Xarxa Vives
d'universitats

Using Generative Artificial Intelligence to Translate Texts into English

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines aim to help users navigate the challenges presented by generative AI and the particular use case of translating texts from Catalan into English in accordance with the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English. They were put together by the English Language Quality Team (formerly the English Language Quality Work Group) of the Vives Network of Universities Language Committee over the course of a year, starting in early 2025, during a period of rapid transformation in the field of language technology. Chatbots and large language models are evolving at an extraordinary pace, with new functionality, improved performance and novel applications appearing every week. As a result, the guidance we offer should be considered provisional.

The practices, tools and workflows described in these pages reflect current possibilities rather than definitive solutions. Interfaces may change, features may be added or removed, and new systems may emerge that alter established ways of working. For this reason, our aim is not to provide rigid procedures, but to support informed, critical use of chatbots in the preparation of translations and management of texts. We seek to highlight principles, good practices, decision-making processes and awareness of risks and limitations. These insights are more likely to remain useful even as technologies develop.

We encourage you to treat the guidelines as a framework for reflection and experimentation, and to remain alert to ongoing developments in the field. Effective use of chatbots for translation preparation and text management depends not only on technical skill, but also on professional judgement, linguistic competence and ethical awareness. In a dynamic environment, learning to adapt is as important as learning to use any particular tool. This guide is intended as a starting point within that ongoing process.

Our primary audience—the 'you' addressed in these pages—consists of staff members within university professional services. However, we hope this guide will also prove valuable to anyone involved in multilingual communication, particularly those crafting effective texts in English as a foreign language.

Translation teams

Until recently, the tasks of writing, revising and translating a document in our Catalan university context were performed by three different people whose professional skills distinguished them from one another and contributed

in clearly defined ways to the final text. These people, the writer, editor and translator, often worked together to produce a final text that reflected their combined merits. Increasingly, however, they are being replaced by just one person, the writer, who also has to act as the editor and translator of their own text. If you are the writer, of course, you have the help of generative AI, which is becoming more and more effective, and can even mimic a human set-up with technologies such as multiagent systems that act as a translator-editor team. But still, in order to guarantee the quality of any final text, you need to do more than simply write; you need to oversee the revisions and translations that language assistants produce and propose. Or, in other words, you need to recognise the features of good editing and translation.

Features of a good translation

A good translation is one that is fit for purpose, so always start your conversation with the assistant by clearly stating the text's intended use. Good translations should demonstrate linguistic accuracy, which can be improved by adjusting the AI assistant's settings, for example, lowering the temperature to favour a more literal translation over a creative one. Beyond accuracy, the translation must exhibit excellent writing, which can be achieved by training the assistant on the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English*. Cultural awareness is also essential; providing context helps the assistant capture nuances and avoid inappropriate phrasing. Additionally, the subject field must be specified to ensure the translation reflects the correct terminology and expertise. Finally, for quality assurance the output must be revised and refined before it is used.

Remember that, in your role as translator, you will be responsible for the target text and checking all the facts and handling any errors in the source text, and you must be able to justify your decisions and translation choices. A translator's close, critical reading and engagement as an unwitting, covert editor of the source text continue to be important, perhaps even more so, in the age of AI-generated translation.

1. GOOD PRACTICES

This section is a collection of tips and tricks for using generative AI effectively to produce the best possible translations.

Paraphrasing

Harness the generative power of AI assistants by working with multiple versions of a translation, asking the assistant to give you options or alternative wordings. Your AI assistant is very good at generating alternatives (or substituting ingredients), so make the most of this function if you're unhappy with something that isn't quite working. Translation always involves choices, and the discernment of the professional translator is still a key component in the workflow.

After the assistant has generated its first proposal for the translated text, ask it to paraphrase the output to make the English more appropriate, perhaps emphasising certain aspects of the goal (academic or administrative; descriptive or compressed; appealing or functional; etc.). In other words, decouple the target text from the original in Catalan. At the sentence level, ask it to generate alternatives for you to choose from. That way, you maintain control but have enhanced resources available. For example, consider the transcript of this conversation.

Prompt:

> *Express the academic competence below in a more concise British English style. Suggest five alternatives.*
> *Develop an analytical, reflective and critical attitude towards information technology.*

Output:

> *Here are five elegant and concise alternatives in British English for the academic competence:*
> *Cultivate a discerning and reflective approach to digital technologies.*
> *Foster critical engagement with information technology.*
> *Develop a thoughtful and analytical stance towards technological systems.*
> *Encourage reflective and evaluative thinking in relation to IT.*
> *Adopt a critical and informed perspective on digital tools and platforms.*
> *Would you like these tailored for a specific academic level or discipline (e.g., education, humanities, computer science)?*

This is very useful, in our view. We can now choose or create something new on the basis of this output.

The attempt to create one-shot quality translations of university texts from Catalan to English may be the wrong approach. Assistants should be used in a dialogue fashion. If our prompts are precise enough, the dialogue will not be overly extensive. It could be quite concise. University staff translating into English can automatically create English copy from the Catalan original that is more acceptable, but professional language services will still be needed to produce translations that are fit for purpose. The good news for professional translators is that they can work faster and creatively to come up with great alternative solutions.

Checklisting

Use a checklist with detailed prompts. (See "Recipes".)

Flagging

Tell the assistant to highlight anything unclear in the original text, before it starts the translation, and anything that needs to be checked in the translation it gives you.

Using columns

Tell the assistant to present the original and the translation in columns so that you can revise the text more easily and ensure that all parts have been translated. This can also be useful if you are working with translation memories.

Revising machine translation

Use an AI assistant to revise machine translation. (See "Recipes".)

Querying

Use an AI assistant for translation queries, e.g., terminology.

Asking for references

Tell the assistant to refer to the style guide and to demonstrate where it has been applied.

Revising output

Revise the translation, including checking that the translation is complete and that the main terms are translated accurately and consistently.

Starting a new conversation

If you want to start a new task with new prompts and input, open a new conversation with the assistant.

Setting up an agent

Set up and use an agent with access to resources. (See “Recipes”.)

2. RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

This section highlights a series of issues you may encounter when using GenAI for translations.

Text management

With a free AI tool, you are not likely to be able to upload a file in a given format and then download the translation in the same format, as you would with Google Translate. This is a major drawback at this stage, as it means translators using AI will have to reformat the document, which does away with any savings on time. There are also limits on length: the maximum output of a free AI assistant may be around 3,000 words (10 pages), so you will sometimes need to break up a translation task into chunks.

Formatting

Because an AI assistant will often unnecessarily remove italics or add bold, use the prompt below to avoid this, or watch out for this specifically when you revise the translation.

Prompt:

> *Maintain the same bold and italic formatting.*

Paragraphing

AI assistants will often paragraph the translation differently to the original, and you may sometimes decide that you like those changes. But if you don't want your assistant to change this aspect of the text, use the prompt below or the columns solution outlined above.

Prompt:

> *Maintain the same paragraph structure.*

Completeness

Because an AI assistant will often omit parts of the text, use the prompt below, watch out for this specifically when you revise the translation or use the two-column solution above. Completeness is essential: a translation is not a

summary. The ideas, nuances, details and intentions of the source text should be faithfully rendered in the target text.

Prompt:

> *Make sure all the content of the original text is reflected in the translation.*

Favouring naturalness over precision

When faced with translating complex course names such as *Disseny i Comunicació Digital* and *Biomaterials i Biomecànica Avançada*, an assistant will probably suggest "Digital Design and Communication" and "Advanced Biomaterials and Biomechanics", because these combinations or structures are statistically more likely, when in fact the close reading that a translator must engage in would give "Design and Digital Communication" and "Biomaterials and Advanced Biomechanics" or lead to further research on the content of the course to ascertain whether the names in Catalan should be *Disseny i Comunicació Digitals* and *Biomaterials i Biomecànica Avançats*. Use the prompt below to limit adjective scope.

