

## Style Guide for Community Translations into Arabic

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## **1. Audience and scope**

This style guide is intended for professional translators and translation checkers, and may also be useful for copyeditors, community review panels, and machine translation post-editors. The document sets the expectations for community translators in particular and outlines the preferred style for translations into Arabic. The document is unable to cover all the relevant translation, language and style issues, but focuses on aspects that have been judged important based on a review of Arabic translations currently available in Australia. The style guide was prepared with the understanding that translators undertaking translation work for public services would have already received adequate training and/or NAATI certification.

## **2. Background**

Both in Australia and worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of timely, accurate and effective translation – probably more than any other phenomenon or crisis. Governments, community organisations and leaders, the media, and people in general have had to deal with or hear about the need for translation to communicate public health advice to all residents, regardless of their first language. Translation has been in the spotlight – mostly because of its essential contribution to health literacy and public health, but sometimes also because of translation or production errors.

Community translations play a key role in public messaging. They facilitate communication between governmental and non-governmental services and end users who speak a language other than English. Community translations allow departments, agencies and services to reach out to CALD communities, and facilitate access to public information and instructions that would be inaccessible due to language barriers. Community translations are also effective communication tools with community members who have a functional command of English but prefer to receive information in their LOTE. Public messaging through the target audience’s first language or the language they emotionally identify with, is likely to have more impact.

Community translations are part of the communication strategies of organisations that publish content to inform and educate the Australian public, including in healthcare, legal, social service, educational and other sectors. The value of translations therefore lies in the extent to which they are communicatively effective and fit for purpose. Back in 2014, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care noted: ‘There has been some concern that translation of information about health and health care is not done consistently and to a high standard.’ ([Health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality](#)). Such concern is still current, at least in relation to some published translations. A translation may be at the highest standard in terms of language correctness and accuracy, but it also needs to communicate contents in a way that suits the target audience, helps them understand information and act upon it.

As professional translators are well aware, translation does not consist of replacing words in one language with ‘equivalent’ words in another, or mirroring phrases and sentences found

in the source text. It needs to convey the messages of the source text, keeping in mind the type of text being translated and its communicative function. For public messaging, in particular, translations also need to read and flow ‘naturally’, appear credible, and be suitable for the target audience, so that they can use, understand and act upon the messaging.

### 3. Translation approach

There is wide agreement that a communicative or functionalist approach to translation is the most appropriate, especially for community translations. In this approach **the translator is guided by the function of the text, rather than the words or sentences themselves.**

Two broad categories of texts are translated for the benefit of CALD communities: regulatory texts and informative/instructive texts.

Regulatory texts define procedures, rights, entitlements and obligations in a formal tone, which makes them legal texts or close to legal texts. An example is the Australian Tax Office’s document [Registering for GST](#).

Informative and instructive texts aim to inform, raise awareness, educate, and encourage the public to take action. These are the most typical texts translated as part of public messaging. Examples are the COVID-related translations available on the [website of the Department of Health](#).

While translations of legal and regulatory texts require special attention to accuracy and precision because of the legal implications involved, translations of informative and instructive texts need to be accurate and precise too but have accessibility and impact as their paramount aims. **Governmental and non-governmental organisations produce such texts to inform and get people to act. Community translations should also be written in a style that can get the message across and get readers to respond.**

### 4. Audience: Personas of community users

Every writer has an audience in mind; translators are no exception. The only difference is that the translator’s audience is already determined in the instructions received from the commissioning organisation or author (translation brief). To visualise the audience of a given translation, the notion of ‘persona’ is extremely useful. ‘Personas’ are typical user profiles within the target community which a translator can imagine or outline on paper (or an electronic device) based on the translation brief and their knowledge of the relevant community (in our case Arabic speakers in Australia, Arabic-speaking older people in NSW, etc.).

For each translation task, the translator would need to have a few ‘personas’ in mind to determine the most appropriate language (i.e. style, lexical choices, structural complexity, etc.). These personas will need to cover as many backgrounds and sub-groups of the target readership as possible (e.g. literacy levels, country of origin, age, etc.). For example, for the

[vaccination advice](#) available on the website of the Department of Health, we can create the following personas:

**Rana:** Lebanese heritage; 65-year-old woman; has been living in Australia since 1980's; able to speak English in everyday situations, but more confident reading information in Arabic. Completed university studies in Arabic back in the 1980's; continues to read Arabic newspapers online.

**Ezzat:** 35-year-old Egyptian male; migrated to Australia recently with a partner visa; left school when he was 15; finds Arabic text relatively easy to understand, but too challenging when the text contains complex structures or specialised terminology. Often asks his wife to clarify concepts.

**Shady:** 50-year-old Syrian male; migrated as a refugee as a result of the current civil war in Syria; highly literate in Arabic, but with a beginner level in English.

**Eman:** 30-year-old Sudanese woman; migrated to Australia recently with a partner visa; spends most of her time at her family business and does not have time to read in English or Arabic. Completed high school in Sudan. When looking for information, she prefers to get brief, to-the-point instructions or information.

