

EDUCATION

What to Look for in a Translation Solution: A Buyer's Guide for School Districts

Nine features to seek out (and the questions to ask) to unify and simplify translation for your school district



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retour à l'école

la tarea de hoy



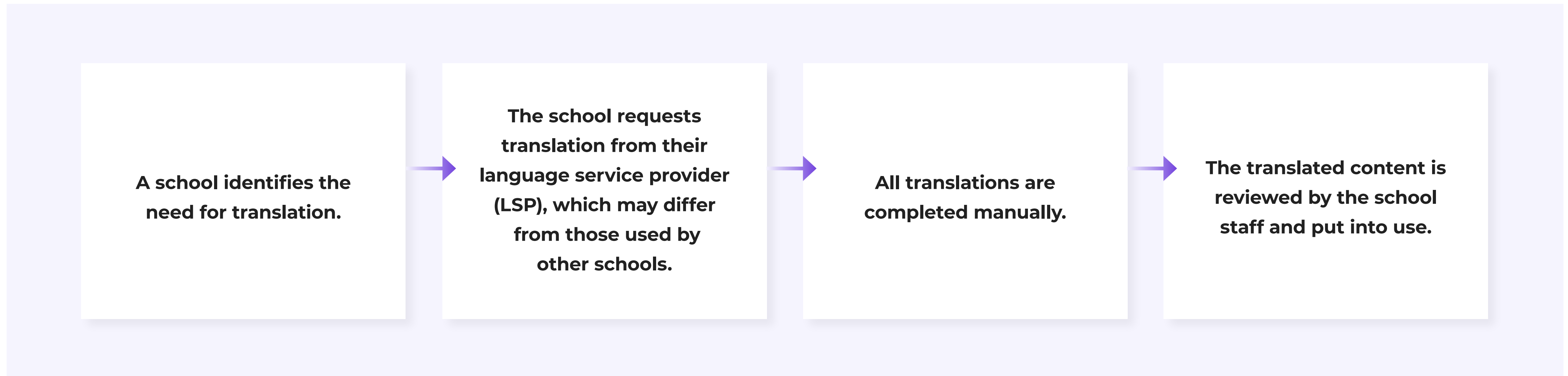
Contents

03	Introduction
08	What are the main problems school districts face when creating translations?
14	Nine key features to look for in a translation solution
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Workflow management and automation2. Integration to your existing tech stack3. Communication and work tools for translators4. Linguistic asset support5. Quality control and consistency6. Centralized reporting and visibility7. Scalability and security8. Translation or language services9. LanguageAI, including AI-powered translation
33	Conclusion

As populations within school districts become more diverse, the need to translate educational content and communications is increasingly evident. Implementing a successful translation and localization strategy poses a challenge for any organization.

This challenge is often even more pronounced for school districts with numerous individual schools making translation requests, often unnecessarily complicating the process.

The standard translation workflow for one school district with over 100 schools:



This strategy illustrates a prevalent scenario for translation processes within school districts. The inherent problem with this approach lies in the use of slow, manual processes which can result in students and families being without vital information for days, or even weeks.

In addition, this decentralized process exposes school districts and individual schools to redundant efforts, inefficient use of translation funds, and inconsistencies in communications.

Fortunately, advances in technology have made it so that school districts can meet the individual, unique needs of schools while also maintaining central control and driving consistency throughout translated materials.

It is time that school districts leverage this technology for their translation solution — specifically by investing in the right translation management system.

For school districts that haven't automated their translation process yet, here's a bit of a primer: A Translation Management System (TMS) is a means of automating content collection, managing workflow,

and ensuring quality and delivery of translated content. It's also an ecosystem that provides translators with the tools they need to translate content with the highest quality possible quality.

Finally, it helps streamline communications between team members and linguists around the globe.

Introduction



Introduction

Most school districts rely solely on manual translation, often using internal resources, contracted resources, or an LSP to support their ever-growing translation volume. So, using technology for translation may seem like a monumental shift in strategy. However, as school budgets get tighter and the expectations for multilingual content grow in the community, using tools like a TMS offers a way to keep up.

This guide is here to help you begin evaluating these new translation tools and solutions. We outline key features to look for and questions to ask based on our experience working with school districts to transform their translation process. Before going into more detail about those key features, here are some insights into what gives school districts doing translations their biggest headaches.

