

Guidelines for the Development of Legal Glossaries

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to guide the reader through the following concrete steps in the consideration and planning process for the development of a bilingual or multilingual legal glossary:

Step 1: Identify your audience and setting

Step 2: Define the overall scope of the glossary

Step 3: Determine the organization and structure of the glossary

Step 4: Identify the best platform for delivery of the glossary

Step 5: Select and coordinate a team of legal and linguist subject matter experts

Step 6: Develop an ongoing maintenance plan

Each of these steps is described in detail, with examples provided where appropriate. The examples and suggested approaches to each step account for challenges that arise with languages that:

- are spoken in countries with legal systems that differ significantly from the U.S. legal system;
- have a low 1:1 correspondence with English legal terms; and
- use a non-Latin alphabet or present other script-based formatting challenges.

Finally, the document contains a sample project plan, with discrete tasks, responsible leads and proposed timeframes for completion.

These guidelines are intended for use by language access coordinators and other court-based administrators who are considering the development of tools for legal interpreters.

Note: Prior to beginning any bilingual or multilingual legal glossary development project, it will be essential to review the budgetary resources available for initial development tasks, as well as resources available for ongoing maintenance. Budgetary resources should be considered when determining the overall scope of the glossary development project, as well as the platform for the delivery of the glossary. Information provided by language access program managers and estimates included in the [Policy for the Development and Modification of Test Inventory](#) indicate that legal glossary development costs can range from \$13,000–\$35,000 for the initial development of a standard glossary document of legal terms in both English and the target foreign language (not including the development or implementation of a glossary database). Final costs can vary depending on a number of factors including, but not limited to: available linguist expertise to develop the glossary (in-house staff resources vs. contractor work); linguistic resources, such as legal reference documents to support the glossary development; level of complexity to create a text-based document (which may contain two different language fonts) in a final, searchable format; and delivery platform. This initial estimate would not include costs for future maintenance of the legal glossary. Maintenance costs will depend on the scope and volume of work needed during future revision processes.

Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Identify your audience and setting

Much like the development of an organization's mission statement, asking and answering a series of threshold questions will help you clearly define the purpose of your glossary from the outset. Later decisions regarding glossary elements, subject matter experts and presentation will all be informed by and benefit from these initial considerations.

Threshold considerations in the development of a legal glossary are:

- **Who** is the intended user of the glossary?
- **What** does the intended user do?
- **Where** do they work?
- **Whom** does the user serve?

Some possible answers to each of the above questions include:

Q: Who is the intended user of the glossary?

A: Interpreters, translators, bilingual court staff, bilingual agency staff

Q: What does the intended user do?

A: Consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, translation, sight translation, provide direct service in-language

Q: Where do they work?

A: Courtroom, court clerk's office or other courthouse location, justice partner or court-affiliated agency

Q: Whom does the user serve?

A: Litigants only, litigants' family members, court personnel, the general public

The following is an example that answers the threshold questions for a sample project to develop a bilingual English/Burmese glossary of legal terms.

Example*: *This glossary is meant to serve as a resource for English↔Burmese interpreters working in criminal court. Interpreters will be providing in-court interpretation for LEP Burmese speakers who are accused of a crime and their family members who attend court proceedings.*

*We will use the English/Burmese glossary proposal for our examples throughout this document.

Step 2: Define the overall scope of the glossary

A glossary is distinguished from a dictionary in that a **dictionary** captures both general and technical terminology, while a **glossary** is a specialized list of words and phrases. A multilingual glossary will provide a specialized list, preferably with a definition, along with an equivalent translation.

The following considerations should be taken into account in the identification of the scope of the glossary:

- Determine what **terminology** the glossary will contain. The following are some examples of the scope of existing glossaries:
 - legal terms specific to a state or region
 - family law
 - criminal law
 - civil law
 - drugs
 - weapons
 - traffic & automotive
 - medical
 - profanity & slang
- Identify what, if any, **existing multilingual glossaries** in the selected language combination are readily available to language professionals, and if they can be used for the purposes defined under Step 1.
- Gather **existing monolingual glossaries** that can serve as a base list of terms. [Links to several existing glossaries are provided in Appendix A.]

