

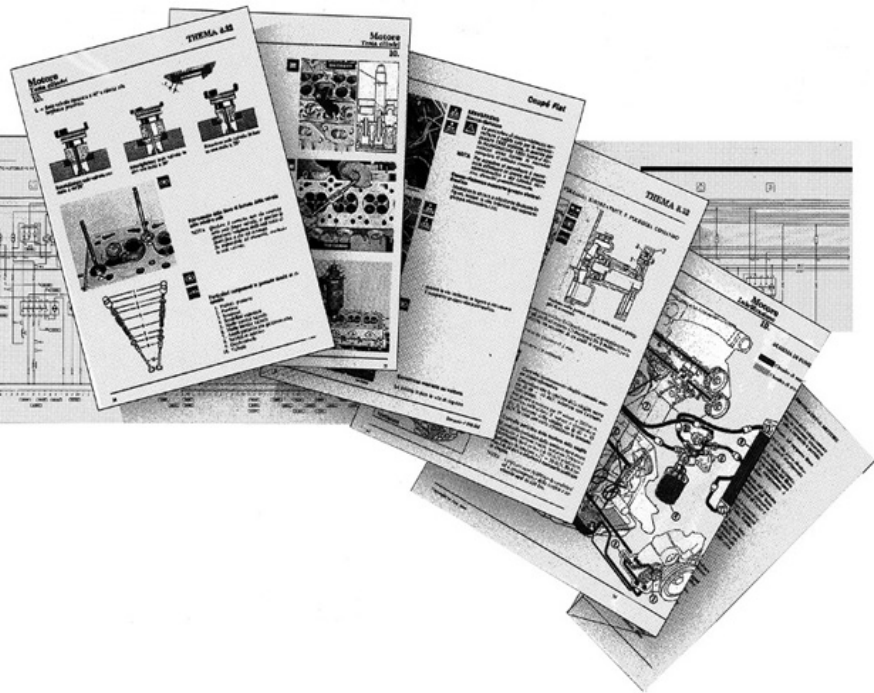
# **From Cover to Back Cover**

**A voyage to the wonderful and  
sometimes frightening world  
of translating Technical Manuals**

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# What are technical manuals?



**A roadmap for the user**

**The bread and butter of any technical translator**

**Nobody *reads* a manual; everybody *uses* a manual**

**Just another part of a machine**

**A nightmare, if you don't understand what's in them...**

**A translator's best friend, at paying time...**

**The translator is usually  
the first reader of the manual  
outside the environment  
where it was produced.**

**Besides being good translators,  
we must also be excellent readers.**

# Anatomy of a technical manual



Cover and back cover

Spine

Reference number

Contents

Safety instructions and safety words

Body text (sections, chapters and paragraphs...)

Units of measurement

Pictures, illustrations and captions

Tables, diagrams and charts

Warranty information

Certificate of Conformity

Index

Some surprises for the translator

# Covers and back covers

Mainly pictures and colors  
Not much work for us here...

Look for similar manuals  
Use the conventions used  
in the target market/language