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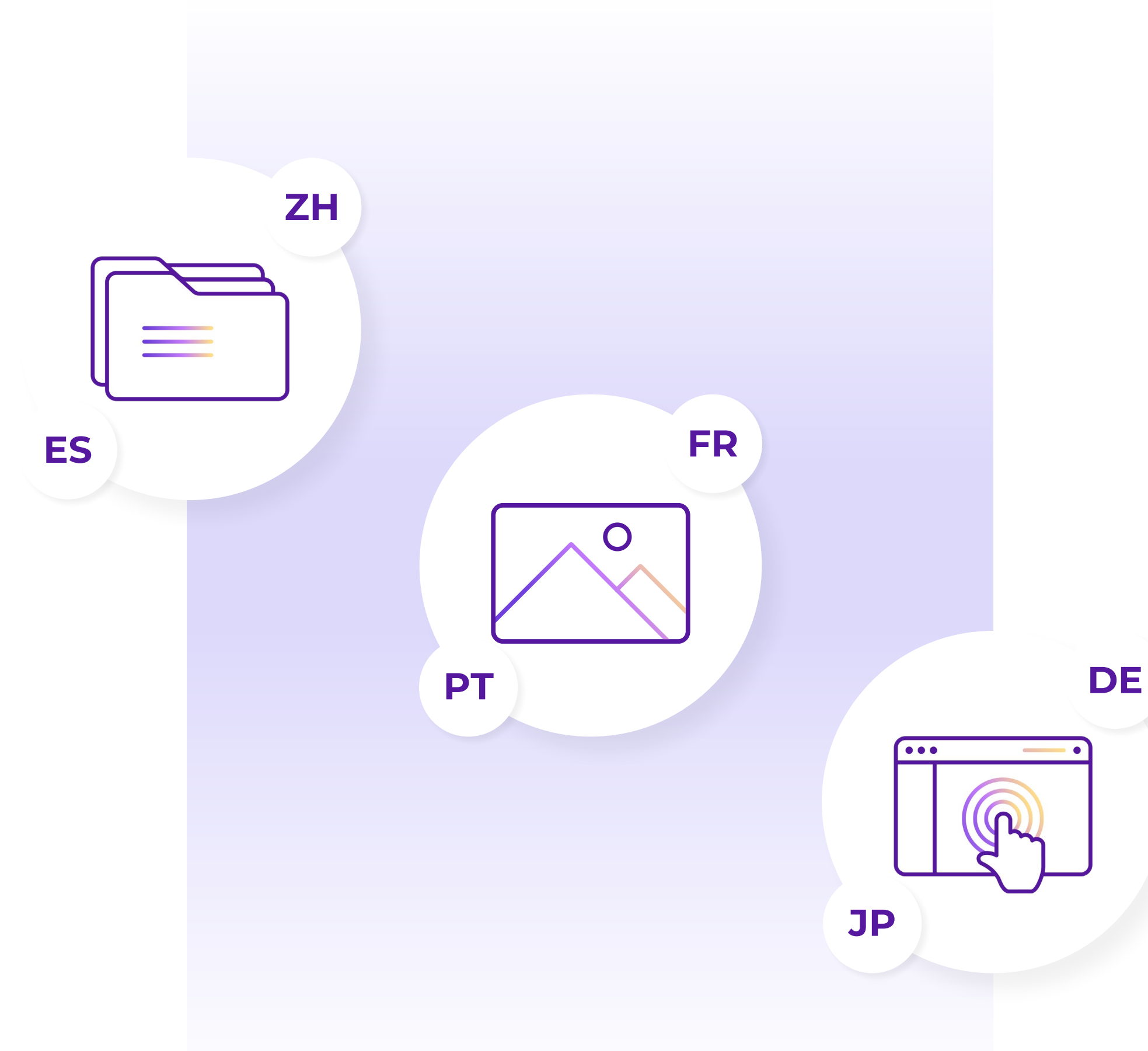
What are the main problems school districts face when creating translations?



Problem #1

One of the main difficulties school districts face with translations revolves around the sheer volume of content they need to translate. While translation needs may seem manageable at first, it can quickly spiral out of control as more and more schools begin translating.

The purpose of the content matters, too, whether it is for student individual education plans or a school website. For example, a school may be required to translate individualized education plans into the native language of students. They may also need to translate their websites into a certain number of state-mandated languages. Lastly, they may want to start offering translated versions of learning materials for students in the classroom. The issue then becomes, how to make a translation available for use across these various scenarios and potentially more as their student population becomes increasingly diverse.



Problem #2

A second problem involves making sure that translations are completed efficiently. For example, school districts shouldn't have to pay for the same content to be translated a second (or third) time. When a translation from English to Spanish is completed for one school in the district, the same translation process shouldn't happen again when the phrase is needed for another school.

It sounds obvious that redundant work should be avoided. But it happens all too often and leads to quality issues — especially when multiple people are responsible for translation and are using different methods — if there aren't processes in place that encourage automation and streamlined workflows.

