

# TRANSLATION QUALITY STANDARDS IN EUROPE: AN OVERVIEW<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

*Necessity is the mother of invention*

In the era of the “Eighth Continent”<sup>2</sup> and global business on the web, translation markets are constantly seeking after pioneer ways of globalised e-commerce. It is out of sheer necessity that the translation industry is starting to mature. Precisely, an extremely important sign of maturity is the creation and adoption of translation quality standards.

The aim of this paper is to review, in chronological order, a number of representative European quality standards on translation services, service requirements, working procedures, contracts and terminology work<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the following pages will be devoted to UNI 10547 (1996), DIN 2345 (1998), ÖNORM 1200 and 1201 (2000), *EUATC Quality Standard for Translation Services* and the future CEN prEN 15038.

We will be mainly concerned about translation (as a professional activity) and translations (as the final product). After presenting the quality standards and initiatives currently in place, we will reflect briefly on possible consequences for the translation industry and academia. After all, standards can greatly benefit them, since for both alike the question of translation(s) quality has always been a top priority<sup>4</sup>. It should be borne in mind, though, that there are as many possible criteria and models for translation quality assessment as potential theoretical and/or professional frameworks. As House (1997: 1) has rightly pointed out: “Evaluating the quality of a translation presupposes a theory of translation. Thus different views of translation lead to different concepts of translational quality, and hence

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<sup>2</sup> On present-day markets within the global village, see DePalma (2002).

<sup>3</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge J. Arevalillo, J. Cañizares and M. Núñez for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> On this topic, see some relevant contributions in Schäffner (1998).

different ways of assessing it". The same easily applies to the translation process itself.

## 2. UNI 10547

The Italian UNI 10547 standard (*Definizione dei servizi e delle attività delle imprese di traduzione ed interpretariato*) is the result of a joint project developed by FEDER.CEN.TR.I and UNITER (Organismo di Normazione e Certificazione di Sistemi Qualità Aziendali Commercio, Turismo e Servizi). Approved by UNI (Ente Nazionale Italiano di Unificazione) in 1996, it is the first quality standard in Europe that defines service requirements and the activities to be performed by translation and interpreting companies<sup>5</sup>. This is an outstanding feature, as it does not apply to individual translators and/or interpreters.

The standard covers and defines (a) translation services and (b) interpreting services, subdivided into subtypes: business interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting and *chuchotage* (whispered interpreting). Within service requirements, three phases are identified: planning of service and preparation of contract, execution of service and service monitoring and control. Distinctive minimum requirements are identified for each subtype of interpreting service. In the case of translation, a project manager should be responsible of the service (it also includes revision, correction and completion of already translated texts). Functionalist approaches to translation can be identified within the planning phase in the translation brief (ie. target text style, translation end use and client's specifications are specifically mentioned). No information is provided as to the way service quality control – the third phase – is to be achieved. However, general normative references are mentioned in the text, namely UNI EN ISO 8402 (*Management of Quality and Quality Assurance. Terminology and Definitions*) and UNI EN 29004-2 (*Quality Management and Quality System Management. Guidelines*).

The formalization of the service contract is also dealt with under service requirements. It is a compulsory agreement on the actual commercial terms (fees, invoicing, payment, delivery) that also specifies the contents of a given project: client's specifications, languages involved, translation purpose, technical details, human resources, working and delivery conditions, confidentiality clauses, and dispute settlement provisions. Guidelines on units of measure and criteria for determining fees are also provided. It is worth mentioning that the contract should ensure monitoring and controlling the delivery of the service by the supplier.

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<sup>5</sup> Sometime later came out the ATA Taalmerk, ie. a national standard for compliance within the Netherlands. Unfortunately we have had no access to the Dutch document.

A detailed description of requirements on material, technical and human resources are further mentioned. Not only should the company have office premises, but also a meeting room and appropriate terminology resources. Only for translation services, companies should have in place computer tools and other appropriate equipment.

