



Quality In Professional Translation

Assessment and Improvement



Quality in Professional Translation

BLOOMSBURY ADVANCES IN TRANSLATION

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CONTENTS

Series editor's preface vi

Preface vii

Acknowledgements viii

Glossary of acronyms ix

Introduction 1

1 Today's translation profession 5

2 Translation quality: Importance and definitions 35

3 Tools, workflow and quality 81

4 Top-down translation quality models 125

5 Bottom-up translation quality models 159

6 Conclusion: Lessons from industry 183

Notes 193

Bibliography 201

Index 213

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The aim of this new series is to provide an outlet for advanced research in the broad interdisciplinary field of translation studies. Consisting of monographs and edited themed collections of the latest works, it should be of particular interest to academics and postgraduate students researching in translation studies and related fields, and also to advanced students studying translation and interpreting modules.

Translation studies has enjoyed huge international growth over recent decades in tandem with the expansion in both the practice of translation globally and in related academic programmes. The understanding of the concept of translation itself has broadened to include not only interlingual but also various forms of intralingual translation. Specialized branches or sub-disciplines have developed for the study of interpretation, audiovisual translation and sign language, among others. Translation studies has also come to embrace a wide range of types of intercultural encounter and transfer, interfacing with disciplines as varied as applied linguistics, comparative literature, computational linguistics, creative writing, cultural studies, gender studies, philosophy, postcolonial studies, sociology, etc. Each provides a different and valid perspective on translation, and each has its place in this series.

This is an exciting time for translation studies, and the new *Advances in Translation* series promises to be an important new plank in the development of the discipline. As General Editor, I look forward to overseeing the publication of this important new work that will provide insights into all aspects of the field.

Jeremy Munday
General Editor
University of Leeds, UK

PREFACE

Translation quality has long been the focus of academic and industry attention but there are still no ‘generally accepted objective criteria for evaluating the quality of translations’ (Williams, 2009: 3). Yet every day, translation quality is evaluated. Clients expect quality guarantees. Agencies and organizations require that translators work to agreed standards. Professional translators have to demonstrate their work is superior to that of inexperienced bilinguals or machine translation (MT). Editors and revisers must justify judgements. By describing how translation quality is managed in the real world, this book offers a new, practical way of considering the issue.

For a sector whose entire *raison d’être* is communication, there is a surprising lack of awareness across the piece as to how other parts of the industry operate. This is explained in part by its nature and scale. Large, diverse and geographically dispersed, it encompasses the individual freelance working from a spare bedroom and multinational bodies employing thousands of specialists to work on translation and a host of related activities. Research for this book thus involved visiting the full range of language service providers (LSPs), from the smallest to the largest. Interviewees invariably wanted to know how peers, rivals, suppliers and clients were addressing the issues and challenges we discussed.

The first aim of this book is to provide a broad account of approaches to measuring and improving quality. Theorists’ and professional assumptions about quality are identified and explained. Approaches to quality observed during research visits are outlined in order to identify patterns and group common methodologies together. Although the range of approaches is wide, I argue that they belong to two underlying ways of thinking: top-down and bottom-up. The second aim of the book is to examine these underlying assumptions critically and consider how fitting they are, given significant changes in the industry.

Who will benefit from this book? Translators will gain a broader understanding of what employers expect (and reward). Translation companies and organizations can learn how peers manage this sensitive area. Clients will discover what quality levels they can expect and common pitfalls they might avoid. Students and academics are given an insight into how the profession manages quality.

Writing about translation quality is dangerous: typos and other mistakes are inevitable, but doubly frustrating and embarrassing when discussing quality in others’ work. Apologies in advance.

