All Languages Ltd®
Since 1971

Translators & Interpreters

The Importance of Quality

Insights into Translation

Introduction

The quality of translation you require for basic business correspondence will differ from the quality you require for a legal contract, technical document, or medical report.

In conceptual terms, quality relates to how a product or service conforms to a given set of specifications. Higher quality is subject to thorough quality assurance processes to meet the rigorous requirements required by industry-specific or technical terminology. Lower quality can satisfy less stringent requirements; such as business or informal communication.

So, how do you know what type of quality you need, and when quality can vary?

Quality in the translation industry is comprised of four critical components: resource selection, quality assurance processes, industry certifications and industry experience. Understanding the important factors in each area will help you become a better translation buyer.

This document was written to help you understand how quality is achieved at different levels and why receiving the appropriate level of quality is always important.

Components of quality

RESOURCE SELECTION

The first step to a successful translation is helping the Translation Service Provider ("TSP") understand your needs, after which they will begin the resource selection process. To understand your needs, a professional TSP utilizes coordinators who will gather all your project requirements:

- Source and target language(s)
- Information about importance and usage of the material(s)
- Delivery requirements
- Reference materials to maintain consistency

The TSP will examine the above details and draw upon a deep pool of resources that covers all industries. It is imperative that a TSP be highly competent at evaluating linguists to determine which translators are consistently providing the best quality work within the prescribed timelines.

Professional translators:

The most important asset to any translation project is the expertise and accreditations of the translator. All linguists are qualified professionals who are subject to ongoing evaluations, and have one or more of the following attributes:

- Passed internal translation tests during recruitment;
- An undergraduate degree or higher education in translation;
- A professional designation as a Certified Translator;
- A minimum of 5 years experience in the translation industry.

Translator selection is based upon relevant domain expertise, locale, and performance history.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCCESSES

There are varying levels of quality that can be specified to meet more/less stringent requirements. The quality oriented TSP follows a standardized quality assurance process for each level. Client-review is suggested, and generally occurs at each level of the process.

Quality level	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3
Top Class (Highly stringent requirements e.g. medical, legal, technical documents)	Translation, revision and proofreading by qualified translator with industry specific knowledge	Revision and proofreading by second independent native-speaker with industry specific knowledge	Review by a domain specialist ensuring target text has been properly translated for intended target audience
Commercial Grade (Stringent requirements e.g. marketing, packaging)	Translation, revision and proofreading by qualified translator with industry specific knowledge	Revision and proofreading by second independent native-speaker	Not included
General Usage (Minimal stringent requirements e.g. letters, business correspondence)	Translation, revision and proofreading by qualified translator	Revision and proofreading, ensuring correct formatting of text and images	Not included
Basic Quality (No stringency)	Translation, revision and proofreading by qualified translator	Not included	Not included
Machine Translation (Computer translation to understand small phrases)	Post-editing of machine generated translation to help it flow	Not included	Not included

Translation tools for every level of quality

Experienced TSP's will understand if-and-when to leverage appropriate translation technology. Translation memory recognizes how human translators have previously translated similar content, and prompts them to maintain consistent terminology. Generally, style guide creation, terminology extraction, and construction of a single centralized term base and translation memory should be expected.

Customer satisfaction measurement

The professional TSP formally measures their customer satisfaction levels using internal data (% of projects delivered on time) and client feedback (% of complaints regarding the translation itself, or customer service related). Most often, client feedback is received on an ad hoc basis over the phone, and from structured e-mail based surveys.

Escalation process

Client review is an integral part of translation quality, and it is recommended that clients communicate candidly with their TSPs. When translation errors or service issues do arise, their concerns will be quickly mitigated through a formalized escalation process.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Your TSP should be transparent and be able to provide you with client references by industry. There are more than a hundred different industries in the world, using Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes and sub codes as a guide, so it stands to reason that no single provider can be expert in every field.

The more established TSPs have a broad base of industry experience, and have assembled an extensive resource base of linguists who are able to work on every type of project from basic communications to complex technical or legal material.

INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS

The development of translation service provider certifications is the result of industry growth and maturation. Certifications are a quick way to identify whether or not a particular TSP meets certain standards and has demonstrated compliance by virtue of the certification. The two key certifications you should be aware of are explained below, and were developed by service providers, clients, and general interest participants, all working together to establish standards which are independently audited to establish compliance.

ISO 17100:2015

ISO 17100:2015 provides a framework for the necessary components of quality translations – as recognized internationally. The standard covers all aspects of translation, including processes, resource selection, and the capability to deliver translation services. Compliance is ensured by recognized certification bodies through on-site audits.

Canadian General Standards Board CAN/CGSB-131.10-2008

Developed under the auspices of the Canadian General Standards Board and approved by the Standards Council of Canada, this certification establishes and defines the process requirements for the provision and translation services. It harmonizes, where possible, with the provisions of EN-15038 and was highly advocated for by l'Association de l'industrie de la langue/Language Industry Association (AILIA).

THE IMPACT OF SPEED

Speed affects quality, consistency and cost.

As a rule-of-thumb, excluding technology benefits, a professional translator will translate approximately 1,500 – 2,000 words per day depending on the complexity of the material, source file format, reference materials, and the time required research new terms.

Translators that work frequently on your texts will have built a translation memory that remembers how he/she previously translated your text, and improves production levels proportionately based on the level of similarity between projects.

Humans are not gasoline engines that enable you to step on the gas and generate more revolutions per minutes. To achieve quality, linguists need to be given sufficient time to achieve a minimal number of errors.

What if you need your translation project turned around in a rush?

To maximize consistency, it is recommended that a project be translated by the same set of linguists, one to translate and one to revise. In a rush situation, multiple enlargement teams can be deployed, this however can create opportunities for inconsistency in translation. As your translation service provider — in order to mitigate these problems — we rigorously manage your Term Banks and Translation Memory (TBs and TMs) to maintain consistency amongst proprietary and technical terminology from one translator to another.

As you might expect, rush services require a premium to be charged. The TSP has to reshuffle their production flows, apply higher levels of project management, and seek out the most experienced (and thus more costly) linguists who have proven they can work under pressure.

Summary

1. There are higher/lower levels of quality to match more/less stringent requirements.
2. Resource selection is critical.
3. The TSP will follow the same quality assurance process regardless of the number of steps required to complete a given project.
4. Industry certifications are a quick way to identify a TSP's compliance to certain standards.
5. Speed affects quality, consistency and cost.

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