

BUON VIAGGIO!

*What every manager should know
about Italian translation*



COMMUNICATION. IN ANY LANGUAGE.

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Bella Italia

Italy. Land of vineyard-draped hillsides, world-renowned masterpieces, cutting-edge design, and even Beckham himself would be forced to admit, a pretty darn good football – or as Americans say – soccer team. To hear its language whispered in smoky trattorias or bellowed across breathtaking piazzas, you instantly know why many consider Italian to be the most romantic of the Romance languages.

If your goal is to produce perfect Italian translations, however, you should leave the museums, wineries and tourist traps behind and head straight for the kitchen. It's in the art of Italian cooking that the art of Italian translation can best be understood.

The food, like the language, isn't complex or exotic. But when you add the richness of the local ingredients – the herbs and oils, the cheeses, the *pomodoro* sauces – the result is a taste and character



like no other. Just so, it's the individual, regional dialects that give Italian its heavenly appeal. On the other hand, these same regional variations often give English-speaking translation managers a devil of a time producing accurate translations.

But don't cancel those Alitalia tickets just yet. Just as the instructions in a good Italian cookbook can make your first attempt at a hearty *ribollita* a success, by following the suggestions in this guide, you'll cook up accurate Italian translations from the very beginning. Who knows, you may be so pleased with the results that you'll invite us over for a *ribollita* dinner.

Mondo italiano

Even Dante himself couldn't tell you how many people actually speak Italian in the world, but most authorities put the number at somewhere between 70 and 125 million. Of the total, approximately 58 million live in Italy, San Marino and Vatican City.

Italian is also an official language of Switzerland, Slovenia, Somalia and the Istria County of Croatia. Other countries with large Italian-speaking communities include Malta, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and several European countries.

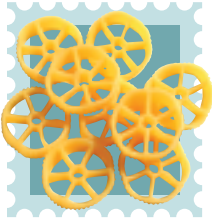


More than 350,000 people also speak Italian in Australia, where it is second only to English as the most widely spoken language. You'll also hear Italian in many U.S. and Canadian cities, where thousands of Italians have emigrated and continue to cherish their native tongue.

A member of the Indo-European family, Italian is a Romance language and a direct descendent of the Latin spoken in ancient



Rome. Other Romance languages closely related to Italian include French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian.



Like Italian culture and cuisine, the influence of the Italian language far exceeds its Romantic roots. Today, Italian is ranked as the 10th or 11th most spoken language in the world, and Italian words and expressions bring a little *La Dolce Vita* everywhere.

Livin' La Divina Commedia

When Dante Alighieri finished writing his *Divina Commedia* (known to us lesser mortals as *The Divine Comedy*), he probably thought his imaginative take on the afterlife would amount to little more than a poetic paycheck and a chance to give the ruling establishment his own version of the Italian boot. Funny, then, that Dante's attempt to disrupt the existing "status quo" would create an all new "status quo" for centuries to come.

Linguistic scholars agree that Dante's masterpiece actually standardized the Italian language. When Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* in 1320, it was before the invention of the printing press. The manuscript first made the rounds of an elite group of Italian intellectuals, sparking discussion and commentary that continued throughout the 14th Century.

But with the advent of Gutenberg's printing press in the mid-15th Century, the lower classes now had access to Dante's *Commedia*, not to mention his brilliant writing style. Soon every would-be member of the literati wanted to write like Dante. The result no doubt spawned enough bad poetry to fill the Colosseum, but the trend



also led to a standardized approach that laid the foundation for the modern Italian language.

So take a minute to give a heartfelt *grazie* to Dante. Even if you flunked your test on *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's groundwork makes your translation project easier to manage because – *grazie* to Dante – although Italian has several regional variations, it's still one, standardized language.

Getting it Write

“Sbagliando s’impara.” It's an old Italian proverb that means, “One learns from one's mistakes.” True, but it's safe to say that when you're responsible for producing Italian translations, learning from your mistakes is a lesson you're much better off going without.

Unless your goal is to teach Italian at Oxford, however, you don't need to know very much about the Italian language to avoid unnecessary mistakes. As a translation manager, your job is simply to manage the translation process itself, not to translate the materials first-hand.

But knowing even a few basics will make you feel more comfortable with the management process. Here are three quick tidbits you should know about the Italian writing system – just enough to impress your friends with over a *cappuccino*.