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I am grateful to Leeds University alumni and students for stimulating discussion and feedback. Generous colleagues took on extra responsibilities to give me time to write, especially Terry Bradford, Svetlana Carsten, Debbie Elliot, Serge Sharoff and Daming Wu. Most of all, Bob Clark, Andy Rothwell and Mark Shuttleworth first encouraged my interest in the field and were superb role models with their boundless enthusiasm and inspired workarounds, all the more important in the dark days before Unicode when we carried our IBM Translation Manager files on floppy disks.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ARTRAQ	Argumentation-Centred Translation Quality Approach
ATA	American Translators Association
CAT	Computer-Assisted Translation
CEN	European Committee for Standardization
CIoL	Chartered Institute of Linguists (United Kingdom)
CMS	Content Management System
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSA	Common Sense Advisory
DGT	European Commission Directorate-General for Translation
EBMT	Example-Based Machine Translation
FOSS	Free and Open Source Software
FTP	File Transfer Protocol
GIGO	Garbage In, Garbage Out
HMT	Hybrid Machine Translation
IATE	Inter-Active Terminology for Europe
ICR	In-Country Review
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITI	Institute of Translation and Interpreting (United Kingdom)
L10n	Localization
LISA	Localization Industry Standards Association
LSP	Language Service Provider
MLV	Multiple Language Vendor
MMOs, MMOGs	Massively Multiplayer Online Games
MOC	Massive Online Collaboration
MT	Machine Translation
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreements
OS	Open Source
PM	Project Manager, Project Management
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
QE	Quality Evaluation
RBMT	Rule-Based Machine Translation

RFQ	Request For Quotation
ROI	Return On Investment
SaaS	Software as a Service
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SICAL	Système canadien d'appréciation de la qualité linguistique; Canadian Language Quality Measurement System
SL	Source Language
SLV	Single Language Vendor
SMT	Statistical Machine Translation
ST	Source Text
TAPs	Think-Aloud Protocols
TAUS	Translation Automation User Society
TB	TermBase
TBX	TermBase eXchange format
TEP	Translate-Edit-Proofread
TL	Target Language
TM	Translation Memory
TMS	Terminology Management System
TMX	Translation Memory eXchange format
TQA	Translation Quality Assessment
TT	Target Text
VLTM	Wordfast's Very Large Translation Memory
WYSIWYG	What You See Is What You Get
XLIFF	XML Localization Interchange File Format

Introduction

Concern for quality has been evident as long as translation has taken place, but the industry's focus on quality has intensified recently. This introduction considers why this is so and why there is little material on the professional context, as distinct from academic theories. Research methods and chapter content are outlined.

The context in which translations are produced has changed in significant ways since the 1990s. First, demand for translations and the capacity of the tools which help produce them have soared since the advent of the Internet and globalization. These two developments are linked. Increasing translation demand could not be met without electronic tools which have been created or drastically refined recently. Nor would the tools have developed as they did without the surge in demand caused by the increasing production of information, and expectation that it be available in users' languages quickly and at low or no cost. These linked developments are changing the industry immeasurably and have helped build an unprecedented awareness of translation among new users who would previously have had little such awareness – even themselves joining in crowdsourcing¹ initiatives such as the translation of Facebook. All this has meant increasing attention to different levels of translation quality.

Another factor in the recent focus on quality is the general drive to establish industry-wide standards. Like many other industries, translation is increasingly bound by internationally agreed standards for service provision, through bodies like the CEN (European Committee for Standardization) and ISO (International Organization for Standardization). Establishing objective quality criteria has traditionally been seen as contentious, if not impossible, in translation studies; but in the real world, such criteria have indeed been defined and are increasingly applied to LSPs' work.

There is a sense across the industry that it is hard to know what is happening elsewhere. There are good reasons for this beyond the pace of change alone. LSPs can be wary of discussing problems and potential solutions because of concerns about confidentiality, competition or client objections. They are also focused on core activities of translating and winning new business so have neither time nor resources to research beyond their immediate rivals.

Large-scale providers like Lionbridge may know what direct competitors are concentrating on, and individual translators network with one another, but the big and the small often operate in mutual ignorance. Gouadec has argued that the sector's diversity makes it appropriate to refer to 'translation professions' (2007: xiv), concluding somewhat pessimistically that 'those who know the least about the profession are often the translators themselves' (ibid.).

