side.

GETTING MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY RIGHT

Medical documents are often complex and contain technical jargon, making them difficult for nonmedical professionals to understand. Therefore, a medical or life sciences background will greatly help a medical translator to accurately translate technical documents. More importantly, a thorough understanding of medical terminology in both the source and target languages is crucial in the translation process. Medical translators must also make efforts to stay updated with the latest medical terminology. Poor translation quality often results from incorrect translation of terminology. Asking the client to attach a bilingual glossary before the process or inquiring for clarification on terminology during the process can help produce high-quality medical translations that meet client expectations. If the client does not have a bilingual glossary, an experienced medical translator may help produce one during the first project and expand it when future projects come in from the same client.

To that end, authoritative sources in languages including but not limited to English include health and medical textbooks and scientific journal articles. Regulatory bodies in countries such as China, where the official language is Chinese, provide excellent resources in official medical terminology. Websites for organizations such as the World Health Organization also have official languages in addition to English. Such content can be very useful for looking up standard medical terminology.

MACHINE TRANSLATIONS VERSUS COMPUTER-ASSISTED TRANSLATION

Although machine translations may be an effective way to do some preliminary work, a human is always needed to edit and finalize a translation, especially in terms of medical terminology, tone, flow, and context.² However, using machines to translate medical and/or regulatory documents pose a bigger challenge than a lack of accuracy or flow.³ Using online translation tools is not recommended for sensitive medical documents as it may put privacy and confidentiality at risk: an undesirable outcome in the life sciences industry. That being said, machine translation must not be confused with computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools designed to help translators with repetitive tasks and improve efficiency. Using translation tools like Trados, memoQ, Wordfast, and OmegaT is encouraged. These software tools assist human translators in translating written content between languages. They include features like translation memory and terminology management to improve speed and accuracy while ensuring consistent

terminology use. CAT enhances the work of human translators, allowing them to focus on complex and creative aspects while delegating routine tasks to the computer.

MEDICAL TRANSLATION IS A FORM OF MEDICAL COMMUNICATION

Based on the above information, the complexity and significance of the medical translation process in global medical communication are indisputable. According to the American Medical Writers Association, there are 6 major categories of medical communication deliverables:⁴

1. Regulatory writing
2. Scientific publications
3. Health communication
4. Education for professionals (Continuing Medical Education or CME)
5. Promotional writing
6. Grant writing

But it is important to recognize that medical translation is an additional crucial component of medical communication:

In conclusion, translating medical content is essential for effective communication and collaboration in today's globalized scientific community. Whether it is a part of the final deliverable or simply a behind-the-scenes aspect of the project, medical translation is a necessary step to ensure effective communication and accurate information exchange between international scientific entities.

Acknowledgment

We thank Elizabeth Kukielka, PharmD, MWC, CMPP, for enabling this collaboration.

Author declaration and disclosures: *Acurit Medical Communications does medical translation between English and Chinese. It is a revenue-generating activity for the company. Ishani Thakkar notes no commercial associations that may pose a conflict of interest in relation to this article. Amanda Mao served as the subject expert for this article and Ishani Thakkar served as the writer.*

Author contact: *amanda.mao@acuritmedcomms.com, thakkar.ishani@yahoo.com*

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