Translating for

EMEA Markets

Tips from Local Experts   **SMARTLING**

Contents

The EMEA market encompasses more than 110 countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. To successfully expand into EMEA markets, providing content in customer's preferred language through translation is critical.

We also know that every language and culture is unique, and it would be impossible to be an expert in all of them. So we turned to professional Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Arabic translators who are native speakers, local experts, and specialists in the languages.

Here are the top considerations when translating into some of the most used EMEA languages.

Spanish

Spanish is one of the most popular languages in the world

Spanish is spoken by more than 580 million people in 110 countries, and not everyone speaks it the same way. It's essential to understand your target audience, your intent, and the overall meaning you're trying to convey.

There isn't one "International Spanish"

Many versions of Spanish are born out of historical, cultural, and linguistic changes over time and use different spelling, grammar, and cultural norms.

There are 8 Types of Spanish:

Castilian	Latin American
Andalusian	Rioplatense
Murcian	Caribbean
Canarian	Equatoguinean

Castilian

The oldest type of Spanish spoken in north-central Spain. Often referred to as "castellano" rather than "español"
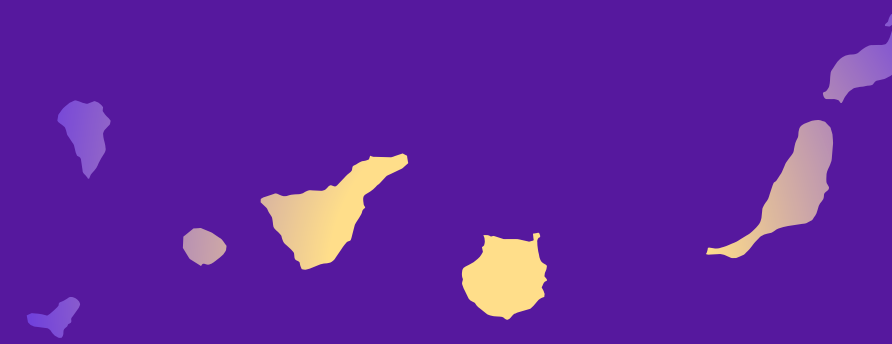
Murcian

A regional variety of Spanish spoken in south-eastern Spain. Commonly heard in the Murcia region

Andalusian

Spoken in southern Spain and shares similarities with Latin American dialects in pronunciation

Canarian

Spoken in Canary Islands. Resembles Caribbean Spanish, and vocabulary is heavily influenced by Portuguese

Latin American

The official language of many South and Central American countries. Known to pronounce "z" and "c" as "s"

Caribbean

Used in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama
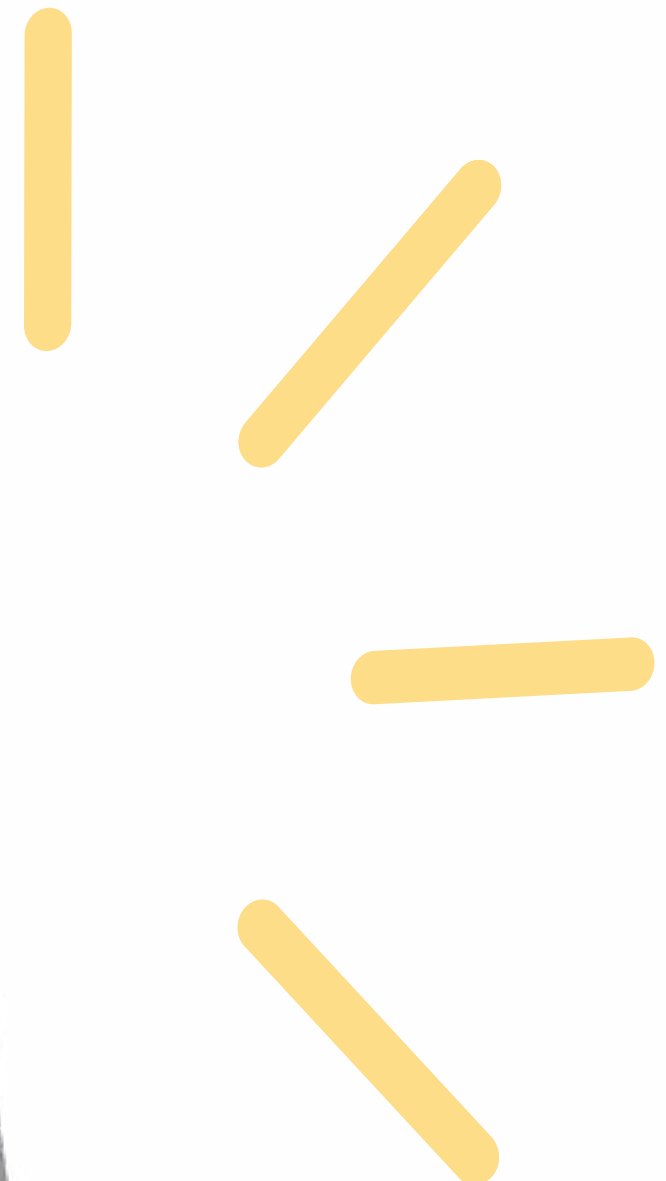
Rioplatense

