

What should a translator look for in his or her translation?

After studying with my colleagues for a year, writing articles about Eugene Nida's work, and analyzing our high points and low points, I have reached the conclusion that these are some of the key aspects of a good translation:

1. Following our clients' instructions. This is essential!
2. Understanding and analyzing the source text. We just can't translate what we don't understand. That is why I gave a presentation about this in Mexico!
3. The target text has to sound right: it has to be connected with prepositions and other connectors that fit the target language, not just ones that would appear to match the source text.
4. The use of tenses in the source and target languages may be different. Often a present tense in English is translated as a subjunctive in Spanish, for example.
5. Sometimes the source text may say "our country", but the target text reader may not be from that locale. Saying "Venezuela" would be a better translation choice if the source text is from Venezuela, for example. So sometimes we have to supply words that are needed in the target but are missing in the source.
6. The dictionary is not the ultimate answer. We understand the context of the word. The dictionary doesn't! We know why that word was used in that sentence. A monolingual dictionary can help us think more clearly about the meaning of a term in the source text than a bilingual glossary – I mean, a bilingual dictionary. To verify our choice, we should check our term in a monolingual dictionary in the target language.
7. We should be careful with false cognates, and be aware that not all cognates are false! Banana, for example, is not a false cognate between English and Spanish!
8. Idiomatic expressions are tricky. In Spanish, there are phrases like "Hay de todo en la viña del Señor". This has no relationship with the New Testament vineyard at all! It simply means "There are all kinds of people in the world." So be careful with literal translations in phrases that have special meanings...

So... what is involved in a translation?

- Understanding the source language.
- Taking that message to the target language.
- Following instructions.
- Writing well.

If we need texts to practice this, I would suggest finding them in editorial columns, the Wall Street Journal, or other texts that express ideas with some depth and complexity.

I hope this helps!

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