The Great Outdoors



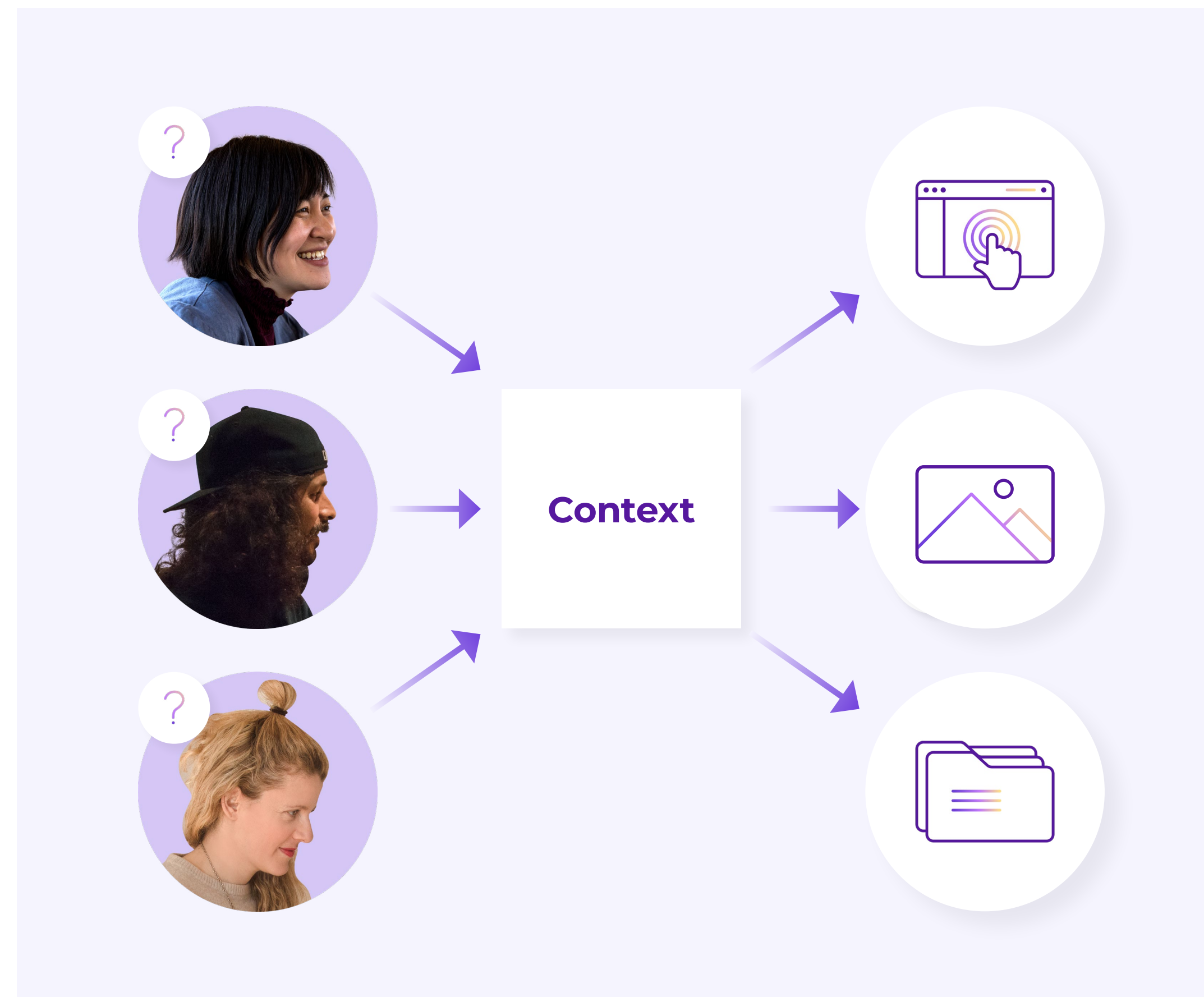
Les Grands Espaces

Los Grandes Espacios

Problem #3

Third, once materials are in the hands of the right translators, problems often arise around ensuring that those translators can consistently produce high-quality translations across content types. Providing context and information regarding where a translation will live is a significant factor here.

If a translator only receives a sentence or body of text in a spreadsheet, they may have no idea that it is part of a website, chart, or graph. For example, if a translator is translating a single word on a website, he or she may need to translate it a particular way if that word lives in the top navigation of the website, compared to in the body text.



All of this is costly.

Tangible cost drivers include prolonged back and forth, redundant work, and manual tasks, which make completing localization projects on time and within budget extremely challenging. But just as crucial to consider are the intangible costs — namely quality. These challenges increase the possibility of translation errors.

If a school district faces any or all of these problems, it is time to consider investing in a full-scale translation solution. Automating the translation process and working with experienced linguists will result in cost savings and an accelerated time to market. Still, cost-effectiveness shouldn't come at the expense of quality. The right translation solution will help school districts build consistency across locations, define which individuals own a process, improve transparency, and ultimately lead to higher-quality translations.

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The solution: Next-generation translation management solution

Before any outreach to potential partners begins, it's important to understand which elements of a translation solution are essential and which will be desirable in the coming years. Buyers should consider their business goals, how their localization strategy will achieve those, and how they envision a translation solution fitting into their established workflows.

The questions that should always be top of mind are:

- Will it work in my school district?
- Will it help accomplish our goals?
- Can we afford it at scale?

Will it work in my school district?

Will it help accomplish our goals?

Can we afford it at scale?

Nine key features to look for in a translation solution.

All are essential.

1 Workflow management
and automation

2 Integration to your
existing tech stack

3 Communication and
work tools for translators

4 Linguistic asset support

5 Quality control and
consistency

6 Centralized
reporting and visibility

7 Scalability and security

8 Translation or
language services

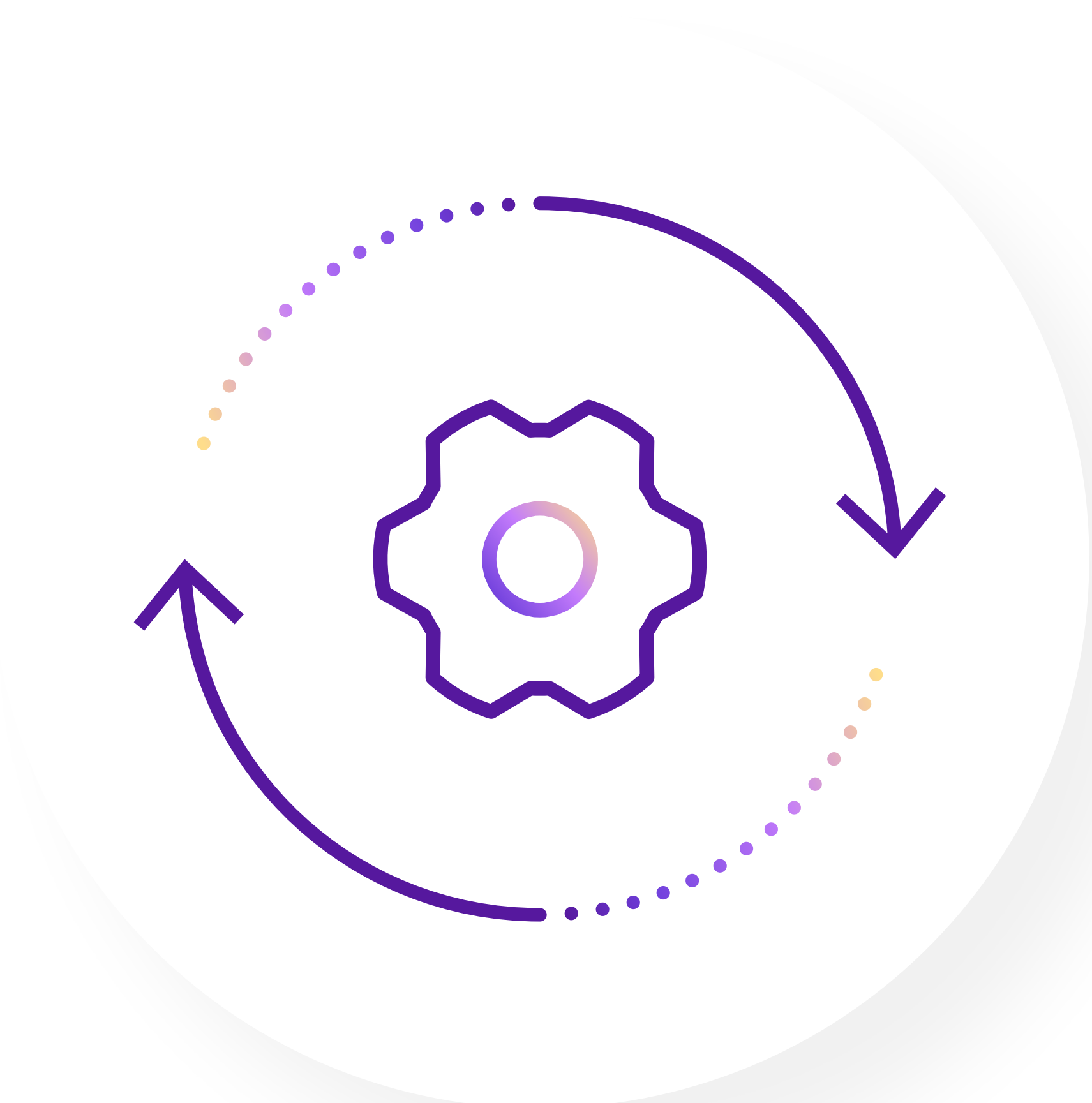
9 LanguageAI, including
AI-powered translation