Upon selection and coordination of a team of subject matter experts (step 5), the scope of the glossary should be reviewed to ensure that language experts agree with the content determination.

Example: *Because this glossary will be used exclusively for criminal court matters, we will be looking for a base group of terms for criminal court that apply to the laws of this state. We will base the Burmese/English glossary on the English terms already identified in the Spanish/English glossary.*

Step 3: Determine the organization and structure of the glossary

Glossary Structure and Organization

The core of any bilingual glossary is the list of words in English and their equivalents in the Target Language. The intended audience and scope (Steps 1 and 2) will determine how complex your glossary should be, how to organize your glossary, and what elements to include. Some questions for you to consider when planning the glossary include:

- Will the glossary be bidirectional or unidirectional?
 - Unidirectional glossaries are organized for users to look up words in one language. Bidirectional glossaries can be used to look up terms in both English and the Target Language. Bidirectional glossaries are more complex, but may be useful depending on the needs of your users.
- How will the terminology of the glossary be laid out?
 - The most basic glossary will be an alphabetical list of terms. Depending on the scope of your glossary (Step 2) and needs of your users, you may decide to break up the terminology in the glossary into multiple sections based on topic, area of law, or other criteria.
- Will the glossary include content beyond the legal terminology? Other sections or appendices in your glossary could include:
 - Introduction
 - Abbreviation/label guide (for abbreviations used in word entries),
 - Usage guide
 - Copyright information
 - Bibliographic/reference information
 - List of commonly used phrases in court
 - Court signage
 - Problematic vocabulary (false friends, Latin terms, French terms, etc.)

Legal terminology contains certain types of expressions that can pose challenges to the glossary structure. Some considerations include:

- How multiword expressions and phrases will be listed. For example:
 - “beyond a reasonable doubt” vs “reasonable doubt, beyond a”
 - “rape, statutory” vs “statutory rape”
 - “hung jury” vs “jury, hung”

Cross references can direct users for potentially confusing vocabulary. For example:
“**hung jury**: see jury, hung”

- How are terms of art and common words that have a specialized legal meaning to be defined? Examples of this kind of vocabulary are: “stay”, “standing”, “party”, and “with

prejudice“

- How are abbreviations and acronyms to be listed? Depending on how common these terms are, they could be listed in their abbreviated forms or full forms. They could also be listed in a separate section of the glossary for reference.

Structure of Word Entry

The minimum components of a bilingual glossary entry are the English term and the equivalent term in the Target Language. Depending on the needs of your users, you may also include additional elements for all or some of your glossary entries, such as:

- English definition
- Target language definition
- Part of speech
- Description of register
- Pronunciation guide (pronunciation could be included for all entries or limited to challenging entries, such as Latin or French terms. For example “amicus curie”, “voir dire”)
- Transliteration of non-Latin characters (for languages using a writing system different from English)
- Description of usage
- Context/example sentences

Appendix B illustrates how some of the elements listed above have been incorporated in existing glossaries.

Example: This glossary will contain the following components:

-English term

-Target language term

-Transliteration of term

-Description of usage

Because Burmese is a language written with non-Latin characters, this glossary will contain a transliteration of terms. Because Burmese has a low 1:1 correspondence of legal terms, this glossary will contain a description of the usage of each word.

Step 4: Identify the best platform for delivery of the glossary

A glossary of legal terms can be as simple as two columns in a Microsoft Word table, or as complicated as a large-scale searchable database of terms, which includes multiple languages, definitions of terms in the source and/or target languages, and other indications of register and appropriate use. A glossary can be developed in a variety of software applications and presented either on paper or online.

The identification of the most appropriate software application for development of a glossary will depend on consideration of the following factors:

- How many **languages** will be included?
- How many **elements** will the glossary have and how text-heavy are these elements?
- How will the glossary be **accessed** by users?