Prompt:

> *Be strict in scope with adjectives that modify two nouns in the original text, e.g., translate 'Biomaterials i Biomecànica Avançada' as 'Biomaterials and Advanced Biomechanics' and 'Biomaterials i Biomecànica Avançats' as 'Advanced Biomaterials and Biomechanics'.*

Inconsistency

Because of the generative nature of AI chatbots, the translations they produce may not satisfy requirements for consistency. In the translation of terms, for example, they may translate *projectes informàtics* as "IT projects" and in the same text *sistemes informàtics* as "computer systems", and *responsable d'informàtica* as "IT manager" but *responsable de serveis* as "management of services". This is worth bearing in mind when you revise the translation, or include the prompt below when you ask for a translation.

Prompt:

> *Maintain consistency in the translation of terms and ensure structures are parallel.*

Mistranslations

Examples of mistranslations encountered by the group are *modernitat* as "modernism", *edificació* as "edification" and "literacy" as *literatura*. Mistranslations are a serious affair, as they are likely to render the entire translation unusable. If we work with smaller languages for which there are fewer texts available to train an LLM, we may find these kinds of errors occur frequently. If in doubt, double-check the meaning.

Prompt:

> *Extract the main terms in the text and offer translations into English in a table so that I can validate them.*

Hallucinations

A hallucination is when the model fabricates content that is not in the source text at all. To prevent this, use the prompt below.

Prompt:

> *Translate with absolute fidelity to the source text. Do not interpolate information or add explanatory material. The target text must be a direct semantic equivalent that is strictly limited to the information explicitly given in the source.*

Abuse of rhetorical devices

This includes the overuse of em dashes as parenthetical indicators when commas will do.

Prompt:

> *Avoid using em dashes as parenthetical indicators when commas would fulfil the same function just as well.*

3. REDUCING RISK

This section addresses how to minimise linguistic and security risks by focusing on the quality of the source text, navigating grammatical pitfalls and ensuring the ethical and confidential handling of data.

A good source text

When cooking, good or adequate ingredients are as important as the chef's expertise or the quality of the pan to produce a good meal. Similarly, having a good source text exponentially increases the chances of getting usable translated output. Unfortunately, this also means that an unclear, badly written source text will make it very difficult for the AI assistant to make the right choices and produce a satisfactory text.

Gender and subject-verb agreement

Although generally speaking AI assistants are good at handling grammar, there are situations where language can be tricky and our favourite assistant struggles when translating.

All languages have ambiguities built in them. When we translate, the ambiguities of both source and target language have to be dealt with, and sometimes the translator (whether a person or a machine) has to make compromises.

For example, in Catalan, the subject of a sentence is often omitted. This means that when the previous sentences mention more than one possible subject for the sentence without an explicit subject, human readers usually make a choice (understand) by context. Look at the following example of an exchange with Google Gemini.

Prompt:

> *Please translate into English:*
> *El ferit va arribar a l'hospital, on la metgessa li va curar la ferida. Després va marxar a casa.*

Output:

> *The injured person arrived at the hospital, where the doctor treated the wound. Afterwards, they went home.*

The AI assistant has treated the subject *el ferit* as "the injured person", *la ferida* as "the wound", and the subject of the second sentence (omitted in Catalan) is "they".

In this sentence, most Catalan readers will understand that the injured man went home. However, the assistant used "the injured person" and "they" as neutral subjects. On top of that, some English readers would understand that "they" is plural and therefore both the injured person and the doctor went home, which might lead to all sorts of further misunderstandings.

Ambiguity is part of language itself, but if we are aiming for clarity, a well-written source text can reduce ambiguity greatly. This leads to translations that are clearer, with fewer ambiguities and content errors.

Very often university texts are written by people who are experts in their field but not professional writers. Moreover, these texts may be written on a tight deadline, by several people or in other challenging circumstances that can make parts of a text unclear or ambiguous. When a text like that is translated by an AI assistant, those problems are likely to make the target text as unclear as the original and may even include inaccurate information. For example, in a translation from Catalan into English (*és increïble*), the translator will have to guess what the subject is ("he", "she" or "it") in order to produce a grammatically correct sentence. Context usually helps make the correct decision but sometimes generative AI translations need supervision; in the absence of certainty, they will just make a guess.

One way to deal with this challenge is to improve the clarity of the source text before translating it, and AI can help in different ways.

A very common trick is to ask the assistant to rewrite a sentence, a paragraph or even the whole text, aiming for clarity. Providing additional information on the target readers, the type of text, the context, etc. will help the assistant produce the desired modified text. If the assistant edits the full text or long chunks, we can tell it to highlight the changes so that it is easier to check them.

Another option is to ask the AI assistant to produce a table with unclear or ambiguous excerpts of the source text, together with one or more alternatives that add clarity, and an explanation as to why that bit of text is problematic. Subsequently, you need to decide which of those suggestions are accepted, disregarded or tweaked, and inform the assistant.

Data protection, confidentiality and ethical use

Generative AI translation workflows should, in principle, comply with data protection laws and institutional ethical standards. This section outlines principles and procedures to safeguard personal information, protect confidential content and ensure responsible use of AI tools in academic and administrative translation tasks.

Legal and regulatory framework

All university staff must adhere to:

- The European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Any other applicable data protection legislation
- Institutional policies governing the handling of personal or sensitive data

These rules apply regardless of whether the AI tool is free-access or otherwise.

Pre-processing and anonymising documents

Before submitting any text to an AI system:

- Remove or mask personal names, student identifiers, email addresses, postal addresses, signatures and any other distinguishing information.
- Use pseudonyms or replace sensitive items with placeholders (e.g., [NAME], [DATE], [ID NUMBER]) in confidential documents.
- Ensure that anonymising does not compromise clarity, especially in structured institutional documents such as letters and forms or official certificates.

Assessing risk level

Not all content is suitable for GenAI processing. Extra caution is required for texts that contain sensitive or personally identifiable information. In the context of our project, this includes documents containing personal data, such as disciplinary records or confidential administrative files. When in doubt, consult your data protection officer.

Responsible use and traceability

AI tools should support, not replace, the professional responsibilities of translators and academic and administrative staff, who should:

- Verify AI output for accuracy, completeness and terminology precision.
- Ensure alignment with institutional style and communication standards.
- Avoid over-reliance on AI and monitor for omissions or ambiguities.

For purposes of traceability, you should retain anonymised source texts, the prompts used, the final human-revised outputs and the version history. Store the final translations securely.

Proper handling of AI-generated content ensures compliance, protects sensitive information and maintains institutional integrity.

4. RECIPES

In the following section we look at a range of text types and offer some advice and conclusions in the manner of a recipe book.

News items and marketing texts

The work on news items and marketing texts took a number of different approaches: building agents, using the assistant to copy edit draft versions of the texts produced by machine translation and, probably most effectively, using a checklist to ensure key guidelines were adhered to.

Tests were run with both Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini with varying levels of success. Both Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini let users create agents (in the case of Gemini, they're called Gems). These are versions of the assistant that can be pre-programmed to carry out specific tasks and refer to specific resources.

A Microsoft Copilot agent

Ingredients

- An agent
- A web page hosting the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English* in PDF
- Detailed prompts (essentially a checklist of key points from the style guide)
- A news item to be translated

Method

Creating an agent is a relatively simple process. You fill in the template with a name and description for the agent. You then give it prompts and the knowledge it should refer to (in the form of public website URLs). You can also add a series of suggested prompts to help guide people when they come to use your agent.

In our case, we ended up giving the agent very detailed prompts because it systematically failed to turn to the information in the style guide despite our having gone to the lengths of setting up a web page specifically to host a copy of it.