There is a lack of information on real-world contexts in translation studies, and hence in translator training. Various factors account for this gap. Researchers have found gaining access to the industry challenging.² Funding bodies have been slow to support applied studies. Private sources (e.g. Google) support research of direct benefit to the funder, but not surveys of the entire industry. Most academics are not users of standard industry technical tools, and are hence ill-equipped to study their use. Time presents further challenges: industry pace of change is swift, so research findings quickly lose relevance. Researchers cannot easily spend sustained periods observing long-term, large-scale multilingual translation projects.

Such research has nonetheless long been recognized as necessary. Holmes' 1970s 'map' of the new discipline of translation studies³ identified the need for *descriptive translation studies*, that is, the branch which 'constantly maintains the closest contact with the empirical phenomena under study' (2000: 184). Holmes identifies three sub-fields for descriptive empirical studies: 'product-oriented', 'function-oriented' and 'process-oriented' (ibid.: 184–5). His map has since been criticized and expanded,⁴ but its call for studies of translation processes remains significant, particularly since those processes are now vastly more complex, and no longer locked inside the 'little black box' of the translator's 'mind' (ibid.: 185).

This book is based on such empirical research. It examines how quality is managed by those commissioning, producing and reviewing translations then describes and groups these approaches, rather than starting from abstract theoretical models. It aims to be the 'kind of study, with respect to translation or anything, that goes out into the world to see what is happening' (Pym, 2010b: 1). Pym holds that this approach is 'against an alternative kind of study that sees the world through the authoritative insights of others, mostly as recycled certitudes of theory'. This either/or position can perhaps be mitigated: starting from empirical study of the profession, insights from translation theorists can help interpret findings, then categorize and critique approaches observed 'in the world'. Williams and Chesterman further argue that 'while technology has become an integral part of the translation profession, there has been little, if any, research into many aspects of the technology itself' (2002: 14). They identify significant gaps in research including workflows, the translation process and 'mechanisms of quality control' (ibid.: 15), all of which are taken up here. They pinpoint appropriate research methods to explore these gaps which

were indeed adopted, to wit ‘a combination of observation, interviews and questionnaires’ (ibid.: 23–4). How this was done is outlined next.

Conclusions presented here are based first on hundreds of interviews and questionnaires, completed during research visits to a representative range of LSPs, clients and support services since 2004. All those involved in managing or measuring translation quality in the industry were included: translators, of course, but also CEOs, clients, developers of national standards for translation quality, editors, end-users, heads of unit/section, project managers (PMs), revisers, sales and marketing staff, software engineers, terminologists, tools developers, trainers, webmasters and dedicated quality managers employed by some of the larger LSPs. The bedrock of the industry is the freelance translator. It was important to study a wide sample of these individuals, often neglected in research. Moving up the supply chain, the study includes over 100 agencies, companies and organizations offering one or multiple language pairs (SLVs – single language vendors and MLVs – multiple language vendors). In-house translators in the public and private sectors also contributed, from companies with only a few members of staff up to sizeable translation divisions and international organizations.

Research also entailed the use of work shadowing, that is ‘accompany[ing] (a worker) in their daily activities for experience of or insight into a job’ (*Concise OED*, 2009: 1320). This meant spending time observing individuals performing a variety of roles, often returning at intervals at different points in the workflow, particularly when they were concentrating on tasks related to translation quality. Think-aloud protocols (TAPs) were sometimes used to elucidate the reasons behind subjects’ decisions (e.g. specific translation or revision choices),⁵ along with prompting, questioning and retrospective interviews. Where possible, I attended training courses and inductions provided for new members of staff to learn how employers expected them to translate, use tools and meet quality expectations.