Some examples of glossary development tools include the following (listed in order from least to most sophisticated):

Word Processing Table

Advantage(s):

- Can be appropriate when there are fewer languages/fewer glossary elements.
- Good for formats that are particularly text-heavy (ex: use of definitions).
- Can be converted to hard-copy format easily.

Disadvantage(s):

- Does not allow for sorting or other organizational functions.

Spreadsheet

Advantage(s):

- Particularly helpful for multiple, single-word entries.
- Can be a good choice when presenting glossary entries in a variety of ways.
- Can allow for sorting based on source and target language, alphabetical order or according to other criteria or groupings depending on design).

Disadvantage(s):

- Would not be the best platform for printing in hard-copy format.

Database

Advantage(s):

- Can include robust functionality for terminology management.
- Can be appropriate for glossary with multiple elements and text-heavy entries.
- Can allow for various organizational strategies (searching through “queries”).

Disadvantage(s):

- May require purchase of platform for use.
- May require ongoing maintenance of the platform (in addition to routine updates/maintenance of glossary entries).

Translation Software

Advantage(s):

- Can include a number of functions, including computer-assisted translation, machine translation, translation management and glossary development.
- Could be used for other translation efforts in the courts or legal settings.

Disadvantage(s):

- Software can be costly and may require some training/expertise to use.
- May not be the ideal investment if the software will not be used/leveraged for other translation projects.

Example: *Given budget constraints, the particularities of the Burmese language, and its intended use, this glossary will be developed in Microsoft Word, produced as a PDF and made available electronically and in hard copy to Burmese interpreters working in the court.*

Step 5: Select and coordinate a team of legal and linguist subject matter experts

Legal and linguist subject matter experts (“SME”) will collaborate on the development, testing, and review of the glossary.

The glossary project should be led by a court employee or delegated lead. This **Project Manager** will facilitate communications, coordinate meetings, oversee budgetary considerations and assist the project team as needed. Appendix B contains a Sample Project Plan for the Development of a Bilingual Legal Glossary.

A **Legal SME** will be selected based on the scope of the project, as outlined in step 2. This expert is not required to speak a language other than English, but rather should have extensive knowledge and practical experience in the legal area covered in the project scope. It is recommended to have one or two Legal SMEs on the project team.

A **Language SME** is a linguistic expert in the language identified in the project. The Language SME is not required to be an interpreter. It is recommended to have one or two Language SMEs on the project team.

At least one **Interpreter SME** on the project is also recommended. The ideal interpreter team member would be credentialed in the language combination identified in the project and have recent court experience. If no credentialing is available for the project's language combination, a practicing interpreter in the glossary language or a certified interpreter in another language can provide interpreting expertise for the project team. It is recommended to have one or two interpreters on the project team.

Example: *The glossary development and review team is composed of a Burmese language professor (language SME), a bilingual Burmese/English attorney practicing in the U.S. and two Burmese court interpreters. The Project Manager is the Interpreter Coordinator for X Court.*

Step 6: Develop an ongoing maintenance plan

Language is always evolving, and a legal glossary will never be complete. It is important to keep the original intent and scope of the project in mind when defining an ongoing maintenance plan. General glossaries that contain only legal terminology may need less regular revision than glossaries that include terms specific to a region or state, or than those that include colloquial terms.

The project plan should provide a mechanism for the submission of content concerns such as errors or omissions, as well as suggestions for additional translation options or new terms. Revision suggestions should include the current entry, the suggested change or addition, and a reference to a published source that supports the recommendation.

Existing revision **mechanisms** include:

- email inbox
- phone number that leads to a voicemail inbox
- website form
- paper form that can be delivered or emailed

The Project Manager or designee will compile all suggestions and categorize them by the response required. If the suggestion involves formatting, grammatical or spelling changes, the Project Manager may update the glossary, documenting all changes. If the suggestions involve legal and language issues, the Revision Team will be convened.

The **Revision Team** will be tasked with reviewing all suggested legal and language revisions on a periodic basis and making a determination regarding inclusion in the glossary. The team can consist of the original project team members or other experts in the same three industries (law, language and interpretation).