These are the prompts we gave it:

> *You are a translation expert handling academic and institutional content for a UK university. Translate the input text accurately into British English, following the style guide below exactly. Do not skip, approximate, or assume rules.*
> *Task Steps:*
> *British English style guide*
> *Spelling & Language:*
> *Use British English consistently: organisation, realise, analyse, programme, labour, honour, licence (noun), defence, travelling, focused.*
> *Avoid Americanisms (gotten, center, elevator, etc.) and Spanglish.*
> *Prioritise correct terminology.*
> *Punctuation:*
> *Double quotes (“ ”) for quotes; single (‘ ’) only for quotes within quotes.*
> *Oxford comma only when necessary.*
> *En dashes (–) with spaces for parenthetical phrases; en dashes (–) without spaces for number/time ranges.*
> *Avoid excessive dashes; never use em dashes.*
> *Time & Dates:*
> *Use 24-hour clock with period (08.00, 18.30).*
> *Use day–month–year format.*
> *Avoid ordinals unless contextually required.*
> *Capitalisation & Titles:*
> *Capitalise standalone academic titles; lowercase with names.*
> *Translate “professor” → lecturer/teacher; “catedràtic” → professor.*
> *Use former student, graduate, or alum/alums (unless capitalised).*
> *Hyphenate compound titles (e.g., vice-dean, co-director).*
> *Tone & Style:*
> *Polished, professional, academic tone.*
> *Clear grammar, natural flow.*
> *Inclusive, gender-neutral language.*
> *Wellbeing (no hyphen), drop-down (hyphen), email (no hyphen).*
> *Numbers & Formatting:*
> *Spell out numbers under 10 except in technical contexts; use numerals for 10 and above.*
> *En dashes with spaces for interruptions; no spaces for ranges.*
> *Sentence case headings; maintain consistent formatting.*
> *Degree Titles & Institutions:*

Capitalise formal degree names: Bachelor's Degree in Psychology.
Use lowercase for generic degree references: a bachelor's degree in psychology.
Use official English names for all universities and institutions.
Ensure alignment with Xarxes Vives style guide where applicable.
Idiomatic English:
Translate accurately.
Avoid literal, awkward, or AI-sounding constructions.
Universities (official English names):
Abat Oliba CEU University
University of Alacant
Universitat d'Andorra
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
University of Barcelona
University of Girona
University of the Balearic Islands
University of Perpignan Via Domitia
University of Sassari
Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
Valencian International University
Universitat Jaume I
University of Lleida
Miguel Hernández University of Elche
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya
Universitat Politècnica de València
Pompeu Fabra University
Ramon Llull University
Universitat Rovira i Virgili
Universitat de València
University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia
Treat UIC Barcelona as an approved institutional name that can be used exactly as is, without needing to spell out Universitat Internacional de Catalunya unless context requires it.
Key Notes:
Always prioritise the style guide.
Focus on accuracy, official terms, and correct British English spelling.
Ensure clarity and natural phrasing.

Parse the Interuniversity Style Guide at https://publishor.wordpress.com/style-guide/. If you can't find an answer in the guide, be up front and say so. Everything you do should respect the style regulated by the Interuniversity Style Guide.
Include a style compliance checklist [for UIC Barcelona] automatically at the end of every future translation to confirm that all your instructions have been followed.
Here's a quick example of how it will look:
Style compliance checklist
British English ✓
24-hour clock format ✓
No em dashes ✓
En dashes used sparingly and with spaces ✓
Inclusive language ✓
"Lecturer" used instead of "professor" ✓
Titles and ranks not capitalised ✓
Catalan-influenced syntax avoided ✓
Xarxa Vives Interuniversity Style Guide followed ✓

These prompts were developed specifically for UIC Barcelona and are adapted to its particular house style.

As you can see, they are long. As we've said above, this was to ensure that they covered all the key points because we couldn't rely on the agent referring to the style guide.

Results

The results were variable. Thanks to the comprehensive nature of the prompts, the output from the agent was generally acceptable, but not always ideal, as shown in the example below.

Prompt:

Translate this into English.
Neix una càtedra universitat-empresa d'innovació i eficiència en salut
Impulsada per AstraZeneca i la UdL per a un període inicial de 3 anys
Promoure la investigació i la formació avançada en innovació i l'avaluació de tecnologies sanitàries amb un enfocament basat en l'eficiència i la millora dels resultats en salut és l'objectiu de la nova Càtedra AstraZeneca

EffiHEALTH d'Innovació i Eficiència en Salut. Impulsada per la Universitat de Lleida (UdL) i AstraZeneca Farmacéutica SPAIN, pretén "com a iniciativa d'utilitat pública, generar coneixement que contribueixi al benestar col·lectiu i a l'enfortiment del sistema sanitari". Així ho recull el conveni de creació d'aquesta nova càtedra universitat-empresa de la UdL signat pel rector, Jaume Puy, i la directora d'Afers corporatius i Accés al mercat de la companyia, Marta Moreno Mínguez.

Output:

New university–business chair for innovation and efficiency in healthcare
Driven by AstraZeneca and the University of Lleida for an initial period of three years
The aim of the new AstraZeneca EffiHEALTH Chair in Innovation and Efficiency in Healthcare is to promote research and advanced training in innovation and the evaluation of healthcare technologies, with a focus on efficiency and improved health outcomes.
Launched by the University of Lleida (UdL) and AstraZeneca Farmacéutica SPAIN, the initiative seeks to "generate knowledge that contributes to collective wellbeing and strengthens the healthcare system, as a public-interest initiative".
This is stated in the agreement establishing the new university–business chair at the University of Lleida, signed by the rector, Jaume Puy, and the company's Director of Corporate Affairs and Market Access, Marta Moreno Mínguez.

Conclusions

In the example above, the agent has correctly translated the name of the university and lowercased the word "rector" in accordance with the style guide's recommendations. However, it doesn't use the abbreviation "UdL" on second mention as the style guide advises.

This inconsistency is often found in the texts produced by the agent and can be frustrating. It means that the user must revise the output carefully to make sure the guidelines are followed in all cases.

As regards the translations themselves, they tended to be very literal, as can be seen in the unusual or stilted turns of phrase "Driven by AstraZeneca and the University of Lleida" or "This is stated in the agreement establishing the new university–business chair".

In short, the agent is probably producing better translations than the generic assistant, but only marginally so.

A Google Gemini Gem

Ingredients

- A Gem
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English* in PDF
- Some brief prompts
- A news item to be translated

Method

Setting up the Gem was very simple. We gave it a name and short description. The prompts we gave it were as follows:

> *You're a translator and proofreader, and you stick religiously to the guidelines set out in the 4th edition of the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English (a PDF of which you have as your knowledge). You won't give advice based on any other source, only the 4th edition of the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English. If the 4th edition of the style guide doesn't cover the issue, you say so.*

And we uploaded a PDF copy of the style guide to its knowledge base.

Results

Again, the results were variable, as shown in the example below.

Prompt:

> *Translate this into English.*
> *Neix una càtedra universitat-empresa d'innovació i eficiència en salut*
> *Impulsada per AstraZeneca i la UdL per a un període inicial de 3 anys*
> *Promoure la investigació i la formació avançada en innovació i l'avaluació de tecnologies sanitàries amb un enfocament basat en l'eficiència i la millora dels resultats en salut és l'objectiu de la nova Càtedra AstraZeneca*

EffiHEALTH d'Innovació i Eficiència en Salut. Impulsada per la Universitat de Lleida (UdL) i AstraZeneca Farmacéutica SPAIN, pretén "com a iniciativa d'utilitat pública, generar coneixement que contribueixi al benestar col·lectiu i a l'enfortiment del sistema sanitari". Així ho recull el conveni de creació d'aquesta nova càtedra universitat-empresa de la UdL signat pel rector, Jaume Puy, i la directora d'Afers corporatius i Accés al mercat de la companyia, Marta Moreno Mínguez.

