

WHAT IS A CERTIFIED TRANSLATION?

Virtually all of us, I suspect, have been contacted more than once with an inquiry from an anxious candidate (for citizenship or medical school, for example) as to whether or not we can produce a certified translation. I myself have never been clear as to what such a translation is, whether one has to be an ATA certified translator to produce one, and whether or not it has to be notarized, and have always asked the client to please check with the requesting agency as to what exactly is required. I would imagine that at least some of our readers have been similarly confused, especially now that the ATA has changed the name of its credential from accreditation to certification. Recently, my attention was drawn to the following definitive answer published on the website of NOTIS, the Northwest Translators and Interpreters Society, which gave us kind permission to reprint it here. LRS

What is a Certified Translation?

In the United States a certified translation consists of the following three parts

- 1). The source-language (original) text
- 2). The target-language (translated) text
- 3). A statement signed by the translator or translation company representative, with his or her signature notarized by a Notary Public, attesting that the translator or translation company representative believes the target-language text to be an accurate and complete translation of the source-language text. Sometimes this statement bears the title "Certificate of Accuracy" or "Statement that Two Documents Have the Same Meaning." Some translators will attach a Curriculum Vitae to the notarized statement.

Please note that any translator and any translation company representatives, regardless of credentials, may "certify" a translation in this way. A translator does not need to be "certified" in order to provide a "certified translation." It is also important to realize that the Notary Public seal assures only that the signature is that of the person who presented him or herself to the notary. The Notary Public is not attesting to the accuracy of the translation.

What is a certified translator?

In contrast to many other countries, in the United States there is no federal or state licensing or certification for translators. There are some credentials available to translators working in some language pairs in this country, but they do not carry the same weight— in the market place or in the translation community— as federal licensing or certification in other countries.

The American Translators Association offers translator certification in some language pairs. ATA-certified translators are required to specify the language pairs and directions in which they are certified. For example, a translator certified in German to English is not necessarily certified in English to German.

The Translators and Interpreters Guild, a national organization of independent professional language translators and interpreters, announced in September 2000 that it will be offering TTIG Certification for translators.

Please note that there are many languages for which there is no type of certification or screening available in this country. There are many excellent, experienced translators who are not accredited or certified.

In the United States it is not necessary to be certified or licensed in order to provide a certified translation for official use.

Reprinted from the NOTIS Website, www.notisnet.org.

Editor's note: After copyediting this, Christina Sever wrote, "If the information in this article is true, I wonder why almost half of my business in the last ten years has been translation of official documents that the person or agency was told had to be translated and notarized by an accredited (certified) translator, or they would not be accepted by the institution requiring the documents." I have also done certificate, diploma, or transcript translation for an agency (when I know that notarization is required), and they assure me that they will "take care of that." From the NOTIS article, it seems that that would be legal if done by the translation company representative. I have also been asked for a copy of my accreditation certificate, and I don't know if that is kosher." Good points, does anyone have any ideas or information?