Widely used in Uruguay and Argentina and heavily influenced by Italian

Equatoguinean

Spoken in Equatorial Guinea and the official language of Sub-Saharan Africa

There's a big distinction between Spanish from Spain and Spanish from Latin America. There's a rich variety of expressions and vocabulary from every country.

Maria R.
Spanish Translator, Smartling

Spanish translations are longer

Stay flexible when designing materials for a global audience. This way, you don't have to spend extra hours re-writing or redesigning because of additional text.

Ensure your website and application(s) are completely internationalized before translating. This will allow you to accommodate for localization changes such as additional characters, accents, and changing text length.

Example

Smartling enables brands to maximize the output of time, energy, and cost spent on translation and localization to deliver culturally relevant brand experiences that facilitate global growth.

Source String (English), 191 Characters (Including Spaces)

Smartling proporciona a las marcas la oportunidad de optimizar el tiempo, los esfuerzos y el dinero invertidos en las tareas de traducción y localización para crear experiencias de marca que **se adapten a cada cultura y faciliten su desarrollo global.**

Spanish Translation, 250 Characters (Including Spaces)

About 30%

Character Expansion

Spanish is more complex

Spanish uses gendered nouns that change based on the gender of the speaker, the noun, and the plural. Additionally, Spanish has different agreement rules regarding verbs and adjectives.

Gender (El)		Gender (La)	
Problem	el problema	Nation	la nación
Courage	el coraje	Economy	la economía
Work	el trabajo	Happiness	la felicidad
(male) teacher	el profesor	(female) teacher	la profesora
(male) teachers	los profesores	(female) teachers	las profesoras
clean car	auto limpio (LatAm ES) coche limpio (EU ES)	clean table	mesa limpia

Spanish requires different levels of formality

In Spanish, formality is about choosing the correct address based on the relationship to the person.

English		Spanish	
You	(singular, informal) • *You are always late!* • *You know I don't like coffee*	Tú or vos	Addressing friends and family, or youth • *¡Tú siempre llegas tarde!* • *Vos sabés que no me gusta el café.*
You	(singular, formal) • *You have an appointment at 11:00.*	Usted	Addressing strangers, older people, or in formal situations. • *Usted tiene cita a las 11:00.*
You	(plural, informal) • *Do you have any plans this weekend?*	Vosotros or vosotras	Addressing friends and family, or youth • *¿Vosotros/as tenéis planes este fin de semana?*
You	(plural, formal) • *You are not allowed to be here.*	Ustedes	Addressing strangers, older people, or in formal situations • *Ustedes no tienen permiso para estar aquí.*

Different countries have different cultural norms and references

Localization isn't always about accurate translations. It's also about the cultural nuances required to have your content feel local and natural.

When translating from your source language to another, you're bound to run into cultural norms that don't translate well. Double-check puns and pop-culture references to make sure they make sense. Your translation team may have to find culturally appropriate swaps.

Example 1

Starbucks' Pumpkin Spice Latte

US ✓   AR ✗   ES ✓

Starbucks' Pumpkin Spice Latte is a popular drink in the US, but Starbucks in Argentina doesn't carry this beverage. In Spain, however, this drink is still sold under its original name — untranslated.

Example 2

ES	US
☀ Morning	☀ Morning
⛅ Afternoon	⛅ Afternoon
🌙 Evening	🌙 Evening
🌙 Night	🌙 Night

In Spain, the idea of times of day is more flexible than in the United States. For instance, "afternoon" begins sometime after 2-3 p.m. and lasts until 9-10 p.m. There is no "evening," so you skip over to "night" right away.