It was important to examine practice in translation sectors with an enhanced reputation for quality (financial, legal, medical, pharmaceutical, software and other technical domains). The research covered dozens of language pairs and locales, again targeting those with a reputation for quality (e.g. Nordic languages), and those facing special challenges for translation quality (e.g. Chinese)⁶. Emerging providers of ‘community’ translation are included, including *pro bono*, crowdsourced and voluntary translation. Professionals have expressed concern regarding quality levels among such providers, stressing their lack of training and experience.

One advantage of such a broad picture of the industry is that overall patterns emerge. Notably, approaches fall into two broad philosophical camps, described here as top-down and bottom-up. In summarizing the benefits and drawbacks of translation quality models for each, I aim to address an important issue identified by Chesterman and Wagner in their discussion of the gap between theory and translation practice. That is, theory usually only ‘describe[s] and explain[s] the practice; but

practitioners seem also to look to the theory for guidance' (2000: vii). It is hoped that practitioners will find a true reflection of their experience, placed in the context of the broader industry, and critical evaluation of different approaches.

The following outline of content is to help readers select the sections of most interest or use. Chapter One, *Today's translation profession*, summarizes industry changes since the 1990s, focusing on their relevance for quality. Chapter Two, *Translation quality: Importance and definitions*, contrasts academic approaches to quality with professional ones, arguing that more applied models are needed for industry purposes. It examines industry assumptions about quality and outlines why these issues are significant. Chapter Three, *Tools, workflow and quality*, evaluates the impact of electronic tools and new approaches to workflow on how translations are produced, and on quality. Real-world translation quality models are then described and critically assessed in two groups: traditional *Top-down models* (Chapter Four) and established and emerging *Bottom-up models* (Chapter Five). The conclusion presents some *Lessons from industry* and identifies further challenges facing the profession, implications for translator training, quality-related ethical issues and suggestions for future research. Throughout, real-world examples illustrate particular claims or scenarios. These are anonymized to respect confidentiality agreements but general information regarding size, sector and so on is included where this does not identify the company or individual concerned, so readers can assess how relevant a case is for their own situation.

CHAPTER ONE

Today's translation profession

1.0 Introduction: A revolution in communication

In 1991, only 2 per cent of those living in developing countries had any telephone access at all, fixed or mobile. A decade later, 31 per cent of the same population had such access.¹ By 2007, the International Telecommunication Union estimated that 45 per cent of people in developing countries had a mobile.² The story of phone access encapsulates how the world has changed dramatically in a very short period. A highly technical product, with no place in the lives of most people in recent memory, has become commonplace. User demand has soared in existing markets and in new ones with little prior experience of easy communication. The phones themselves are significantly more complex and powerful; new features and frequent upgrades are expected; yet their cost has plummeted: early 'bricks' cost several thousand US dollars. They are used in unanticipated ways (e.g. spawning new industries such as money transfer by phone and roadside charging stalls, transforming lives in regions with no banking infrastructure and restricted access to electricity). Such changes can naturally reinforce disadvantage or discrimination as well as improving lives. Even if far more inhabitants of developing countries have mobiles, overall figures disguise the patchy nature of access across different regions and groups due to corruption, war, monopolies, import tariffs, state control, poverty and gender inequalities. The story looks very different to an urban Egyptian male and a rural Zimbabwean female.

There are strong parallels between what has happened in telecoms and translation in recent decades. Accessing translation is now commonplace, not the preserve of specialist sectors or relatively wealthy clients. Use of online MT engines and multilingual websites means more people than ever

before are aware of translation. The corollary is increasing awareness of the *lack* of translated material (e.g. when users click on links and find their language is not supported). Demand has thus soared for translation as for phones: much of the traffic on MT user groups consists of calls for the service to be provided in hitherto neglected yet widely spoken languages.³

Just as phones have become more complex and powerful, translation tasks are now more technically complicated and the impact of translation more extensive, with huge increases in content. Rapid spikes in demand for a service would normally lead to prices going up, yet client pressure, new ways of working and translation technologies have instead led to downward pressure on rates. Translations are therefore being commissioned, produced and used in new ways, with resulting uncertainty and shockwaves across the industry. As Vashee sympathetically notes, the ‘poor translator’ is caught in major shifts, yet has little influence on their development.⁴

