

Chapter 1

Quality and Quality Assessment in Translation: Paradigms in Perspective

Marcel Thelen

Maastricht School of Translation and Interpreting, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This chapter first gives an overview of existing interpretations of the concept of quality in organizations in general, as well as in the translation industry and translator training. This is followed by a discussion of quality assessment and how this is generally dealt with in the translation industry and translator training. Various perspectives are possible, but the focus is on translation as service provision as outlined in the translation services standards EN 15038 and ISO 17100. It is argued that implementing quality assessment of translation as service provision in translator training requires the introduction into the curriculum of quality management and quality assurance by students; a so-called skills lab is an ideal environment for this. Various suggestions are then given for assessing quality management and quality assurance while taking into account the requirements of validity and reliability.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter places existing paradigms of quality and quality assessment in perspective by discussing the various approaches to translation quality and its assessment in the translation industry and translator training. It also surveys the factors that play a role in quality assessment in translator training, and proposes a flexible assessment format. Translation is understood very broadly here, as any product or activity related to producing a target text on the basis of a source text. This can be translation *per se*, but also terminology lists, project management, office management related to translation, translation quality assurance, etc. Quality assessment can be carried out from the perspective of translation as a product, service, or process, but it can also focus on the translator, or the person carrying out the job in question. Central in this chapter will be translation as service provision. A good context for exploring this theme is a so-called in-house skills lab, or student company (or workplace) in the curriculum. Quality assessment of work done by students in such a skills lab involves more than just assessing translations and therefore also requires assessment methods, criteria and metrics other than those used for translation as product.

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The chapter is structured as follows. First existing interpretations of quality are outlined, followed by a discussion of quality assessment in the translation industry and translator training. For translator training, quality assessment is then presented as the central concept that should measure the quality not only of translations and translation-related products, but also of student performance on quality management and quality assurance. The latter two form part of the service provision chain presented in the standards EN 15038 (CEN, 2006) and ISO 17100 (ISO 2015), and introduce service provision as a focal point of assessment. This is followed by a discussion of assessment methods, criteria and metrics in use and the factors influencing quality assessment, such as training method, assignment type, assessment method, criteria and metrics, competences (to be) assessed, etc. In order to take these factors into account in quality assessment, assessment grids are proposed that configure their interdependence and impact on assessment. A number of examples demonstrate how these grids may be used for a skills lab as well as for other training methods.

THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY

In Organisations in General

In organisations in general, the concept of quality is rather fuzzy since it may have various meanings. In his ISO 9000 Quality Systems Handbook, Hoyle (2001, p. 21), for example, lists the following possible meanings:

- A degree of excellence
- Conformance with requirements
- The totality of characteristics of any entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs
- Fitness for use
- Fitness for purpose
- Freedom from defects, imperfections or contamination
- Delighting customers

These meanings cover two perspectives: (1) inherent characteristics and (2) conformance with requirements, needs or expectations. The meaning “freedom from defects, imperfections or contamination” focuses on inherent characteristics, whereas the meaning “conformance with requirements” clearly points towards the perspective of conformance with requirements, needs or expectations. The other meanings seem to cover both perspectives.

It is perhaps for this reason that Hoyle (2001) proposes a combination of the two perspectives in an overall and uniform definition of quality as

... the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils a need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligator (Hoyle, 2001, p. 22).

where “stated” means stipulated in a document, and “generally implied” custom or common practice, whereas “obligatory” is not further explained and left to speak for itself (cf. ISO 9000:2005(E), p. 9).

“Characteristics” are further defined as

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