Lecture 4: Financial and Accounting Terminology — Translating Invoices, Purchase Orders, and Financial Statements

I. Recap and Introduction

Lecture Three focused on commercial contracts and their distinctive legal-commercial language. This lecture shifts to a closely related but numerically driven text type: financial and accounting documents. Translators working in the commercial field regularly encounter invoices, purchase orders, and financial statements, all of which require not only linguistic accuracy but also familiarity with accounting concepts and standardized formats.

By the end of this lecture, students should be able to translate common financial documents accurately, distinguish between easily confused financial terms, and apply the numerical and formatting conventions required in financial translation.

II. Why Financial Translation Requires Special Care

- Numbers, currencies, and dates must be transferred with complete accuracy — a single misplaced decimal or currency symbol can cause serious financial harm.
- Many financial terms have close synonyms in English that are not interchangeable (e.g., Invoice vs. Bill vs. Receipt), and each has a distinct, non-interchangeable Arabic equivalent.
- Financial documents follow standardized international formats and conventions that must be respected in translation.
- Accounting terminology is often governed by international standards (e.g., IFRS), which may have official or widely accepted Arabic equivalents that should be used instead of ad hoc translations.

III. Key Financial Documents and Their Components

1. Invoice (الفاتورة): a document issued by a seller to a buyer requesting payment for goods or services delivered. Components: invoice number, date, itemized list, unit prices, subtotal, tax, total amount due, payment terms.
2. Purchase Order / PO (أمر الشراء): a document issued by a buyer to a seller specifying the goods or services requested, quantities, and agreed prices, prior to invoicing.
3. Receipt (إيصال الاستلام / وصل الدفع): proof that a payment has been made or goods received.
4. Quotation (عرض السعر): a document provided by a seller stating proposed prices for goods or services, prior to any order being placed.
5. Delivery Note (إشعار التسليم / بوليصة التسليم): confirms that goods have been delivered, often accompanying a shipment.
6. Credit Note / Debit Note (إشعار دائن / إشعار مدين): issued to adjust an invoice amount upward or downward after issuance.

IV. Distinguishing Easily Confused Terms

Term	Meaning	Arabic Equivalent
Invoice	A formal request for payment, issued after goods/services are provided	فاتورة
Bill	General term for a statement of amount owed (often used for utilities, services)	فاتورة / كشف حساب
Receipt	Proof that payment has already been made	إيصال / وصل استلام
Quotation	A proposed price before any commitment is made	عرض سعر
Purchase Order	A buyer's formal request to purchase, before invoicing	أمر شراء
Stakeholder	Any party with an interest in a business (broader term)	صاحب مصلحة / أصحاب المصلحة
Shareholder	A person or entity owning shares in a company (narrower term)	مساهم
Revenue	Total income generated from business activities before expenses	الإيرادات
Profit	Revenue remaining after all expenses are deducted	الربح
Turnover	Total sales generated over a period (British usage) — not to be confused with 'employee turnover'	حجم المبيعات / رقم الأعمال

V. Core Financial Statement Terminology

Financial statements follow standardized structures under international accounting frameworks. Familiarity with their components allows the translator to render them accurately and consistently.

Balance Sheet (الميزانية العمومية)

English	Arabic
Assets	الأصول
Current Assets	الأصول المتداولة
Fixed / Non-Current Assets	الأصول الثابتة / غير المتداولة
Liabilities	الخصوم / الالتزامات
Current Liabilities	الخصوم المتداولة
Shareholders' Equity	حقوق المساهمين
Retained Earnings	الأرباح المحتجزة

Income Statement (قائمة الدخل)

English	Arabic
Net Sales / Revenue	صافي المبيعات / الإيرادات
Cost of Goods Sold (COGS)	تكلفة البضاعة المباعة
Gross Profit	مجمل الربح
Operating Expenses	المصاريف التشغيلية
Net Income / Net Profit	صافي الدخل / صافي الربح
Earnings Before Tax (EBT)	الأرباح قبل الضريبة

Cash Flow Statement (قائمة التدفقات النقدية)

English	Arabic
Operating Activities	الأنشطة التشغيلية
Investing Activities	الأنشطة الاستثمارية
Financing Activities	الأنشطة التمويلية
Net Cash Flow	صافي التدفق النقدي

