

ASTRONOMY TRANSLATION NETWORK

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS

This document was created through a research collaboration between the Astronomy Translation Network and ISIT, a language school located in Paris.

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Introduction

Translation and proofreading are difficult tasks if you do not know where to search or how to begin. In order to make it easier for all volunteers from the Astronomy Translation Network, we have compiled some questions on the matter into a FAQ. We hope these tips will help you in your translation or proofreading process. Below you will find some guidelines for translators as well as proofreaders, both available in English and French.

If you have any questions that aren't answered here, please do not hesitate to contact us.

FAQ for translators

How should I proceed if I have never translated a text before?

Each translator works differently. However, we will teach you some important steps of the translation process that can be very useful.

First, you need to fully read the text that you are going to translate to know exactly what the subject is and how it is written. Professional translators usually recommend reading the text 2 to 3 times in order to spot any words, sentences or parts of the text that may be difficult to translate.

Once you have seen what the main difficulties of translating the text would be, it is good to start by reading parallel texts. Those are articles/books on the same topic as the one from your translation and in the same languages. They allow you to have a better understanding of some related concepts or words. Then, you can read other articles on the subject in the language you are translating to in order to find some of the vocabulary and see how people talk about such topics in this language.

Once you are done reading some texts in both languages, you can start translating. While you are translating, you need to keep searching for words either in other texts on the same subject or in online glossaries and dictionaries. If you do not know any, please see the section called "*Where and how do I find the right words for my translation?*". We also advise you to double-check your sources. For instance, if you find the translation of a word thanks to an automatic translator, be sure to check on the internet or in a dictionary that this word really exists and that it is used in this context.

Then, once you are done with the first translation of the text, leave it for a few days (2 or 3) and come back to it afterwards with fresh eyes. This way, you can be more objective when you read it again and it's easier to identify any mistakes so that you can correct them.

It is good to proofread your own text at least once in order to spot small mistakes like a missing letter or incorrect spelling. This will also allow you to see if you would like to change the formulation you used at some point before sending it to the proofreader.

These are the main steps of the translation process but be aware that not everybody will follow them. For example, some people will choose to read only one article in the source language and then watch videos on the topic rather than reading more texts. So, you are free to adapt this methodology and add steps depending on where you think you can find what you are looking for.

How can I deal with languages that have different variations (e.g. British English and American English)?

Your choice of words will depend on your own background. For example, in the case of a translation towards English done by an American translator, he/she will probably choose the linguistic variations (style, word preference) of American English. It is not really a problem as the text can still be understood by people even if they speak British English.

However, once you have chosen which version of the language you are translating to (e.g American English, British English, etc.), you must commit to it. Please try not to mix two different variations of a same language in a text as coherence is key in translation.

Where and how do I find the right words for my translation?

To find the right words, we would advise that you start by checking the exact definition of the word you want to translate. This way you can have a better grasp of the meaning and ask yourself which word you would naturally use that applies to this definition.

Please try to avoid using the sentence structure from the original text as it may not make sense in your language.

Here are some resources you can use to help you in your translation process:

- Online or paper dictionaries in the source language (EN: Cambridge dictionary, Oxford dictionaries, IAU dictionary of Astronomical Concepts, astrodictionary.org.uk, etc): online or paper dictionaries are useful to find definitions and gain a better understanding of the words you struggle with. Do not hesitate to even look up words that you already know, it can be surprisingly helpful.
- Astronomy magazines: the use of parallel texts (articles on the same topic and in the same language as the one you need to translate) can be very helpful when you are looking for the right words. To find such resources, we would advise you to search for it either online and/or in magazines about astronomy.

Here are some examples of such magazines:

- Ø English: Astronomy (American)
- Ø French: Ciel & Espace
- Ø Spanish: Espacio (Spain)

- Multilingual dictionaries (Linguee, IATE, Reverso etc.): do not assume that the first translation provided is always the best choice, always make sure that this word exists in your language as these websites can suggest a translation that does not apply to your text. You could also look up the translation result in your search engine to make sure that it is a real word and that it is actually used.

How do I deal with terms whose translation will not be understood by readers due to their specificity?

Sometimes the translation of a term is too rare or outdated for people to understand it. In this case, you have various options to deal with the problem.

First, you can try to find synonyms that may be easier to understand for people if there are some.

If no synonyms exist, you may add a short definition to clarify the meaning of this term so that your reader can still understand it.

You can also, to some extent, add information to make it more accessible to the reader. To know more about how much information you can add in your translation, please refer to the next question.

How much information can I add to help the reader understand the text?

