

# How Do We Have Confidence In Dealing With Texts Written In Languages To Which We Are Not Native?

Post by "Cassius" of January 1, 2025 at 3:25 PM

Here's a search result which gives some of Cicero's approach to translation that we need to keep in mind in reading his renderings of Epicurean material.

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## 1. Literal versus Sense-for-Sense Translation

In *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* (14), Cicero famously contrasts *verbum pro verbo* (word-for-word) translation with his own approach:

Quote

"Nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator; sentiis isdem et earum formis, tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis." Translation: "I did not translate as an interpreter but as an orator, preserving the ideas and their forms, as it were, but using language suited to our way of speaking."

Cicero insists that the translator must aim to render the spirit and essence of the text, ensuring that the translation resonates within the linguistic and cultural framework of the target audience. His purpose was not to reproduce the exact wording but to capture the rhetorical force of the original.

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## 2. Adaptation of Greek Philosophical Terms

In *Tusculanae Disputationes* (Book 1), Cicero demonstrates the challenges of translating complex Greek philosophical terms into Latin. For example, he often struggles with terms like *katastematicos* (pleasure as a state of rest) and *kinetikos* (pleasure involving movement). Rather than force awkward direct translations, Cicero invents or adapts Latin terms, such as *voluptas* and *tranquillitas*, to approximate the Greek concepts while making them more accessible to Roman readers.

This principle reflects his belief that the translator should create terminology that aligns with the target language's intellectual and cultural framework.

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### 3. Clarity and Accessibility

In *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* (Book 1.1), Cicero justifies his translations of Greek philosophical texts by emphasizing his desire to make these works accessible to Roman audiences:

#### Quote

"Graecos libros Latine vertere non ut interpres, sed ut auctor, ut tamquam aliud ex alia re formarem." Translation: "To translate Greek books into Latin, not as an interpreter but as an author, as though creating something new from the original."

Cicero saw translation as an act of creation, wherein the translator becomes a co-author who molds the source material into a new literary and cultural artifact.