Output:

[According to Section 3.3.9.ii) of the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English (fourth edition), the names of chairs and knowledge areas (Càtedres i àrees de coneixement) are capitalised.
The translation, adhering strictly to the guidelines, is:]

New University-Business Chair for Innovation and Efficiency in Health is Launched
Promoted by AstraZeneca and the UdL for an initial 3-year period
The objective of the new AstraZeneca EffiHEALTH Chair for Innovation and Efficiency in Health is to promote research and advanced training in innovation and the evaluation of health technologies with an approach based on efficiency and the improvement of health outcomes. Promoted by the University of Lleida (UdL) and AstraZeneca Farmacéutica SPAIN, it aims "to generate knowledge that contributes to collective wellbeing and the strengthening of the healthcare system, as a public utility initiative". This is set out in the agreement for the creation of this new UdL university-business chair, signed by the rector, Jaume Puy, and the company's Director of Corporate Affairs and Market Access, Marta Moreno Mínguez.

The examples below only include the headline and subheading to further illustrate the conclusions in this recipe.

Original:

La perspectiva de gènere, assignatura pendent en docència universitària
Les matèries s'han reduït des de 2017, segons el darrer informe de la Xarxa Vives

Translation:

The Gender Perspective, A Pending Subject in University Teaching

The number of subjects has fallen since 2017, according to the latest Xarxa Vives report

Conclusions

The Gem was easier to set up and often produced better results than the Copilot agent, but there were still problems. In the first example above, it wrongly used maximal capitalisation for the headline, despite the style guide recommending sentence case.

The second example raised the same problem. When the Gem agent was asked about the use of this maximal capitalisation, it explained that this was the right capitalisation for the title of a research article. This misunderstanding and its subsequent explanation highlight the need to include, as part of the prompt, the type of genre of the text to be translated, in this case a piece of news. The second example also shows that the translation sticks to the style guide, as the name "Xarxa Vives" stays in its original form.

It is obviously referencing the style guide, as shown in the start to its response ("According to Section 3.3.9.ii"), but it doesn't seem to do so consistently.

In short, the results seem promising and the Gem could easily be shared with or reproduced by members of our university community.

Copy editing machine translations

We used the assistant not to translate texts, but to polish machine translations.

Ingredients

- An assistant
- A machine translation system
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English*
- A news item to be translated

Method

We took a news item and ran it through a machine translation system. We then took the output, the unedited machine translation, and fed it into the assistant.

Results

Prompt:

> *Take this text, adapt it to the style guide and make it more impactful.*

Original:

> *UOC Skills Lab. Forma't en habilitats personals per al món laboral actual*
> *Els cursos de la UOC Skills Lab t'ofereixen una formació pràctica, curta i de qualitat en soft skills!*
> *Tenim la matrícula oberta als cursos de la UOC Skills Lab, una formació que et permet desenvolupar i perfeccionar les teves habilitats personals per assolir el màxim potencial en un entorn laboral en constant evolució.*
> *Si estàs fent un grau, aquests cursos es poden reconèixer dins del teu programa com a activitat universitària.*
> *Tens més informació i els enllaços per fer la matrícula en aquest enllaç*
> *Amb aquesta formació desenvoluparàs les soft skills, habilitats transversals que van més enllà dels coneixements tècnics.*

Machine translation (using Google Translate):

> *UOC Skills Lab. Train yourself in personal skills for today's working world*
> *The UOC Skills Lab courses offer you practical, short and quality training in soft skills!*
> *We have open enrollment for the UOC Skills Lab courses, a training that allows you to develop and perfect your personal skills to reach your maximum potential in a constantly evolving work environment.*
> *If you are doing a degree, these courses can be recognized within your program as a university activity.*
> *You have more information and the links to enroll in this link*
> *With this training you will develop soft skills, transversal skills that go beyond technical knowledge.*

Text edited by the Copilot agent:

> *UOC Skills Lab: Develop the personal skills employers value most*
> *The UOC Skills Lab offers short, practical and high-quality training in soft skills – essential competencies for thriving in today's dynamic professional landscape.*

Enrolment is now open. These courses are designed to help you strengthen and refine your personal skills, empowering you to reach your full potential in an ever-evolving workplace.
If you are currently studying for a degree, these courses may be recognised as part of your academic programme.
Full course details and enrolment links are available here.
Through this training, you will develop transversal skills that complement your technical knowledge and enhance your overall professional profile.

Text edited by the Gemini Gem:

UOC Skills Lab: Training Soft Skills for Today's Workplace
The UOC Skills Lab courses offer practical, short, and high-quality soft skills training!
Enrolment is open for the UOC Skills Lab courses. This training allows you to develop and perfect your soft skills to reach your maximum potential in a constantly evolving work environment.
If you are doing a degree (bachelor's or master's), these courses can be recognised within your programme as a university activity.
Find more information and the enrolment links here.
With this training, you will develop soft skills—interdisciplinary abilities that go beyond technical knowledge.

Conclusions

Both agents adapted and improved the machine translation. For example, both agents used the British English "enrolment", and fixed the "We have open enrollment" problem.

The texts definitely read better. However, Gemini made a dangerous mistake. The original Catalan refers to a *grau*, but Gemini has decided, somewhat perilously, to include master's degrees in its parenthetical. This underscores the need for the person responsible for producing the text to have the skills and eye for detail required to ensure errors such as this don't slip through.

Generally speaking, these revisions fared slightly better than generating content from scratch, improving readability and style. However, outputs still needed several rounds of prompting to ensure everything in the style guide and prompts was followed. A news article automatically translated from Catalan or Spanish to English required repeated prompting to produce a version that read naturally and adhered to all criteria.

Checklists

As current agents are unable to internalise a full style guide or follow a long set of prompts consistently, using a checklist focuses on clearly defining expectations. The checklist covered key aspects such as tone, terminology, capitalisation, punctuation, inclusivity and overall clarity.

Ingredients

- An agent with a checklist as a prompt
- The AI-assisted translation

Method

A checklist was prepared and used either directly within the prompt or as a post hoc review. Each item corresponded to a specific requirement taken from the style guide, which made it easier to verify whether the output met our expectations.

Results

Using a checklist generally improved reliability. Outputs were more consistent and easier to assess, particularly when compared with agent-based approaches, where compliance with prompts was often inconsistent. However, the checklist did not remove the need for review. In practice, texts still required careful checking and, in many cases, repeated prompting to ensure that all points on the checklist were addressed.

It remains unclear why the assistant frequently fails to follow all prompts from the outset, even when these are explicitly stated. While the checklist helped structure the process and highlight shortcomings more quickly, it did not guarantee full compliance.

Conclusions

Overall, checklists proved to be a useful support tool, especially for news items and marketing texts, where stylistic consistency and institutional tone are essential. They improved reliability, but they did not replace the need for human supervision.

One clear takeaway is that, rather than using the checklist as part of the prompt, it works best as a post hoc review tool. The assistant tends to perform better when guided by a small number of clear, checkable rules than when confronted with long and comprehensive sets of prompts. Checklists therefore work best as part of a broader workflow, supporting, rather than substituting, human expertise.

Course guides

The work on course guides is divided into two parts: a discussion of different editing approaches and an agent designed for Copilot that includes prompts.

Editing output

Here we discuss examples of editing output in line with the recommendations of the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* and the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English.*

Ingredients

- An assistant
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English*
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English* (specifically, the section "Writing in English")
- A course guide

Method

If you ask your language assistant or language agent to translate the different parts of a course guide following the guidelines in the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* and in the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English*, specifically those in the section "Writing in English", the results should be fairly satisfactory. However, whether it is translating the course's learning objectives and outcomes, the competences students will acquire or the content of the course itself, you will need to make sure that the assistant follows the guidelines consistently and produces translations of an acceptable quality. If you are a non-native user of English,

checking the first will be easier than checking the second. But fortunately, as this section explains, there are ways of detecting and addressing one of the most recognisable features of substandard translation: an excess of literalness, meaning word-for-word translation that preserves the original grammatical structure, syntax and sentence order at the expense of obscuring the meaning in the target language.

Results

Literalness is not always a problem, of course. With the simpler sentences you give the assistant to translate, this may be good enough for what you want.