Finally, the Italian standard offers guidelines for the companies as to the selection of human and technical resources, as well as to the organisation of refreshment and training courses for in-house and external staff. Finally, formal University education is highly deemed within the standard framework: candidates should have a degree or diploma in Translation and Interpreting or, else, documented evidence of professional experience in the field.

### 3. DIN 2345

The German DIN 2345 Standard (*Übersetzungsaufträge*) was prepared in 1998 within the German Terminology Standards Committee by the Technical Committee “Praxis der Terminologearbeit” with the participation of German, Austrian and Swiss representatives. Both DIN and ISO normative references were taken into account, as it was originally intended to be submitted for a European or International Standard as well. No reference was made, though, to the forerunner UNI 10547. DIN 2345 has proved to be highly influential in the European industry, as it has even inspired recent literature on the topic of translation contracts (cf. Mueege, 2005).

The DIN 2345 Standard covers only translation services, while interpreting is explicitly excluded in the scope. It applies to individual translators and translation companies alike: freelance translators, in-house translation departments and translation agencies and companies are addressed in this standard. As stated in the title, the German standard focuses on the contracts for supplying translation services and the working procedures to be used. In this respect it offers a detailed account of requirements for translation contracts in regard with the source and target texts, revisions, parties to the contract and work procedures. First of all, it should be mentioned that it lies within the client’s<sup>6</sup> responsibility to ensure that suitable translators are involved in a translation contract. As in the case of UNI 10547, qualification as a translator can be obtained by formal University education, either a degree (or equivalent) in Translation or, else, in foreign languages or even a technical degree plus demonstrable translating competence. Prospective translators can be also be eligible provided they can document their

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<sup>6</sup> The German standard contemplates the possibility of subcontracting. In that case the contractor (the contracting party) assumes the role of the client (ordering party).

professional experience, proficiency in the relevant fields and further education or training.

Translation contracts make provisions for agreements between the client and the translator as regards organisational aspects of the translation project and on the target text features. First of all the client should address a specific enquiry to the translator in order to get a quotation. Then the contract terms should be agreed or, when applicable, a standard contract could be drawn up. The translation contract should specify form, means and delivery deadlines; use of appropriate hardware and software; any additional services requested; price on the agreed basis; return of documents; confidentiality clauses; and the possibility for translators to have copyright and complimentary copies of published translations.

As to the features of the target text, a functionalist approach to translation is adopted. Again, the client has a good deal of responsibility as he/she should provide the function, purpose and intended audience of the target text, as well as any client's specifications and appropriate reference material regarding special terminology requirements, such as particular language policies, use of controlled languages and house style guides, etc. In order to avoid the "garbage in garbage out" risk, the standard specifies that the client should clarify errors in the source text. It also indicates that he should answer questions posed by translators and provide further competent contact partners for consultation if necessary. In addition, clause 4.3. recommends that the client may provide feedback on the translation and the way the contract was fulfilled in order to promote quality. In this sense, DIN 2345 clearly aims at standardising clients (as well as translators).

Translators, in their turn, are responsible of drawing the client's attention to any necessary cultural adaptations in the target text so that it fits the intended target audience and purpose. Translators should also perform source text analysis in order to acquire sufficient terminology and domain knowledge necessary for the translation service. Upon completion of the final draft, translators should check for content completeness and language accuracy of the target text. Presentation of the target text should conform to the client's specifications as stated in the contract, as well as to the contract provisions on target text presentation regarding paper size, typography, text structure and lists, tables and illustrations, symbols and mathematical units, translator's notes, translation of proper names and abbreviations, people's titles and affiliations, transliteration and transcriptions, dates and times, quotations and neology. It should be noted that some of the typing presentation guidelines translation should comply with (eg. DIN 5008 and DIN 1422-1) are only applicable to German texts, which inadvertently points towards a typical scenario of translations into German by translators with native competence in that language. Finally, translators should have a consistent documentation

procedure for all translation orders in place, in order to ensure traceability and verification of compliance with the standard.