French

French is the official language in 29 different countries and the United Nations

More than 275 million people speak French around the world. Across locales, you'll find differences in grammar, cultural preferences, style, and tone.

These are the countries where French is the official language:

Belgium — Benin — Burkina Faso — Burundi — Cameroon — Canada

Central African Republic — Chad — Comoros — Côte d'Ivoire — Democratic Republic of the Congo — Djibouti

Equatorial Guinea — France — Gabon — Guinea — Haiti — Luxembourg

Madagascar — Mali — Monaco — Niger — Republic of the Congo — Rwanda

Senegal — Seychelles — Switzerland — Togo — Vanuatu

Anticipate longer translations

With French, it's essential to stay flexible with your content length and limits for document translation. It's best to work directly with your design team to ensure translated copy will work with their design layouts.

Example:

Smartling enables brands to maximize the output of time, energy, and cost spent on translation and localization to deliver culturally relevant brand experiences that facilitate global growth.

Source String (English), 191 Characters (Including Spaces)

Smartling permet aux marques de maximiser les résultats de leurs projets de traduction et de localisation, en termes de temps, d'énergie et d'argent, en vue de fournir des expériences de marque pertinentes sur le plan culturel, qui se traduiront par une croissance mondiale.

French Translation, 274 Characters (Including Spaces)

About 43%

Character Expansion

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In French, you need more words than in English to express an idea. This is a problem translators often face when they are asked to observe character limits. Translation has to fit in a restricted space while staying accurate and convey the same message as the source.

Marie-Hélène P.
French Translator, Smartling

French grammar is more complex

This is one of the most significant differences between English and a romance language like French.

That's why it's vital to provide context for translations so that translators know exactly where and how a given word or phrase will be used. That can be through images, notes, or broader strategic information about the word placement and what information is conveyed.

English	French
Deleted	Supprimé (singular, masculine), for example *"a file" > un fichier supprimé*
	Supprimée (singular, feminine), for example *"an address" > une adresse supprimée*
	Supprimés (plural, masculine), for example *"two files" > deux fichiers supprimés*
	Supprimées (plural, feminine), for example *"two addresses" > deux adresses supprimées*

The same word in English can be translated into French as an adjective, a verb or a noun according to the context.

English	French
Complete	Terminer (verb, infinitive)
	Terminez (verb, imperative)
	Terminé (adjective, singular, masculine)
	Terminés (adjective, plural, masculine)
	Terminée (adjective, singular, feminine)
	Terminées (adjective, plural, feminine)
Report	Signaler (verb, infinitive)
	Signalez (verb, imperative)
	Rapport (noun)

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The French language has more than one level of formality

In French, it's appropriate to address younger people and friends "informally." Older people and strangers should be addressed "formally." Depending on your industry, content, and target audience, you can expect different levels of formality (formal, standard, or informal) in French.

English	French	English	French
You (singular, informal)	Tu	Could you	Pourriez-vous (polite request) (singular, formal / plural, informal / plural, formal)
You (singular, formal)	Vous		
You (plural, informal)	Vous	Noise (informal)	Boucan
		Noise (standard)	Bruit
You (plural, formal)	Vous	Noise (formal)	Vacarme
Can you	Peux-tu (singular, informal) Pouvez-vous (singular, formal / plural, informal / plural, formal)	We don't agree (informal)	On est pas d'accord.
		We don't agree (standard)	Nous ne sommes pas d'accord.

English tends to be more enthusiastic than French

In some cases, French can sound more skeptical than American English, especially in marketing content.

Being too enthusiastic can turn off French audiences when talking about the benefits of a product in a marketing copy. So French translators often try to tone down the intensity or repetition of the English copy.

For example, instead of "awesome" or "the best product," "it's not bad at all" may work better.

English

French

"Great!"

"awesome"

"the best product"

it's not bad at all

It's okay to incorporate English into French

When it comes to modern industries and new terms from English-speaking companies, French translators are increasingly keeping the English expression in the translations to avoid appearing awkward or approximate.

Industries where this is common are e-commerce and technology. Many words in English remain untranslated and get added directly into the French dictionary. Terms like blockchain, playlist, storytelling, and manager are examples of this.

Translation in E-commerce and Technology Industries

English	French
blockchain	blockchain
playlist	playlist
storytelling	storytelling
manager	manager

German

English and German share West Germanic as their root language.