## 5. Language variety

Arabic speakers in Australia use different variants of Arabic: dialects such as Lebanese, Egyptian or Sudanese. Translations of informative texts should aim to use language that is **as neutral as possible** for written communication, a form of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) that is clear and understandable for the average user. As the audience of these messages are Arabic speakers from different backgrounds, the translator needs to maximise readers' chances of understanding and responding to the information and instructions provided. Unless the target audience is a specific community, the translator should **avoid regionalisms and localisms** in terms of lexical choices and idioms that may not be **understood by the majority of the target audience**.

- Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the variant used for written communication in Arabic; by default, it is the variant used in translations into Arabic.
- However, if you are aware that the written material is to be used as part of an audiovisual communication strategy (e.g. video on COVID-19 restrictions), a colloquial variant may be more appropriate. Advice to and consultation with the commissioner or translation agency are key in this regard.
- If using MSA, please keep in mind that there are lexical and terminological differences between Arabic-speaking countries even in this formal variant. Choose the most

widely used options; where appropriate, you may also put alternative terms between parentheses to ensure accessibility for as many people as possible.

- If using a regional dialect (for audiovisual dissemination), use a widely understood regional dialect such as Lebanese or Egyptian. In this case, to make the translation as inclusive as possible, extreme regionalisms (i.e. words and expressions only known in a specific region) are to be avoided. If the information is aimed at a particular Arabic-speaking community (e.g. Sudanese), use the relevant regional dialect, or decline the assignment if unable to translate into that variant.

## 6. Coherence and cohesion

**Texts – including translations – need to be coherent and cohesive to make sense to the audience. Coherence is the semantic connectedness within a text and between the text and its context.**

### 6.1. Coherence

Coherence requires meaning connectedness (smooth flow of ideas), consistency and relevance to the topic or context at hand. Sentences should make sense in their context, be semantically related, and show conceptual and logical consistency (e.g. no contradiction).

In the following example, judging from the context and general knowledge, it is clear that TGA has a list of all approved vaccines and whenever a new vaccine is approved, it is added to the list. The way it is expressed in the English source text, however, suggests that a list of vaccines is kept after TGA approves a vaccine. Such coherence issues should be reported to the commissioning organisation. In terms of translation approach, this is not a legal text or a personal official document (e.g. birth or marriage certificate) where the translator would use [sic] to indicate errors or inconsistencies in the source text. Instead, the sentence should be translated having in mind sense and coherence: “Once TGA approves a vaccine, it adds it to the list of approved vaccines”.

Source text	Less coherent translation	More coherent translation
Once TGA approves a vaccine, it keeps a list of all vaccinations it approved.	بعد موافقة "إدارة السلع العلاجية" على لقاح ما، تحتفظ بقائمة تضم كل التطعيمات التي وافقت عليها.	بعد اعتماد "إدارة السلع العلاجية" لِقاحاً ما، تضيفه إلى قائمة اللقاحات المعتمدة.

In the following example, the coherence issue is also in the source text: the first sentence refers to healthy body, physical activity and a healthy diet, but then the second one reads: “We know that these factors account for at least 30 per cent of all cancers”. Readers will be able to infer that what is meant is that **failure to** keep a healthy body, be active and enjoy a healthy diet accounts for 30% of cancers. Rather than reproduce the logical inconsistency in the source text, a community translator should make their LOTE version more coherent.

Source text	Less coherent translation	More coherent translation
<p><b>Physical activity and cancer prevention</b>            We know that by maintaining a healthy body weight, being physically active every day and enjoying a healthy diet, you can lower your risk of developing cancer. <b>We know that these factors account for at least 30 per cent of all cancers.</b></p>	<p>النشاط البدني والوقاية من السرطان            نحن نعلم أنه من خلال ممارسة النشاط البدني كل يوم والتمتع بنظام غذائي صحي والحفاظ على وزن صحي، يمكنك خفض خطر الإصابة بالسرطان. ونحن نعلم أن هذه العوامل تشكل ما لا يقل عن 30 في المائة من جميع حالات السرطان.</p>	<p>النشاط البدني وعلاقته بالوقاية من السرطان            من المعروف أن ممارسة النشاط البدني يوميًا والحفاظ على نظام غذائي صحي ووزن معتدل، عوامل تقلل خطر الإصابة بالسرطان. ومن المعروف أيضًا أن عدم الالتزام بهذه النصائح يتسبب في ما لا يقل عن 30 في المائة من حالات السرطان.</p>

## 6.2. Cohesion

**Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical linking between sentences and paragraphs, which ensures that the resulting text hangs together and flows smoothly.** Cohesion can be based on linking words and syntactical consistency (e.g. use of pronouns or grammatical tense). It can also be based on lexical reference (e.g. repetition of the same word, collocation, use of a synonym or a word referring to a larger category).