First and foremost, the article should be clear to the reader. If the original text you are translating from has problems (such as ambiguity or unclear parts), it is always better to clear them up so that the reader does not have to deal with them. You can also get in touch with the language coordinator (or even the author), as it can be really useful. If you feel the need to add information, for instance if you think people might not understand a word because it is related to a specific industry, you can add a quick definition in brackets or use what is known as translators' notes. These are footnotes added by the translator to explain foreign concepts when they cannot find an alternative to include it in the text. Try to be as concise as possible but remember that it is important to make sure your reader is able to understand relevant references.

If the concept is mentioned multiple times throughout the text, we would advise you to define it when it is first mentioned, so that the reader can be aware of what it is when reading the rest of the text.

NASA uses many acronyms of all sorts. It is always better to explain what the acronym means to the reader. To do so, we advise you to write the acronym and put the full name in brackets when it first appears in the text. Please keep in mind that the use of too many acronyms can make it harder for the reader to follow.

What can I do if the word does not exist in my language?

If the word does not exist in your language, there are a few simple ways to overcome this difficulty.

First, you can choose to reuse the term in the source language and add a quick definition to help people understand it. But be careful as not all languages admit long

further explanations in a text as it can make it harder to read. This solution is mostly recommended for concepts.

It would be interesting to try and find how this word or concept was handled or translated in other articles and texts. Medias play an important role in the acceptation of a word and it can also evolve with time.

For instance, the word “Rover” was first translated in French as “Jeep lunaire” (“lunar Jeep”). Nowadays, however, “Rover” is kept as “Rover” in translations.

If you do not encounter any translation of the word, you can try to create a word that captures the whole idea behind the original word. However, this word needs to make sense and it is a very difficult process that requires creativity and resourcefulness. That is why you will need to get in touch with others, astronomers if possible, in order to get it right as knowing what the concept is about in great details might be essential for this task.

How can I deal with transliteration?

Transliteration is the conversion of letters from one alphabet to another but it does not imply a translation. Most common words have a very different translation compared to their transliteration. For instance, the name for Russia in Cyrillic script is written "Россия" and is usually transliterated as "Rossiya" however the English translation is obviously not "Rossiya" but "Russia". This technique is most often used for names without an official translation.

There are several ways to approach transliteration:

- Search for an existing translation. If it is a famous person or place it's more than likely that their names have been translated before.
- You can consult the [ISO 9 standard](#) which offers exact equivalents for the transliteration from and into many languages. Unfortunately, this resource is not free. Otherwise, you can look for free transliteration guides online as such might exist in some languages.
- Try contacting experts who might have come across the term.
- If none of these options work, you can make a phonetic transcription of the name by using the alphabet of the target language to create a similar effect. However, we would advise you to always tell the language coordinator about it.

Do I need to adapt the references to a culture (e.g. distance, system of units)?

If you are translating a text, you should make it as easy to understand as possible for the reader. Therefore, it is usually better to find a similar reference in the language you are translating to. This method is very useful for idioms and units. For example, what currency would be used in an article written in this language? What would be the unit to measure distance?

For instance, in a French translation, it would be better to convert dollars in euros and to use centimeters rather than inches as the reader will get a better grasp of the meaning.

However, it is important to keep in mind that currency conversion can change as exchange rates fluctuate. Because of this, adding the date of conversion is recommended. (For instance, “\$12,000 (€ 10,000 as of March 8, 2018”).

Here is a list of online converters you can use if you need to convert currencies or units.

Currencies:

- <http://www.xe.com/fr/currencyconverter/>
- <https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/tools/currencyconverter>
- <http://www.x-rates.com/calculator/?from=EUR&to=USD&amount=1>

Units:

- <https://www.unitconverters.net/>
- <https://www.digitaldutch.com/unitconverter/length.htm>
- <https://www.digitaldutch.com/unitconverter/mass.htm>
- <https://www.translatorscafe.com/unit-converter/en/length/>

What can I do if I have questions about grammar/punctuation?

If you have some questions regarding grammar, punctuation, syntax or anything related to the writing style, please refer to official guides that you can find on the internet or in libraries such as the Chicago Manual of Style.

What should I do if I am having trouble understanding some parts of the text I am translating?

If you are having trouble understanding the meaning of the article you are translating, despite having done research, please do not hesitate to ask other volunteers from your language group for their opinion.

If this step doesn't work then you can get in contact with the IAU to see if they can help you. If you are still unsure of what the author meant, you could maybe ask the IAU for their contact details so that you can ask a few questions. Please be mindful: give them time to reply and do not send them an overload of messages.

If you are unaware of who the author is or of how to contact them, try to read articles on the same subject. They might help you understand.

Is there a specific way to translate a quote?

If you need to translate a quote, you need to do some research in order to know how you are going to translate it.

First, you will have to check where the quote comes from. Sometimes, you can find this information in the list of sources of the source text, otherwise you can search for the quote using the name of the person quoted and the beginning of the quote.