Feature #1

Workflow management and automation

The best translation solutions offer powerful workflow configuration. You should be able to use any mix of vendors and internal resources you wish, and assigning (or unassigning) users to each workflow step should be simple and eliminate manual processes. This should be configurable at the account and project level so that individual schools can have flexibility where needed but the school district can also retain some control.

Your translation solution should also provide analytics to determine the best workflow for each content type. At Smartling, we refer to this as optimizing your translation mix: Customers can choose to have certain content go through the traditional human-only



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

workflow and have other content go through a machine translation (or AI translation) workflow, optimizing cost and quality.

Finally, as buyers map out the stages of their translation process and where each vendor fits in, they need to move translation projects from one step (and sometimes vendor) to the next. Automation is a critical feature to look for here, as having a human play the role of conductor invites delays unnecessarily. Once authorized for translation, content should instead flow smoothly through the workflow, with the translation management system analyzing and routing your content based on a set of parameters you choose.



Questions to ask:

- **Describe your multi-vendor capabilities.**
- **Can internal and external translators and reviewers be incorporated into the process?**
- **Can workflows be set at the account and project level?**

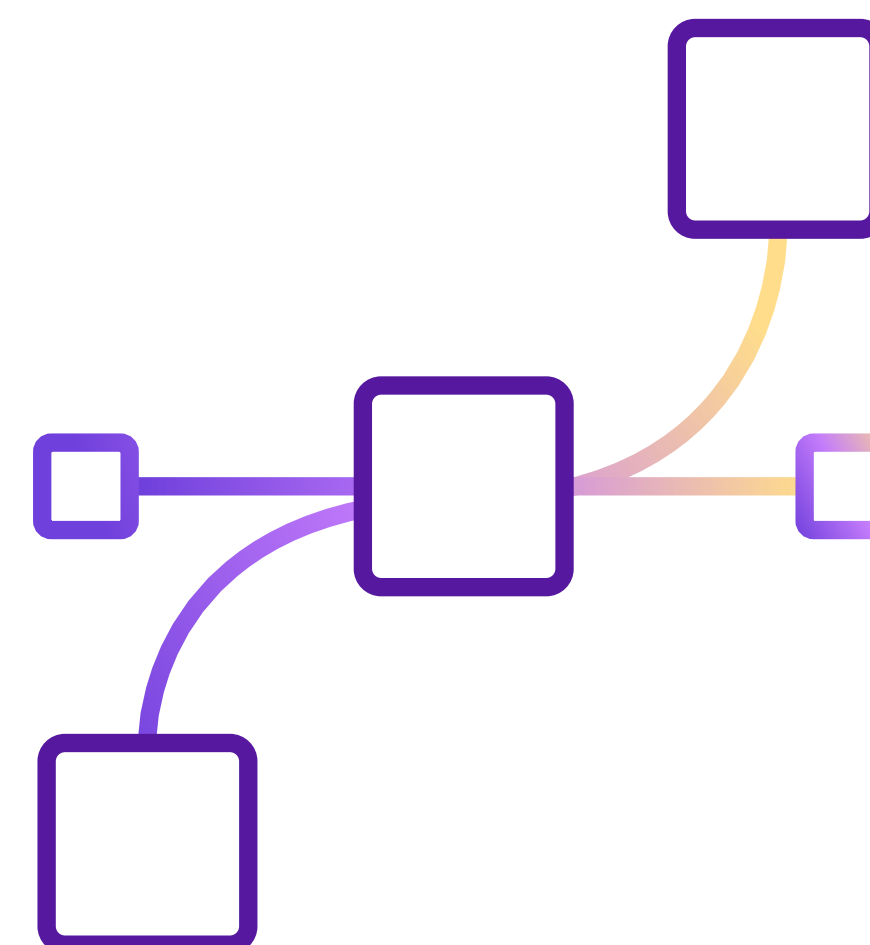
Feature #2

Integration to your existing tech stack

Many school districts start by utilizing simple drag-and-drop for translations. With the right translation provider, this step should be straightforward.

Consider what support there is for specific file formats your school district uses:

- Can teachers send in their education plans as PDFs, word documents, or other text files?
- Will you have proper support for HTML files, including landing pages and email templates?
- Can you translate promotional materials for after school programs that might come in InDesign, Photoshop, or other graphics formats?



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

Even if you start with drag-and-drop, you'll want to choose a translation solution that has the ability to grow with your needs. Meaning that there should also be easy solutions for translating your website, syncing with your email automation platform, or connecting to other elements of your software stack. That will make it easy to send content for translation without leaving the applications you use daily.



Questions to ask:

- **What is your drag-and-drop solution?**
- **What file types are supported?**
- **What integration options does your solution offer?**

Feature #3

Communication and work tools for translators

Anyone who works with your content needs to know its context, which includes the original format and layout as well as where the translated text will appear. It is also invaluable to have an open line of communication with you or other key stakeholders to ask questions that arise as they work and to get timely answers. Otherwise, a translator may need to make assumptions, which could lead to lower accuracy and output that may not align with your goals.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

Make sure your chosen translation solution sets your translators up for success. At Smartling, for example, translators work with a feature-rich CAT (Computer Assisted Translation) tool directly in the Smartling platform, eliminating the need to download files and work offline in order to see full visual context. They can easily refer to your linguistic assets when translating — more on that next — and ask for clarification or flag issues to you without leaving the platform.