Comprehensive as it is, the German standard may be used for conformity by translators<sup>7</sup>, but certification is not required. In fact, the foreword specifies that this declaration of conformity is just intended to increase the client's confidence in the quality of the services provided, since compliance with the standard can be verified for every translation. However, no mention of a quality procedure is made. Suffice to mention that the third party review, a key issue in prEN 15038, is just listed as an additional service in DIN 2345.

#### **4. EUATC Quality Standard for Translation Companies**

A year before the publication of DIN 2345, the Quality Committee of the European Union of Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC) had started to draw a document for a Quality Standard for Translation Companies. The final version of the document came out two years later, in 1999. The EUATC standard made reference to previous standards: UNI 10547, ATA Taalmerk, DIN 23445, ISO 9000 and EUATC Code of Conduct<sup>8</sup> and the Code of Good Practice in Translation. Objective measurement of translation quality is the rationale behind the EUATC standard. This Quality standard is not intended for use by individual translators, who are referred to DIN 2345 instead.

The EUATC Quality Standard only applies to translation companies. A translation company is described as an organisation of more than one full-time employee working as an in-house translator that is registered as independent legal body and adequately insured for liability. Such organisation should be a member of a national Association of Translation Companies (which is a member of the EUATC and subscribes to the Code of Conduct) and incorporate translations into a complete professional process by applying value-added services. Once a translation company has been accredited with the EUATC quality standard it becomes a QS company.

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<sup>7</sup> Translators are allowed to use the DIN symbol as long as they specify that the translation has been performed in accordance with DIN 2345 and an appropriate registration number has been obtained from DIN CERTCO (Gesellschaft für Konformitätsbewertung mbH).

<sup>8</sup> The EUATC Code of Conduct is included as annex A in the EUATC Quality Standard. The rest of annexes include the regulations for the use and control of the collective service mark (annex B), the QS service mark and logo (annex C), the rules of arbitration (annex D), the arbitration procedure (annex E) and a quality checklist of general items, and items relating to customer management, resources management and quality management (plus explanation and suggested evidence for auditing processes) as annex F.

Quality assurance is essential in this standard. Quality management and quality control are key issues covering the whole process in order to produce translation projects to the customer's satisfaction. It implies a close cooperation with clients (not standardization of them) in order to deliver a conforming service through quality project management. To ensure compliance with the standard, a quality manager should be appointed within the company for writing the procedures, monitoring internal statistics and evaluating the quality systems.

The standard sets the minimum levels of quality as regards customer's satisfaction, project management (from handling an enquire to final delivery), human and material resources management, in-house and external staff training, invoicing, liabilities, remedial action in the event of a non-conforming product, complaints and EUATC arbitration procedures, and sanctions.

As in the case of UNI 10547, a QS company should have an office with appropriate equipment (telephone, e-mail, hardware, etc.), IT (software, CAT tools, databases, electronic resources, etc.) and adequate means for project storage and traceability. As to human resources, the standard just states that translators should be mother tongue as a rule and have "appropriate linguistic qualifications". It does not go on to describe the nature of such linguistic qualification, nor the way they could be acquired. No mention is made to University degrees, for example. However, cooperation between QS companies and training bodies as to placements by post-graduated students to ensure that they fully benefit from the traineeship is mentioned under human resources management.

## 5. ÖNORM D 1200 and 1201

The Austrian ÖNORM D 1200 Standard (*Dienstleistungen –Übersetzen und Dolmetschen –Übersetzungsleistungen – Anforderungen an die Dienstleistungen und an die Bereitstellung der Dienstleistung*) came out in 2000. It covers translation services and the requirements for the service and the provision of the service by translation services providers (individual translators and translation companies). Interpreting, defined in clause 2, is nevertheless excluded from this standard<sup>9</sup>. Unlike the German standard, ÖNORM 1200 is a certifiable standard.