You may already know words like delicatessen, kindergarten, schadenfreude, or Über. Start looking closely, and you'll see similarities between German and English, especially in vocabulary, alphabet, and culture. While you'll find many similarities between the two, there are still things to be aware of if you're translating between English and German.

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German has additional letters

German uses the same alphabet as English, but with a few additional letters: Ä, Ö, Ü, and ß.

These letters are often not counted as part of the official alphabet, but they impact how you speak German. For example, an umlaut (Ä, Ö, Ü) signals the reader or speaker to use a sharper sound, often in the plural form. The eszett (ß) signals the reader or speaker to use a sharp s-sound, like a double "s."

A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z Ä Ö Ü ß

English	German
Apples	Äpfel
Daughters	Töchter
Trains	Züge
Feet	Füße

German expands English text dramatically

German is known to be one of the longest languages in the world. English text expands dramatically when translated by about 35%. And by now, we know this means it will affect design.

Example

Smartling enables brands to maximize the output of time, energy, and cost spent on translation and localization to deliver culturally relevant brand experiences that facilitate global growth.

Source String (English), 191 Characters (Including Spaces)

Smartling bietet Marken maximalen Ertrag für ihren Zeit-, Energie- und Kostenaufwand bei Übersetzungen und Lokalisierungen als Grundlage für kulturell angepasste Markenerlebnisse, **die förderlich für das globale Wachstum sind.**

German Translation, 225 Characters (Including Spaces)

About 18%

Character Expansion

German grammar is more complex

The German language is one of the most complex languages. German-English translation has to consider this grammatical complexity and requires robust quality assurance for high-quality translations.

German uses agreements for three different genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Additionally, what can trip up English speakers the most is a word people often overlook: "the."

There are 16 different ways to say the word "the" in the German language.

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
Nominative	Der	Die	Das	Die
Genitive	Des	Der	Des	Der
Dative	Dem	Der	Dem	Den
Accusative	Den	Die	Das	Die

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German requires more specificity

It's essential to provide context to your translators with any language. This is especially true for German, a language known for precision. Make sure your team knows what type of content they're looking at and the goals for the content.

Provide notes on images, layout, and design so that translators can provide more accurate translations.

You can lose credibility from your audience if you mention something inaccurate or appear overly enthusiastic.

Remember to prepare specific notes for translators to ensure accuarcy.

Image 🗒

Layout 🗒

Design 🗒

German is more reserved

Languages like German tend to be more polite and reserved than English, which can be more enthusiastic and expressive. Repeating words and phrases can appear too bold, pushy, or self-serving to the German-speaking audience.

In marketing copy with calls to action — whether converting email subscribers into paying customers or driving awareness of new features and products — translators have to find out what resonates culturally with a German audience before asking for action.

Example

Marketing copy in English	German translation	Back translation
"I absolutely love CoffeeMaster2000. It's just a wonderful addition to my kitchen."	*"Der CoffeeMaster2000 passt wunderbar in meine Küche. Ich verwende ihn oft und gerne."*	*"CoffeeMaster2000 fits wonderfully in my kitchen. I enjoy using it often."*

Thought process

German-speaking audiences like knowing the reason why a product is desirable and prefer products that are useful.

Something like 'I absolutely love CoffeeMaster2000. It's just a wonderful addition to my kitchen.' is something an American customer might realistically say.

But it would need to be toned down for a German-speaking audience because it would be perceived as overly enthusiastic when speaking of a coffee machine.

Michail S.
German Translator, Smartling

Italian

Italian is one of the most iconic romance languages and a close cousin to Latin.

As you decide which markets to expand to, Italian is an important language to consider. Today, 85 million people speak Italian. Here are some things to consider to solve the most common challenges when localizing for the Italian-speaking audience.

Italian requires more context than English

The English language uses many of the same words to mean different things.

Translating into Italian is more difficult because the Italian language uses more nuance and complexity to communicate ideas.

Here is an example of technical language that must be adapted to context: delivery.

	What it means in Italian	What it means in English
Delivery	Postal Shipment	The action of providing something
		The style of giving a speech
		The process of giving birth

The literal translation of "delivery" can only be used in Italian to indicate a postal shipment, while in English, it could also mean the action of providing something, the style of giving a speech, or the process of giving birth. This leads to having to find a meaning for the concept using other words.

Italian requires different levels of formality

Italian has multiple levels of formality. Translators need to strike a balance between the right formality for an Italian audience and the right tone of voice of your brand.