Original:

> *Distingir entre dades, informació i coneixement.*

Translation:

> *Distinguish between data, information and knowledge.*

But in other moments, a word-for-word translation style may produce a text that ignores recommendations in the style guides.

Original:

> *Desenvolupar una actitud analítica, crítica i reflexiva envers les tecnologies de la informació.*

Translation:

> *Develop an analytical, reflective and critical attitude towards information technology.*

Original:

> *Emprar les eines conceptuals, tècniques i metodològiques que permetin assolir una certa autonomia.*

Translation:

> *Use conceptual, technical and methodological tools to work independently of others.*

We analyse these examples below.

In the first example, by using a verb that is essentially empty of meaning ("Develop…") and following that with a dense, six-word noun phrase ("an

analytical, reflective and critical attitude"), the assistant has ignored the advice in the section "Writing in English" of the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English* that "readers understand sentences more easily if the verb expresses the action". (See the subsection "Verbs and actions".) In line with that advice, you could revise the sentence as follows.

Translation:

> *Develop an analytical, reflective and critical attitude towards information technology.*

Your revision:

> *Analyse, reflect on and critically evaluate information technology.*

And in the second example above, the word-for-word translation of "les eines conceptuals, tècniques i metodològiques" ignores the style guide's advice to avoid unnecessarily technical language. (See the subsection "The unofficial style".) You could revise that sentence as follows.

Translation:

> *Use conceptual, technical and methodological tools to work independently of others.*

Your revision:

> *Use concepts, techniques and methods to work independently of others.*
> *Second, with the more complex sentences you give it to translate, the assistant may still produce fairly literal, surface-level translations of some parts but then show welcome depth in its treatment of others.*

Original:

> *Conèixer els diversos sistemes d'escriptura utilitzats a la Mediterrània i al Pròxim Orient Antic en el primer i el segon mil·lenni aC, atenent, especialment, als punts de contacte i de divergència entre elles.*

Translation:

> *Know the writing systems of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean of the second and first millennia BCE, paying particular attention to the points of contact and divergence between them.*

In the example above, the translation does two things well: first, it reverses the order of the two millennia, hereby observing the English-language academic

convention which lists earlier periods in history before later ones; second, it translates "aC" as "BCE" rather than "BC", in line with another academic practice. This kind of result, where the assistant uses its resources to go further than just providing a serviceable translation, is what makes generative AI a valuable translation tool. Moreover, the quality is such that you might even decide to go back to your original sentence and rephrase it, which is a common enough practice in traditional writing-and-translation processes. Not because your original text was badly written, but because needing to translate it has given you more time to invest in the overall quality of the language.

On the other hand, again there are parts of the translation above that continue to suffer from over-literalness. First, the choice of the verb "know" to translate *conèixer* ("Conèixer els diversos sistemes…") fails to follow the recommendation to express learning objectives and outcomes with dynamic, readily measurable verbs that describe what students will be able to do, as explained in the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English*. By choosing one of the verbs from "Verbs giving evidence of knowing" in the section "List of verbs" in the appendix of the style guide, you could revise that sentence as follows.

Translation:

> *Know the writing systems of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean of the second and first millennia BCE, paying particular attention to the points of contact and divergence between them.*

Your revision:

> *Identify the writing systems of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean of the second and first millennia BCE, paying particular attention to the points of contact and divergence between them.*

Second, the meaning of the sentence is made less clear by the excessively literal translation of the participle clause "atenent, especialment, als punts de contacte i de divergència entre elles" ("paying particular attention to the points of contact and divergence between them"). The original is essentially saying that students will examine the similarities and differences between two writing systems. If you return to the principle that English-language sentences are more easily understandable when they are led by well-chosen verbs, then you can re-express this idea of examining similarities and differences with the verb phrase "compare and contrast", adding that phrase to the verb we already have at the beginning of the sentence ("identify"), and simply discarding the participle clause at the end.

Your revision:

> *Identify and compare and contrast the writing systems of the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean of the second and first millennia BCE.*

Finally, as explained at the beginning, another effect of literal translation is that it conserves the order of the elements in a sentence. Sometimes, in simpler sentences, this is adequate for the purposes of translation. Other times, sticking to the original order of the clauses can distract from the focus of the original.

Original:

> *Escollir activitats d'aprenentatge, estratègies i rutines d'aula que aprofitin el capital cultural i lingüístic dels alumnes d'educació infantil i primària per fomentar una millor comprensió del multilingüisme i la diversitat lingüística.*

Translation:

> *Choose classroom learning activities, strategies and routines that draw from the cultural and linguistic capital of infant and primary learners to foster a better understanding of multilingualism and linguistic diversity.*

The original sentence above describes a series of things that students will learn to do ("Escollir activitats d'aprenentatge…") in order to achieve an objective ("per fomentar una millor comprensió del multilingüisme…"). Arguably, and following the advice given in "End weight" in the subsection "Sentences" in "Writing in English", this could be more clearly expressed in the translation if the objective was stated first, followed by the means by which it was to be achieved.

Translation:

> *Choose classroom learning activities, strategies and routines that draw from the cultural and linguistic capital of infant and primary learners to foster a better understanding of multilingualism and linguistic diversity.*

Your revision:

> *Foster a better understanding of multilingualism and linguistic diversity by choosing classroom learning activities, strategies and routines that draw from the cultural and linguistic capital of infant and primary learners.*

Conclusions

To sum up, the best way to ensure that your language assistant or language agent is translating your course guide satisfactorily is to check that it is doing

two things: first, that it is following the guidelines in the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* and in the "Writing in English" section of the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English*; and second, that it is not using literal, word-for-word translation to the point that the meaning of the original text is compromised in the translated text. Of course, the second may be more difficult for you to do than the first—after all, that is why you are using the assistant in the first place—but you need to remember that, like it or not, where you were once only the writer of a course plan, you are now both the writer and the translator. Fortunately, one of the main features of substandard translation is the overuse of literalness and, as this recipe has shown, literalness is relatively easy to detect.

A course guide writer

This agent for translating and revising course guides in line with the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* was developed specifically for the UPC and adapted to its particular house style.

Ingredients

- A Copilot agent called Course Guide Writer
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English*
- A course guide in Catalan

Method

The agent was given the content of the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* as a prompt. The content was adapted to the UPC's specific house style as needed. Additional prompts were given after an evaluation of the output.

> *General principles for writing course guides*
> *A course guide outlines a subject taught in a degree programme and includes key information: course code, prerequisites, learning objectives, outcomes, methodology, types of classes, assessment system and practical details like office hours and reading lists.*
> *It focuses on competences students must acquire, guiding their learning and assessment.*

The guide is primarily for professors writing in English, but also useful for coordinators, translators and mobility students.
Course guides vary in structure and terminology across universities; this guide standardises terms like course guide, competences and contents.

Definitions and structure
Competences
Basic, general, and interdisciplinary competences are expected across programmes and may be pre-developed.
Specific competences are course-specific and usually acquired during the course.
Examples:
Teamwork: Ability to contribute pragmatically and responsibly.
Independent learning: Ability to choose methods and extend knowledge.
Reasoning: Critical, logical and mathematical thinking.
Learning objectives vs. learning outcomes
Learning objectives: What students should learn.
Learning outcomes: What students can do after completing the course.
Often only one section is used due to overlap.

Writing competences, objectives and outcomes
Formatting lists
Use clear headings or introductory phrases.
Ensure grammatical connection and parallel structure.
Maintain consistent punctuation:
Full sentence intro → colon + capitalised items with full stops.
Fragment intro → lowercase items with commas or semicolons.

Competences examples
General: Teamwork, public speaking, report writing.
Specific:
"Students must be able to explain how the economy works."
Use dynamic verbs (e.g., explain, describe) not stative verbs (e.g., understand, know).
Learning objectives examples
Infinitive list:
Describe how living beings are organised.
Classify living beings into five kingdoms.

Student-centred:
"By the end of the course, students will be able to…" followed by bare infinitives.
Learning outcomes examples
"Explain the main theories of development."
"Describe how the public sector operates."