Coherence and cohesion are related: coherence relates to conceptual and logical connections within a text; cohesion relates to connectedness at a structural and referential levels.

**Cohesive devices are essential to readability and comprehension, probably more so for Arabic than English.** Mirroring English language structures without due attention to linking words often leads to Arabic translations that are difficult to follow and less coherent texts. Translators need to make the necessary syntactical adjustments to ensure cohesion.

Arabic sentences are usually longer than English ones and are typically linked using conjunctions or discourse connectives such as *لذلك*، *إذ*، *حيث*، *ثم*، *و*، *ف* and so on.

In English, the logical link between sentences does not need to be explicit; in Arabic, it often does. Even when there is no logical connection between clauses or sentences, Arabic typically uses the conjunction *و* to ensure continuity and cohesion. Linking devices in Arabic are used for a variety of purposes. The following are just examples:

- To express contrast, differentiation or contradiction: *لكن، على الرغم، إلا أن، وإن كان....*
- To express causality (cause-result relation): *لذلك، لهذا، بسبب....*
- To justify or explain: *بسبب، ل، ف، فقد....*
- To link events chronologically: *.....(أن) قبل (أن) (بعد (أن)، بعدما، قبل (أن).....*
- To add: *إلى جانب، بالإضافة إلى....*

In translation, Arabic sentences do not always need to be longer than the sentences in the source text. However, it is important to ensure cohesive ties between phrases, clauses and sentences. Even in a list of items in the same sentence, the conjunction *و* is used instead of commas.

Source text	Translation with poor cohesion	More cohesive translation (with other amendments)
There is support for people adversely affected by a state public health order. This is a lump sum payment to help people who are unable to earn income due to a COVID-19 state public health order. This may involve a lockdown, hotspot or movement restrictions.	هناك دعم للأشخاص المتضررين من أمر الصحة العامة للولاية. هذا مبلغ يدفع مرة واحدة لمساعدة الأشخاص غير القادرين على كسب الدخل بسبب أمر الصحة العامة للولاية المتعلق ب COVID-19. قد يشمل ذلك إغلاقاً أو منطقة موبوءة أو قيوداً على الحركة.	هناك دعم خاص بالأشخاص المتضررين من أحد أوامر أو إجراءات الصحة العامة الصادرة عن الولاية. ويتمثل هذا الدعم في مبلغ يدفع مرة واحدة لمساعدة الأشخاص غير القادرين على الكسب بسبب أحد إجراءات الصحة العامة الخاصة بكوفيد ١٩، بما في ذلك إعلان منطقة ما منطقة موبوءة وفرض إغلاق أو قيود على التنقل.

Arabic has its own rhetorical tools that can be used to join sentences at times or to separate meanings and start a new idea.

Some types of cohesive device can be found in both Arabic and English, but they may be used differently. For example, ellipsis (omission of words because they have been mentioned earlier or because they can be inferred from the context) works in the following English example, but not in the Arabic one:

**English:**

Interview recordings will be transcribed in a way that individual participants cannot be identified. **Once transcribed**, you will have the chance to review the recording before it is deleted to ensure your confidentiality.

**Arabic:**

سيتم نسخ تسجيلات المقابلات بطريقة لا يمكن من خلالها تحديد هوية المشاركين. وبعد نسخ التسجيلات ستتاح لك الفرصة لمراجعتها قبل حذفها للحفاظ على خصوصيتك.

## 7. Readability

A text that hangs together with the help of appropriate cohesive devices is likely to be more readable, but there is more to readability than just cohesion. Readability is the extent to which a written text can be understood by readers with different literacy levels. Many elements can contribute to readability:

- Sentence length and complexity: shorter sentences with no subordinate clauses are more readable than longer sentences with subordinate clauses;
- Word length and lexical complexity: a dosed frequency of specialised terms or uncommon words makes texts more readable. **When you have a choice, use the most commonly used word or expression.**

- Correct language use (grammar, punctuation, and spelling);
- Presentation (e.g. font size, spacing, visual aids, etc.);
- Diacritics: In Arabic, diacritics (short vowel marks) improve readability significantly (See Section 12 below).

**Readability is key to accessibility of information in community translations. Improving readability of translations (e.g. by adding and/or omitting lexical and/or syntactic elements to ensure clarity) is not a translation error. As long as the meaning in the source text is not altered and the addition/deletion is justified, that is not considered a mistranslation.**

Source text	Translation with a lower readability score	More readable version
Most workers have unpaid pandemic leave. This means that you have a right to not go to work for 2 weeks because of the lock-down. You need to let your boss know as soon as possible that you need to take this time off. Your boss can't fire you for taking this time away from work.	معظم العمال لديهم إجازة وبائية غير مدفوعة. هذا يعني أن لديك الحق في عدم الذهاب إلى العمل لمدة أسبوعين بسبب الإغلاق. تحتاج إلى إخبار مديرك في أقرب وقت ممكن أنك بحاجة إلى أخذ هذا الوقت من الراحة. لا يمكن لرئيسك طردك من العمل لأخذك هذا الوقت بعيدا عن العمل.	يحق لمعظم العمال أن يأخذوا إجازة بدون راتب بسبب الحالة الوبائية. ويعني هذا أنه بسبب الإغلاق لديك الحق في عدم الذهاب إلى العمل لمدة أسبوعين. ولكن عليك أن تخبر رئيسك في العمل في أقرب وقت ممكن بأنك بحاجة إلى هذه الإجازة. ولا يمكن لرئيسك طردك من العمل بسبب هذه العطلة.