For example, you'll choose either "tu" (you, singular) or "voi" (you, plural) when addressing your Italian audience on your website. "Lei" on a website would sound too formal but is appropriate for contracts, business agreements, and other official documents.

Appropriate Formality in Italian

English	Italian
You (singular, informal)	Tu
You (singular, formal)	Lei (if you don't know this person or if she/he is in higher positions or older)

Italian translations will be longer

With languages like Italian that expand when translated from English, you must plan in advance to incorporate translations into your overall design and development process.

Internationalize your website and application before the translation step begins. Developers should ensure a given set of code can accommodate other language structures, and designers will need to build a flexible UI.

Example

Smartling enables brands to maximize the output of time, energy, and cost spent on translation and localization to deliver culturally relevant brand experiences that facilitate global growth.

Source String (English), 191 Characters (Including Spaces)

Smartling permette ai brand di massimizzare i risultati dei processi di traduzione e localizzazione risparmiando tempo, energia e costi e offrendo esperienze di marca in grado di includere la **dimensione culturale e promuovere la crescita globale.**

Italian Translation, 246 Characters (Including Spaces)

About 29%

Character Expansion

In my opinion, the most marked cultural difference is the tone of voice. English is much more concise and brisk, while Italian is less direct in expressing itself because there is often an underlying fear of offending someone.

Generally speaking, this comes from the formality of interpersonal relationships and from the willingness to keep a certain distance in language.

Antonella G.
Italian Translator, Smartling

Translating for EMEA Markets: Tips from Local Experts

Arabic

One of the oldest languages in the world, Arabic is an official language of more than 25 countries.

Across the Middle East and Africa, you'll hear more than 30 varieties of Arabic. It's difficult to translate text between two languages in a way that maintains the same meaning and style. The Arabic language, in particular, is one of the hardest to translate.

Cultural differences

One of the most interesting things about translation is that it makes people more open to different cultures. This can be seen with English translated into Arabic text.

Arabic is an emotional language and has many ways to convey the same meaning. Different words with the same meaning can be used to "intensify" an idea, usually making sentences longer.

For Arabic-English translation, a single English word from an English dictionary often can't replace an Arabic one. The translator may need to explain the meaning of the Arabic word, especially when working on Islamic terms. The translator's job is not limited to interpreting the meaning literally but explaining what facts or feelings are behind it.

Some Arabic letters have no equivalents in English

This makes transcription difficult when writing Arabic names in English letters. For example, take an Arabic name, "Naaot." The section "aa" is the standard attempt to make the double (a) sound like the Arabic letter (ع).

However, the letter (ع) is emitted from a deeper place in the mouth than the English equivalent (aa). Translators have to pick the letters that best resemble the sounds of the Arabic ones.

Arabic Letter		English Substitute
غ	———————▶	gh
خ	———————▶	kh
ع	———————▶	N<u>aa</u>ot

Shifting the way of thinking

Arabic translators have to switch to the "English way of thinking" when translating from English to Arabic to make sure the meaning makes sense. That can be challenging because English grammar looks very different from Arabic.

For example, Arabic has no "to be" verb or the verb "do." Also, Arabic doesn't distinguish between the past and present in tenses. This requires different ways of processing time and space.

Grammar Differences

Arabic	English
❌ "to be"	✅ "to be"
❌ "do"	✅ "do"
❌ past tense	✅ past tense
❌ present tense	✅ present tense

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Thank you for allowing us to be your trusted guide as you look to take advantage of one of the fastest-growing markets in the world!

To successfully expand into the EMEA region, it's critical to respect cultural differences while maintaining your brand voice. To do so, your localization strategy must be comprehensive, scalable, and efficient.

Smartling is how hundreds of the world's largest and most trusted brands manage their complex localization needs.

If you have any questions or want to learn more about our solutions, don't hesitate to reach out!

Learn more about Smartling's

Translation Management Platform and Language Services.

When you combine Smartling's translation platform features with professional translators, you get:

Tens of thousands of dollars saved

Hundreds of thousands of human hours saved

New languages launched instantly

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About Smartling

Our translation platform enables companies to create multilingual websites, marketing communications, and applications.

Smartling is the solution of choice for hundreds of B2B and B2C brands, including IHG, Tesla, Shopify, AstraZeneca, SurveyMonkey, Pinterest, and Lyft. Smartling is headquartered in New York, with offices in Dublin and London.

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