

Translating for the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical Industries

Ana María Paredes

The translation of documents generated by the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical industries carries a myriad of challenges for translators that are not commonly found when translating for other industries.

Most companies associated with the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical industries are headquartered or have offices in the U.S. Gulf Coast region. From their Gulf Coast hubs, they conduct business across the globe. In this industry, documents needing translation into and from English usually originate in Latin America and Africa. The bulk of the translations are into and from Spanish, generated by businesses located in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, and sometimes from other countries in South and Central America and the Caribbean. Translations into and from Portuguese are mostly from Brazil, though sometimes from Africa, and translations into and from French are associated with business conducted in Africa. Documents going to and from Europe and the Far and Middle East rarely require translation as they are usually written in English.

Some of the challenges facing the translator in these industries are:

I. Vocabulary: Keeping up with all of the terminology in the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical Industries can be very challenging for a number of reasons.

- A. Because the fields within the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical industries are so diverse, the translator has to know many different vocabularies. For example, in the area of exploration and upstream production of oil and gas, extraction location alone splits into two types: inland and offshore, with offshore splitting into shallow or deep waters, with well-defined reservoirs or with challenging formations that require advanced technologies. Other fields include: downstream production of oil and gas products (gasoline, diesel, liquefied gas) and the construction of new refining plants or the modernization of old ones in order to adapt to new techniques, just to mention a few. A tender from Latin America may include many document sections: terms and conditions, general specifications, targeted specifications, scope of work, engineering design requirements, deliverables, etc.; the list can go on and on.
- B. Perhaps the greatest challenge is translating technical terms. Technical documents related to the engineering, design and construction of petrochemical plants require knowledge of terms used in the diverse fields of design, engineering and construction. The usual major fields of engineering are Chemical, Civil, Mechanical, Electrical and Instrumentation.

There are always HSE (Health, Safety and Environmental) specifications requiring translation. There are also terms associated with the procurement of materials and the assembly of equipment, piping and instruments, not to mention transportation, housing, risk analysis and related fields.

- C. You will find that Oil and Gas documents have different technical terminology than Petrochemical ones. In addition in both industries, many new terms are constantly being added as new technologies are developed. Many new technical terms in oil and gas deal with work offshore, especially deep-water exploration. In addition, there are new technologies, such as horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracking, which at this time are mostly employed in land formations. All these technologies are constantly evolving and improving, and new terms are certain to surprise you on your next project, regardless of your experience in the field.
- D. There are also specific terms associated with pipeline construction and maritime work, which may be similar to those used by companies doing international business in engineering and construction service industries.
- E. To complicate matters even more, different countries have developed their own terminology, so you may find that "procurement" may be commonly translated in Mexico as "procura de materiales," but in Colombia it may be "compra o adquisición," in Venezuela "provisión," and in Argentina "obtención" to mention just a few. Specifically when translating into Spanish, it is important to research the term to make sure you are using the term most widely used in the target country. A good example is the term "flare," which is frequently translated as "antorcha," "tea," "quemador," "chimenea," "mechero," "mechurrio," etc.
- F. The translation of tender documents and contracts into English and proposal and contract documents into the target language include legal and financial sections too. A thorough knowledge of the translation of contracts is necessary to understand and be able to convey precisely the ambiguities that are sometimes a very important part of the document.

II. Fast turn-around time

- G. The turnaround for a translation of this type is usually very short. A request for bids or tenders from a client needs to be translated into English very quickly to allow the US Company to understand the technical requirements, terms and conditions of the tender and decide if they are going to bid the potential job or decline it. **There is always a deadline.**

H. The response of the US Company in most cases needs to be translated back from English into the target language, and the turnaround is almost always impossible to meet. Be prepared to work long hours and weekends to meet deadlines.

III. Special formatting issues

I. In addition, most of the time, the technical documents include tabular sections requiring time consuming formatting with narrow columns and/or line spacing, showing lists of items requiring research from different sources to convey a concise meaning in the target language.

Things that help with the challenges

Standard documents

Because in Latin America, Oil and Gas and Petrochemical business is mostly developed by government agencies, over the years, standard documents for various categories of tender have been developed. As a result, although some private companies are now entering the field, in general, the translator can develop expertise in a specific field and become familiar with the terms used within a particular country.

