

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN TRANSLATION**

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All sectors of industry strive to achieve Quality, and this process is essential for producing professional translations. This paper looks at the application of Quality Assurance (QA) in translating, explaining what quality is, what quality management comprises, who is responsible and describes ICL Language Translation Centre Quality procedures and processes.

### WHAT IS QUALITY MANAGEMENT?

What is Quality? Quality of translation can be defined as a finished product which is factually correct, with no English words in the target language (except where requested), using clear and appropriate language which is relevant to local practices. Quality is also defined as conformance to requirements.

To achieve Quality, management processes must be applied by the translator, the agency - where the translator works through one - and the client. These processes consist of consultation between translator/agency and client; creation of a clear statement of requirements; briefing for the translator; status reports at regular intervals; change control procedures; and validation/quality control procedures.

But why go to all this trouble and create and implement such management processes? There are several reasons, and one of the most important is market pressure. In today's IT market there are plenty of mediocre, adequate products being introduced with upgrades at shorter and shorter intervals, with a continually increasing number of functions. As a result, user expectation is constantly increasing.

If a company wants to hold on to, or even increase, its market share, time-to-market must be kept as short as possible. Usability must be constantly reviewed and improved and the product image must be one of excellent quality. All

this must be achieved as cost-effectively as possible since margins in the IT industry are under constant pressure. Quality Management leads to better processes and reduces the price of non-conformance, and so addresses the above problems.

It therefore becomes clear that the consequences of not having effective Quality Management is loss of business, loss of profit caused by the cost of putting things right and, in extreme cases, consequential damages if a faulty product has caused the customer to lose business.

#### WHAT COMPRISES QUALITY MANAGEMENT?

What are the building blocks which ensure effective Quality Management in translation, and therefore a Quality end product? Here are some of the most important ones:

##### Consultancy

The translation project manager should ideally be involved in a consultancy role during the planning stages of a product, particularly where software and documentation is concerned. This will help ensure the quality and translatability of the original. This is the time when guidelines and standards for the writing of the original text should be discussed and agreed. Standard check lists will help to ensure that all aspects are considered.

The training of authors in translation issues should also be discussed at this stage. This training will benefit the client in improved quality of documentation or software which is not going to be translated. The number of users with English as a second language is increasing and software and documentation which are easily translatable are more easily understood by such users.

##### Statement of requirements

As the result of the consultancy, or at the start of the project, an agreed statement of requirements is essential. This should clearly state the client's needs, that is the deliverables, time schedules, the scope of responsibilities and a statement of risks. It should contain details on the format in which the original material will be delivered and in which the translation is required. Any special constraints as to characters available, length of translated text, design and special requirements regarding artwork should also be covered. It will also contain a short statement of the change procedures.

The statement of requirements forms the basis of the translation plan. The plan should be signed off both by client and translation project manager and is the yardstick against which progress is monitored.

#### Selection of translators

The selection of translators is very important within quality management. A translator can be a jack-of-all-trades only at the expense of quality. Translators should be extensively tested in their specialist field. It is not enough to accept what a translator gives as his or her specialty in the CV. Translators should not be pressured to accept work which they themselves do not feel qualified to do. It is certainly better to lose a job because no translator is available than to lose a client forever because of a poor translation.

It is also important to match a translator's known style to the client's requirement. Although a translator can adapt to a certain extent, there are some fields, such as marketing literature, which need a specific talent.

Another factor to take into consideration is the ability of the translator to adapt and to work under stress situations such as frequent changes to the original. For larger projects translators should, where feasible, be invited to attend meetings with the client and the technical contact.

#### Selection of tools used

The selection of translation tools is important. They should be appropriate to the job and should ensure that the work can be delivered in the format required without incurring high costs. There are a number of translation tools on the market, the evaluation of which would be a subject for a separate paper.

#### Procedures and processes

Clearly defined procedures and processes are certainly necessary. They are, in fact, a prerequisite to obtaining ISO 9000 (BS 5750) Quality status. This is important because more and more companies will require the agency they use to have ISO 9000 because they themselves have this standard and it may be required in their procedures.

The procedures must be user friendly, short and to the point, otherwise they will just gather dust on the shelves. Procedures will cover all aspects of translation from consultancy, through the selection process to the hand-over of the final product. The procedures covering the actual translation work must be made available to translators.

The procedures should be proven, this means that there will be a period of testing and they will need updating as translation technology changes.