The definition of the service requirements encompasses service categories, procedures and provision of the service. ÖNORM 1200 offers a detailed account of service categories, according to transfer types (documentary translation, communicative/functional translation, adaptation, informative translation, rewriting, updating, localization, internationalization, technical documentation, etc.); linguistic parameters (printable, standard or working versions); lay-out (text

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<sup>9</sup> Interpreting services are separately covered in ÖNORM D 1202 (2002).

formatting, adaptation of graphics) and other organizational factors that influence the work effort and complexity (time, equipment and expert consultation requirements). It should be noted that the default translation service is a communicative/functional translation in a standard version. Additional services that go beyond transfer (specific lay-outs, reviewing, localization tests and so forth) are also clearly indicated.

As to procedures, little is mentioned except for basic issues regarding request and offer (service type, client's specifications, deadlines, cost estimate); preliminary source text analysis to assess the service provider's documentary needs (terminology and background information) and subcontracting liabilities. Quality control is reduced to compliance with agreed specifications and service completeness and coherence. Other organisation procedures make reference to project documentation for purposes of traceability and confidentiality.

Finally, issues concerning personnel include the basic qualifications required from translation service providers. Such requirements are, in fact, a checklist of required competences: translational, linguistic and textual, research and documentation, cultural and technical competence. There is no mention, though, to the way the required competences can or should be acquired. Further training lies within the translation service provider's responsibility. Should the provider have employees for the provision of the service, he or she is to keep a record of each employee which may at least include personal details, working languages, professional experience, education and tasks assigned in a given project. Technical requirements are briefly mentioned as well, ie. appropriate equipment for handling and storing of the project documentation, access to information resources, adequate hardware, software and communications equipment.

Translation contracts<sup>10</sup> are covered in a complementary Austrian standard that was also published in 2000: ÖNORM 1201 (*Dienstleistungen –Übersetzen und Dolmetschen –Übersetzungsleistungen – Übersetzungsverträge*). It should be noted that the Austrian standard is not as comprehensive as DIN 2345. ÖNORM 1201 places special emphasis in client-service provider cooperation and translator's confidentiality. Once again, clients are standardised as they are bound to provide translators with all relevant documentation and information needed to render the service (technical documentation, parallel texts, terminology, previous translations, consultation, relevant experts, etc.). Furthermore, the client is deemed responsible of any inaccuracies and errors in the source text. Once a cost estimate (either binding or only for reference) has been prepared and agreed, the client

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<sup>10</sup> Interpreting contracts are covered separately in another standard published in 2003: ÖNORM 1203 *Dienstleistungen –Übersetzen und Dolmetschen – Dolmetschleistungen – Dolmetschverträge*.

should place the order in writing. Specifications as to the transfer service should be included in the written order, namely, type of transfer requested, target text purpose and addressees, linguistic parameters and format specifications for the target text in accordance with ÖNORM 1200, delivery date, calculation basis and fee, and agreed deadlines. By default, fees should be calculated on the basis of the number of lines of the target text and delivery shall be effected by mail (unless otherwise agreed).

Copyright issues are dealt with in detail. The client should guarantee to hold copyright on the source text. In paying the translation fee, the client acquires any exploitation rights. In contrast, the service provider holds the copyright of the translated text and the right to have it appropriately acknowledged. Finally, other legal aspects concerning deficiency claims, remedy and liabilities, payments, interest on arrears, etc. are also covered by the Austrian standard.

## 6. CEN prEN 15038

In 2001 the CEN (Centre Européen de Normalisation) accepted the EUATC Quality Standard as a CEN project to transform it into a European Standard. Since then, the Technical Committee CEN/BTTF 138 “Translation Services” – under secretariat of the Spanish Standards Association (AENOR) – has been working in the future European standard on translation services. In 2004 a draft European Standard (CEN prEN 15038 *European Standard on Translation Services – Service Requirement*) was submitted to CEN members<sup>11</sup> for inquiry. This standard draws from previous translation quality standards in Europe and it is, therefore, a new, unified and improved European Standard that will replace all the others when it goes into effect in 2006. The standard applies to translation service providers (TSP), i.e. individual translators, translation companies, in-house translators and any subcontractors. Interpreting is defined within CEN prEN 1538, but is not covered.