Writing course contents
Cohesion
Ensure the topic heading encompasses all list items.
Avoid dependencies between items (e.g., item 2 relying on item 1).
Concision
Avoid repeating information from the heading.
Example:
Instead of "Child neuropsychological evaluation", use "Children" if the heading is "Neuropsychological evaluation".
Clarity
Simplify technical lists and label equations clearly.
Translate compound titles into concise phrases:
"Psicologia del treball i de les organitzacions: marc teòric" → "A theoretical framework for industrial and organisational psychology."

Language use and style
Types of assessment
Use terms like:
Continuous assessment, formative assessment, written exam, multiple-choice test.
Grading system
Translate Catalan grades:
Excel·lent → Excellent
Matrícula d'honor → Distinction
No presentat → Absent
Mark vs. grade
Mark: UK, numerical, task-specific.
Grade: US, alphabetical, overall BUT "final mark".
Percentages
Write as "75%" (not "75 %").
Types of class

Classe magistral → Lecture
Pràctica en empresa → Work placement
Classe híbrida → Hybrid class
ECTS credits
Always write "ECTS credits" (not just "ECTS").

Student-centred language
Prefer plural "students" unless emphasising individual work.
Use inclusive pronouns: they, them, their.
Example:
Instead of "he or she will present his or her assignment", write "they will present their assignment".

Verb choice: dynamic vs. stative
Use dynamic verbs for measurable actions:
Explain, classify, define, analyse, discuss.
Avoid stative verbs:
Know, understand, be familiar with.
Examples:
"To understand the system regulating public safety" → "To explain the system regulating public safety"
"Know the legislative procedures…." → "Identify the legislative procedures…"

Appendix: verbs for learning outcomes
Knowing
Define, describe, identify, list, state, recall.
Comprehension
Interpret, explain, summarise, discuss, classify.
Application
Apply, solve, demonstrate, use, illustrate.
Analysis
Analyse, compare, evaluate, diagnose, justify.
Synthesis
Design, construct, organise, formulate, revise.
Creativity
Invent, create, develop, generate, produce.
Evaluation
Judge, assess, criticise, defend, rate, value.

Terminology
These are terms in Catalan that pertain to course guides and their English translations.

Catalan	*Recommended English translation*
competències bàsiques	*basic competences*
competències generals	*general competences*
competències genèriques	*generic competences*
competències transversals	*cross-disciplinary competences*
competències específiques	*specific competences*
avaluació contínua	*continuous assessment*
avaluació en línia	*online assessment*
avaluació final	*final assessment*
avaluació formativa	*formative assessment*
avaluació sumatòria	*summative assessment*
examen escrit	*written exam*
examen oral	*oral exam*
examen parcial	*mid-term exam, mid-semester exam*
prova d'opció múltiple	*multiple-choice test*
aprovat	*pass*
apte	*pass*
excel·lent	*excellent*
matrícula d'honor	*distinction*
no apte	*fail*
no presentat	*absent*
notable	*good*
suspens	*fail*
pendent	*pending*
classe magistral, classe teòrica	*lecture*
pràctica de laboratori	*laboratory practical*
pràctica en empresa	*work placement*
tutoria	*tutorial*
seminari	*seminar*
classe presencial	*face-to-face class, on-campus class, on-site class*
classe virtual, classe en línia	*virtual class, online class*
classe híbrida	*hybrid class*
classe semipresencial	*blended class*

professor	*professor*
aprenentatge autònom	*independent learning*

Additional instructions
Avoid summarising or reordering the information. A translation must accurately reflect the source text and no parts must be missing. Keep all paragraph breaks and structure unchanged.
Reproduce the reading list as is unless a particular citation style is asked for. Include ISBNs and links.
Use "responsible" as an adjective only after the noun.
Use "competencies" rather than "competences".
Use "professor" rather than "lecturer".
Prefer "mid-semester exam".
Use "study load" for "dedicació" whenever it refers to hours of study.
Use "h" for "hours" if you need to but insert a space between the number and the symbol.
Use "final mark" for "qualificació global".
Use sentence case for headings, title case for course names.
Once you have provided a full, faithful translation, show me a side-by-side comparison of the Catalan and the English.

Copilot requires users to provide URLs for its agents' knowledge base, but we might want to work with unpublished documents rather than URLs, or the URL we want to point to may be more than two levels deep, so we have taken advantage of Copilot's extensive word limit for prompts to include the content of the *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* and additional instructions there.

Prompts:

Please translate this course guide in Catalan into English according to the recommendations of the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English. Avoid summarising the content and translate everything that's there. Apply British spelling throughout.

Please revise this course guide in English according to the recommendations of the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English. Apply British spelling throughout.

Results

The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Course Guides in English* discusses the problem of translating stative verbs, including *conèixer*, but not the associated noun *coneixement*.

For the translation to be approved by the reviser, the competences in the example below needed to become verbs in the translation, in parallel with all of the other competences in the course guide.

Original:

> *Competències específiques*
> *Coneixement de les característiques químiques dels materials utilitzats a la construcció, els seus processos d'elaboració, la metodologia dels assajos de determinació de les seves característiques, el seu origen geològic, de l'impacte mediambiental, el reciclatge i la gestió de residus.*
> *Coneixement dels materials i sistemes constructius tradicionals o prefabricats emprats a l'edificació, les seves varietats i les característiques físiques i mecàniques que les defineixen.*

Translation:

> *Specific competencies*
> *Describe the chemical characteristics of construction materials, explain their production processes, apply testing methodologies to determine their properties, identify their geological origin, assess their environmental impact and discuss recycling and waste management.*
> *Identify traditional and prefabricated construction materials and systems used in building, classify their varieties and describe the physical and mechanical characteristics that define them.*

But this only happened on one occasion, without the reviser really knowing why it had worked then and not at other times, with the same prompts.

Conclusions

The results were improved by incorporating specific prompts as mistakes were detected. Even then, additional prompting was required to ensure that "responsible" was used only in a postpositive position, as it had produced "responsible unit" and "responsible professor", for example. The agent

confirmed that the prompt was clearly worded and that it was to blame for not applying it.

The agent generally used verbs for competences as per the prompt but produced "knowledge of" for competences beginning with *coneixement de*. When this was questioned, it talked about conflicting demands: on the one hand to reflect the source faithfully and on the other to apply the style guide. It seems that to turn it into a verb would have been too great a departure from the source text, so another prompt had to be added to cover the noun *coneixement* in addition to the verb *conèixer*.

It suggested asking for a second pass after translating to audit its own output against the rules, which reinforces our advice to proceed in steps: one for translation, another to check the rules or instructions have been followed. Another suggestion was to ask for a list of editing decisions.

Correspondence

This section of the guide outlines the workflow for translating institutional correspondence using generative artificial intelligence. In this case, we applied a method designed to prompt the AI assistant to produce a professional-level translation, rather than a standard machine translation with no user interaction, allowing for a more refined result that goes beyond simple word-for-word rendering.

A four-step workflow for translating institutional correspondence

Ingredients

- An assistant
- The *Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English*
- A four-step set of prompts
- An anonymised institutional letter in Catalan

Method

To translate the letter into English, we used the free versions of Copilot and Gemini, following the steps outlined below. First, the letter was anonymised to

ensure full compliance with GDPR and to prevent AI providers from storing or using any identifiable personal data.