VI. Numerical and Formatting Conventions

1. Decimal and thousands separators differ: English commonly uses a comma for thousands and a period for decimals (1,250.75); many Arabic-language documents follow the same convention in modern commercial use, but translators should confirm the target institution's house style.
2. Currency placement: in English, the currency symbol typically precedes the amount ($1,250.75); in Arabic commercial documents, the currency name or abbreviation often follows the number (1,250.75 دولار أمريكي / ر.س / د.إ).
3. Dates should follow the target document's expected convention, and any ambiguity (e.g., 03/04/2026) should be resolved by writing the month in words if the source format is unclear.
4. Percentages and rates must be transferred exactly, including whether they apply per annum, per month, or per transaction.
5. Company and product names are generally not translated unless an official localized name exists; only descriptive parts are translated.

VII. Translation Techniques for Financial Documents

1. Preserve numerical accuracy above all: double-check every figure, date, and currency amount against the source before finalizing.
2. Use standardized accounting terminology: prefer widely recognized Arabic accounting equivalents (as used in IFRS-based Arabic financial reporting) over improvised translations.
3. Maintain tabular formatting: invoices and statements are typically presented in tables; the target document should mirror the same layout for ease of comparison.
4. Distinguish near-synonyms carefully: always verify whether a source term is Invoice, Bill, or Receipt before choosing the Arabic equivalent.
5. Keep line-item descriptions concise and consistent: product or service descriptions should be translated the same way every time they recur within the same document.

VIII. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Confusing Invoice, Bill, and Receipt and using them interchangeably in Arabic.
2. Misplacing decimal points or thousands separators when converting number formats.
3. Translating 'Shareholder' as صاحب مصلحة (which actually means 'Stakeholder'), blurring an important legal distinction.
4. Failing to preserve the tabular structure of financial documents, turning a clear itemized invoice into an unclear block of prose.
5. Converting currency values instead of simply translating the currency label — the translator's role is linguistic transfer, not currency conversion.

IX. Worked Example

Source Text (English) — Invoice Excerpt

“Invoice No.: INV-2026-0142 — Date: 20 August 2026 — Bill To: Al-Noor Trading Co. — Description: Office Furniture (Qty: 10) — Unit Price: $150.00 — Subtotal: $1,500.00 — VAT (5%): $75.00 — Total Amount Due: $1,575.00 — Payment Terms: Net 30 days.”

Target Text (Arabic)

رقم الفاتورة: INV-2026-0142 — التاريخ: 20 آب 2026 — المرسل إليه: شركة النور التجارية — الوصف: أثاث مكتبي (الكمية: 10) — سعر الوحدة: 150.00 دولاراً أمريكياً — المجموع الفرعي: 1,500.00 دولار أمريكي — ضريبة القيمة المضافة (5%): 75.00 دولار أمريكي — المبلغ الإجمالي المستحق: 1,575.00 دولار أمريكي — شروط الدفع: خلال 30 يوماً من تاريخ الفاتورة.

Note that every figure, date, and percentage is transferred exactly, the currency label follows the number per Arabic commercial convention, and 'Net 30 days' is rendered functionally rather than literally, since a literal translation would be unclear in Arabic.

X. In-Class / Homework Exercise

Translate the following purchase order excerpt from English into Arabic, paying attention to numerical accuracy and correct terminology (Purchase Order vs. Invoice):

“Purchase Order No.: PO-3390 — Date: 5 September 2026 — Supplier: Gulf Office Supplies LLC — Item: Laptop Computers (Qty: 15) — Unit Price: $620.00 — Total Order Value: $9,300.00 — Requested Delivery Date: 20 September 2026.”

XI. Steps for Next Session

1. Review of the homework exercise and discussion of numerical/terminology accuracy.
2. Translating economic reports and studies.
3. Introduction to interpreting statistical and analytical language in economic texts.

XII. Lecture Summary

This lecture examined the translation of financial and accounting documents, including invoices, purchase orders, and financial statements. We distinguished between easily confused terms such as Invoice, Bill, and Receipt, reviewed core terminology from the balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement, and covered essential numerical and formatting conventions. Translation techniques emphasized numerical accuracy, standardized terminology, and preservation of tabular layout, alongside common pitfalls translators must avoid.

(End of Lecture Four)