## 8. Idiomatic language

Idiomatic language refers to expressions, collocations and sentence structures that are typical of a given language. Appropriate use of idiomatic language makes texts read naturally. Unidiomatic language, on the other hand, is often a sign of a literal approach to translation. **When translating into Arabic, always ask yourself: What is the idea/message here? How would I normally say this in Arabic? What would a text of these characteristics and content 'sound' like in a monolingual setting?**

**When revising your first draft, read it as if you were one of the 'personas' you created and try to imagine their reactions to the idiomatic component of the translation.**

Avoid the use of calques (translating phrases and structures word-for-word) as they often result in unsuccessful renditions and unnatural language.



## Examples of idiomaticity:

Source text	Awkward/unidiomatic	More natural/idiomatic alternatives
Keep up to date with the Australian Government's response to COVID-19	أبقى على معرفة باستجابة الحكومة الأسترالية لـ 19-COVID	لمواكبة إجراءات الحكومة الأسترالية الخاصة بجائحة كورونا ...  للاطلاع على مستجدات إجراءات الحكومة الأسترالية لمكافحة جائحة كورونا ...
<b>Being active is one of the best things you can do.</b> For good health, put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.	أن تكون أكثر نشاطا هي واحدة من أفضل الأشياء التي يمكنك القيام بها لنفسك لصحة جيدة، ضع معا مالا يقل عن ٣٠ دقيقة من النشاط البدني المعتدل الكثافة في معظم أيام الأسبوع، ويفضل كل الأيام.	النشاط البدني من أهم العوامل للصحة الجيدة  للحفاظ على صحة جيدة، خصص ٣٠ دقيقة على الأقل يوميا للنشاط البدني المعتدل، وإن لم تستطع ففي معظم أيام الأسبوع.

## 9. Writing style and tone

Translators are guided by the style and tone of the source document. The tone of the source document normally conveys the author's or the commissioning organisation's relationship with the readers and how they would like the target audience to respond to their messaging. Translators are also guided by the norms and conventions of the target language (in this case Arabic) and the expectations of the target community (See Personas in Section 4).

**Unless instructed otherwise in the translation brief, community translators need to take into consideration the crucial information conveyed in the source text and the constraints of the target language and community and strike a balance between them.**

## 10. Grammar

### 10.1 Syntactical structure and word order

As is well known, English has a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure, while Arabic basically follows a verb-subject-object (VSO) order, with the SVO structure also possible for certain functions and rhetorical purposes. Nominal structures (SVO) in Arabic are usually used to provide definitions, to describe facts and scenes, or to highlight or emphasise the role of the nominal group at the beginning of the sentence:

English translation	Arabic example
Vaccination is the most effective protection against COVID-19.	التطعيم هو الحماية الأكثر فعالية من مرض كورونا.
The situation here is better than before: the number of cases is going down and shops have reopened.	الحالة هنا أحسن مما كانت عليه، فعدد المرضى أخذ يتناقص والمتاجر فتحت أبوابها من جديد.
It is the cooperation of citizens and residents that has enabled us to achieve these goals.	إن تعاون المواطنين والمقيمين هو الذي مكنا من تحقيق هذه الأهداف.

Translation from English into Arabic requires adaptation to the norms of the target language, including the use and function of VSO and SVO structures in Arabic. **Mirroring the SVO structure of English sentences often leads to unidiomatic and poorly connected translations.**

Source text	Literal word order	More appropriate word order
In the first five years of life, experiences and relationships stimulate children's development, creating millions of connections in their brains. In fact, children's brains develop connections faster in the first five years than at any other time in their lives.	في السنوات الخمس الأولى من الحياة، التجارب والعلاقات تحفز نمو الأطفال، وتخلق ملايين الروابط في أدمغتهم. في الواقع، أدمغة الأطفال تطور اتصالات أسرع في السنوات الخمس الأولى من أي وقت آخر في حياتهم.	في السنوات الخمس الأولى من الحياة، تحفز التجارب والعلاقات نمو الأطفال، وتخلق ملايين الروابط في أدمغتهم. وفي الواقع، تطور أدمغة الأطفال روابط بوتيرة أسرع في السنوات الخمس الأولى من أي وقت آخر في حياتهم.