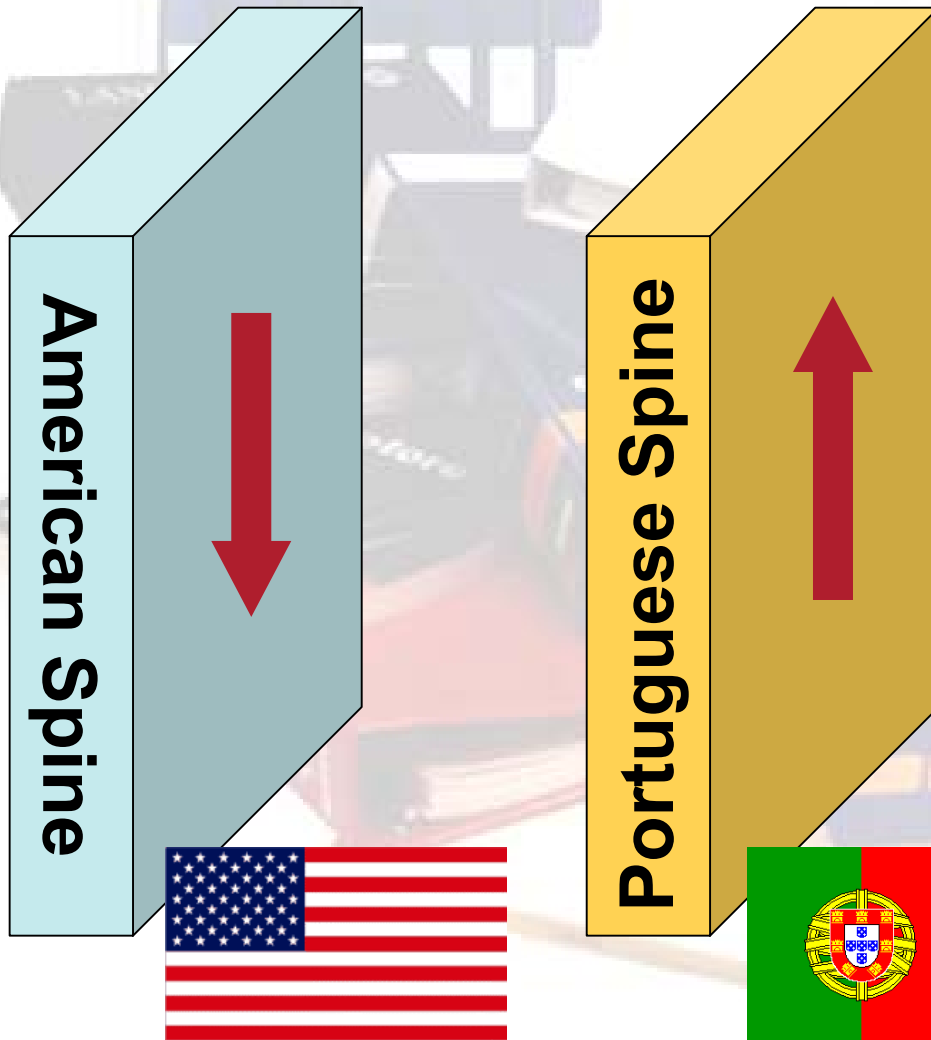
Translating titles

Owner's Manual  
*Manual de Operação*

Owner's and Maintenance Manual  
*Manual de Operação e Manutenção*

DKW Owner's Manual  
*DKW  
Manual de Operação*

# The spine, yes the spine ...



Thick manuals have spines...

Spines also have text....

But, can it be read ?

**and, how is it  
in your country ?**

# Reference number

## ISO 3166 Country Codes

US	USA	840
PT	PRT	620
BR	BRA	076
ES	ESP	724

## ISO 639 Language Codes

en	eng	English
pt	por	Portuguese
es	spa	Spanish
fr	fra	French

Manuals are nothing  
but another part  
of a machine or equipment

Look for odd-looking stuff like:

Ref. Number

TR0654-en-002

Mfg. number

Language Code

Issue / Edition / Revision

# Contents



**Contents, table of contents, etc.**

**The index of the roadmap.**

**If the whole manual must be absolutely clear for the user...**

**... the Table of Contents should be absolutely, positively crystal clear!**

**Period.**

**Tip: Read the whole manual, before translating the table of contents. Always.**

# Body text

In other words ... the meat of the stuff.

Follow the proper conventions for your language, e.g., infinitive or imperative ?

Get the meaning of those obscure acronyms.

You're translating a roadmap: think as if you were its user.

A “**section**” is not a “**secção**” in Portuguese.  
How is it in your language?

# Body text, American style (1)

**What you should know**

**How to start the machine**

**When things go wrong**

**These colloquial expressions do not translate well into Portuguese. What about your language?**

**Previous knowledge**

**Starting procedure**

**Troubleshooting / Fault diagnostics**

## **Body text, American style (2)**

**American punch lines, puns, jokes  
or references to American sports...**

**I've seen them all in manuals!**

**These do not translate well into other languages.  
So, don't translate them.  
Discuss this issue with your client. Always.**

**And, US 800 numbers cannot be dialed  
from foreign countries.**

**So, ask for regular phone/fax numbers. Always.**

# Body text, American style (3)

**Do NOT translate the names of the departments to where users must write for support.**

**US postal workers and people in the mfg's mailroom DO NOT read your language.**

**ACME, Inc.  
Technical Department  
1234 Main Street  
Beverly Hills, CA 90020  
Estados Unidos**

**And Portuguese postal workers do not read English either ...**

# Ah! Yes. Those false friends ...

In about 99% of the cases:

**Transmission is not transmissão**

**Direction is not direcção**

**Union is not união**

**So, get to know those false friends  
in your own language.**

**It pays.**

**... models ending in 873.)**

**... modelos terminando em 873).**

# ... and those display messages ...



**Find out if the labels  
and controls will also  
be translated.**

**If the operator will have  
a button marked CLOSE,  
DO NOT translate it.**

**Don't drive him nuts,  
looking for a button marked  
FECHAR / FERMER / ZU ...**

# Safety words and sentences



**They're in every manual.**

**They look so easy, right ?**

**They can also be the translator's worst enemy...**

**Proven recipe for a BAD translation:**

- a) translate only the word, with no respect for the concept**
- b) know nothing about the standards behind them**