Questions to ask:

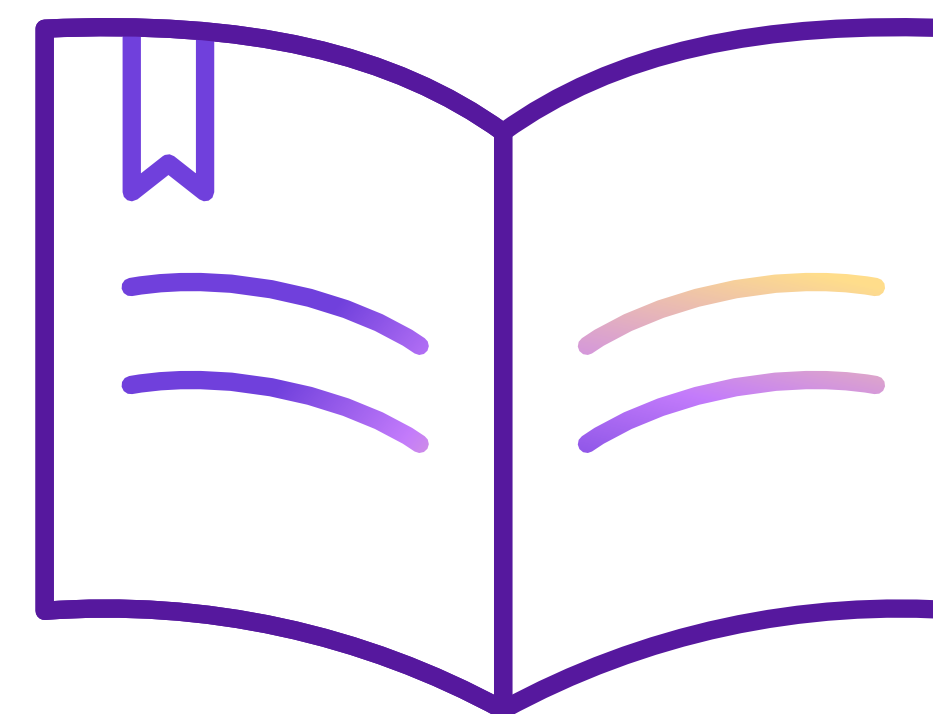
- **Is direct communication between customers and translators possible, and if so, how does it work?**
- **Do you provide visual context for the translators, and if so, how?**
- **Please provide an overview of the translator tools in your system. How do those support translation quality?**

Feature #4

Linguistic asset support

Translation memory is a database containing your previous translations. Other linguistic assets include your glossary, which dictates how preferred terms should be translated, and your style guide, which answers broad questions about how a translation should sound or the impression it should leave with readers. It can also include rules to follow in specific situations and answer questions about formal, informal, or casual registers needed for different content types.

At the bare minimum, your translation solution should make storing and updating your linguistic assets a breeze, ensuring that the most up-to-date versions are easily accessible in real time to all.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

For school districts, this means that you can utilize translation memory across all schools to save money over time and reduce duplication of effort.

If you're just starting out with translation technology, you'll want to look for a vendor that allows you to use old translation memory files or previous translations to develop a base translation memory as a starting point. Savvy translation buyers also look to partner with a translation provider that takes a proactive approach to linguistic asset management and can help them optimize those assets for higher-quality translations.



Questions to ask:

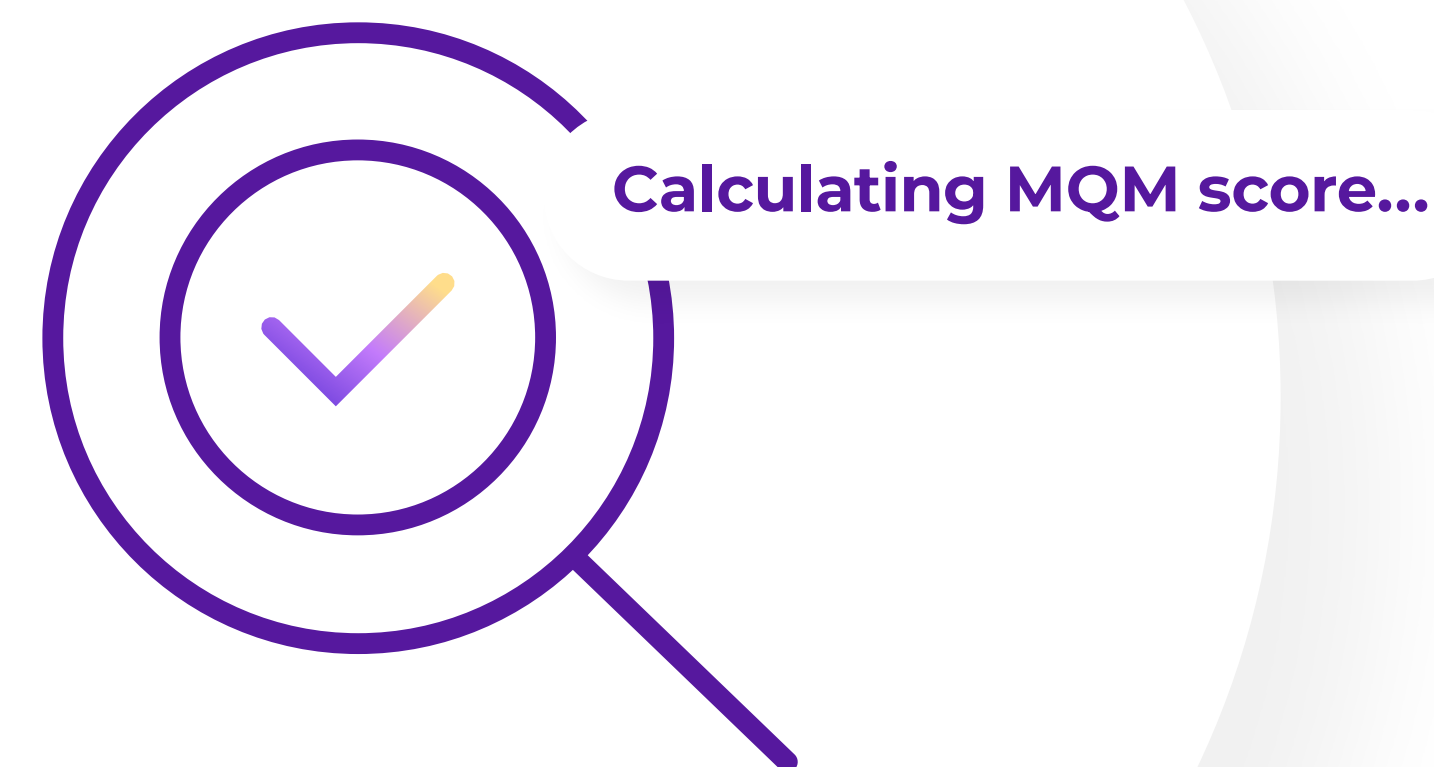
- **Can linguists access real-time changes to the translation memory from other collaborators, and if so, how does this function?**
- **Please describe your solution's glossary and terminology management capabilities.**
- **Can instructions and reference materials be added to the translatable content?**

