

Du français à l'anglais: Understanding your source

Medical translation requires total accuracy and precision. A translated medical document can be critical in determining the treatment or care a patient receives, as well as the information they have regarding their own health.

A translator must be well-versed in their area of expertise. They need to understand medical terminology in the source language (the language the text was originally written in), and accurately and succinctly render it in the target language (the language the text is being translated into). French is the main language I translate from, and it's not short of its challenges!

Syntactical and grammatical conventions vary hugely between French and English, and adapting to target conventions is essential. French tends to use more words to express a meaning than English, resulting in longer texts. If you have a 10-page French publication translation, for example, it may end up only being 8 pages in English. This is worth noting in terms of format and design, and important to flag to the client! Sentences are also generally much longer in French, and often need to be split up for clarity and readability in English.

For publications, where the source has (hopefully!) been edited and proofread, acronyms and abbreviations are normally spelled out on first use, so at least the translator knows what the short form refers to before rendering it in another language. For texts where these are rarely explained, such as medical reports, translators may need to do a bit of research to decipher these. Resources like ProZ, Cosnautas, and the ITI Mednet forum are invaluable for researching tricky terms.

While some English acronyms and abbreviations resemble their French counterparts, making them easier to translate – e.g. *VIH* in French is simply reversed in English to become *HIV*; some require more in-depth knowledge. Examples commonly found in medical reports include *NFS* (*numération formule sanguine*), referring to a patient's complete blood count; and *EVA*, used to assess pain intensity, and

known in English as VAS or the visual analogue scale.

It's not uncommon for translators to have to deal with concepts that simply don't exist in the target language. This is particularly true of healthcare schemes and systems which are often unique to an individual country or region. A French medical document might refer to someone's *carte vitale* (literally, *vital card*), for example. Depending on who the translation is for, you may need to add a translator's note to explain that this *carte* is a patient's state-issued, electronic health insurance card. An awareness of the source country and its corresponding medical system is particularly useful in instances like this!

In terms of best practices, having another medical translator review or proofread your work is essential. It's hard to spot small mistakes when you've been reading the same text for days ... or weeks! The phrase "sleep on it" is just as true for translators as it is for writers; things often seem clearer in the morning when you can read a text with a fresh pair of eyes!



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