# Safety words and sentences



ANSI Z535



ISO 3684

**"The word message should be concise and readily understood."  
(ANSI Z535.4 6.5)**

**The same rule should apply to the translation !**

- Z535.1-1998 - Color Codes
- Z535.2-1998 - Safety Signs
- Z535.3-1998 - Safety Symbols
- Z535.4-1998 - Safety Labels and Signs
- Z535.5-1998 - Accident Prevention Tags

# Units of Measurement



**Units of measurement must be clear for the user.**

**They must also be usable.**

**Conversion (or not...)**

**Proper usage of the SI symbols and prefixes**

**Rounding off**

# Make units usable to the user, please!



**Functional dimensions:**  
units used by the user

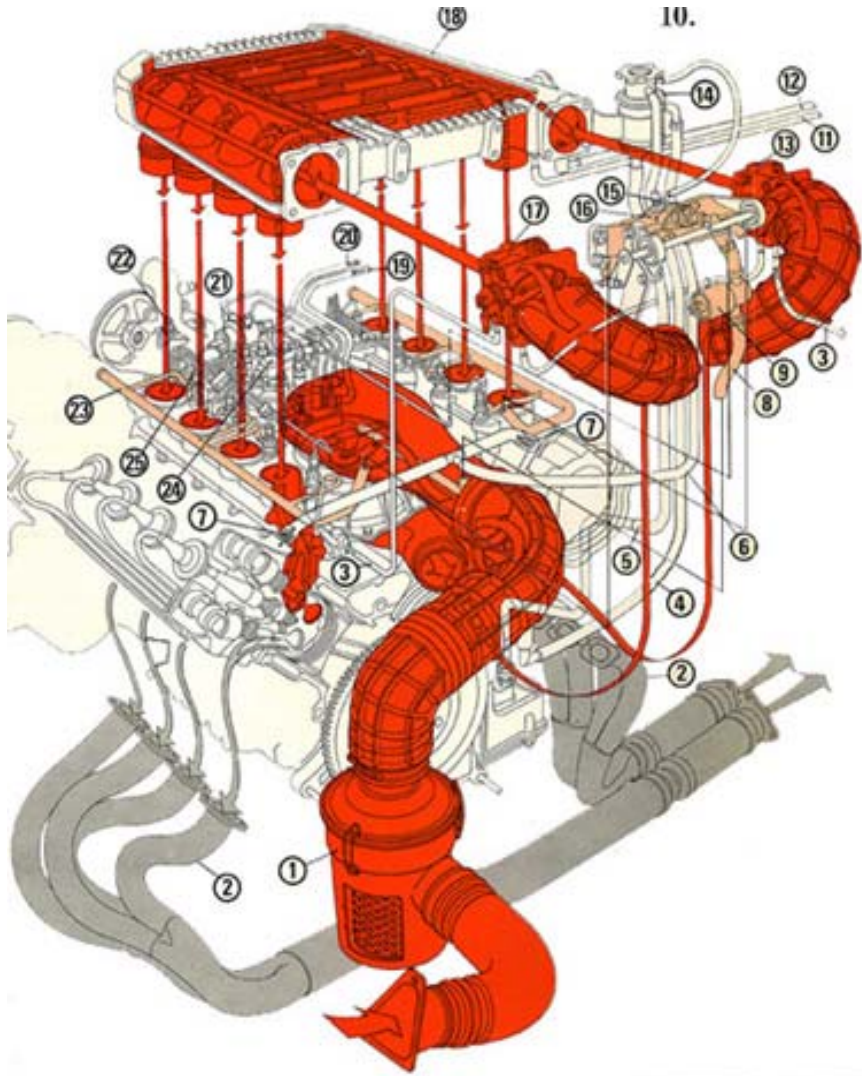
**Space for installation:**  
units used by the user

**Weights:**  
units used by the user  
(and/or other units related to  
the lifting equipment used)

**Electrical current:**  
don't worry,  
they're the same all over

**Consumables:**  
original units  
Example: inches (mm)

# Pictures and captions



Yes, they may be worth a thousand words ...

Refuse translating picture captions without seeing ... the picture.

And, if the picture is available, please look at it!

A “ring” may be “anel” in one picture and “segmento” in another ...