The story of mobile phone access illuminates how translation has changed because of parallel developments in the two industries, but the telecoms revolution has also had a direct *impact* on translation. Global demand for such fast-changing products and services means that the need for translation has rocketed. Translation is now required throughout the phone production cycle. In the past, companies producing fixed-line telephones rarely sold their products in multiple regions or languages and users kept the same model for decades. Today, R&D, engineering, manufacturing, staff training, sales and marketing, user information and after-sales support all involve translation, across more languages and for new users who face particular challenges (e.g. low literacy levels or the need to understand material not in their native tongue). Translation jobs could traditionally be considered complete (‘signed off’) when returned to the client, but telecoms products and services are continuously updated, necessitating new kinds of rolling translation service and collaborative working. Time-to-market and *simship*⁵ pressures in competitive commercial sectors like telecoms mean that translation deadlines have been forced down. Outsourcing to low-cost countries, usually China and India, has had an impact on translation like other industries.

This changed – and still-changing – paradigm has implications for translation quality. This chapter looks in more depth at how economic, social and technological changes are transforming the translation industry, and why it has increasingly focused on quality.

1.0.1 Translation: Industry or profession?

Industry: a particular branch of economic or commercial activity.

Profession: a paid occupation, especially one involving training and a formal qualification.

(CONCISE OED, 11TH EDN, 2009)

The terms translation industry and profession are used interchangeably in this book; this requires explanation. Even discounting the view of translation as an art or craft, there is debate over which term to use. A prominent topic of discussion since the 1950s, one established definition of a profession is that of a 'vocation whose practice is founded upon an understanding of the theoretical structure of some department of learning or science, and upon the abilities accompanying such understanding' (Cogan, 1953: 33). Some translators demonstrated a marked preference for the term profession. Others favoured industry, perhaps recognizing skilled translators who learned 'on the job' rather than studying for qualifications. Most, however, accepted both terms.

Translation clearly fulfils certain criteria of dictionary definitions for industry and profession. Both terms are used in most written accounts. Chriss (2006) switches without ado between the two, for instance, though his work is specifically directed at *Translation as a Profession*. Where the term profession is preferred, it can indicate regret regarding recent developments in translation, seen as a shift from a high-quality 'artisanal' tradition to one of mass production. Gouadec deems that 'translation now bears all the hallmarks of an industrial activity' (2007: 297) and later analyses the effects of this 'industrialization' (2009: 217–32), comparing translators' current fate to the earlier ruinous mechanization of French lace-making. Like Chriss, Gouadec refers to both industry and profession, but where Chriss uses them interchangeably, Gouadec often implies criticism, differentiating between two distinct approaches to translation.

Those who favour the term profession often allude to translation quality issues. They typically want to regulate the sector, believing that increasing professionalization is needed to improve quality. While entry to professions such as law, medicine or engineering is controlled, translation is unregulated in most countries, notwithstanding the explosion in training programmes (Caminade and Pym, 1995; Drugan and Rothwell, 2011), intermittent attempts to establish certification (sworn translators, chartered linguists), and calls for 'kitemarks' or periodic re-examination (Picken, 1994: 197).⁶ Daunting accounts of professional translators' qualities are provided to indicate who might qualify. For example, in addition to the merely desirable 'good grounding in marketing, management and accountancy', Gouadec's professional paragon demonstrates:

absolute linguistic proficiency, [. . .] perfect knowledge of the relevant cultural, technical, legal, commercial backgrounds, [. . .] full understanding of the subject matter involved, a gift for writing, an insatiable thirst for knowledge, [. . .] the stamina, thoroughness and sense of initiative needed to find any information (or informant) that

might be required to fully understand that subject matter, [. . .] the ability to relate both effectively and smoothly – both professionally and personally – with numerous partners. (2007: xiii)