Feature #5

Quality control and consistency

School districts need a TMS that ensures high-quality, consistent translations across various languages and content types. Parents and students rely on this translated content to get accurate information about their education, so errors are not acceptable.

Measuring translation quality, much less guaranteeing satisfaction with high-quality work, has been a longstanding challenge for those in localization. Therefore, an essential element to look for is a solution that can help you measure and control the quality of your translations.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

It is advisable to choose a vendor that offers both technology and services that make it easy to assess quality for your program. This includes quality evaluation tools that fit easily into existing workflows and reduce manual work, such as taking translations out of the platform for assessment.

Quality evaluation services should include independent auditors to mitigate bias and the flexibility to scale evaluations across multiple locales. Finally, quality reporting should be transparent and easily accessible — we'll talk more about that in the following section.



Questions to ask:

- **How do you define and measure quality?**
- **What quality evaluation services are available?**
- **Do you offer a quality satisfaction guarantee?**

Feature #6

Centralized reporting and visibility

Most school districts want to make decisions based on facts and accurate data. A good translation partner will provide access to data via a combination of real-time and on-demand reports.

School districts should look for a vendor that makes it easy to glean actionable insights about all aspects of the translation process, such as pre-translation cost estimates, platform usage, resource productivity, content quality, and total translation spend. All of these metrics can help you evaluate how your translation program is working and make changes to improve the process for schools.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

The best translation providers provide drill-down reports on each translation project and locale and aggregate data across all the business's content and languages. Key stakeholders like trustees and school board members should be able to download the reports or view the results in a digestible format via an in-app dashboard in near real-time to make evaluating performance a straightforward endeavor that doesn't take up a lot of time.



Questions to ask:

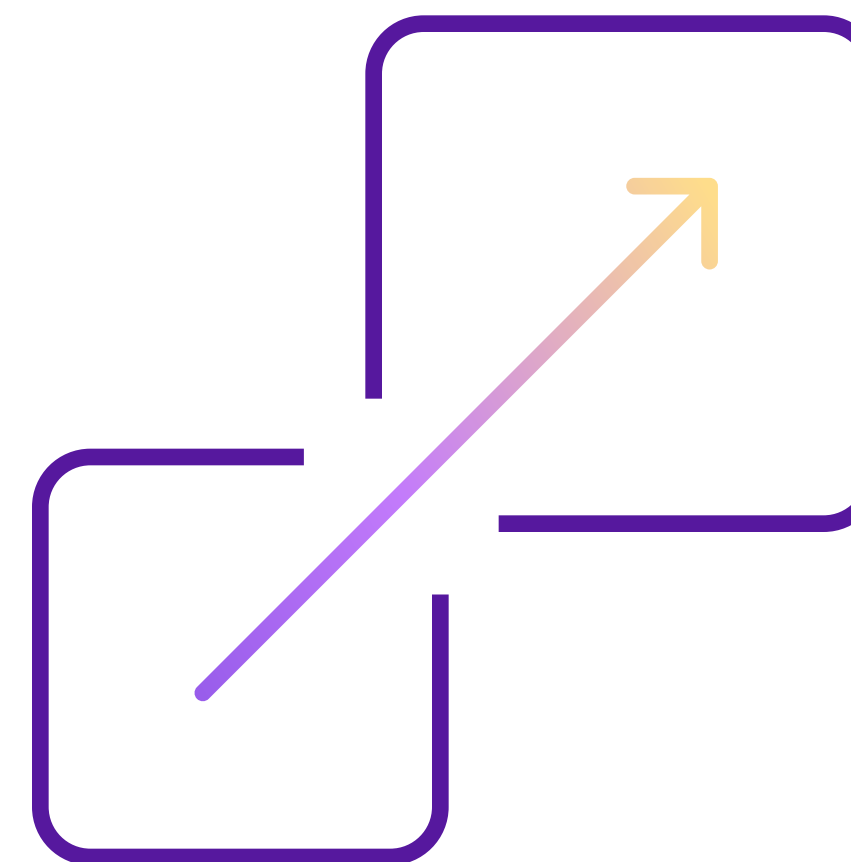
- **Do you provide automatic and immediate cost estimates for projects?**
- **What reporting capabilities are available?**
- **What review capabilities does your system have?**

Feature #7

Scalability and security

School districts must place a lot of trust in their translation solution. Cybersecurity threats abound, and while compliance with the latest security standards is something translation buyers should generally expect from their vendor, the details matter.

Security standards and certifications should include the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), SSAE 16 SOC2, PCI DSS L1, and HIPAA. When inquiring about language services, also ask about compliance with ISO 17100 standards.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

Uptime is another critical factor. Vendors should offer at least 99.99% uptime. For example, Smartling's web proxy, which guarantees a 99.99% uptime — or less than one hour of downtime per year compared to a vendor that boasts 99% uptime is still allowing for a little over 3.5 days of downtime per year.

The solution should also be a multi-tenant Software as a Service offering, ensuring rapid and frequent updates, bug fixes, security patches and enhancements. For example, Smartling's world class engineering deploys over 3,000 releases per year on a continuous basis — this is world class.