### 10.2 Active/passive voice

Active- and passive-voice structures are syntactical options available in both English and Arabic; however, the functions and frequency of passive voice in Arabic are not the same as in English. **The fact that we have a passive construction in an English source text does not mean that we must always use a similar structure in Arabic.** One main difference, for instance, is that the passive voice is used in Arabic when the agent is unknown or undisclosed for one reason or another. In English, on the other hand, agentive passive constructions (i.e. with the agent mentioned) are quite common. Subject to other textual considerations, the following English sentence would normally be translated as follows:

English	Arabic
New measures were announced by the governments of Victoria and South Australia.	أعلنت حكومتنا ولايتي فكتوريا وجنوب أستراليا عن إجراءات جديدة.

### 10.3 Multi-word noun phrases

Noun phrases with several pre-modifiers and/or post-modifiers can often lead to mistranslation or ambiguous renditions. In the following examples, the **highlighted words** are clearly the heads in their respective phrases (the main item we refer to), while the other words provide additional information:

- Pre-clinical **trial** (تجربة ما قبل السريرية)
- Medicare funded **services** (خدمات تمويلها "ميديكير")
- Australian Technical Advisory **Group** on Immunisation (المجموعة الاستشارية (التقنية الأسترالية الخاصة بالتحصين / المجموعة الأسترالية للاستشارات التقنية الخاصة بالتحصين)
- **Behaviours** observed over a long period of time (السلوكيات التي لوحظت خلال فترة طويلة)

It is important to read such phrases carefully in context, identify the main referent (the head) and translate accordingly. Often the order in English is pre-modifier + pre-modifier, etc. + head, which is translated into Arabic in the opposite order (head + modifier + modifier, etc.). However, this is not always the case, as the last example above shows (noun + post-modifiers).

**Whether the English phrase includes pre-modifiers, post-modifiers or both, the Arabic translation of the phrase will usually follow the structure head noun + modifiers or head noun + relative clause/verbal clause, as in the examples above.**

### 10.4 Common grammatical errors

Frequent grammatical errors undermine translation quality and impact on the community's trust in translated public messaging.

The following example shows different types of grammatical errors in the same translation (verb inflection, prepositions, case marking, gender agreement, etc.):

Source text	Translation with grammatical errors	Translation without grammatical errors (but still improvable)
It comes as no surprise then, that like some women, you may wish to give birth in the comfort and privacy of your own home. Women who have had a home birth(s) describe a greater sense of self-determination and a feeling of being more in control of the birth process and their environment, free from the pressure and restraints sometimes felt with birth in hospital.	ليس من المستغرب إذن أن <b>ترغبين</b> في الولادة في راحة وخصوصية منزلك مثل بعض النساء الأخريات. تصف النساء اللواتي ولدن في المنزل <b>بأن كان لديهن شعورا أكبر</b> بتقرير المصير والشعور بأنهن يتحكمن أكثر في عملية الولادة وفي <b>بيئتهن</b> الخالية من الضغط والقيود التي تصحب في بعض الأحيان الولادة في المستشفى.	ليس من المستغرب إذن أن <b>ترغبين</b> في الولادة في راحة وخصوصية منزلك كـبعض النساء الأخريات. تصف النساء اللواتي ولدن في المنزل تجربتهن بأنها <b>منحتهن شعورا أكبر</b> بتقرير المصير والتحكم أكثر في عملية الولادة وفي <b>بيئتهن</b> الخالية من الضغط والقيود التي تصاحب الولادة في المستشفى في بعض الأحيان.

Common grammatical errors in translation into Arabic include, but are not limited to:

- *Use of incorrect verb or incorrect conjugation*

Source text	Translation with grammatical errors	Proposed translation without grammatical errors
Everything you need to know about COVID-19 in Victoria	اعثر على معلومات حول فيروس كورونا (كوفيد-19).	كل ما تحتاج إلى معرفته عن كورونا (كوفيد-19) في فيكتوريا.
wear a mask if your state or territory advises you to do so.	ارتدي كمامة إذا نصحت ولايتك أو إقليمك أنك بحاجة لذلك.	ارتدي كمامة وفقاً لتعليمات الولاية أو الإقليم الذي تقيم فيه.
Don't forget to allow time for your children to be silly, giggle, laugh and play!	لا تنسى إتاحة الوقت لأطفالك ليتصرفوا ببساطة وعفوية، يضحكون ويلعبون!	لا تنسى إتاحة الوقت لأطفالك ليتصرفوا ببساطة وعفوية ويضحكوا ويلعبوا!
...based on two broad concepts that can help support a balanced lifestyle for your family.	من شأن هذين المفهومين أن يساعدانك على المحافظة على نمط حياة متوازن لأسرتك.	من شأن هذين المفهومين أن يساعدك على المحافظة على نمط حياة متوازن لأسرتك.

