



// Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people."

William Butler Yeats

100 pitfalls of computerized translations

By: Ann Mickow

Well, maybe there are not 100 specific pitfalls of using computerized translations, but there are thousands of words that have many different meanings in many different languages so the risk of error when plugging text into computer software and asking the equipment to translate is enormous!

■ While you may think that the latest and greatest computer software for translating your legal documents is the best and most cost-effective method of translations, think again. Even though there are several computer programs on the market that purportedly can translate any document from a simple enclosure letter to a complex business agreement, the fact is these programs have many faults and can cause you and your client huge problems and cost you lots of money in the long run. ▶



Beware of the following pitfalls when deciding whether or not you should use a computer program to translate an important legal document:

■ **The software may not be designed to translate legal documents and legal terminology.** Let's face it. Legalese is a language all its own with roots in Latin and with terminology which becomes increasingly complex depending upon the subject matter. Not only must legal translators be familiar with legal terminology— they must be somewhat familiar with the subject matter of that legal document, whether it is a pleading in a complex product liability case or a stock-purchase agreement between two technology companies or a patent application.

■ **Any word in the English language that has more than one meaning (and there are millions) may not be accurately translated.** Anyone who has learned English as a second language will tell you that it is a very complex language to learn, mostly because of the multiple meanings of many English words.

■ **Computer programs lack the human intuition that is so vital to accurate translations of any type of document: especially a legal document.** A human translator is uniquely qualified to comprehend what a document is saying or what is intended by the writer's vocabulary—a computer is not. If a word or a sentence is unclear, then a human translator can examine the overall purpose of the writer, and thus, decipher and accurately translate a word or a phrase which would otherwise be misunderstood by a machine.

■ **The legal systems in one country are often different than they are in another country.** Qualified translators should have a good working knowledge of the court systems in any country whose language they are translating. The court systems around the world function differently, use different terminology for the same pleading or document, and have very different rules for processing documentation they receive. A computer program has absolutely no way of differentiating terminology unique to a particular court system. Courts and governmental entities will reject documents that are not properly translated.

■ **Computerized translations may translate the literal interpretation of every word in a document but it will completely ignore the author's writing style.** Like lack of human intuition, computers certainly cannot grasp a writing style and that may result in a misinterpretation and an inaccurate translation of a legal document.

■ **Computerized translations may not always be the least expensive method of having your documents translated.** If errors are made in the computerized translation of a legal document, it not only results in costs to correct the errors: it could cost you the entire value of your case. Beware of what might appear at first glance to be the quick and dirty way out via a computer program. Consider these pitfalls before deciding to use computerized translations. While the programs on the market now may be a useful supplemental tool for an experienced, qualified translator, this is one arena where the human factors are key and may mean the difference between winning that case or closing that deal and losing it. ■