



# HOW TO CHECK THE QUALITY OF A TRANSLATION IN A LANGUAGE YOU DON'T KNOW



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# Introduction

You are a professional. You give your customers the best service. And they know it. So why on earth it is so hard to find good, reliable translators? In this age, translations services are provided and received online, and most of the time there is no personal relationship. But, even if you don't know your translator very well, it is possible to evaluate the quality of their work.

But wait! What if you had a licensing agreement translated from English to Portuguese, and you cannot put two words together in Portuguese (with the exception of "Carnaval" and "Rio")? Can you tell something about the quality of this translation in less 5 minutes?

May I suggest a few tips that can be used to quickly tell a "high-quality" translation from a poor one?

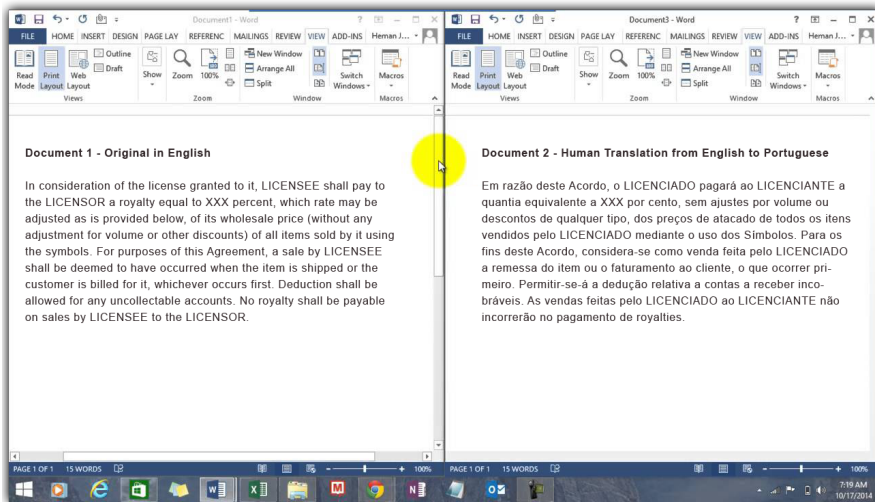
I have been translating professionally for the past 7 years. One of the largest translation projects I am currently managing is over 2,000,000 words. On this project, I serve as the chief translator as well as the overall manager of the translation team. I know whereof I speak.

# Step #1

## The simplest and quickest - a visual inspection

You can learn a lot just from looking at the translation, and forming a subjective impression. Ask yourself how do you feel when you look at the translation.

View the translation and the source side by side on your screen. Now, take a look at the layout. Look for items that you can recognize in both the source and the target: legal terms that do not translate, case numbers, bulleted lists, headers, dates, financial figures, etc.



There are simple visual indicators of poor quality. Look for omissions, missing or mismatching numbers and the overall match of the formatting (headings, bulleted and numbered lists) to the original. For example: go over the bulleted lists and count the number of items.

A quality minded linguist will do their best to recreate the translation in meaning as well as form. However, if you do not speak the language, the form will be more visually apparent to you.

Some of the more tedious checks are better left for the computer, though.

## Step #2

# A bit more technical - let the computer sweat on it

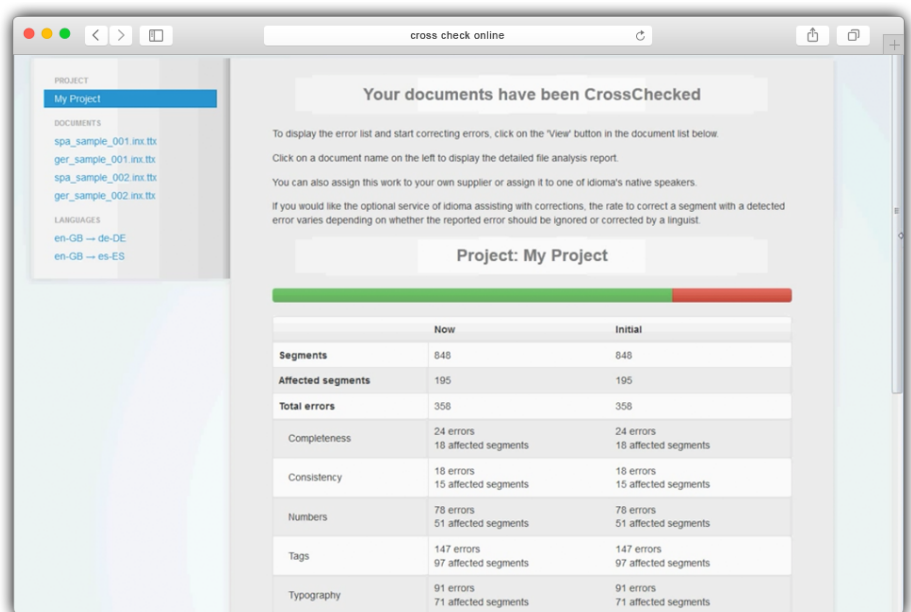
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While this step can also be done in under five minutes, it does require a bit more technical effort. These types of tools are software based. They harness the power of computer to conduct in a fast and efficient manner the types of syntax checks that can be done without analyzing the meaning of the text.

