



European  
Commission

**#DiscoverTranslation**

## **Testimonial: *The added value of Translation***

### **Translating Food: a business perspective**

#### **Background**

The Parma Ham Consortium manages the protected designation of origin (PDO) *Parma ham*. It protects and promotes Parma ham all around the world and provides export support to its members. They currently number 139, all located within the province of Parma.

With Parma ham being exported to numerous countries across the globe, the Consortium and its members deal with customers from different cultural backgrounds, who speak a variety of languages. In its main foreign markets, the Consortium operates through a network of independent marketing agencies. It has local agents in Germany, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia, the USA, Canada, Japan, China, Australia and Singapore. Supervised and coordinated by the Consortium, these agencies handle its external communication.

#### **How translation needs have changed in the food industry**

The need to "translate food" has expanded over the last 20 years on account of two major developments:

- globalisation
- the growth of communication.

Globalisation has triggered a general process of internationalisation among companies, which – whether by design or necessity – are increasingly venturing beyond national borders. They now have to deal with foreign customers in various languages. This has naturally generated a greater need for translation.

In the Parma ham sector, which is made up mainly of small and medium-sized family businesses, internationalisation has made huge inroads among a significant number of companies. Until about 20 years ago, very few were adequately equipped to export. Most businesses that sold their products abroad simply sent them to other countries, without adopting a truly export-oriented approach. By contrast, some 40 firms within the Consortium have restructured to meet the challenges of export markets. At the very least, they have hired staff who speak foreign languages (something that was previously fairly unusual), have produced information material in other languages and have translated their websites into English. This has clearly contributed to the increasing need for translation.

The second factor is **communication**: not just the changes brought about by new technologies, but also – and especially – the pivotal role communication now plays on a day-to-day basis in the business world. Most firms are now well aware of the importance of communication, and the difference good or bad communication can make.

Until recently, the prevailing view among food industry operators was that a product's success depended almost exclusively on its taste. Basically, they believed food would communicate itself. Today they understand that quality is not enough, and that communication plays an integral part in determining whether a product succeeds or fails. Food, like any other product, needs to be communicated. This change in mindset is evident in some restaurant menus: the more elaborate the description of a dish, the higher its price. A higher price needs to be justified, and the menu is one way a restaurant owner can communicate the difference. The real test of a dish's quality comes in the tasting, of course – but as well as guiding the customer's choices, the menu serves to introduce and improve the overall restaurant experience.

This also applies to Parma ham, a product that costs on average 40% more than ordinary ham. The reason for the price difference needs to be made clear to the customer through effective communication.

For today's companies, communication is no longer optional or occasional – it is a business process requiring the utmost attention. Translation is part of that process and has undoubtedly benefited from the greater emphasis on business communication. It is not just that companies are communicating more, but rather that their approach to communication has changed.



As well as conveying a message, all the communication material produced by a company (right down to the simplest leaflet) helps in sculpting a brand's image and customer perceptions.

Every year, the Parma Ham Consortium participates in 6 or 7 fairs around the world, with promotional material translated into the language of the country. This may seem obvious, but unfortunately many businesses at these fairs have their communication material only in English. It is true that English is the universal language of trade, but if I go to Japan with my brochures in Japanese, my clients will appreciate it – this gives them the message that I have made an effort to reach out and adapt to their world. It also gives them the message that my company respects and cares about its clients and their markets.

Companies wishing to translate any of their material need to understand that the role of translation is not simply to make oneself understood. Translation helps to convey the company's image and a certain type of message.

It adds value to a company when it is not seen as merely transferring text into another language, but as part of a truly modern approach to communication in the business world.