Questions to ask:

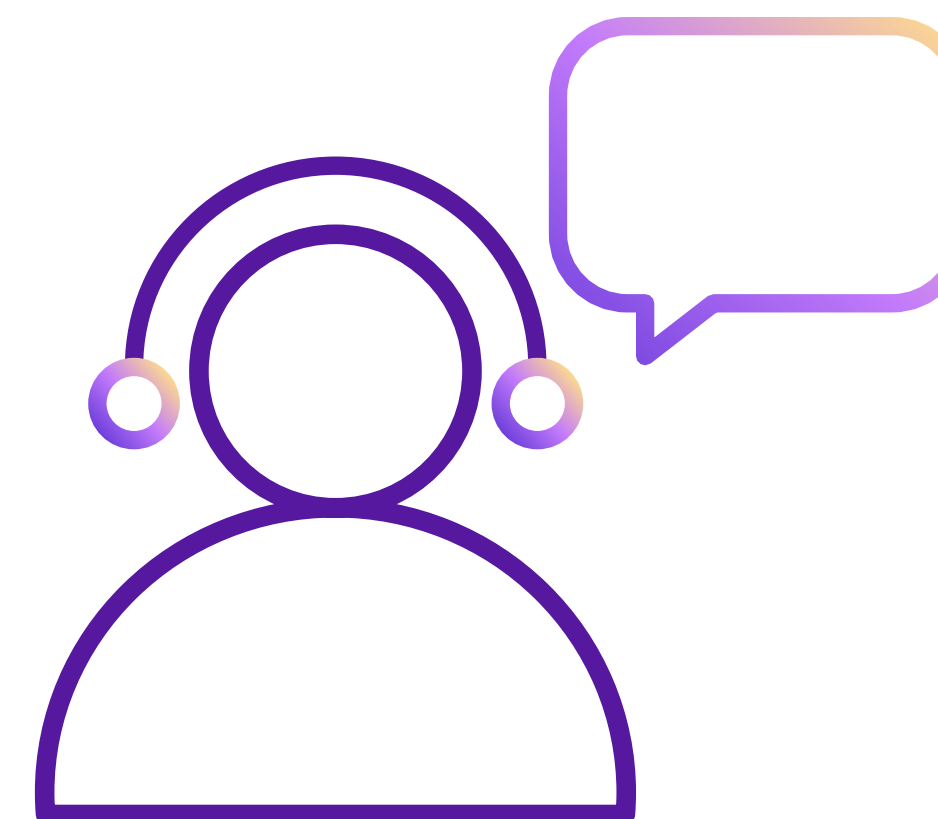
- **What are your security and data protection standards?**
- **What is your business continuity plan?**
- **Share performance statistics regarding your solution including uptime guarantee.**
- **How frequently do you release product updates?**

Feature #8

Translation or language services

With so many options, shopping for a translation solution can be daunting. School districts may feel like they must split their focus: identify a robust TMS and, separately, find a competent LSP to support all their translation needs. Then, once they decide which TMS and LSP to use, their days often fill up with the minutiae of managing individual translation projects instead of focusing on their overarching localization strategy.

It sounds exhausting! But it doesn't have to be.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

School districts should look for a solution that can support every element of their translation process — from providing them with a feature-rich TMS to offering high-quality language services, complete with expert translation project managers and a fully vetted pool of seasoned translators.

School districts should also inquire whether they can offload some or all of their internal, day-to-day localization tasks, such as account administration, resource management, and training, to their prospective translation provider before deciding to buy.



Questions to ask:

- **What are the benefits of combining your language services and your software?**
- **Will customers work with a dedicated project manager?**
- **What support options do you offer?**

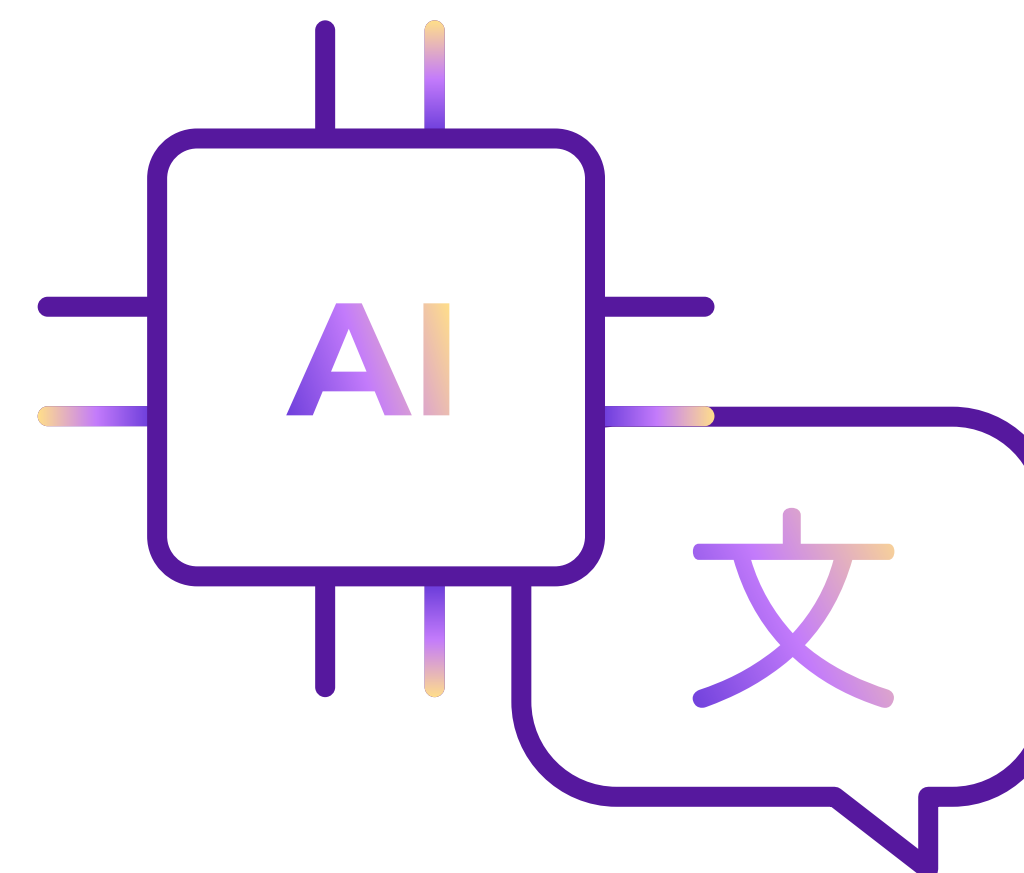
Feature #9

LanguageAI

(Including AI-powered translation)

There is a lot of excitement around artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning — and for good reason. There is a strong potential for these technologies to transform entire industries. Many of the most promising applications in the localization space are still relatively new. However, we're already seeing how they can help deliver high-quality results at scale, all while saving time and money.

