

How to Obtain Valid, Certified Translations for German Authorities

“Sworn translators” can perform officially certified translations, which are then freely recognized by all German authorities.

The German authorities require certified translations for certain types of documents, including those needed for starting up a business in Germany, for example commercial registry excerpts, company contracts and powers of attorney.

What is a “certified translation”?

When talking about certified translations, it is important to know that the term “certification” has a particular meaning in Germany when relating to translations, because a “sworn translators” system is in operation here. These translators must meet certain criteria in order to be sworn in by the court. As such, they are authorized to confirm the accuracy and completeness of a translation by providing their signature and stamp, but exclusively in the language combinations for which they have been approved.

Directory of sworn translators and interpreters

So how do you procure a certified translation which is guaranteed to be accepted by the German authorities? There is an official directory listing all sworn translators for written texts (and interpreters for verbal negotiation), and their direct contact details: <http://www.justiz-uebersetzer.de/>. Only these translators can perform officially certified translations, which can then be freely recognized by all German authorities.

Nationwide recognition

Certified translations according to the German system are recognized right across the

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Christine Schmitt

Publicly appointed and sworn
Japanese and English document translator
for Baden-Württemberg

country, i.e. if you require a translation for a registry office in Munich, it does not have to be performed by a Bavarian translator, but can be done by a translator from anywhere in Germany. So if you choose a translator from North Rhine-Westphalia, for instance, the wording on the stamp might say “Japanese translator authorized by the presiding judge at the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court,” but the translation can be submitted to authorities anywhere in Germany.

An ambiguous term

The confusion resulting from the differing interpretation of the term “certified translation” is partly due to the fact that there is unfortunately no definitive name for Germany’s situation, since the term “certified translation” says nothing about the special background. This type of translation might be better termed something like “certified translation in accordance with the German system,” because the simple term of a “certified translation” gives the impression that this sort of certification can be issued by any official authority, similar to a “certified copy,” which can be issued by the receptionist at any town hall or district branch office. As this system is not well known, and because there is no specific term for it, many people buy translations produced by translators certified under systems different to the German one or translations stamped by embassies or translation agencies, but these are generally not accepted by the German authorities and have to be redone here with the added cost this entails.