



GOEDE REIS! (Bon Voyage!)

*What every manager should know
about Dutch translation*



COMMUNICATION. IN ANY LANGUAGE.



About 22 million people speak Dutch today, the majority of which live in the Netherlands and Belgium.



Rule Number One: Go Dutch!

Like the Dutch themselves, we'll begin this guidebook by being very direct. If you want to succeed in the Dutch-speaking market, don't take the Dutch for granted simply because they speak English so well.

Keep this advice in mind as you move forward on your Dutch translation projects. Why? Because you're likely to hear the opposite time and again. The biggest myth to overcome about doing business in the Netherlands is that you don't really need to go Dutch at all. "Why bother to do anything in Dutch when everyone in the Netherlands also speaks English?"

The short answer is: "Because they don't."

Roughly 85% of the Dutch population does, in fact, know at least some degree of English. And many Dutch speak it beautifully, especially in the major metropolitan areas. English is also their



international business tongue, and when it comes to learning foreign languages in general, the Dutch leave their Anglo Saxon cousins waiting enviously in the wings.

But this doesn't mean you can ignore the Dutch language altogether. Like everyone else, the Dutch value anyone who shows an appreciation of their language and culture. In fact, because the Dutch don't typically expect other nationalities to know anything about their language, any effort to speak or translate English into Dutch is appreciated many times over.

Once again, we'll be as direct as the Dutch are. This guidebook will show you how to produce perfect Dutch translations every time.

The Dutch Touch, Worldwide

The number of Dutch speakers today is modest in comparison to those of other European languages that were swept across the world by the brooms of colonialism. Spoken on a much a smaller scale than its post-colonial cousins – English, Spanish, French and Portuguese – Dutch nevertheless remains an important language worldwide.

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Dutch is also found in Aruba, the Netherlands Antilles, and Suriname, where about 60% of the population learn it as their mother tongue.

In the Netherlands, the Dutch refer to their language as *Nederlands*. In Belgium, the language is called *Vlaams*, which corresponds to the English word, Flemish. Dutch and Flemish are different dialects of the same language, rather than unique



languages in and of themselves. The difference between the two can be compared to the nuances between American and British English.

From a linguistic perspective, Dutch is a member of the



Germanic language family and is closely related to German and English alike. It's closer grammatically to German, but like English, it doesn't have as many verb conjugations or the complex noun declensions that German does.

But before we get too technical, we'll stop right here. Your goal is to produce perfect Dutch translations, not to write a dissertation on its grammar or linguistic history. Just be aware that Dutch is often described as a bridge between English and German. The sample sentences below will show you why.

English: *The school is in the city.*

Dutch: *De school is in de stad.*

German: *Die Schule ist in der Stadt.*

As you can see, Dutch, English and German are very close neighbors. Just don't remind them of the fact during a football match.

Out of Afrikaans

With more than 16 millions speakers, Afrikaans is a modern derivative of the Dutch language previously spoken in South Africa, Namibia and a few other heavily colonized African regions. As one of the official languages of South Africa today, Afrikaans merits special mention because, unlike the difference between Dutch and Flemish, it is regarded as a distinct language in its own right.



That said, Afrikaans is extremely close to Dutch, and in many situations, the two languages are mutually intelligible. The spelling standards differ, but for the most part, Dutch speakers can read and understand Afrikaans with relative ease, and vice versa.



But if your business calls you to Johannesburg instead of Amsterdam, don't try to substitute Dutch for translations that should be done in Afrikaans. The linguistic differences are large enough – and the cultural sensitivities strong enough – to require the involvement of a professional translator who speaks Afrikaans natively. If you overlook the importance of local differences, your business success will be flatter than a Dutch pancake.

Design/Layout Guidelines

One of the biggest mistakes inexperienced translation managers make is to assume that because the English and Dutch languages are so similar, it's possible to translate English into Dutch directly, word for word.

So here is a word to the wise: *beware*.

Dutch routinely requires more words – sometimes considerably more – to express the same meaning you want to convey in English. From a design and layout perspective, this difference can be critically important.