### Checking and validation

As the original material arrives from the client, it should be checked that it conforms to the agreed requirements. If this is not the case, it is better to go back to the client and ask him to re-send the material rather than to try and change it. It could be that the client has forgotten to advise the translation project manager of changes in the production of the material. Conversion, without checking with the client, could lead to problems.

All translations should be checked for linguistic quality and conformance to format requirements. It has happened to us that the translator passed the work on to another translator without telling the project manager. The translation project manager, knowing the quality of the original translator, passed on the translation to us without a quality check and we found serious problems. The work had to be redone and the deadline was not met. An incident like this can quickly destroy the client's confidence and will lead to a loss of business.

The client should have the finished translation validated by native speakers who should also know the language in which the original material was written and who should have knowledge of the market and the target audience. The choice of validator is very important. It is no good, for instance, to have an end-user manual of a PC based office automation product validated by an expert in mainframes.

Product knowledge is important, but the validator must be aware of the fact that the user will have less knowledge and that what is understandable to the expert might be confusing to the newcomer. However, the validator should also be given clear guidelines as to how far the validation should go.

This will change according to the type of translation. Marketing literature will probably be validated for technical accuracy but even more importantly for the appropriate style. Installation documentation will have the emphasis on technical accuracy and clearness, end-user documentation for PC products will have the emphasis on usability.

In the case of a project containing both software and manuals, the client must arrange for these to be validated in live software tests. This is the only way to ensure that software and manuals conform.

The client must see to it that any changes arising from validation are discussed with the translator and that they are implemented either by the translator or by a person with linguistic skills.

#### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT?

Everyone involved has a responsibility for quality, but responsibility for quality management lies with a number of key people. Project managers, translators, the client and the original language text author all have key roles for implementing the quality processes outlined above.

#### The project manager

The main responsibility for managing the Quality Assurance process lies with the translation project manager. He is the only one who can see the total picture and who has ready access to all parties.

The project manager must agree the exact requirements with the client. This involves a number of meetings for large projects, in order to determine the scope of the project, format and style requirements, the necessary product training, detailed time schedules, hand-over and change procedures, and validation procedures. The project manager must select the right translators and that does not mean simply picking a translator with the appropriate specialist area in his or her CV. It means testing translators thoroughly and checking that they really are the specialists they claim to be.

It also means consultation with the client during the course of the project, in order to confirm that the work is carried out to the agreed requirements as understood by the client. The translation project manager has to genuinely manage the project - not just act as a post box, which, unfortunately, too many agencies still think adequate!

Managing a translation project means not only making sure that the material handed over for translation by the client is in the agreed format. It also involves monitoring progress constantly - in particular monitoring the agreed milestones - and conducting quality checks throughout the project. The milestones, or schedules, should be submitted to the client at agreed intervals, usually weekly in long-term projects.

Monitoring ensures that any problems can be uncovered in time and solutions worked out in cooperation with the client. There is nothing worse than getting regular reports stating 'Work proceeding to schedule' and at the last minute being told that unforeseen problems will cause a slip in the end date.

When a new translator is being used, this should result in asking not just for a status report every week, but actually asking the translator to send in a certain amount of the translation as first draft at specific intervals. This will also allow a constant check on the quality of the work. Even good translators can have bad periods, but this is not an excuse that the client will or can accept - because his customers don't care. They see the quality of the finished work and judge the client, not the translator, by it.

Since time-to-market is so restricted by market pressures and customers increasingly expect simultaneous launches of products in all major European languages, it is rare that translation of a product can wait until everything is cut and dried and the original manuals ready for the printer. Translation will have to start at the latest when product development is only halfway down the line. This means that effective change control is becoming more and more important. This will have to be agreed with the client and translators before the project starts.

Constant monitoring is important and the project manager must ensure that the client is adhering to it. This will not be easy because developers and authors will be under considerable pressure and change control means an added workload for them. In this situation, a translation project manager will need considerable diplomatic skill to ensure cooperation and continued good will. However, the price of non-conformance can be very heavy, both for the client and the translation agency. It will be better to risk temporarily frayed tempers because the translation project manager insists upon adherence to change control procedures rather than have a disappointed client and tainted reputation.

### The translator

The translators have a major responsibility for quality in translation. They must be honest and self-critical about their capability. It is far better to refuse translation work for which one is not really qualified than to accept it for fear of not getting any further work. A client disappointed with the quality of the work will make sure that the specific translator is never used again for any of his work and the agency in turn might take the attitude that it cannot afford to use such a translator.