Once you have this information, you need to see if the book or article it comes from has been translated in your language. If that is the case, and if the source of the translation is official and reliable (namely if it is from a renowned newspaper or an official website) you can reuse the existing translation.

If not, then you need to translate it yourself.

Moreover, depending on the language you translate to, the quote will be introduced differently. For example, in French, it is better to use indirect speech to introduce a quote whereas in other languages they might prefer quotation marks.

What should I do if my text includes a picture in the source language?

Most texts include pictures but sometimes those pictures include text. When translating you have a couple solutions when you come across one of these.

First you should ask the project manager if this text should be translated. If you need to translate the image, then you can:

- o Modify the image directly using photo editing software if you are proficient using image editing tools (Photoshop, Paint, etc.). In this case be careful to export the modified image in the same format as the original and respect the available space.
- o Create a small two-column table in the text file beneath each image with the source text in the first column and the translation in the second column. For clarity, we recommend adding a header to the table to clearly identify each language column.

Choose the solution best suited to your skills / whichever solution you prefer. **The most important thing is not to leave any text untranslated.**

How can I deal with acronyms / names of organizations?

Many astronomy texts contain acronyms referring to organizations or technologies used in the field and it can sometimes be difficult to know how to translate them. Here is some advice you could use when facing this problem.

First, you need to check if there is an official translation of the acronym in the language you are translating to. If there is you need to take that official translation, if not, you can

put the full name in the source language and give a translation in brackets in addition to the acronym.

For example: “The Assemblée des Départements de France or ADF (Assembly of French Regions) represents French regions on a national and European level.”

Then, the first time you encounter the acronym in a text, you need to write the full name behind it and put the acronym in brackets right after. If the acronym is repeated many times in the text, you can write the full name only the first time and then just put the acronym as you will have already explained what it means.

Sometimes, an acronym in one language will not be translated by another acronym in another language. In such cases, you will need to find the translation most used.

As an example, “LV” (Launch Véhicule) will be translated by “Lanceur” in French.

You can find online resources that will give you a list of the acronyms that exist in a language such as acronymfinder.com.

What can I do if the source text is badly written?

Sometimes, when you have to do a translation, the source text is not very well written. This can create problems to understand the meaning of the text and it is not always easy to find a solution.

If it happens to you, try to get in touch with the writer to ask him/her what he/she means by this sentence for example. But always do it kindly as you do not want to be harsh to the author even if his/her English is not perfect for example.

To give you an example, sending them a message or an email saying you are not sure you understood well what he/she meant when he/she said this or that may be a good solution. This way, you are not saying that it is his/her fault.

FAQ for proofreaders

How should I proceed with proofreading?

Using track changes whenever possible could make the process of proofreading much easier to follow, as the translator can clearly see what changes have been made. They will have to accept the change or not.

If possible, it is better to justify the changes you have made with a small comment, so that it's easier for the translator to understand what you meant to correct or improve and why.

What should I look out for as a proofreader?

As a proofreader, your main focus should be to ensure that the meaning of the text remains the same in both source and target languages and to check grammar, spelling and punctuation.

However, there are other important points that should not be ignored when proofreading.

First of all, consistency is key in translation. So as a proofreader, you should make sure that the translation is consistent when it comes to:

- the translation of concepts and technical words
- language variation (for instance, American English or British English)
- localisation (for instance, if the translation is from English to French, are dollars converted into euros in the translation?).

However, it is important to keep in mind that currency conversion can change as exchange rates fluctuate. Because of this, adding the date of conversion is recommended. (For instance, “\$12,000 (€ 10,000 as of March 8, 2018”).

You can use the following online converters if you need to:

Currencies:

- <http://www.xe.com/fr/currencyconverter/>
- <https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/tools/currencyconverter>
- <http://www.x-rates.com/calculator/?from=EUR&to=USD&amount=1>

Units:

- <https://www.unitconverters.net/>
- <https://www.digitaldutch.com/unitconverter/length.htm>

- <https://www.digitaldutch.com/unitconverter/mass.htm>
- <https://www.translatorscafe.com/unit-converter/en/length/>

Furthermore, clarity of expression is very important so, as a proofreader, you need to make sure the audience can understand the text.

Titles also matter a lot. When possible, they should be attractive to readers. The proofreader should make sure that it is the case. Do not hesitate to look up the titles of other articles to find inspiration.

For esthetic reasons, please make sure the text is justified (typographically speaking) so that it looks better.

How can a proofreader balance between respecting a translator's writing style and maintaining writing quality?

It is best not to alter the translator's writing style. However, you are allowed to make some changes as long as you can justify them as improving the clarity of expression in the text.

If you believe that the writing style stands completely in the way of the comprehension of the text, then you can contact the translator in order to overcome the problem together. Please try to be mindful of the translator's work. You should also inform the language coordinator about this problem as it can be frequent and he/she might have already dealt with such problems.