

Translation Quality in the Age of Digital Transformation

Edited Volume



Jean-Marc Dalla-Zuanna, Christopher Kurz (Eds.)

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Foreword

Quality – a word you’ll find in every flyer, on every website. Everybody is promising it: quality, every time and everywhere. Quality has become a marketing buzzword, a catchphrase that can mean anything or nothing. Translations, too, are promoted as quality translations, but with no precise explanation of what that means. This is one side of the coin.

The other side of the “quality” coin is the sometimes extremely exacting standards demanded of translations that either have to be legally watertight and terminologically precise, while also consistently applying a company’s language guidelines, or serve to position a product appropriately for target groups in international markets. And then there are translations that are only needed for a rough overview of content. Between these two poles we find a multitude of highly disparate ideas about what constitutes quality in translation, illustrating how elusive the concept of quality in translation can be. Yet in all these cases quality is in no way just a buzzword, it is the foundation for a successful relationship between service-provider and client, regardless of who delivers the translation – an individual translator, an agency or an in-house language service.

Quality is what is agreed between the contracting parties – a statement you will no doubt find reiterated in this book. Quality is not merely the absence of errors. It is the fulfilment of requirements agreed upon before the work started – no less than that, but also no more.

This book examines the concept of quality in translation very much from a practical standpoint. It defines the parameters within which objectively definable criteria for assessing translation quality can exist, beyond all subjective preferences for one word or construction over another. The editors – themselves experienced practitioners – invited colleagues to submit contributions on themes that for them are not distant theory but day-to-day business practice.

Addressing not only the criteria, strategies and norms that have been constantly refined over many years, but also new tools and the challenges presented by (neural) machine translation, this book covers the full breadth of the subject. It offers a range of important contributions to an authoritative and thorough appraisal of the concept of quality in translation – an appraisal that the sector needs urgently so that those who deliver high-quality work can then differentiate themselves effectively in the competitive environment.

With its wealth of information presented from a wide variety of perspectives, this book is an outstanding and indispensable reference work for anyone concerned with quality in translation.

Norma Keßler
BDÜ President
April 2020

Preface from the editors

The concept of *translation quality* is probably the most ambiguous in our sector. Ideas of what does and does not constitute translation quality and the factors that influence it vary enormously. However, while this debate has been going on for decades, the wheel of technological change has been turning faster and faster, bringing about radical changes to our profession. As we enter the age of digital transformation, we are all faced with the task and the challenge of clearly transporting (or rather *translating*) this decidedly hazy notion into a world dominated by concepts such as *key figures*, *artificial intelligence* and *automation*, where buzzwords like *globalization*, *efficiency*, *synergy* and *cost optimization* set the tone and shape our everyday work with lasting impact.

From the point of view of cognitive science, our job in the 21st century is embedded in a complex translational ecosystem composed of diverse elements: cooperation partners, social factors, physical and mental factors, and a variety of artefacts¹. CAT tools such as translation memory systems, terminology management systems, alignment tools, machine translation systems and project management components are crucially important examples of such artefacts. They have become indispensable for day-to-day work in the language industry. However, amid all the (clearly necessary) technological advances and digitalization taking place in our profession, it is vital that the critically-thinking human translator is not neglected or ignored.

The increasingly clear manifestation of the fault lines between digital transformation and the redefining of our profession and work environment on a daily basis have given way to numerous discussions with various industry participants, colleagues and friends. In summer 2019, the idea was thus born to issue a collective volume that sets out examples covering a diverse range of issues, and above all the various requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to attain – highly individualized – translation quality in as many different areas of our sector as possible. The result of this idea, the collective volume you hold in your hands, represents a strong link between theory and practice. On the one hand, it reflects findings, tips, strategies and suggestions from day-to-day work, but on the other hand also addresses basic theory and offers a reflective and multifaceted way into the set of issues surrounding quality and translation.

1 See Krüger, R. (2015): „Fachübersetzen aus kognitionstranslatologischer Perspektive: Das Kölner Modell des situierten Fachübersetzers“ [LSP Translation from a Cognitive Translational Perspective: the Cologne Model of the Situated LSP Translator], in: *trans-kom* 8 [2], pp. 273–313.

The first part of the collective volume deals with the dimensions of translation quality. To begin with, various different approaches to defining quality are considered. This is followed by a differentiation between process-related and product-related dimensions of quality, with a particular focus on risk management, standardization and the subject of errors, error categories and error assessments. Two examples from the automobile industry are examined to illustrate both dimensions.

The second part describes factors that have a significant influence on translation quality: terminology management, the quality of source texts and – often underestimated – the translator’s specialist knowledge and grasp of technical concepts.

The third part of this book illustrates the importance of the aforementioned artefacts of the translational ecosystem for achieving translation quality. These man-made tools of information technology are present in abundance and are permanent features of the modern-day translator’s working environment. They dominate our working conditions and it is hard to imagine doing our everyday job without them today.

The final part of our collective volume is dedicated to application in practice. The chapters are divided into five broad areas to provide a better overview: finance; multimedia; software industry; technology sector; international institutions and NGOs.

The afterword provides the reader with an outlook of the future of translation quality.

We were able to attract a multitude of experts from the profession to write contributions for the collective volume (employers from industry, language service providers within large companies, public authorities, NGOs, translation agencies and freelancers). Their everyday practical work is centered on the topic of translation quality and they are measured on their achievements in this field on a daily basis. In order to ensure the content is as wide-ranging as possible, we did not only ask well-known, successful authors to contribute, but also approached young authors who have not yet gathered much experience putting their expert knowledge down on paper. This has resulted in an interesting mixture of accomplished authors and new, young writers, reflected in the diversity of the articles previously addressed. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to you all at this point!