Original:

> *Fundació Nexes*
> *Sra. [RECIPIENT NAME]*
> *C/ La Pau, 23*
> *46003 València*
> *Senyora [SURNAME],*
> *Us agraïsc, abans que res, la col·laboració demostrada pel personal de la Fundació Nexes a l'hora de consultar els arxius, la bibliografia i el fons de documentació gràfica de què disposeu.*
> *Les àrees de Política i Vertebració Territorial (Escola Politècnica Superior) i de Dret i Legislació Autonòmica Comparada (Facultat de Dret) han obert recentment una línia d'investigació conjunta sobre xarxes de petites i mitjanes ciutats al sud del País Valencià, en la qual considerem cabdal la vostra experiència i les aportacions científiques i documentals que pugueu fer. Tal com vam tractar en la conversa telefònica del passat 11 de novembre, [REPRESENTATIVE NAME] ha estat incorporada, com a representant de la Fundació Nexes, al grup de treball constituït a la Universitat per les dues àrees abans esmentades.*
> *L'objectiu d'aquest grup és elaborar un informe sobre el potencial de creixement de les comarques meridionals valencianes en base a l'activitat industrial i terciària, valorar la idoneïtat o no de les actuals infraestructures i plantejar-hi, si escau, les millors alternatives, tant en funció de la rendibilitat econòmica com de l'impacte ambiental.*
> *Atentament,*
> *[SIGNATORY NAME]*
> *Cap de Projectes Institucionals i Coordinació Investigadora*
> *Alacant, 20 de novembre de 2011*

Next, to produce a clean and consistent source text, we asked the AI assistant to verify that the Catalan text was grammatically correct and stylistically consistent. This included checking terminology, punctuation and abbreviations, and flagging any unclear or context-dependent segments. These checks aimed to improve the quality of subsequent machine translations and reduce the time required for post-editing.

Step 1. Pre-editing: source text quality control

Before translating:
Verify that the Catalan text is grammatically correct and stylistically consistent.
Standardise terms, punctuation, and abbreviations (e.g., use consistent academic/institutional phrasing).
Flag any unclear or context-dependent segments.

The anonymised and polished Catalan text was then processed through the AI assistant, with data controls enabled to ensure GDPR compliance. In the next step, we requested a translation into British English in a formal, institutional register. The resulting translation was saved as a 'raw' version, which provided the structural scaffolding for subsequent refinement steps.

Step 2. Machine translation (AI output)

Translate this anonymised Catalan letter into British English in a formal, institutional register.

The resulting output was a functional first draft that contained literal phrasing, Catalan syntactic patterns and formatting that did not meet institutional standards. This 'raw' version served as the foundation for refinement in the following step, which involved post-editing using a set of three structured prompts.

Step 3. AI-assisted post-editing

In this step, the raw translation was submitted to the AI assistant for refinement. The prompts below instructed the model to align the translation with the intended tone and terminology of institutional correspondence, seeking to ensure compliance with the style guide and focusing specifically on the relevant chapters.

Setup and initial translation:

You are a professional editor specialised in institutional and academic texts.
- Please refine the letter into fluent non-Oxford British English.
- Avoid literal or word-for-word translation.
- Use natural British phrasing appropriate for official university documents.
- Improve clarity and conciseness while preserving accuracy.
- Keep placeholders (e.g., [NAME], [DATE]) unchanged for sensitive information.

- Avoid literal phrasing; make it sound like authentic, polished British institutional text.

Style guide compliance:

Now revise the translation according to the Interuniversity Style Guide for Writing Institutional Texts in English, focusing especially on:
Section 3 Capitalisation (pp. 46-57)
3.3 Proper nouns
3.3.1 Titles and Ranks (pp. 49-50)
Section 5.6 Dates (pp. 72-74)
Section 9 Writing in English (pp. 92-102; there is a summary on p. 102)
Section 11 Model documents
11.4 Letter (pp. 123-126) (Link to guide: https://cdn.vives.org/var/www/html/vives.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/11/files/2024/12/18112655/Interuniversity-Style-Guide-4a_ed.pdf)

Reviewing terminology and flagging uncertainty:

Review the translation and ensure that all terminology, especially institutional or academic, is correct.
If any specialised term is unclear or might have more than one possible rendering, mark it as [CHECK] for human review.
If useful, refer to our approved glossaries (attached here).

Finally, we asked the AI assistant to further refine the translation, focusing specifically on reducing overly literal phrasing and eliminating traces of translationese. This step involved a final prompt designed to emulate the judgment of a professional translator and editor, ensuring that the resulting text read as if originally written by a native British speaker.

Step 4. Human-like professional post-editing with quality control

You are an expert institutional translator, editor, and native British university administrator.
Your task is to refine the letter into formal, polished British English, ensuring that it reads naturally, as if originally written in English rather than translated from Catalan.
- Apply conventions typical of British academic and administrative correspondence, and maintain a tone suitable for university communications.
- Prioritise clarity, conciseness, and fluency.

- Avoid literal phrasing or structural calques.
- Ensure consistency with the Interuniversity Style Guide (capitalisation, dates, titles, formatting, punctuation).
- Keep placeholders (e.g., [NAME], [DATE]) unchanged.

Results

The results were mixed. When guided by detailed and structured prompts, the AI models generally produced functional translations suitable as a first draft. However, the outputs fell short of institutional quality standards and required human post-editing.

Overall, the use of generative AI for translating institutional correspondence revealed both clear strengths and recurring limitations. While the method proved effective in producing coherent and largely accurate translations, human oversight remained essential for addressing contextual and stylistic issues.

When provided with well-defined prompts, the AI models usually generated fluent translations that preserved a formal institutional register and conveyed the main intent of the source text. Formulaic expressions, such as acknowledgements and expressions of thanks, were often rendered idiomatically and required minimal correction.

Nevertheless, testing with both Gemini and Copilot showed that, despite extensive prompting, the models frequently reproduced Catalan syntactic patterns and exhibited a tendency towards lexical calques. The results tended to be either too literal or too loose, which increased the risk of false friends and subtle shifts in meaning. The most notable errors observed are summarised below, according to the different prompting approaches used. It is worth noting that even after applying the final prompt (requesting that the AI assistant refine the translation as if it had been drafted by a professional translator, editor and native British English speaker) the models did not produce fully polished or idiomatic output.

As a parallel test, the same letter was translated using a different approach: instead of the four-step procedure, only the first general step was prompted, but the assistant was fed with two model letters from the Style Guide. The output was virtually the same with both methods, which leads us to think that AI assistants' general knowledge carries more weight than specific prompts that require the assistant to deviate from such knowledge.

Conclusions

When the letter was translated using the AI assistants with the prompts described above, several issues were observed.

The first error noted was that the date was only placed in the correct format and position after applying the second prompt in the third step, which explicitly required the model to comply with the style guide.

In a different test, the assistant added the name "Institut de Formació Professional Ramon Llull" to the address, information which was not in the source text. It also modified the street name from *C/* to *Carrer de*. Whilst that action may have corrected a human slip, it may have also added wrong, outdated or unnecessary information, so the need for human supervision remains clear.

We also observed that the tool adhered more closely to the style guide when it was provided as an attached document rather than as a hyperlink. We infer that this is because attached documents are fully ingested into the model's immediate context, allowing direct reference and pattern matching, whereas external links are not reliably accessed or internalised and therefore tend to be treated as indirect or optional guidance.

It is important to note that we did not create any agents for the tests. Properly trained and customised agents may produce outputs that differ slightly more from the standard responses and follow the style guide and other specific requirements more closely. Although better results are possible, it is worth questioning how much time needs to be invested in preparing agents for very specific text types before any time savings can be achieved during post-editing.

An issue in the handling of letter-writing conventions was also identified. The model selected the close "Yours faithfully" despite addressing the recipient as "Dear Ms [Surname]". In British English, when the recipient is addressed by name, an acceptable formal close is "Yours sincerely". Although this distinction is not explicitly stated in our style guide, it remains a widely observed convention. In this case, the error likely resulted from the anonymisation process, which may have obscured the link between the salutation and the recipient.

Another issue we observed was that the AI assistant inserted the adverb "formally" deliberately, as in "I am writing to formally express…" even though there was no equivalent in the Catalan source. In British administrative English,

the formal nature of the communication is already implicitly conveyed by both the context and the genre of the document.

This example illustrates how AI can introduce unnecessary words, even when it is not directly mimicking the source language's emphasis, as in this case, producing translations that are technically correct but stylistically more cumbersome than needed. It underscores the importance of human post-editing to ensure idiomatic, concise and professional institutional English.

