

A decorative graphic featuring a large, light blue dashed circle that frames the central text. Various solid-colored circles in shades of teal, green, yellow, orange, and pink are scattered around the page. Some circles are solid, while others are dashed. A large teal ring is in the top left, a yellow ring is in the bottom right, and a green ring is in the top right. The text is centered within the dashed circle.

Why
translation
should be
reassuringly
expensive

The real cost of translation

How much do you need to spend on translation?
What price do you pay at the time, and in the long run?

Machine translation systems have introduced a “free” (and fast and easy) option that can make the time, effort and cost of managed human translation seem unnecessary.

But not paying for a service may cost you something else, particularly when it comes to skilled work that needs investment - **time, resources and money.**

Properly managed, this investment will pay for itself many times over.

The background features several decorative elements: a large orange ring with a dashed white inner circle in the top left; a large teal ring in the bottom right; a large teal number '1' inside a dashed white circle in the top center; and various smaller solid and dashed circles in green, yellow, and pink scattered throughout.

1

Investing in words

Words are all you have

Your text works for you 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Online content and brochures, case studies and contracts.

It can be the first, sometimes the only, point of contact with the people you're trying to reach and persuade: potential customers, backers, supporters.

The words you need don't appear by chance.

They're chosen by an expert with the skills and experience to get them just right.

Invest in those words and they will pay you back time after time.

The background is white with various colorful circles and dashed lines. In the top left, there is a large orange circle with a dashed white outline, overlapping a yellow circle and a small pink circle. In the top right, there is a green circle with a white dot inside, a smaller yellow circle, and a lime green circle with a dashed white outline. In the bottom left, there is a lime green circle with a dashed white outline, a small cyan circle, and a larger lime green circle. In the bottom right, there is a large cyan circle with a white dot inside, and a smaller cyan circle with a dashed white outline. The number '2' is centered in the top half of the page.

2

The price of
free

What are you saying?

Translation looks simple. Even software seems to be able to do it.

Machines have **no natural language ability, no specialist knowledge and no judgement.**

Would you trust one to speak on behalf of your company, your project, or your product?

To speak for you? In a language you may not understand?

It could end up costing you a lot, whether or not you paid for it.

The background is white and decorated with various colorful circles and shapes. There are orange, yellow, pink, green, and teal circles of different sizes. Some circles are solid, some are dashed, and some are hollow. A large teal circle is partially visible on the right side. A large orange circle is partially visible on the top left. A large teal circle is partially visible on the bottom right.

3

A language is not
• just a language

Language is also culture

Every language belongs to a cultural group (sometimes more than one). Even a seemingly straightforward text will carry the mark of where it was created, and can harbour meanings beyond the immediately obvious.

This cultural dimension affects the process of transferring a message, along with its cultural and emotional associations, into the frame of reference of a different language - and its culture.

Knowing the language is not enough. A translator has to **know the culture** in order to reach between the lines and pull out the full meaning.

The background features several decorative elements: a large orange ring with a dashed white inner circle in the top left; a large teal ring in the bottom right; a large teal number '4' inside a dashed white circle in the top center; and various smaller solid and dashed circles in colors like green, yellow, pink, and teal scattered throughout.

4

Finding the
right words

Making new words work

Translated words have work to do -
persuading, educating, selling.

Transferring a text into another language is not enough
to ensure the new words can pull their weight.

Overly direct translation (due to lack of skill, resources or time)
may contain imagery, rhetoric devices or even grammatical
structure from the source text, and fail to recast the
message into forms familiar to its new audience.

A translated text has to engage its reader just as powerfully as
one originally written in that language.
Translators therefore also have to be skilled writers.

The background features several overlapping circles in various colors: orange, yellow, pink, green, and teal. Some circles have dashed outlines, while others are solid. A large teal circle is partially visible on the right side.

5

A text is not
just a text

No text is an island

Every text is about something. Sometimes several things.

It can be an obvious specialised area such as law or medicine, or a specific context such as regulatory approvals or industrial safety.

Sometimes the purpose of the text dictates how it is expressed and used: venture capital funding, marketing for fast-moving consumer goods, patient education.

A translator understands that language is used differently in specific contexts, and researches and writes accordingly.



