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The One Source for a World of Translation Services

The Challenge of Translating Scientific and Technical Documents

Imagine trying to comprehend the information in a scientific article like “Capillary Flow Technology for Gas Chromatography” and re-state it clearly enough that experts in the field can understand it. Unless you have some expertise in that field, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

That's the challenge translators face with scientific translation, along with the added component of working in a second language. Medical research, scientific treatises and engineering documents are complex and include terminology unique to those industries. In order to provide an accurate translation, the translator must be thoroughly versed in the subject matter and underlying concepts. A technical dictionary cannot take the place of a true comprehension of the subject matter.

For example, translating pharmaceutical research requires a background in medicine and chemistry, and a wealth of scientific knowledge. Translating a typical study such as “Treatment of Perianastomotic Ulcer” necessitates a strong command of the industry nomenclature. A technical manual for an ultrasonic measuring device may discuss “A-scan echoes,” or a “backwall echo attenuator.” These are not general business subjects and are outside the expertise of the majority of translators.

Exercise extreme care when purchasing translation services for technical and scientific documents. It is particularly important to avoid the “low cost trap.” The difference in rates between a knowledgeable translator and an inexperienced one can be as little as US \$.05 per word, yet the difference in quality can be significant. Taking into account the expense of conducting research or engineering studies, the cost to procure an acceptable translation is a good investment.

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