# Tables, diagrams and charts

**Does text fit in the allocated space ?**

**Get those decimal separators right !**

**Just like with pictures,  
always ask for the table itself ...**

**Offer your opinion, if diagrams or charts  
do not appear graphically clear.**

**The user may have the same  
problem reading them ...**

# Warranty information

**Always beware of the legal language.**

**Even the best technical translator  
may find it difficult translating legal texts.**

**Ask for previous texts, whenever available.**

**Take your lawyer friend out for dinner.**

**Discuss your problems. Ask for help.**

**Pick up the check ...**

**Do this always! Lawyers are so ingenious ...**

# Certificate of Conformity

**Stuff sold in Europe must include a Certificate of Conformity.**

**These certificates are always very short and often look quite harmless...**

**Get familiar with the basic terminology used in EEC Directives.**

**Machinery Directive 98/37/EC  
Directiva de Maquinaria 98/37/EC**

# Index

**Is not the same as the Table of Contents**

**A simple way to find a subject  
in manuals with many pages.**

**A straight translation of the index may  
render it unreadable and unusable.**

**The index must be sorted alphabetically  
in the target language.**

**Usually, this is not the translator's task  
and may lead to extra costs...**

# Ah! Yes ... those nasty surprises

**Acronyms and abbreviations known but to God!**

**English written in hell ... by the devil him/herself!**

**Conceptual mistakes:  
no problem, since you're an expert in the field**

**Endless, useless and obscure text,  
often written by authors paid by the word ...**

**120 V / 60 Hz outlets in machines sold in Europe**

**References to OSHA and NFPA regulations**

**The other whole nine yards...**



# One example ...



Most fire extinguishers used worldwide are of the ABC type ...

**USA**  
NFPA 10  
ANSI/UL 711

**Europe**  
EN 2  
ISO 3941:1977  
NP 1553 (NP EN 2)

**Class A**  
Solid Materials

**Class A**  
Solid Materials

**Class B**  
Flammabale  
Liquids and Solids

**Class B**  
Flammabale  
Liquids and Solids

**Class C**  
Electrical

**Class C**  
Gases

**Class D**  
Metals

**Class D**  
Metals

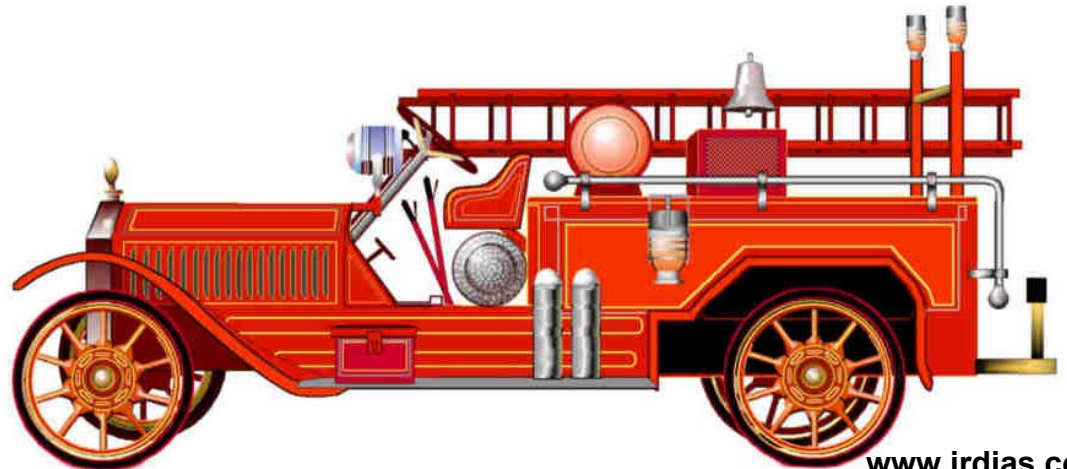
**Class K**  
Kitchen Fires  
(Deep Fat Fryers)

**No equivalent**  
(there are exceptions:  
UK, Ireland - Class F)

# What about errors ?

**Due to editorial, translation and printing mistakes:**

**added, missing and wrong components  
wrongly-positioned components  
inconsistencies in the source copy  
conceptual and context errors  
spelling typos  
typographical errors  
wrong version, wrong manual**



# We, the translators ...

**Can only provide an acceptable translation if we understand the contents of the manual. Period.**

**Must be conveniently familiar with the industry and the target-audience of the manual.**

**Should not translate only the words.  
Users expect to read the manual  
in their own language ...**

**Must look at our clients as a reliable source  
for the clarification of obscure passages.**

**Sometimes, they're also  
the only source ...**



## **Closing arguments and final sentence ...**

**Translating technical manuals can be a good job, a rewarding job and a fun job.**

**It can also open us new doors, because the end user is usually well known: more jobs, more money and more fun!**

**But, BE CAREFUL and, above all, BE HONEST:  
do you master the subject, the industry  
and the proper register of the language?**

**Thank you for your presence**

**To download the handout logon to**

**[www.jrdias.com](http://www.jrdias.com)**