It is interesting to observe the different translations for one of the key sentences of the letter. Whilst some of the solutions produced by the assistants identified the main reason for writing the letter as being to thank the institution for "granting access" to their archives, one of the assistants rendered that part as "thanks for the cooperation (…) during the consultation", which actually shifts the main function of the letter. Some readers might feel upset that they are being thanked for their cooperation and not for granting access to the archives (or vice versa).

A typical challenge in translating institutional correspondence arises when AI models produce translations that are structurally accurate but stylistically heavy. For instance, consider this Catalan sentence:

> *(…) ha estat incorporada, com a representant de la Fundació Nexes, al grup de treball constituït a la Universitat per les dues àrees abans esmentades*

It was translated by Gemini as:

> *(…) has been incorporated, as the representative of the Nexes Foundation, into the working group established at the University by the two aforementioned areas.*

At a structural level, this translation is correct: each segment of the Catalan sentence is represented accurately, the grammar is valid and the meaning is preserved. However, the sentence is overly formal and bureaucratic, reflecting Catalan syntax too literally. Phrases such as "by the two aforementioned areas" and the use of passive voice make the text heavy and less idiomatic in English.

A more natural and professional rendering in British English would be:

> *(…) has joined the University working group for the aforementioned areas as the representative of the Nexes Foundation.*

It should be noted that all translations of the letter using AI assistants slightly improved one section of the letter by turning a single, long paragraph in Catalan into two paragraphs in all the different English versions.

As for terminology, the assistants occasionally selected lexical items that lacked the appropriate institutional or academic register. For example, it suggested "research stream", where "research programme" or "initiative" would be more standard in British academic usage. Similarly, verbs such as "compile" and "prepare" were used where "produce" would more clearly indicate that a completed document was expected as the outcome, rather than an ongoing process. While this does not constitute a serious error, it highlights the importance of subtle lexical nuances in translation—nuances that AI does not always handle reliably.

Another example of the need for human supervision is that all versions translated *rendibilitat econòmica* as "economic viability", where "profitability" sounds closer to the original and more appropriate to the context.

Introducing a prompt to flag doubtful terminology as "[CHECK]" for human review proved particularly effective, as it prompted the AI assistants to carry out a targeted terminology check and to highlight cases where terms were ambiguous or open to more than one possible rendering. One such example was *País Valencià*, which the model translated as "Valencian Country". Although the assistant identified this as a standard English equivalent in some university contexts, it correctly flagged the term as sensitive and in need of human revision. Moreover, *comarques meridionals valencianes* was translated as "southern regions of the Valencian Community" and "southern Valencian counties". These examples show that when an institution has a preference for specific terms or needs official names to be handled in a specific way, the assistant must be fed with a glossary.

In addition, the models consistently applied typographical emphasis, most notably by placing portions of the translated text in bold, despite the absence of any such emphasis in the source document. This behaviour appears to reflect the models' training on instructional, marketing and web-based genres, where visual highlighting is commonly used to draw attention to key information, rather than established conventions of institutional correspondence.

As a result, while AI-generated translations can provide a useful first draft, they require careful human review to ensure semantic accuracy, stylistic appropriateness and full conformity with institutional writing norms.

5. FINAL REMARKS

This guide outlines a clear, structured and responsible approach to using generative AI for translation within academic and institutional settings. While AI can significantly accelerate translation tasks, improve consistency and reduce human error, its output must always be subjected to careful human judgement.

High-quality translation depends on completeness (no omissions, correct structure, preserved meaning), accuracy and terminological precision, appropriate tone and style, cultural and contextual awareness, and a final professional revision.

The workflows, checklists, 'recipes' and general advice presented here are designed to support staff in carrying out these responsibilities efficiently. They also demonstrate that AI works best when integrated into a broader, human-led process involving pre-editing, targeted prompting, iterative refinement and expert review.

We encourage you to apply these guidelines flexibly, to adapt your prompts to different genres and to experiment responsibly while maintaining full compliance with data protection regulations and ethical standards.

Ultimately, AI is a powerful ally but the quality, integrity and reliability of the final translation remain human responsibilities.

LIST OF TERMS

These definitions were produced using a generative artificial intelligence assistant and specifically cover the use of GenAI for language and translation tasks.

Agent: A specialised, pre-programmed version of the assistant. Agents allow users to create a custom version designed for a specific task (such as translating course guides) by giving it a unique name, detailed prompts and a dedicated knowledge base (like a PDF of a style guide) to refer to religiously.

Anonymisation: The process of removing personal data (names, addresses) before feeding text into an AI tool to comply with GDPR and privacy regulations.

Artificial intelligence (AI): AI refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks that usually require human intelligence, such as reasoning and learning. These systems analyse data to recognise patterns, solve problems and make autonomous decisions.

Assistant: An AI assistant is a tool designed to help you complete specific tasks through direct interaction. It is primarily reactive, meaning it waits for you to give it a command or a prompt before it does anything.

Chain-of-thought prompting (CoT): Directing the model to show its reasoning step-by-step before providing a final answer to improve accuracy in logic or maths.

ChatGPT: ChatGPT is a specific conversational application and product developed by OpenAI that uses GPT models as its core engine.

Few-shot prompting: Including a small set of examples (typically 2–5) to guide the model through complex or highly specific tasks.

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI/GAI): Artificial intelligence capable of generating new content (like text or translations) rather than just analysing existing data.

Google Gemini: A generative artificial intelligence assistant used to translate, revise and polish texts.

GPT: A generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) is a type of AI model architecture designed to understand and generate human-like text by predicting the next word in a sequence based on patterns it learned during massive-scale training.

Hallucination: Inaccurate, implausible or wholly made-up outputs provided in response to a prompt made in a generative AI application. They occur when a large language model (LLM), like ChatGPT or Google Gemini, generates false information.

Human in the loop: The principle that a human must oversee, revise and refine AI output to catch hallucinations or mistranslations (e.g., translating ***modernitat*** as "modernism").

Iterative prompting: A conversational approach where you continually refine instructions based on the model's previous responses.

Large language model (LLM): The underlying AI systems (like those powering chatbots) that are evolving rapidly to perform complex linguistic tasks.

Machine translation (MT): Traditional automated translation systems (like Google Translate) used to create a raw first draft before the AI polishes it.

Machine translation post-editing (MTPE): The stage where a human expert refines AI-generated text to ensure accuracy, institutional integrity and stylistic compliance.

Microsoft Copilot Chat: The specific chatbot assistant available to university staff under a Microsoft Education licence, used as the primary example in the guide.

Multiagent systems: A setup where different AI agents work together to mimic a human team (e.g., one agent translates while another acts as a reviewer).

Negative prompting: Specifically listing what the model should avoid (e.g., "Don't use jargon" or "No mountains in the background").

One-shot prompting: Providing exactly one example in the prompt to help the model understand the desired pattern or output format.

Post-editing: The final stage where a human (or an AI acting as a professional editor) refines the draft for fluency and cultural appropriateness.

Pre-editing: Improving the quality of the source text (fixing grammar/consistency) before the AI sees it to ensure a better translation.

Prompting: The act of giving specific instructions or 'recipes' to the AI to guide its output (e.g., "Translate in two columns" or "Flag unclear parts").

Role prompting: Telling the AI to act as a specific character or professional (e.g., "Act as a senior software engineer") to influence its style.

Sequential prompting: Instead of one long prompt, the task is broken into four steps (Setup, Style, Terminology, Polish). This prevents overwhelming the AI and ensures it follows every rule.

System/meta prompting: A high-level instruction that sets the persona, rules or tone for the model before the user ever types a message.

Temperature: An AI setting that controls the balance between literal and creative output. Lowering it in a prompt favours accuracy; raising it favours creativity.

Zero-shot prompting: Asking the model to perform a task without providing any examples, relying entirely on its pre-trained knowledge.

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