

**PROVISIONAL DOCUMENT/ FEBRUARY 2005**

**Note to the User:** These draft Skill Level Descriptions for Translation were provisionally approved by the Interagency Language Roundtable on February 4, 2005, to be used for one year. In February, 2006, the ILR will revisit the Descriptions with the goal of finalizing them and publishing them officially. During this year, questions, comments and suggestions about the Guidelines are welcomed. Please email your input to the Chair of the ILR Translation and Interpretation Committee, Dr. Maria Brau, at [Maria.Brau@ic.fbi.gov](mailto:Maria.Brau@ic.fbi.gov).

**ILR Skill Level Descriptions for Translation**

**PREFACE**

Translation is the process of transferring information from one language into another. The term "translation" is normally reserved for trans-language renditions of written documents. Translation is thereby distinct from interpretation, which refers to trans-language oral exchanges. While there are correspondences between translation and interpretation skills, the following applies only to document-to-document renderings.

Bilingual competence is a prerequisite for any translation task: the translator must be able to (1) read and comprehend the source language and (2) write comprehensibly in the target language.

Given these prerequisites, the translator must also be able to (3) choose the equivalent expression in the target language that both fully conveys and best matches the meaning intended in the source language (referred to as *congruity judgment*).

A weakness in any of these three abilities will influence performance adversely. Therefore, all three must be considered when assessing translation skills.

As translation tasks run from simpler to more complex, the individual's performance range depends on the degree to which competence in (1) reading the source language and (2) writing in the target language combines with (3) congruity judgment in order to produce a rendition useful to a reader not familiar with the source language.

From the standpoint of the user, a successful translation is one which transfers information or conveys the meaning of the source

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language as fully and accurately as possible into the target language.

Ideally, translators should be assigned to tasks within their performance range. To facilitate this correspondence, the Skill Level Descriptions for Translation are divided into three bands: Minimal Performance (levels 0+ to 1+), Limited Performance (levels 2 and 2+), and Professional Performance (levels 3 to 5).

Examples of tasks appropriate for each level are provided, and each level implies control of all previous levels' functions. The "plus level" designation is used to describe performance which substantially exceeds the previous skill level but for any reason does not fully meet the criteria for the next level. At the lower levels, the individual's performance suffers from a weakness in any or all of the requisite skills for translation. It is at the Professional Level 3 (or above) that these skills align to enable production of a translation that is both accurate and reliable. Accordingly, the need for product review and oversight diminishes as the performance level rises. Nonetheless, any translation of potential importance should, to the extent possible, be subject to review for accuracy by another qualified individual.

Throughout the scale, various non-linguistic factors may also affect performance, such as familiarity with the subject matter and the socio-cultural aspects of either or both source and target languages. Given previous knowledge of these factors or appropriate training, an individual at the minimal or limited performance levels may be able in certain instances to produce useful renditions of various texts. On the other hand, an otherwise skilled translator who lacks subject matter knowledge or who is unfamiliar with certain socio-cultural aspects may provide an unreliable translation of some points.

Moreover, analytical and research skills as well as adeptness in using translation tools and resources (such as monolingual dictionaries and glossaries, on-line aids, consultation with experts) may allow the individual to proceed in a methodical fashion and verify the appropriateness of the equivalents chosen.

It must be noted that language tasks often associated with translation, such as gisting and summarizing a text, are not included as tasks affecting translation skill levels, since such tasks represent skills separate from translation skills, not

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necessarily related to an individual's translation performance.

The prerequisite bilingual skills for translation (reading in the source language and writing in the target language) can be tested separately from translation skills. Testing these prerequisite skills should provide a preliminary indication of translation capability. However, if a translation score is desired, a translation test should be used that measures the individual's congruity judgment.

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**Performance Level 0**

Has no practical ability to transfer information from one language into another.

**Minimal Performance Level 0+**

Able to recognize and transfer very little information from one language into another, usually representing isolated words and phrases. Accuracy is haphazard.

**Minimal Performance Level 1**

Ability limited to word-by-word transfers. May be able to identify documents by their label or headings and scan graphic materials for items of specific interest, but meanings may sometimes be inaccurately rendered.

**Minimal Performance Level 1+**

Able to scan source language texts for specific categories, topics, key points and/or main ideas, generally rendering an accurate report on these but often missing supporting facts and details. Can to some extent render factual materials, such as records or databases, often relying on real-world knowledge or familiarity with the subject matter.

**Limited Performance Level 2**

Able to render into the target language straightforward, factual texts in the standard variety of the source language. Can

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typically render uncomplicated prose, such as that used in short biographical data documents, police reports, simple letters, instructions and some training manuals. Can normally rely on knowledge of the subject matter to operate within one given subject field, consisting of a narrow body of material that is routine, repetitive, and often predictable. Expression in the target language may be faulty, frequently reflecting the structure and word order of the source language.

### **Limited Performance Level 2+**

Can render straightforward texts dealing with everyday matters that include statements of fact as well as some judgments, opinion, or other elements which entail more than direct exposition. In these types of texts, the individual can read source language materials and render them accurately into the target language, conveying the key points and/or main ideas, supporting facts, most of the details, and some nuances. Can usually operate in at least two narrowly defined subject fields, using both linguistic knowledge of the languages involved and familiarity with the subject matter, often relying on the latter to solve any translation problems. A tendency to adhere to source language structures may result in target language expressions that may be correct but appear awkward and perhaps non-native.

### **Professional Performance Level 3**

Can successfully translate texts that contain not only facts but also abstract language, some situations and events which are subject to value judgments of a personal or institutional kind (as in newspaper editorials, propaganda documents, critiques of tasks or projects, and colloquial writings) and capture their intended implications and many nuances. Linguistic knowledge of both the terminology and the means of expression specific to a subject field is strong enough to allow the translator to operate successfully in that field. Word choice and expression generally adhere to target language norms.

### **Professional Performance Level 3+**

Can successfully translate a variety of texts, such as scientific or financial reports, some legal documents and most

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colloquial writings. Can convey the meaning of many socio-cultural elements embedded in a text as well as most nuances and relatively infrequent lexical and syntactic constructions of the source language. May be able to operate in fields outside areas of specialty.

**Professional Performance Level 4**

Can successfully translate a variety of complex texts containing difficult, abstract, idiomatic, and colloquial writing, ranging from treaties and diplomatic communications to commentary reflecting someone's culture to analysis and argumentation, capturing subtleties, nuances, tone, and register (such as official, formal, and informal language). Linguistic knowledge and familiarity with source language norms enable an individual at this level to read and translate handwritten documents and texts that represent spontaneous expression characteristic of native speakers. Can translate materials outside the individual's specialties, but may not reach the absolute subject matter accuracy of the specialist in the given field.

**Professional Performance Level 4+**

Can successfully translate texts that contain highly original and special purpose language (such as that contained in religious sermons, literature, and poetry). At this level, a successful performance requires not only conveying content and register but also capturing to the greatest extent all nuances intended in the source document. Can produce fully accurate translations in a number of subject fields. When the need arises to perform in areas outside of specialization, a translator at this level is able to reach a successful level of performance given the time necessary for acquiring the corresponding knowledge of the subject matter.

**Professional Performance Level 5**

Can translate successfully texts where lack of linguistic and cultural parallelism between the source language and the target language requires precise congruity judgments. A level 5 consistently excels in a number of specialties, and is generally regarded as one of the arbiters of translating very high level language by persons competent in dealing with such material.