

## WHY SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS BREAK ALL THE RULES: GUIDELINES ON HOW TO CORRECTLY ASSESS TRANSLATION QUALITY

**Potential Lionbridge clients often request sample translations as a way to test the quality of our translation work. While theoretically, this appears to be a good idea, realistically, sample translations are not the best way to evaluate quality.**

Typically, the test translation scenario does not allow Language Service Providers (LSPs) to follow standard translation processes and, often, forces them to break industry best practices. As a translation buyer, this is important for you to know, and taking an alternative approach is in your best interest. It will save you time and minimize risk, and ultimately result in a better vendor selection process.

### How do sample translations break all the rules?

There are some best practices that all LSPs follow to give customers the highest quality translations within the context of a real project. Most sample translations don't allow language vendors to adhere to those best practices. Here's why:

- » **Terminology** A glossary that establishes terminology in the target languages is a critical component of a quality translation, especially for highly-complex domains such as gaming, medical, and legal. The best practice is to obtain a current glossary (if it exists) or develop one and submit it for the customer's review and approval before beginning the actual translation. In most sample translations, a glossary is not provided, nor is there time to create one.
- » **Style Guide** Style guides govern tone, usage of terminology, punctuation, sentence structure, date/time/number formats, etc. Even if the client only has an English style guide, that provides a place to start. The LSP can leverage this to help the client develop style guides for each additional language. To the

detriment of test translation projects, a style guide is rarely, if ever, provided.

» **Training** Product training is very important to translators, especially if software, hardware, or a medical device is being translated. The companies that receive the highest quality translations from their LSPs invest in training the vendor's resources. Sample translations rarely ever have associated training.

» **Questions** Over the course of a normal translation process, translators ask questions about source content to make sure they understand it correctly. Customers clarify terms, meaning, intent, etc., and translators revise or construct the translation accordingly. (All translators are given these clarifying answers.) During the sample translation process, Q&A is rare; therefore, translators are left to guess, hoping their inclinations are right. This is like being asked to paint a house and guessing on what color the customer wants.

» **SMEs/Resources** To provide the highest quality translations, LSPs work to find translators who are subject matter experts (SMEs) in certain areas, whether it's medical, financial, or IT. These expert resources are in high demand and are booked well in advance of projects to ensure the right resources are working with the right customers. (Many translation providers have a large database of translators indexed by subject matter expertise.) Sample translations assume the best resources are available "on-demand." These resources are typically removed from other paid projects to address a sample that requires a quick turnaround, breaking all best practice rules. Ironically, most test translations come from clients who have specialized content—meaning that content is the most difficult to translate in a test setting.

» **Speed** Often, clients request that test translations be completed in 2 or 3 days. This simply does not allow for all the optimal steps to take place. Typically, kickoffs and other information exchanges are skipped, as well as the aforementioned Q&A between the translators and the client. It is nearly impossible to engage the right resources when adequate lead time is not given, and when translations are due back immediately. (In the context of an established program, the vendor would have client-familiar resources already in place and would be able to act quickly.)

### What is the solution? How can a client test the quality of a potential translation vendor?

It is important for clients to be clear about why they want a sample translation in the first place. Is it to test the ability of an LSP to act quickly? To test their ability to communicate with you? To see how the LSP operates? Is it to assess the quality of the final product? None of these goals can be judged effectively via a test translation.

Here's the approach we recommend:

- » Ask for **samples of work** from similar customers to assess the translation supplier's quality in a particular domain. By providing materials already translated in the customer's domain, that comply with the LSP's best practices, the customer will be able to more realistically review and evaluate the LSP's work.
- » Ask for in-depth information about **project ramp, quality steps, and project methodology/process**. Does the LSP have documented processes for each of these? Do they follow their own process consistently?
- » Be clear about your perceived **success criteria**. Ensure the LSP understands what resources you feel are required to succeed on your project, and ask for information on resourcing that validates the LSP is able to secure the right resources.
- » Ask about **project management**. How does the

LSP's PM control quality?

- » If you believe it is critical to assess an LSP's work on a live job, conduct a small, **pilot project**. You can control the time and cost of evaluating the materials by short listing language providers and asking only two to complete the pilot; and, you can have the LSP complete translations that you will actually use, so your money is not spent on redoing already translated material.
- » Lastly, **ask the LSP** how they showcase their translation quality. They may offer something creative and compelling that you've never considered.

### About Lionbridge

Lionbridge Technologies, Inc. (Nasdaq: LIOX) is a leading provider of translation, localization, and testing services. Lionbridge combines global language resources with proven program management methodologies to serve as an outsource partner throughout a client's product and content lifecycle. Organizations in all industries rely on Lionbridge language and testing services to increase international market share, speed adoption of products and content, and ensure the integrity of their global brands. Based in Waltham, Mass., Lionbridge operates across 26 countries, and provides services under the Lionbridge and VeriTest® brands.

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