Some who favour the term profession are crusading to raise the sector's status, visibility or remuneration levels. Venuti's 'call to action' on the translator's invisibility increased awareness of these issues (1995/2008: 265–77). Robinson uses the term faithfully, stating his aim as 'raising the status of the profession' (1997: 39). Cronin recognizes that 'the professional and the political are inextricably linked', calling for a 'more engaged, activist notion' of translators' responsibilities, both to defend professional interests and '[get] societies and cultures to realize how important translation is to comparative self-understanding and future development' (2003: 134). A few dislike either term, with Pym arguing (2006: 8) that, in the era of localization, 'there is no such thing as a "translation industry", in the singular'. What, though, do we then refer to? Pym himself notes that acronyms like GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization, Translation) have failed to catch on. Despite its limits, he reverts to the convenient shorthand of 'industry' (singular) then to the 'translation and interpreting professions' a few lines later.

Both terms are used in the present book. They help distinguish between student translation, translation studies/theory and the kind of translation under discussion here: (usually) paid, for a client, to a deadline, with an intended end use and some sort of translation specification. As noted, most industry discussions use both terms. Finally, recent developments, particularly increasing integration of the 'gifted amateur or keen bilingual subject specialist', may herald dramatic change for the industry, even the 'closure of the cycle which began when translation became an "independent" profession' (García, 2009a: 199). Some of these developments are considered in relation to translation quality in this book, so it is helpful to be able to distinguish between the profession and newer approaches.

1.1 Changes affecting the translation industry

Strong growth has been accompanied by other significant changes: a huge increase in demand (volume) into a wider range of languages (reach), and a corresponding increase in awareness of translation. Translation is needed more quickly and to different kinds of deadline. Source content is more complex. The tools used to translate are more efficient, reliable and accessible, and cheaper than in the 1990s. These economic, societal and technological changes affecting translation in recent decades, and their implications for translation quality, are now examined in more depth.

1.1.1 Market growth

In the course of the 50 years between 1950 and 2004, international trade enjoyed average annual growth of 4%, whereas the translation industry grew by a minimum of 5% each year. Clearly, the development in international trade generated a need for translation and will continue to ensure the almost parallel growth of the translation sector. (Boucau, 2006: 3)

Industry growth figures are difficult to establish and compare, given the sector's diversity, global spread, shifting exchange rates, varying conceptions of what should be measured and the fact that leading companies are privately held and not obliged to share data on performance. All surveys in the past two decades have nonetheless identified growth outstripping that of trade in general. Specialist industry research provider, Common Sense Advisory (CSA), made the staggering estimate that, from US \$9 billion in 2006, the market for 'outsourced language services' grew by one-third in a single year, reaching US \$12 billion by 2007, and further predicted a compound annual growth rate of 14.6 per cent between 2008 and 2012 (Beninato and De Palma, 2008: 1). The largest recent European study estimated annual compound growth rate at 10 per cent minimum from 2009–15, giving a European language industry valued at a 'conservative' 16.5 billion € by 2015, with the 'real value' likely to be above 20 billion € (Rinsche and Portera-Zanotti, 2009: ii). These large-scale studies concur that economic downturns do not stop growth:

The language industry seems to be less affected by the financial crisis than other industry sectors. Where turnovers from multilingual business activities have been negatively impacted, this has been mainly in the case of individuals and micro-companies dependant on a small number of clients, a quick recovery and continued steady growth of the market is forecasted. (ibid.)

The first survey following the global downturn supports this analysis, claiming a 2009 growth rate of 13.15 per cent for translation and interpreting and estimating the global market at US \$26 billion in 2010 (Kelly and Stewart, 2010: 3).

Why should the translation market have grown more than international trade in recent decades and continue to flourish even in troubled times? In short, globalization.⁷ The recent penetration of free- or mixed-market economies across the globe has driven more translation, particularly since the opening of huge new markets in Eastern Europe and China from the early 1990s. The scale of this change is striking: '10–15 per cent of the