- *Lack of subject-verb or pronoun-verb agreement*

Source text	Translation with grammatical errors	Proposed translation without grammatical errors
Once TGA approves a vaccine, it keeps a list of all vaccinations it approved.	بعد الموافقة على اللقاح، فإن TGA تحتفظ بقائمة التطعيمات التي يوافقون عليها.	بعد موافقة "إدارة السلع العلاجية" على لقاح ما، تحتفظ بقائمة تضم كل التطعيمات التي وافقت عليها.  بعد اعتماد "إدارة السلع العلاجية" لقاحاً ما، تضيفه إلى قائمة اللقاحات المعتمدة.
Although pets can spread infections, they play an important role in patient healing.	يمكن للحيوانات الأليفة أن تنشر العدوى، إلا أنهم يلعبون دوراً مهماً في تعافي المرضى.	يمكن للحيوانات الأليفة أن تنشر العدوى، إلا أنها تلعب دوراً مهماً في تعافي المرضى.

- *Lack of gender and number agreement*

One important difference between English and Arabic is the fact that grammatical gender and number in Arabic affect word inflections (verbs, nouns, adjectives). Sometimes, translators focus on short translation units. As a result, they are not aware that the gender/number of a certain word in the next unit is linked to a previous one, where it is explicit. Machine translation aids tend to assign a masculine class to unknown or ambiguous words. To avoid this kind of mistake, it is crucial to reread the translation paying special attention to gender and number inflections.

Source text	Inconsistent gender/number	correct gender/number
Pfizer is safe.	لقاح "فايزر" آمنة	لقاح "فايزر" آمن
Vaccines are medicines that protect you against specific diseases. They train your immune system to remember and fight the germ.	اللقاحات هي أدوية تحميك من أمراض معينة. إنهم يدرّبون جهاز المناعة على تذكر الجراثيم ومكافحتها.	اللقاحات أدوية تحمي من أمراض معينة، فهي تدرّب جهاز المناعة على تذكر الجراثيم ومكافحتها.

- **Incorrect case marking (e.g. direct object), especially when the noun is plural**

Source text	Translation with grammatical errors	Proposed translation without grammatical errors
Authorities have announced emergency contact numbers	أعلنت السلطات أرقام للاتصال في الحالات المستعجلة	أعلنت السلطات أرقاماً للاتصال في الحالات المستعجلة
The Minister of Health called on nurses to put an end to their strike	دعا وزير الصحة الممرضون والممرضات لإيقاف إضرابهم	دعا وزير الصحة الممرضين والممرضات لإيقاف إضرابهم

- **Incorrect use of prepositions**

Prepositions are an area where errors are common in Arabic writing. Part of their complexity lies in the diversity of functions associated with the same preposition and differences between Classical and Modern Standard Arabic. Below you can find a couple of examples. For more information, see, for instance, Ammar (1998) or Husni and Zaher (2020), listed under Useful Resources below.

Source text	Incorrect preposition	Correction
As parents, we need to be involved in school activities	كآباء علينا أن نشارك في الأنشطة المدرسية	باعتبارنا آباء علينا أن نشارك في الأنشطة المدرسية
Family members care for one another	يعتني أفراد العائلة ببعضهم البعض	يعتني أفراد العائلة بعضهم ببعض
They are addicted to screens	يدمنون على استعمال الشاشات	يدمنون استعمال الشاشات
The vaccine shipment was returned to the supplier	تمت إعادة شحنة اللقاح للمورد	تمت إعادة شحنة اللقاح إلى المورد

- **Incorrect relative pronouns and structure of relative clauses**

Source text	Incorrect/ambiguous use of relative pronoun	Proposed translation without grammatical errors
This brochure explains what the cervical screening test is and what your test results mean.	يعطيك هذا الكتيّب معلومات لمساعدتك على فهم نتائج فحص عنق الرحم الذي أجري لك بشكل أفضل.	يشرح هذا الكتيّب فحص عنق الرحم وما تعنيه نتائجك.

- **Articles**

Definite and indefinite articles are also a problematic area in translation between English and Arabic. There are considerable differences, for example, in the use of articles with abstract nouns (e.g. medicine vs. الطب) and with nouns referring to a non-specific group of people or objects (e.g. medical practitioners vs. الأطباء). **It is a good idea to go back to a good grammar book from time to time.**

Source text	Incorrect use of articles	Correct use of articles
Diet is key to good health	نظام الغذائي هو سِرُّ صِحّة جيّدة	النظام الغذائي هو سِرُّ الصِحّة الجيّدة.
All pharmacists have been invited to participate in the campaign	تمت دعوة جميع صيادلة للمشاركة في الحملة	تمت دعوة جميع الصيادلة للمشاركة في الحملة
All the pharmacists in the area have been invited to participate in the campaign	تمت دعوة جميع الصيادلة المنطقة للمشاركة في الحملة	تمت دعوة جميع صيادلة المنطقة للمشاركة في الحملة
Family members care for one another	يعتني أفراد العائلة ببعضهم البعض	يعتني أفراد العائلة بعضهم ببعض