On the following page is an example of an English paragraph, followed by its Dutch translation.



In the 17th Century, the Dutch established a colonial settlement on a small island off the northeastern coast of the North American continent. They also founded a town on the island, which they named New Amsterdam and soon developed into a major port and trading center. In 1674, however, the Dutch traded their colony to the British in exchange for Suriname, and the British renamed the city New York.

In de 17e eeuw vestigden de Nederlanders een koloniale nederzetting op een klein eilandje aan de noordoostkust van het Noord-Amerikaanse continent. Op dat eilandje vestigden ze ook een stad die ze Nieuw Amsterdam noemden. Deze stad ontwikkelde zich al snel tot een belangrijke haven en handelscentrum, maar in 1674 ruilden de Nederlanders hun kolonie met de Britten voor Suriname. De Britten gaven de stad een nieuwe naam, New York.

As you can see, the Dutch translation requires one more line of printed type than the English version does. This added length is normal for English to Dutch translations. And particularly when your translation projects involve lengthy documents, the extra space that Dutch requires can cause design and layout problems.

As a rule of thumb, you should always plan for Dutch translations to require 20% to 25% more printed space than your English materials. If possible, plan for this extra space when you're designing your English drafts, and leave enough white space in your original design to easily accommodate the Dutch version.



If you don't plan early on, you may need to create a new design and layout for your Dutch materials. Why add time, headaches and unnecessary costs? Be as cautious with your money as the Dutch are themselves by planning ahead!

Achieving High Success Rates in the Low Countries

You now know more about Dutch translation than 99.9% of all English speakers in the world today. Here are a few final tips to help you achieve perfect Dutch – 100% of the time.

Don't Tiptoe Through the Tulips

If you don't want to know the truth, don't ask the Dutch. In America, for example, if two women are enjoying a cup of coffee together and one remarks, "My hair is an absolute mess today," the other is likely to say, "What on earth are you talking about? Your hair looks wonderful!"

But in the Netherlands, if you had a bad hair day and were bold enough to confirm it out loud, your coffee companion's response might be, "Yes, I noticed it as soon as you walked in the door. Would you pass the sugar, please?"



As we said at the very beginning of this guidebook, the Dutch are direct. To communicate effectively in Dutch-speaking markets, your communications should be direct and straightforward as well. Keep this important cultural difference in mind when preparing your original English language texts. Fluffy or indirect language tends to translate poorly into Dutch.



All Dutch Isn't Created Equal

If your business calls you to Belgium, rather than the Netherlands, make sure to have a Flemish, instead of a Dutch translator handle the assignment. The Flemish people are extremely proud of their heritage, including their language, and the stylistic differences between Dutch and Flemish are immediately noticeable to native speakers.

When your target markets include both countries, it's also a good idea to have a Flemish speaker review your Dutch translation, and vice versa. Communications that respect local sensitivities are always the most powerful.



Never Rely on Translation Software Alone

Anyone who believes translation software can produce perfect translations without the help of a qualified professional might also believe the legend of the little Dutch boy who saved his town from flooding by bravely holding his finger in a dyke.

They are both beautiful stories, but unfortunately, neither is true. Excellent Dutch translation software does, in fact, exist, but it should always be used as a tool to support the work of a qualified translation professional who is familiar with your business terminology.

Process Makes Perfect

Most importantly, the secret to achieving successful translations every time is to focus on the overall translation process, rather than the specific translation itself. The first step is to work with a qualified



translator who is a native speaker of Dutch. After this translator prepares the first draft, another native Dutch speaker – preferably one you already know and work with – should review it for mistakes or stylistic inconsistencies.

If there are disagreements – and in most cases there will be – the two translators should then work together to resolve all issues and develop another, agreed-upon version before the final materials are produced.

It's as simple as that. And as rewarding. For more information on how to produce perfect Dutch translations every time, contact your Convensis representative. In the meantime, goodbye for now.

Or, as the Dutch say, *Doei*.

