

When a Good Translation Goes Bad: A Disclaimer

dis · claim · er¹

Pronunciation: -m(r)

Function: noun

Etymology: Anglo–French disclaimer to disclaim

2 b : [REPUDIATION](#), [DISOWNMENT](#)

Sooner or later, it happens to every translator: after you submit a translation, someone alters it in ways you cannot condone. Even worse, no one tells you. You don't discover the damage until you receive a copy of the published result, and it proclaims *your* culpability in the colophon. To the rest of the world, you are the person who penned the prose inside, warts and all.

Translation is an art and a calling. I take pride in my work, and I spend hours niggling over the best phrasing, the right nuance in tone and meaning. I continually scrutinize my choices, refining a translation until my gift for writing my native tongue best serves the author's message and manner. To see my work marred by someone else's linguistic infelicities is, to put it lightly, vexing.

But it's more than that. It's a stain on my professional reputation. Potential clients who stumble across my name on an inferior translation can do no more than conclude I am an inferior translator. This disclaimer is meant to mitigate that damage.

So, dear reader, should you run across certain inelegant, error-ridden translations bearing my name, please know that I am as horrified as you are. If I could turn back time, I would ask the client to remove my name. But what's in print is in print; thus I repudiate the tampered translations, I disown them, I put them behind me.

1. "disclaimer." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*. Merriam-Webster, 2002. <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com> (20 Nov. 2009).