Examples of current applications include workflows combining AI and machine translation (MT) with the expertise of human translators to produce human-quality translations for less and the automatic application of linguistic assets.



Nine key features to look for in a translation solution

Such technologies are also being used to make quick work of adjusting the level of formality of a text, identifying and removing gender bias in translations, and even proactively evaluating the quality of every translation delivered.

This is a solution that more school districts are considering and applying as the cost reduction associated with these technologies does not come with a decrease in quality. Buyers who want to reap the benefits of these cutting-edge technologies should look for a solution that is actively exploring ways to incorporate them throughout the translation process as a means to do more with less.



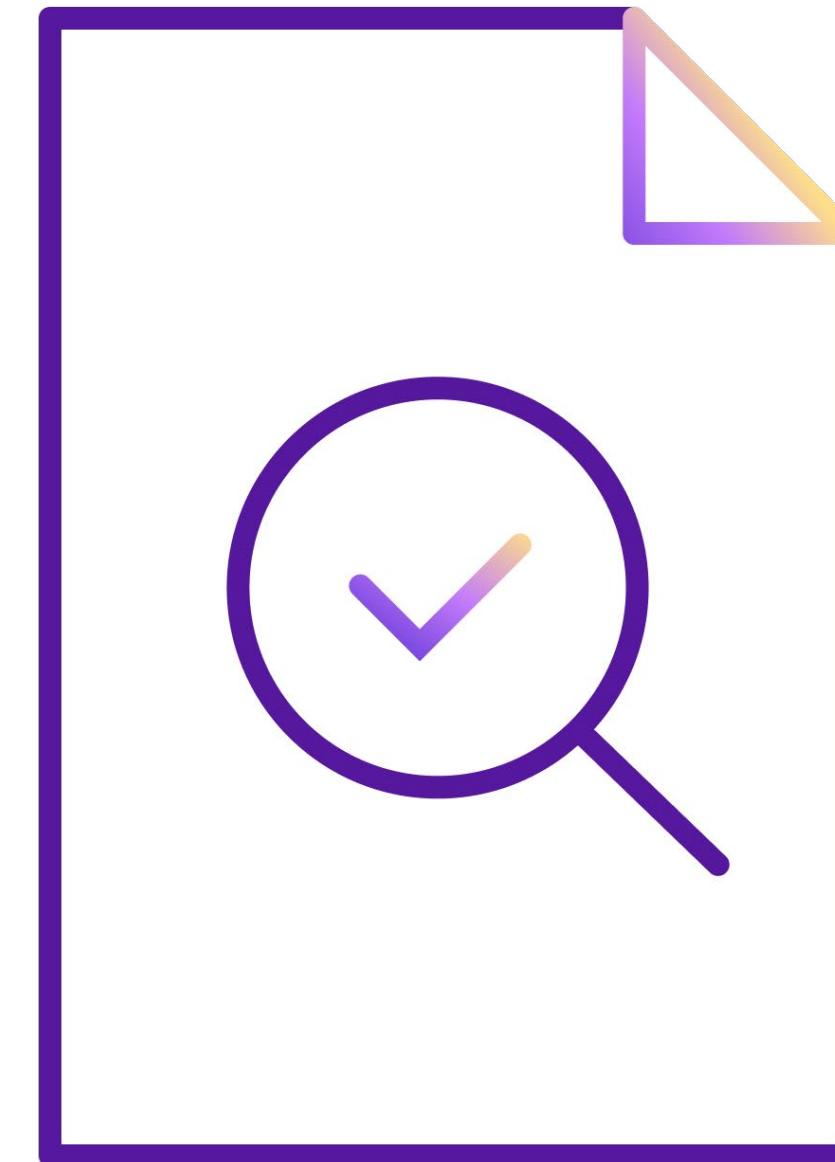
Questions to ask:

- **How does your workflow incorporate AI to improve quality, increase efficiency, and reduce costs?**
- **Does your MT offering support the use of translation memory and glossaries?**
- **How do you use, or recommend using, large language models (LLMs) in the translation process?**

Conclusion

To summarize, all nine of these key features are what school districts should expect from a next-generation translation solution.

Today's translation solutions are customizable, configurable, and adaptable so you can meet the needs of individual schools while also maintaining control centrally for your district.



Conclusion

An effective translation solution should create a totally new approach to translation. It should effortlessly connect school districts with the right resources and innovative tools that make it easy to manage the localization process from end to end.

Yet, it should also enable schools to be as hands-off or hands-on as they wish by offering a number of different features and services that do the heavy lifting for them. This way, schools can deliver the translated content that their students and parents need, while still being able to maintain focus on education.

Are you already translating or thinking about translation in your school district?

Learn more about Smartling's end-to-end translation solution at [smartling.com](https://www.smartling.com)

About Smartling

Smartling's LanguageAI™ platform is revolutionizing the translation and localization of the world's digital content. Named as the top translation management system by CSA Research and by users on G2, Smartling harnesses AI and machine learning to enable the automation of workflows, integrates seamlessly with existing tech stacks and measures and improves translation quality at enterprise scale for a fraction of the cost of traditional translation.

Smartling is the platform of choice for hundreds of B2B and B2C brands, including IHG Hotels & Resorts, State Farm, British Airways, and Lyft. Smartling is headquartered in New York with an office in Dublin.



hi@smartling.com

1 (866) 707-6278

smartling.com