Numero uno: The Alphabet

The Italian alphabet consists of 21 letters. It's the same Latin alphabet we use in English, but standard Italian doesn't include the letters j, k, w, x and y. These letters are only found in foreign words, such as *karaoke*, *weekend* and *taxi*.



Numero due: The Accents

Italian frequently relies on two different accents, which are called the “acute” and the “grave” accents. The acute accent is an angular dash pointing upward that is sometimes used over the “e” vowel, as in the word, *perché* (because). The grave accent is a dash pointing downward, as in the word “tè” (tea), and it can appear above all five vowels – à, è, ì, ò, ù.



The grave accent is used to indicate the placement of stress, like in the word *la facilità* (the facility), where it clearly shows the stress to be on the last syllable. Sometimes the acute accent clarifies the difference between two words.

And, *perché* inexperienced typists often mistake an apostrophe for the proper Italian accent, make sure to have a native Italian speaker proof your materials for accent errors before the final product is delivered.

Numero tre: Capitalization

Italian doesn't capitalize nearly as many words as English does. Days of the week, months of the year and seasons aren't capitalized. Neither are nationalities or polite forms of address, such as Mr., Mrs. or Miss. In New York, the great Italian singer, Mr. Luciano Pavarotti, might give a concert on a Friday evening in October, but in Rome, the great *italiano*, *signore* Luciano Pavarotti would give a concert on a *venerdì* evening in *ottobre*.





Layout/Design Guidelines

When it comes to planning for the design and layout of your Italian translations, you should be as generous with your space requirements as the Italians are with their hospitality. Words and phrases are often longer in Italian than they are in English, and realizing the difference beforehand can keep you from going *pazzo* later on. (For those of you who still haven't taken that "Italian for Lovers" class, *pazzo* means *crazy*.)

The example below illustrates how a paragraph written in English looks after it has been translated into Italian:

Italian is a Romance language that evolved from the Latin spoken in ancient Rome. It is often considered to be the most romantic language in the world, and in this case, Italian's reputation has nothing whatsoever to do with its linguistic roots. Italian's open vowels and purely pronounced consonants give it a melodic quality that often sounds romantic, even to those who don't speak the language.

L'italiano è una lingua romanza derivata dal latino parlato nell'antica Roma. È spesso considerata la lingua più romantica del mondo e, sotto questo aspetto, la reputazione dell'italiano non ha nulla a che fare con le sue radici linguistiche. Le vocali aperte dell'italiano e le consonanti pronunciate in modo puro gli conferiscono una qualità melodica associata spesso al romanticismo, anche per chi non parla la lingua.

As the preceding example shows, the Italian paragraph is slightly longer than the English version. If you're translating several paragraphs in a long document, this difference in length becomes



increasingly problematic. As a rule of thumb, plan for your Italian translations to be about 10% longer than your English wording, and leave enough white space in your original design to easily accommodate the added space requirements of your Italian draft. Why go *pazzo* when a little planning will save you time and money?

A Perfect Translation...*Bravo!*

Compared to the fall of the Roman Empire, a less-than-perfect translation might not seem like a catastrophic event. But if you're responsible for maintaining quality and cost controls in your organization, producing a bad translation can cause a significant amount of damage. By following the simple guidelines presented here, you'll not only avoid some of the most common pitfalls, you'll say *arrivederci* to poor translations forever.

- If your translation contains numerical figures, always double-check your numbers. Italian uses periods instead of commas to indicate thousands, while it uses commas instead of periods to indicate decimals. See the table below:



ENG	ITL
1,000	1.000
1,000,000	1.000.000
25,500.50	25.500,50
0.50	0,50



- Anyone who relies on translation software alone gets no *tiramisù!* It's true that in some projects, translation software can play an important role in making the process go more smoothly, but translation software should never be used alone. Perfect translations *always* require the hands-on attention of a qualified translation professional.
- And finally...make sure to have an objective third party who speaks fluent Italian check your first draft. Your reviewer should also be familiar with your business, and since Italian has so many dialects, your reviewer should have a clear understanding of regional differences as well. If differences of opinion between translators should arise, they must be resolved before the final translation is produced.



It's as easy as that! And as worthwhile. For more information on how to produce perfect Italian translations, contact your Conversis representative. In the meantime, *ciao!*