Certification will be possible for TSPs that satisfy the requirements of the standard. The European Standard focuses on quality and transparency of the entire process of the translation service<sup>12</sup>. The standard includes basic requirements as to

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<sup>11</sup> CEN members are the national standardization bodies of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

<sup>12</sup> For a clear account of relevant aspects of the CEN prEN 15038, see the papers by Arealillo Doval (2004, 2005), head of the Spanish delegation of CEN/BTTF 138. The author of this paper is also a member of the Spanish delegation, together with Ms. P. Valenciano.

human resources, professional competencies, professional development, technical resources, quality management and project management. As far as human resources are concerned, the TSP should have a documented procedure to select staff and any outsourcers. The European Standard establishes that translators, revisers and reviewers should meet the requirements of professional competence, as listed in the standard, preferably through a degree in translation, a degree in other fields plus two years at least of documented experience in translating, or through a minimum of five years of documented experience. The TSP is also responsible for providing continuing professional development of all persons involved in the translation service. Technical resources refer to requisite equipment, communications and appropriate resources. Quality management includes quality control and quality management review.

The European Standard is intended to meet the market requirements for both clients and TSPs. Although it does not try to standardize clients in any way, the standard also defines the relationship between clients and service providers. In this sense, it explicitly makes reference to project feasibility, quotations, contracts, confidentiality, copyright, handling of information, and so forth. Procedures in translation services deal with project preparation (administrative, technical and linguistic aspects), and the translation process itself, namely, project management, translation work, checking, revision, review, proof-reading and final verification. The third party revision – compulsory for the first time – has been a major issue within the standard, as national practices tend to differ greatly in this respect. As a way to reinforce translation quality procedures it is also stated that TSPs should have a model of quality control in place, but it does not explicitly recommend anyone in particular.

The standard concludes with a series of informative annexes that contain information and recommendations on project log (Annex A), technical pre-translation processing (Annex B), source text analysis (Annex C), style guide (Annex D) and a list of added value services, such as localisation, DTP, subtitling, legalisation, adaptation, to name but a few (Annex E).

## **7. Final remarks**

*If the cap fits, wear it*

As can be seen, the European translation standards reviewed in this paper make reference to the translation process in general within a functional approach to translation. Special reference is made to quality requirements, project traceability and service provider-client relationships. It should be noted that no specific quality models for assessment of translations as products are mentioned in any of the

standards reviewed, though most of them state that the service provider should have an appropriate model in place. There are specific models, such as the LISA QA Model or SAE J2450 (cf. Corpas, 2001), as well as translation companies' own metrics and quality sheets (mainly inspired in LISA QA model). For want of space, models for quality assurance of translated texts have been left out in this paper.

The future CEN prEN 15038 *European Standard on Translation Services – Service Requirements* entailed a thorough review of the aforementioned standards in a conscious attempt to learn from past experiences, keep any outstanding achievements, and eliminate any hindrance or restriction from translation quality management. There is an underlying assumption that transparency, efficiency and traceability will promote quality and enhance TSP-clients' relationships in terms of mutual trust and respect. In other words, the future European standard intends to take “the best of two worlds”, ie. to cover the quality of the whole translation service, not only the management of a translation project, as in the case of ISO 9001. Recently, the ISO has shown an interest in this European Standard as a bridge to a future international standard within the Technical Committee ISO/TC 37 “Terminology and other language resources”<sup>13</sup>. Let us hope that a beneficial compromise can be reached by CEN and ISO on translation quality now that translation is considered serious business and everything becomes commercialised.

The translation industry has reached the age of majority. It is high time, then, that both service providers and clients are connoisseurs of quality. *Traduttore, traditore* ... if the standard fits, just “wear” it.

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<sup>13</sup> The ISO TC 37 also prepared the ISO 12616 standard on translation oriented-terminography.

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