## 11. Gender, inclusiveness and political correctness

Unlike English, Arabic is a grammatically gendered language, i.e. verbs, nouns, adjectives and demonstrative pronouns are assigned a masculine or feminine case, depending on the referent. This means that as soon as a gender-neutral sentence referring to people is translated from English into Arabic, a decision needs to be made as to whether to use the masculine or feminine form. Thus a 'nurse' becomes either 'ممرض' (male nurse) or 'ممرضة' (female nurse). In Arabic writing, the masculine form (both singular and plural) is usually used as the standard form, with feminine forms used when reference is made specifically to women. Writers, translators included, may attempt to be inclusive by using both masculine and feminine forms (e.g. الممرضون والممرضات), but it is impractical to maintain dual reference throughout the text, especially in relation to affixed pronouns. While the English pronouns 'he/she', 'him/her' are independent words, which can easily be used (although the generic pronoun 'they/them' offers a more practical alternative), many Arabic pronouns are suffixes, which makes it difficult to attach two pronouns every time a pronoun is needed (e.g. حالاتهم/هن الصحية).

As a rule, use masculine forms as a default form, but whenever possible, use both feminine and masculine lexical items to ensure gender inclusiveness. Also avoid using feminine forms specifically when such language use may be perceived as sexist, such as when the text provides information or instructions about a topic that might be culturally associated with women. It is safe to use feminine forms when the source text is addressed to women only (e.g. pregnancy tips), but not when it deals, for example, with childcare, home schooling, or cooking.

When the source text includes sensitive content (e.g. domestic violence or sexual abuse), it is good practice to check with the translation commissioner whether the translation should use a gender-neutral or a gender-specific approach.

## 12. Diacritics

Diacritics in Arabic play an important role in differentiating sounds, meaning and grammar:

- لَكَ for you (masculine) vs. لِكْ (for you, masculine)
- مُدْرَج (listed, included) vs. مُدْرَج (amphitheatre)
- مُسْتَهْلِك (consumed, exhausted) vs. مُسْتَهْلِك (consumer)

Strategic use of diacritics (e.g. different words with similar spelling) can reduce cognitive load, facilitate understanding and avoid ambiguity. You do not need to use diacritics for every word and every letter (unless you are translating for children or readers with low literacy), but **strategic use of diacritics (e.g. different words with similar spelling) can reduce cognitive load, facilitate understanding and avoid ambiguity.**

## 13. Punctuation

Although Modern Standard Arabic uses the same punctuation marks as English (e.g. full stop, comma, colon, question mark, etc.), punctuation is less systematic in Arabic. Where an English source text consists of a series of short sentences separated by full stops, it may be more appropriate in Arabic translation to join the sentences with conjunctions and linking words. Commas are also common instead of full stops in such cases.

Some punctuation marks such as the colon and the semicolon have specific conventional functions in English, but not clearly so in Arabic. These differences can be problematic in translation if the translator is not aware of the function of the punctuation mark and therefore fails to convey it in their translation.

- **Semicolon**

Among other functions, the semicolon is used in English to mark contrast between two clauses. In Arabic, this is better expressed using a conjunctive such as “أما” or “بينما”.

Source text	Incorrect punctuation	Correction
Conventional vaccines can take months to produce; RNA vaccines can be constructed faster.	قد يستغرق إنتاج اللقاحات التقليدية شهورًا؛ يمكن بناء لقاحات الحمض النووي الريبي بشكل أسرع.	قد يستغرق إنتاج اللقاحات التقليدية شهورًا، بينما يمكن إنتاج لقاحات الحمض النووي الريبي بشكل أسرع.

- **Colon**

Among other purposes, the colon is used in English to provide more information, explanation or examples. When translating into Arabic, the function needs to be determined and a link needs to be provided such as “ف”، “إذ إن”، “حيث إن”، “فعلى سبيل المثال”، or “فمن بين هذه”. The following is an example.

Source text	Incorrect punctuation	Correction
Many experts consider Australia's electoral system to be one of the finest in the world. The majority of Australians apparently share this view: 70% approve of compulsory voting.	يعتبر العديد من الخبراء أن النظام الانتخابي الأسترالي من أفضل الأنظمة في العالم. يبدو أن غالبية الأستراليين يشاركون هذا الرأي: 70% يوافقون على التصويت الإجباري.	يعتبر العديد من الخبراء أن النظام الانتخابي الأسترالي من أفضل الأنظمة في العالم. ويبدو أن غالبية الأستراليين يرون هذا الرأي، إذ يوافق 70% منهم على التصويت الإجباري.

- **Commas in a list**

Another difference in punctuation between English and Arabic is the **use of commas in lists** (i.e. sequence of items in the same sentence). In English, a comma is used to separate items in a list, and the conjunction “and” or “or” is used at the end. In Arabic, it is more appropriate to add “و” or “أو” between each two items, as follows:

Source text	Incorrect punctuation	Correction
Vitamin D supplements are available as tablets, capsules, drops or liquid.	تتوافر إضافات الفيتامين د كأقراص، كبسولات، قطرات أو سائل.	تتوافر إضافات الفيتامين د كأقراص أو كبسولات أو قطرات أو سائل.  <b>With further correction:</b>  تُباع مكملات الفيتامين د على شكل أقراص أو كبسولات أو قطرات أو سائل.