6

Serious
business



Your business is their business

People who make translation their business take it seriously.

Professional translators continually deepen their understanding of language and culture, improve their writing and editing and develop their specialist knowledge and business skills. Some translation associations recommend or insist on continuous professional development as a condition of membership.

Translators invest in their skills and maintain them at a high level, and pay for this investment through the services they provide.

The background features several overlapping circles in various colors: orange, yellow, pink, green, and teal. Some circles are solid, while others are dashed. A large teal circle is partially visible on the right side. The number '7' is centered within a large, light blue dashed circle.

7

One person,
many skills

The many facets of translation

Source language: the language the translator works from

Source language*

Specialist knowledge

Business skills

Target language*

Target language: the language the translator works into

Translators maintain at least four groups of skills

A decorative graphic featuring several overlapping circles in various colors (orange, yellow, pink, green, teal, blue) and dashed lines. The number 8 is centered within a large dashed circle.

8

Freelance economics

The price of freelance

Freelancers are more expensive than employees or temporary staff.
They have to be.

Their pricing has to cover benefits that employers provide (paid holiday, training, insurance, etc.) and also provide for time spent on the non-billable work required to run a small business.

Freelancers' skills and expertise are maintained even when you're not using them, so they're always ready.
You pay for the convenience of hiring the right person only when you need them.

Seth Godin explains it concisely in "[Double and half: \(freelancer math\)](#)".

The background is white and decorated with various colorful circles and shapes. In the top left, there is a large orange ring with a dashed red inner circle, overlapping a yellow circle and a small pink circle. In the top center, a large teal number '9' is centered within a large dashed light blue circle. To the right, there is a green circle with a white dot, a small orange circle, and a lime green circle with a dashed yellow border. In the bottom left, there is a green circle with a dashed green border, a large lime green circle, and a small teal circle. In the bottom right, there is a large teal ring and a teal circle with a dashed teal border.

9

Only the words
that matter

Choose your words carefully

Could you maximise your translation budget by translating less?

Bring in a translator before you start to see if anything can be left out.

Omit local safety or legal information that will ultimately be replaced.

Review of documents to be translated to confirm they are needed, or if a summary or partial translation will be enough.

For a tentative move into a new market, or if you're not yet sure if it's worth translating everything, work with a translator to identify the most important material and track usage to see if demand is there.

(See "[Translation: Getting It Right](#)" for more advice on commissioning translation.)

The background is white and decorated with various colorful circles and dashed lines. In the top left, there is a large orange circle with a dashed white outline, overlapping a yellow circle. Below it is a small pink circle. In the bottom left, there is a large green circle with a dashed white outline, overlapping a smaller cyan circle. In the top right, there is a green circle with a white dot inside, overlapping a yellow circle. Below it is a green circle with a dashed white outline. In the bottom right, there is a large cyan circle with a white dot inside, overlapping a smaller cyan circle with a dashed white outline.

10

What lies
beneath

A question of infrastructure

When you take the investment needed to gain and maintain skills into account, are low prices really a bargain?

Low prices can't sustain the invisible assets that a translator needs to provide their services.

Low-cost translation companies can't attract or retain freelancers committed to investing in themselves, making them vulnerable to frequent turnover and unable to deliver high quality services over the long term.

The background features a large, light blue dashed circle that frames the text. Scattered around this circle are various solid-colored shapes: a large lime green circle at the top left, a smaller green circle with a white center to its left, a small blue circle below the green one, a large cyan ring at the top center, a large yellow circle on the right, a large orange circle below it, a small pink circle above the yellow one, a large orange circle on the left, a small pink circle below it, a large yellow ring at the bottom left, a large lime green circle with a white center at the bottom right, and a small cyan circle below it.

**Every text has a mission to accomplish,
which requires taking on different forms in other cultures.**

Translation must be more than just words in
and words out to be successful.

Have a strategy for what you translate and why,
and find the right person to help you achieve your goals.

For a price that may be higher than you expected,
but always worth it.



Arline Lyons

Japanese to English translation and localisation
arline@arlinelyons.com || www.arlinelyons.com



@arlinelyons || medium.com/@arlinelyons