Resources

Google search

Searches on the Internet are very useful; however, as with any other subject, do not accept a translation blindly, without researching the meaning of the original term as well as the suggested translation. The translator must research a term until he/she understands its meaning, before attempting to translate it. Your best bet is to use Google. Use the advanced search feature and limit your search by language and/or country. For example, write a word in English in the search box and tell Google to look for it only in Spanish. Use the "define" function on Google: type the word "define" followed by a colon, followed by the term you are trying to understand, in the search box.

Website glossary

One website that is extremely helpful is the Schlumberger Glossary (www.glossary.oilfield.slb.com); currently it has an English and a Spanish section. And now you can access the glossary on your mobile device. It does not offer translation, but by checking the glossary's description of a term you can find the term's equivalent and, most importantly, understand the meaning of the term. The glossary includes diagrams of systems, which are very useful and help you to visualize the different items.

Industry websites

Most institutional websites contain lots of information. For example, the American Petroleum Institute is very useful. They have English<>Spanish dictionaries, plus you can search their standards for the terminology used.

In Latin America, most state oil companies have websites and some of them, such as Ecopetrol, include glossaries (<http://www.ecopetrol.com.co/contenido.aspx?catID=342&conID=41727>), while others, like Petroperu, have links to their publications (<http://www.petroperu.com.pe/portalweb/index.asp?Idioma=2>). In addition, some private companies also have glossaries that are useful when verifying use in a specific target country, for example, Guatemala (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/190345604/PROMISA-OTROS-Glosario-Petroleo>). There is a website about the history of the Mexican petroleum industry (<http://petroleo.colmex.mx/index.php/glosarios>) that has links to PEMEX glossaries as well as glossaries from the U.S. Department of Labor and the UK. The many different divisions of PEMEX all have their own glossaries online; although most are just in Spanish, some have translations into English.

com.co/contenido.aspx?catID=342&conID=41727), while others, like Petroperu, have links to their publications (<http://www.petroperu.com.pe/portalweb/index.asp?Idioma=2>). In addition, some private companies also have glossaries that are useful when verifying use in a specific target country, for example, Guatemala (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/190345604/PROMISA-OTROS-Glosario-Petroleo>). There is a website about the history of the Mexican petroleum industry (<http://petroleo.colmex.mx/index.php/glosarios>) that has links to PEMEX glossaries as well as glossaries from the U.S. Department of Labor and the UK. The many different divisions of PEMEX all have their own glossaries online; although most are just in Spanish, some have translations into English.

Technical dictionaries

A good technical dictionary is essential. One to consider is the *Routledge Spanish Technical Dictionary*. In addition, specialized oil industry dictionaries are very helpful. The Instituto Argentino del Petroleo y del Gas published an excellent English<>Spanish Dictionary called *Technical Dictionary of the Petroleum and Gas Industries*, but I understand it is currently out of print. Another good source of terminology is the *Glossary of Petroleum and Environment* published in Caracas, Venezuela in 2003. Caution: when using a technical dictionary, always second guess and double check that the word you have chosen has the same meaning as the original term.

Publications

If you want to learn about these industries, there are specialized magazines, like *Oil & Gas Journal* (<http://www.ogj.com>), that have very interesting and educational articles. Keep in mind that to read most articles you must register or subscribe. The websites of large oil and gas service companies like Schlumberger, Halliburton, Baker Hughes, etc. have information as well. Schlumberger publishes *Oilfield Review* (http://www.slb.com/resources/publications/oilfield_review.aspx), a quarterly publication about technological advances in the search for and production of hydrocarbons. It is available in English and Spanish, which makes it an excellent source of knowledge and terminology.

This list of the challenges of translating for the Oil and Gas and Petrochemical Industries should not discourage you from entering this field. It is challenging, yes, but it is also a good source of work and very interesting. ♦

Ana Maria Paredes has worked for over 30 years as a freelance translator and is ATA-certified in English<>Spanish. She also works as a conference and court interpreter. She has been certified to interpret and worked in the U.S. federal courts for almost 20 years and is licensed by the state of Texas. Prior to her work as a translator/interpreter, she taught Spanish for ten years. Because of geography, a great portion of her work is related in one way or another to the oil and gas business. anamaria@iatranslation.com