### These tools check for:

- **Completeness:** are there portions of the source that were left untranslated?
- **Adherence to terminology:** by accessing a predefined glossary that was used by the human linguist.
- **Typography:** repeating words, multiple spaces together, missing/extra spaces, unusual letter case aLteration, missing/extra symbols, punctuation marks.
- **Consistency:** translation consistency, number/symbol/parenthesis mismatch.

One of the simplest tools is free, and is cloud-based, so it does not require any installation or configuration ([CrossCheck](#)). Other free and non-free desktop tools require installation and some configuration (e.g. [ApSIC](#), [Xbench](#), [CheckMate](#), [QA Distiller](#)), and already not that simple to use.



## Step #3

# Can Google Translate be of use?

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For most simple texts it works surprisingly well. Not so much for legal texts, where a single word may reverse the entire meaning of the phrase.

Let's examine a real-life example. You've purchased a translation of a licensing agreement from English to Portuguese. Since you have a good command of English, you could use Google translate to translate back from Portuguese to English, and compare the original to this Google translation (see below).

The highlighted sentences (my own highlights) show suspicious areas. Note, in the first sentence, how the legalese is not properly handled by Google translate. In the second sentence, the LICENSEE becomes LICENSED and "uncollectible accounts" become "uncollectible accounts receivable". In this case the human translation has no such errors - these are probably a good indication of the current limitations of machine translations.

Original in English	Human Translation from English to Portuguese	Google Translate: from Portuguese back to English
In consideration of the license granted to it, LICENSEE shall pay to the LICENSOR a royalty equal to XXX percent, which rate may be adjusted as is provided below, of its wholesale price (without any adjustment for volume or other discounts) of all items sold by it using the symbols. For purposes of this Agreement, a sale by LICENSEE shall be deemed to have occurred when the item is shipped or the customer is billed for it, whichever occurs first. Deduction shall be allowed for any uncollectable accounts. No royalty shall be payable on sales by LICENSEE to the LICENSOR.	Em razão deste Acordo, o LICENCIADO pagará ao LICENCIANTE a quantia equivalente a XXX por cento, sem ajustes por volume ou descontos de qualquer tipo, dos preços de atacado de todos os itens vendidos pelo LICENCIADO mediante o uso dos Símbolos. Para os fins deste Acordo, considera-se como venda feita pelo LICENCIADO a remessa do item ou o faturamento ao cliente, o que ocorrer primeiro. Permitir-se-á a dedução relativa a contas a receber incobráveis. As vendas feitas pelo LICENCIADO ao LICENCIANTE não incorrerão no pagamento de royalties.	Because of this Agreement, the LICENSEE shall pay to Licensor the amount equal to XXX percent, unadjusted volume or discounts of any kind, the wholesale prices of all items sold by LICENSED by the use of Símbolos. Para purposes of this Agreement it is considered as sale by LICENSED shipment of the item or the billing to the customer, whichever comes first. It will allow the deduction for uncollectible accounts receivable. Sales made by LICENSEE to the LICENSOR will not incur the payment of royalties.

## Step #4

# Google the translator...

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There is a lot of “hobby” translators out there. The best thing is to form a relationship with a translator that you can trust. You that can serve you reliably and consistently. Better yet, **find a linguistic solution provider that you can rely on**. But, the good ones are hard to come by.

As in any profession, the brightest and most talented linguists are sought after. Try googling them. Do they share their insights in a blog? How well do they write? What do their customers say about them? The higher quality translation portals, where some translators get their project from, rank both the translation companies and the freelance translators. For example, look your translator up on [Proz](#).

Ask your linguist whether they have credentials or accreditation. How long have they been translating? Ask them for samples of their previous work. Read them. A great translator not only understands the language, culture and subject matter of the source text but **MUST** be able to write, and write well, in the target language.

# Need linguistic solution provider that you can rely on?

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Our full-service legal translation solutions can get you the peace of mind that comes when you know everything is always taken care of to your satisfaction.



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Legal Translation Solutions

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