

## How do You Translate Love?

Love: The concept is universal but does that mean that the way we communicate about love between couples is the same across different cultures?

To answer that question, we have to understand that there are many different aspects of love and that they can differ greatly between cultures. What follows is a quick look at some of the ways various cultures treat the concept of love.

You must treat the language of love carefully when communicating to an international audience. The business of love is at the heart of several online dating sites such as Match.com, MeetMe.com, and Date.com. ENLASO helped these companies reach out to the international market by translating their website assets into different languages. To capture the vocabulary of love, the act of simple word-for-word translation does not capture the nuances found in how each culture responds to the language of love.

For languages like Turkish and Arabic, it is not appropriate to discuss or post the kind of intimate content that is common in the western cultures. The notion of romantic love is not always universal either. In many cases, the American idea of marriage holds romantic love to be essential. However, in East Asia, trust and respect are very important components of love. In Finland, it is culturally uncommon for the phrase "I love you" (minä rakastan sinua) to be expressed verbally, illustrating that, for some cultures, the frequent verbal expression of love somehow diminishes the significance. This reinforces the idea that context and audience are critical to finding the right terminology to express love.

When depicting couples, or other imagery surrounding love or courtship, you must also be careful. Some countries wear wedding and engagement rings on the right hand, instead of the left hand as found in the US. In Western countries, the red rose may signify love, but in China, the orchid, lily, or hydrangea may better express the sentiment.

Dating websites should reflect the dating habits of the target country. For instance, many Europeans see dating in the US as too formal and codified, and that it seems to lack room for spontaneity. The American insistence on knowing whether an outing is a formal date can be a romance killer from the cultural perspective. Many European cultures prefer a more natural, intuitive approach, with far less emphasis on formal verbal declarations. The terminology used on dating sites outside the US may require additional language for culturally specific concepts. For example, in India, search by social caste may be relevant, while in Japan, Sumo Wrestling might be listed as a hobby.

If we look at the concept of Valentine's Day, some very obvious differences emerge. Muslims do not celebrate the holiday, and in Saudi Arabia it has been made illegal. China's unofficial internet Valentine's Day is May 20th, because the numbers 5-2-0 are close homophones to the phrase "wo ai ni" (I love you). In Sweden, it is called Alla hjärtans dag (All Hearts' Day) and was introduced as a commercial pretext for selling flowers and candies. For Finland, the closest similar holiday is Ystävänpäivä or Friend's Day, which is more about celebrating friendship than romantic love. In Denmark and Norway, February 14th is known as Valentinsdag, but it is largely a commercial import from America, though still a romantic holiday. In Japan, the real romantic holiday for lovers is celebrated on Christmas Eve. However, while the Valentine's tradition was introduced to Japan in the 1930s, the idea of giving chocolates to your love did not take hold until the late 1950s. The exchange was initially very one-sided, with women primarily giving chocolates to men. This is said to be a result of a cultural mistranslation, and it wasn't until the 1980s that March 14th was designated as a 'reply day' where the men could reciprocate in kind.

Clearly, the answer to the question, "how do you communicate love across cultures," is more complicated than it first appears. You first have to decide whether you are trying to describe the nature of love between couples in each culture. You need to understand whether your content targets a formal business context, a casual context, or caters to an emotional or passionate side. You must consider what international audience you are addressing, and how each culture views the customs and language surrounding the term. Keeping all these things in mind, you can then proceed with the business of translation, assured that your translated content gives the right message.

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