The updated glossary should reflect the revision date, and all changes should be documented to avoid the duplication of suggested considerations in the future.

Appendix A: Resources

English

Self-help glossary terms (Massachusetts)

<http://www.mass.gov/courts/selfhelp/court-basics/glossary.html>

Nolo's Free Dictionary Of Law Terms and Legal Definitions

<http://www.nolo.com/dictionary>

Spanish

Translating Justice: A Spanish Glossary for New York City

https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/translating-justice-a-spanish-glossary-for-new-york-city/legacy_downloads/Spanish_FINAL.pdf

In addition to those listed above, the following **Bilingual Glossaries** are linked at:

<http://www.ncsc.org/Education-and-Careers/State-Interpreter-Certification/Legal-Glossaries-and-Dictionaries.aspx>

English

- [Glossary of Legal Terms](#) (United States Courts)
- [Glossary of Commonly Used Court & Justice System Terminology](#) (Consortium for Language Access in the Courts)

Spanish

- [Glossary of Legal \(and Related\) Terms and Courthouse Signs English/Spanish](#) (New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts)
- [English-Spanish Glossary](#) (Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts)
- [Diccionario del Español Jurídico](#) (Royal Spanish Academy)
- [English/Spanish Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)

Languages other than Spanish

- Amharic: [Legal Terminology in Amharic](#) (United Cultures of Canada)
- Arabic: [English/Arabic Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Arabic: [Glossary of Legal Terminology English-Arabic](#) (Wisconsin Courts)
- Cantonese: [Glossary of Selected Legal Terms English/Cantonese](#) (Washington Courts)
- Chinese: [Glossary of Commonly Used Court & Justice System Terminology English-Chinese](#) (Consortium for State Court Interpreter Testing)
- Chuukese: [Glossary of Legal Terms for Multnomah County English/Chuukese](#) (Multnomah County, Oregon)

- French: [Legal Vocabulary English/French](#) (Maryland AOC)
- German: [Glossary of Legal Terminology English-German](#) (Wisconsin Courts)
- Haitian: [Glossary of Legal \(and Related\) Terms and Courthouse Signs English/Haitian](#) (New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts)
- Hindi: English/Hindi Legal Glossary [Part I](#) [Part II](#) [Part III](#) [Part IV](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Hmong: [English/Hmong Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Hmong: [English/Hmong Legal Glossary](#) (Wisconsin Court Interpreter Program)
- Ilokano: [Abbreviated Glossary for Ilokano examination](#) (Consortium for State Court Interpreter Testing)
- Korean: [Glossary of Legal \(and Related\) Terms and Courthouse Signs English/Korean](#) (New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts)
- Korean: [Glossary of Selected Legal Terms English/Korean](#) (Washington Courts)
- Mien: [English/Mien Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Mong: [English/Mong Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Polish: [Glossary of Legal \(and Related\) Terms and Courthouse Signs English/Polish](#) (New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts)
- Portuguese: [Glossary of Legal \(and Related\) Terms and Courthouse Signs English/Portuguese](#) (New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts)
- Persian (Farsi): [Legal Terminology in Persian \(Farsi\)](#) (United Cultures of Canada)
- Punjabi: [English/Punjabi Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Romanian: [English/Romanian Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Russian: [English/Russian Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Somali: [Glossary for Somali Examination](#) (Minnesota Judicial Branch)
- Tagalog: [Legal Terminology in Tagalog](#) (United Cultures of Canada)
- Tigrigna: [Legal Terminology Tigrigna-English](#) (United Cultures of Canada)
- Urdu: English/Urdu Legal Glossary [Part I](#) [Part II](#) [Part III](#) [Part IV](#) [Part V](#) [Part VI](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Vietnamese: [English/Vietnamese Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)
- Western Armenian: [English/Western Armenian Legal Glossary](#) (Superior Court of Sacramento)

Other Dictionaries

- [Marshallese English Online Dictionary](#)
- [Essential Dictionaries](#)
- [Glossaries for 2010-2011 Test Development](#)

Appendix B: Examples of Glossary Entries from Bilingual Legal Glossaries

This appendix provides sample entries from existing legal glossaries. These samples illustrate some of the types of information a glossary entry can have and how the information can be laid out.