We also owe many thanks to Roland Hoffmann, Head of the BDÜ Weiterbildungs- und Fachverlagsgesellschaft mbH, for his consent to this book project. Together with his team, he offered outstanding support in all phases of the project and this collective volume would not exist in its current form without him.

Jean-Marc Dalla-Zuanna, Christopher Kurz
Wolfsburg, Aurich/Leipzig
Summer 2020

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INTRODUCTION

1 Translation: a billion-dollar business

Florian Faes

The global language industry is big business. Worth an estimated USD 24.2bn,² companies providing translation and interpreting services, as well as language technology, employ and collaborate with hundreds of thousands of employees and freelancers.

The language industry services every other industry imaginable, from enterprise IT, life sciences, finance and banking, to gaming and media, and many more.

While the 2020 Covid-19 crisis is expected to lead to around an 8% drop in market size in 2020 from 2019,³ the language industry has historically been resilient in the aftermath of a recession and quickly resumed its secular growth pattern soon after economic recovery began.

Translation, localization, and interpreting are not nice-to-haves but, in many cases, essential product or service components. Software must be accessible to a global audience, equipment has to be assembled using local language instructions outside a manufacturer's factories, and clinical trials need to be conducted across the globe. All this drives demand.

2 Slator 2020 Language Industry Market Report

3 Ibid.

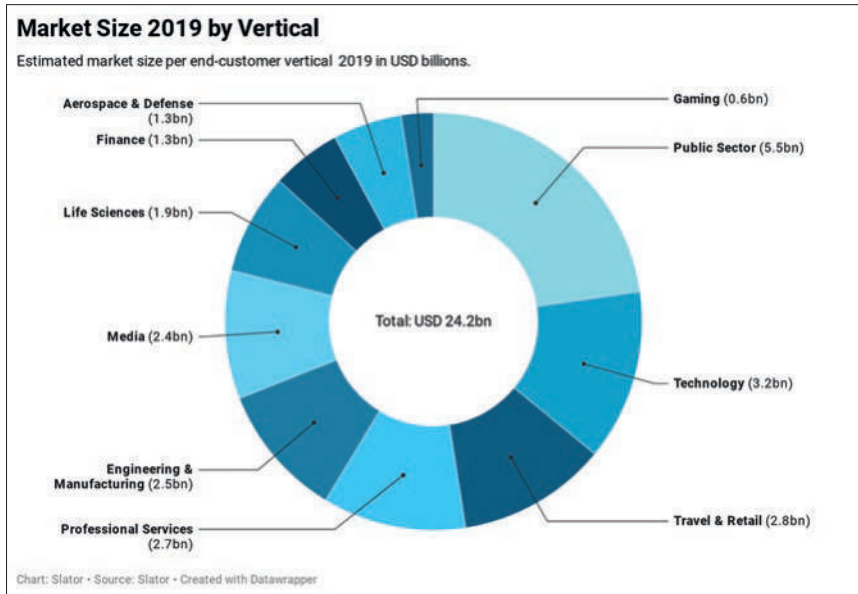


Fig. 1: Estimated market size per end-customer vertical 2019 in USD billions

At its core, the language industry relies on human professionals from a vast pool of skilled and experienced linguists, as well as project and account managers, salespeople, senior managers, and entrepreneurs. These professionals, however, operate in an incredibly complex and fast-evolving technology ecosystem.

Over the past two decades, technology, such as translation productivity technologies or order and client management systems, has dramatically improved and boosted productivity across the industry.

Moreover, over the past five years, rapid advances in machine learning have resulted in a new generation of much-improved machine translation tools, which have been quickly adopted by both vendors and buyers of language services. While perceived by some in the industry as an existential threat, others have embraced these technologies and upgraded their offerings to compete in the marketplace.

Jean-Marc Dalla-Zuanna, Christopher Kurz (Eds.)

Translation Quality in the Age of Digital Transformation

Edited Volume

As we enter the age of digital transformation, we are all faced with the task and the challenge of clearly transporting the hazy notion of translation quality into a world dominated by concepts such as key figures, artificial intelligence and automation. The increasingly clear manifestation of the fault lines between digital transformation and the redefining of our profession and work environment on a daily basis gives way to numerous discussions. The collective volume you hold in your hands represents a strong link between theory and practice. On the one hand, it reflects findings, tips, strategies and suggestions from day-to-day work, but on the other hand also addresses basic theory and offers a reflective and multifaceted way into the set of issues surrounding quality and translation: dimensions of translation quality, factors that have a significant influence on translation quality, importance of the elements of the translational ecosystem for achieving translation quality, application in practice.



Jean-Marc Dalla-Zuanna studied German philology at Sorbonne University as well as translation and terminology at I.S.I.T. in Paris, France. He obtained a degree in French, German and English in 1986 and has been working at Volkswagen Language Services in Wolfsburg, Germany, since 1987. He is a senior expert in the fields of translation quality assessment, supplier management and risk management.



Dr. Christopher Kurz has worked as a translator, project manager and translation manager for various companies on the TSP side and the client side. Since 2016 he is Head of Translation Management at the German wind turbine manufacturer ENERCON. As a member of ISO TC 37/SC 5/WG 1 Translation he has been involved in the development of several translation standards (e.g. ISO 17100 and ISO 18587) since 2011.



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