



Does translation software work?

In today's technologically savvy world, there are a variety of translation methods used by businesses in attempt to communicate with clients and vendors who speak different languages. We live in a constantly changing global economy. The heavy influence of the internet and easy access to free software programs often colors the view of savvy professionals with regard to the complexity of Japanese language translation. The illusion is that if I just simply copy and past my English letter into a box, today's technology toys will spit out an accurate translation for free.

Bilingual individuals are all in agreement that while software may work reasonably well with European languages, even the most expensive translation software programs yield virtually cryptic results when attempting to translate from English into Japanese, via the word by word approach. Cultural context and situational experience is missing.

A few years ago as an interpreter, I had access to a \$1400 translation program to aid work speed, but even this best in the industry software on a Japanese computer made mistakes in nearly every line of translation. Similarly, sometimes companies believe that a \$300 hundred dollar software program will teach employees enough Japanese to conduct business in Japanese. In truth, even the most famous programs only teach collegiate, first year level Japanese.

It is important to be realistic about language learning; most quality education requires time. Logically, it takes most Americans approximately twelve years of compulsory education to learn enough English to be considered to have adult "fluency" in English. This education standard is also at work in other countries with other languages. Then think about the amount of time it takes to master the lingo and terminology of a professional specialty. Therefore, it stands to reason that like any well-taught traditional art that has been imported from Japan to date, it could take between two to four years studying in a disciplined learning system to master the intricacies of Japanese as a foreign language simply for social competence.

While there may be exceptional learners out there, reflecting on language learning in a realistic light makes it seem unlikely that a free on-line translation software is going to be able to capture the heart of a business message in a matter of minutes and compute the proper translation for a business document. Or that a computer program is going to be able to teach an employee how to strategize for working with Japanese clients. Technology just cannot offer the necessary experienced based wisdom.

Seasoned native speaking instructors and professional interpreters can guide professionals committed to business excellence in the right direction. Students in quality learning programs can use the twenty to thirty years of experience of their instructors to their advantage. Instructors and interpreters can help serious professionals strategize how to conduct business for the cross-cultural win-win, positively impacting all involved in YOUR business transactions.