Basic Entry

This entry from a French glossary¹ illustrates the most basic kind of entry for a bilingual glossary, showing the legal term in English and the equivalent in the TL.

Guilt	Culpabilité
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Unique Considerations

This entry from a Chinese glossary² is very basic, but it illustrates how some languages have unique characteristics that need to be considered. This entry includes two TL examples because the Chinese writing system has two varieties: Traditional characters and Simplified characters.

guilty	有罪	有罪
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Definitions

Many glossaries contain a definition of the term in English, the TL, or both languages. The entry below comes from a Cantonese glossary³ that includes English definitions for potentially problematic terms, such as the word “hearing,” which has a general meaning and a special legal meaning.

HEARING (formal proceeding held before judge or administrative law judge)	聆訊
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¹ <https://www.wicourts.gov/services/interpreter/docs/frenchglossary.pdf>

² <http://www.ncsc.org/~media/Files/PDF/Education%20and%20Careers/State%20Interpreter%20Certification%202/GlossaryMandarin-Final2.ashx>

³ https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_interpret/content/glossary/Glossary%20of%20Legal%20Terms%20-%20English-Cantonese.PDF

Formatting

Below are entries from two Hmong glossaries^{4,5}. Both include definitions in English and in Hmong, but have slightly different formats.

GUILTY - A court decision that a defendant committed a crime.

Txhaum - Xav qeb lus txiav txim hais tias tus tiv thaiv txim ua txhaus kev txhaum cai.

GUILTY = TXHAUM - Responsible for a delinquency, crime, or other offense; not innocent. *Yuav tau ris lub txim txhaum; yuav tau lees paub qhov ua txhaum.*

Parts of Speech

Glossaries can also indicate the part of speech of the term as this Arabic glossary⁶ indicates. This glossary also includes definitions for both English and the TL.

guilty (legally judged not innocent of committing a crime)- *adj.*

مذنب، من ارتكب فعلا يعاقب عليه القانون.

Pronunciation Guide

English spelling can be very complex and can pose many challenges for non-Native speakers. Some glossaries include a key to help with pronunciation of some terms. This Tagalog glossary⁷ includes a pronunciation guide immediately after the English term.

Guilty: gil ti

Ang estado na napatunayan ng korte na may responsibilidad ang akusadong gumawa ng pagkakamaling krimen o ang pag-amin ng akusado sa sakdal at sinabing "May-sala."

This Amharic glossary⁸ entry includes both a pronunciation of the English term in the Amharic script and the pronunciation of the Amharic term in Latin characters.

Guilty (ጊልቲ)

ጥፋተኛ(Tifategna): በወንጀል ተጠያቂ የሆነ ወገን ወይም የተከሰሰበትን ወንጀል በተመለከተ ተከሰኛ ጥፋተኛ ስለ መሆኑ ሲያምን

⁴ <https://www.saccourt.ca.gov/general/legal-glossaries/docs/hmong-legal-glossary.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.wicourts.gov/services/interpreter/docs/hmongglossary.pdf>

⁶ <https://wicourts.gov/services/interpreter/docs/arabicglossary.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.ucca.ca/common/data/legal-terminology-tagalog.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.ucca.ca/common/data/legal-terminology-in-amharic.pdf>

Appendix C: Sample Project Plan for the Development of a Bilingual Legal Glossary

Proposed Project Plan

Step/Activity	Project Lead	Projected Completion Date
Define audience, scope & setting		
Determine glossary organization & structure		
Identify delivery platform		
Select SMEs		
SME kick-off meeting		
Agreement on glossary organization & structure		
Identification of and agreement on base terms		
Translation		
Review		
Development of maintenance and distribution plans		
Final production and distribution		