

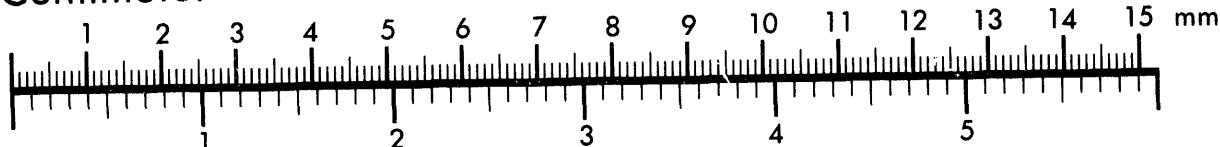


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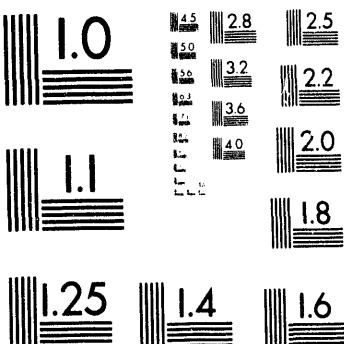
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*Title:* PREPARING TECHNICAL TEXT FOR TRANSLATION: A COMPARISON  
BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH AND METHODS FOR SIMPLIFYING  
LANGUAGE

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Preparing Technical Text for Translation:  
A Comparison Between International English and Methods for Simplifying  
Language

by  
Ileana Buican, Vivi Hriscu, and Mable Amador

*For the past four and a half years, the International Communication Committee at Los Alamos National Laboratory has been working to develop a set of guidelines for writing technical and scientific documents in International English, that is, English for those whose native language is not English. Originally designed for documents intended for presentation in English to an international audience of technical experts, the International English guidelines apply equally well to the preparation of English text for translation. This is the second workshop in a series devoted to the topic of translation. This time, we will focus on the advantages of using International English, rather than various methods of simplifying language, to prepare scientific and technical text for translation.*

The difficulties and pitfalls of translation have been the subject of numerous articles that stress the importance of starting a translation from a clear text in the source language. Translated text has to communicate the meaning and the flavor of the original document, and it has to sound right in the target language.

Communication and translation are facilitated when authors write in uncomplicated prose. Complicated, convoluted sentences and ambiguous, elliptical ways of presenting concepts make comprehension taxing and result in unintentional, yet often unavoidable, mistakes in translation.

Professional translators are primarily language experts, not technical experts. When they have to translate unfamiliar concepts that are presented ambiguously in the original text, they may miss the intended point of the original. To give only one example, consider the following sentence:

*Another potential problem is trapping air in a system that is tightly sealed.*

The translated version of this sentence changed "trapping air" to "how to trap air." Being unfamiliar with the technical concept, the translator did not know that air should not be present in the sealed system and that "trapping air" was an elliptical and, therefore, ambiguous way of saying "that air may get trapped." Scientists, whether they are native speakers of English or not, are able to fill in the shorthand in writing, but translators often are not. We must bear this fact in mind when preparing English text for translation.

Having recognized the need for documents in English that are easy to read and understand, the International Communication Committee at Los Alamos National Laboratory has been working for the past four and a half years to develop a set of guidelines for writing technical and scientific documents in International English, that is, English for those whose native language is not English. In developing our guidelines, our aim has been to isolate those areas of language that are particularly relevant to nonnative speakers of English and to focus on the sources of confusion that are most clearly related to cultural and linguistic differences.

We originally designed our guidelines for documents intended for presentation in English to an international audience of technical experts. Knowing that the guidelines would apply equally well to the preparation of English text for translation--translators are usually native speakers of the target language, not of the source language--we have applied our guidelines to preparing English technical text for translation into Russian, Spanish, and French.

This workshop is a second one in a series of workshops devoted to the topic of translation. This time, we will focus on the advantages of using International English, rather than various methods for simplifying language, to prepare scientific and technical text for translation.

Not unlike various methods for simplifying language, International English offers a set of guidelines to help writers present their ideas in a straightforward manner, so that those ideas will be more readily accessible to an international audience. However, this is where the similarities with methods for simplifying language end. International English does not reduce the variety of the English vocabulary, it does not impose limits on the length of sentences and paragraphs, and it does not restrict writers to using certain tenses, as do most methods for simplifying language. Indeed, the audience for and writers of International English are technical experts who need a rich vocabulary and a varied sentence structure to understand and to express technical and scientific ideas, which are often complex and highly specialized.

For our workshop, we will select a few of the International English guidelines (a complete list is given below) that best illustrate the differences between International English and several methods for simplifying language, and we will demonstrate why International English is the method of choice when preparing technical and scientific text for translation. We will then apply our guidelines to excerpts from technical documents intended for translation into French, Russian, and Spanish. Finally, the participants will get a hands-on experience by rewriting text intended for translation.

## **Guidelines for International English**

### **Vocabulary**

1. Avoid idioms.
2. Do not use the same technical term to describe two or more different concepts. Do not use more than one technical term to name the same concept.
3. Avoid using as part of your general vocabulary a term that has both a technical and a general meaning. Use a synonym for the general term.
4. Avoid useless jargon.
5. Avoid localized expressions.
6. Avoid acronyms, abbreviations, and initials.
7. Avoid wrong diction (incorrect word choice, fabricated terms, etc.)

### **Nouns**

1. Avoid overmodified nouns.
2. Avoid the apostrophe form of the possessive case for nouns modified by more than one word.
3. Use articles correctly.

### **Verbs**

1. Use the active voice whenever you can.
2. Use correct tenses to express the relation of one action to another in time.

## **Sentence Structure and Length**

1. Vary sentence structure and length, but make sure that long sentences are not compound/complex.
2. Use correct punctuation and lists to make a long sentence readable.
3. Avoid ellipses.

## **Miscellaneous**

1. Use a comma to set off restrictive and introductory elements in a sentence.
2. Use Standard International conventions for numerical notations.

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**Title of Paper: Preparing Technical Text for Translation: A Comparison Between International English and Methods for Simplifying Language**

**Biography:**

Ileana Buican was born in Romania. She obtained her undergraduate degree in England and her graduate degree in Canada. For many years, she taught English language and literature at various universities in Europe, Canada, and the United States. She speaks four languages and has a working knowledge of a fifth. Seven years ago, Ileana joined Los Alamos National Laboratory to work as a technical writer and editor. During this time, she has written or contributed to writing several brochures that make science available to the public. She has also edited many reports that were intended for publication at Los Alamos or for presentation in international scientific meetings.

Operations at Los Alamos involve international technology transfer and active scientific participation in international meetings; documents for these activities must be clear and readily accessible to an international audience. Together with Mable Amador, Vivi Hriscu, and a few others, Ileana Buican has been working on making technical documents in English clear and thus easier to understand and translate, if translation is necessary.

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