Translators must also make sure that their processes ensure quality. This means thorough product research and not being afraid to ask questions. In fact, the translator should insist upon being given the name of a contact so that he or she can discuss any technical queries directly. Some agencies seem unwilling to allow direct contact, but it is absolutely necessary in the interest of quality and keeping translation time as short as possible. Thorough checking of the finished work seems obvious and, when agreeing to an end date, time for must be allowed for this.

### The client

What is often overlooked, however, is that the client also bears responsibility for quality management. It is not enough to simply choose an agency, hand the work over and then take the result and sell it.

In addition to specifying the requirements the client is responsible for the quality of the original. A good translator can certainly work wonders with a bad original, but that costs time and money. By including a translation specialist in the documentation and, where appropriate, product planning stages the client can ensure translatability and avoid problems later.

Another requirement that needs managing by the client is that of a technical contact. It is not enough to give a name to the agency. The technical contact must be managed so that he or she makes the time available to answer questions and does not feel this requirement is an unnecessary conflict with other demands on his or her time.

The technical contact must also be made aware that although translators are highly trained people, they are not technicians and might sometimes ask questions which seem self-explanatory. However, if the questions seem to reveal crass ignorance in the field, the technical contact will have to inform the translation project manager, because it might indicate that the translator is not suitable.

Keeping to agreed schedules and, if this becomes impossible, advising the translation project manager of any changes in the schedule is necessary if release dates are to be met. Failure to do this can lead to delays and/or reduced quality in addition to frustration in translators. The client must remember that freelance translators, whether working directly for him or through an agency, lose money if they have to stop work for any time.

The client is responsible for the validation of the glossary at the outset and the validation of the finished work. This is necessary to ensure that any company specific terminology is followed and that the end-product conforms to company standards.

The responsibility for following agreed change procedures also lies with the client. The translation project manager can make sure that the changes received conform to the agreed format but the client must ensure that developers and authors follow them in the first instance and that the appropriate procedures are set up within his company.

As a part of quality management, the client feeds back to the translator any changes required after language validation. Translators must have the chance to comment on the changes since validators are not infallible and have been known to introduce, rather than eliminate, errors. It is also good policy to let the translators know the validators' comments so that they can keep them in mind next time round.

Last, but not least, the client must make sure that any comments are implemented either by the original translator or by persons with linguistic skills, preferably in the language involved. Otherwise it is only too easy to introduce errors, spelling or otherwise.

#### Original text author

The authors of the original text, whether software or documentation, have responsibility for the translatability of the text. They should have received training and written guidelines and standards for translatability. If none exist in the client's company, the project manager should provide these during the initial consultancy stages. It should be pointed out to the client that conformance to such standards and guidelines will improve the quality of the original as well as save translation costs and time.

Authors must conform to agreed change procedures and should be open to discussion if the translators find passages or messages unclear.

#### ICL QUALITY PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES

At the ICL Language Translation Centre we have developed quality management processes which start with test procedures for new translators and are used to ensure conformance through the translation process from 'cradle-to-grave'. We are proud to have achieved ISO 9000 Quality status as part of the ICL corporate QA programme.

We have evolved a number of forms designed to be used in the planning stage. These are used for defining requirements, for change control procedures and for briefing the translator. Guidelines and seminars for authors and software writers are aimed at making documentation and software translatable. Milestones incorporating the data from the agency's status reports ensure control over time-to-market.

We encourage dialogue between translator and technical contact. Where possible, we arrange for translators to see the product. We also believe that large projects, translating both software and manuals, are best done on-site. This allows the translators to have constant contact with development, a process often leading to improvements in the original product.

We are constantly evaluating translation tools and are not only using them in our translation work on-site, but also look for agencies willing to use them. This ensures that updates can be made cost-effectively and that glossaries can be used across the product range, ensuring consistency in the terminology. This is important to make products user-friendly.

Validation of translated documentation and software is carried out by native speakers of the target language. They have relevant technical knowledge which ensures that localisation issues are not overlooked. Dialogue between validator and translator ensures that no errors are introduced by this validation process.

Translation becomes cost-effective, time-to-market is kept at an optimum, and the resulting documentation and software is of uniformly high quality. A major benefit is that the original text is usually a higher standard as a result of the introduction of the translation quality procedures.