#### 14. Font and font size

Depending on the font type you choose, the Arabic text might look smaller than the English one. Normally, 12 point Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman is the standard font size, while font types such as Al Bayan or Arabic Typesetting would require a minimum of 14 points. In some cases, such as translations specifically aimed at older readers, it is recommended that a larger font size is used (e.g. 16 points). The font size will also vary depending on client specifications and publication type.



## 15. Organisation names

**Unless explicitly required by the client**, organisation names need to be translated into Arabic. Organisation names can also be introduced with Arabic words such as “منظمة”, “هيئة” or “دائرة” even if such words are not in the source text. These are justified additions. For organisation names that are widely known and have a commonly used translation in Arabic, this translation should be used consistently. For less known organisations and committees, a functional translation of the name can be used. For names that do not have a semantic meaning (e.g. Centrelink), transliteration should be used (سنترلنك).

In general, organisation names may be included between parentheses (in English) immediately after the Arabic translation of the name. This improves understanding, as the audience would normally know these organisations. However, they should not be used at the beginning of a sentence.

**Excessive use of English names of institutions, programs and services may impact the readability of Arabic translations. To ensure a balanced approach, the English name can be inserted between parentheses once (the first time it appears) and subsequently translated or transliterated.** When the English name is hyperlinked, it makes sense to leave it in English.

## 16. Acronyms

Acronyms need to be spelled out and translated into Arabic. In some cases, when an acronym is placed between parentheses immediately after the name of an organisation, the same acronym (in English letters) may be used in the Arabic text too, especially if it is commonly used in the community. However, English acronyms should not be used as part of an Arabic sentence (e.g. as subject or object).

**Like excessive use of English institutional names, frequent use of English acronyms (e.g. LGA, TGA, COVID-19, etc.) may affect the readability of Arabic translations. An English acronym may be used between parentheses once and translated in subsequent occurrences.**

In the following example, both the use of a number after the definite article “ال” and the use of English acronyms affect the presentation and readability of the translation:

Source text	Existing translation	Proposed translation
<b>Why are these 8 LGAs being given priority?</b> There are a high number of cases of COVID-19 in the LGAs of concern.	لماذا تم إعطاء هذه الـ ٨ LGAs الأولوية؟ يوجد عدد مرتفع من حالات الإصابة ب COVID-19 في الـ 8 LGAs التي تعتبر مثار قلق.	لماذا تم إعطاء الأولوية لهذه المناطق الثمان؟ لأن عدد الإصابات بكوفيد ١٩ في هذه المناطق مرتفع. لأن عدد الإصابات بفيروس كورونا فيها مرتفع.

## 17. Useful resources

### 17.1 Translation and language references

Alkhuli, Muhammad Ali (1999). *Comparative Linguistics: English and Arabic*. Amman: Alfalah.

Ammar, Mahmoud Ismail (1998) الأخطاء الشائعة في استعمالات حروف الجر. Riyadh: Dar Alam Al-Kutub.

Badawi, Elsaid, Carter, Michael, and Gully, Adrian (2016). *Modern Written Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar* (revised edition). London and New York: Routledge.

Baker, Mona (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. London; New York: Routledge.

Dickins, James, Sándor, Hervey and Higgins, Ian (2017). *Thinking Arabic Translation: A Course in Translation Method: Arabic to English*. London and New York: Routledge.

El-Haj, Mahmoud and Rayson, Paul (2016) "OSMAN: A Novel Arabic Readability Metric" in *Proceedings of the Language Resources and Evaluation Conference 2016*, N. Calzolari, K. Choukri, T. Declerck, M. Grobelnik, B. Maegaard, J. Mariani, . . . S. Piperidis (eds.), 250-255. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/staff/elhaj/docs/elhajlrec2016Arabic.pdf>

Husni, Ronak and Zaher, Aziza (2020). *Working with Arabic Prepositions: Structures and Functions*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lahlali, El Mustapha and Abu Hatab, Wafa (2022). *Advanced English-Arabic Translation: A Practical Guide*. Edinburgh University Press.

Taibi, Mustapha and Ozolins, Uldis (2016). *Community Translation*. London: Bloomsbury.

### 17.2 Dictionaries and glossaries

- Al-Hafiz, Al-Tahir (2004). *Al-Hafiz Arabic collocations dictionary: Arabic-English*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban.
- Almaany. <https://www.almaany.com>
- [Glossary of Medical Terminology for Immunisation and Vaccine Development \(English-Arabic\)](#).
- Hitti, Yusuf K. and Al-Khatib, Ahmad (2004). *Hitti's New Medical Dictionary (English-Arabic)*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban
- World Health Organization (2006). *The unified medical dictionary: English-Arabic*. Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean & Librairie du Liban Publishers. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/119845>

### 17.3 Other resources

Australian Government. Style Manual. <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au>