

A vertical photograph of a man in a dark suit and tie walking on a beach at sunset. He is carrying a white briefcase and looking towards the right. The background shows the ocean and a bright, hazy sky with the sun low on the horizon. The image is repeated three times vertically, creating a layered effect.

# Quality Assessment

By Jiri Stejskal

# in Translation

## In *Zen and the Art of* Motorcycle

*Maintenance*, R. M. Pirsig defines *quality* as a “cleavage term between hip and square.” Other definitions include “pride of workmanship” (W. Edwards Deming), “fitness for use” (Joseph Juran), and “conformance to specifications” (Phil Crosby). Dozens of other definitions are available, but there is no agreement on the universal concept of quality. Each definition is specific to a particular field: management, manufacturing, music, and so forth.

The concept of quality is plagued with the same problem as the concept of translation—it is a mixed bag with an enormous spread between the creative and the normative. Readers of Edith Grossman’s translation of *Don Quixote*, for example, are the judges of the quality of her translation, and no sensible person will demand that Grossman be a certified translator, that she follow a standard defining a quality translation process, and that the novel satisfy the Society of Automotive Engineers’ (SAE) J2450 Translation Quality Metric. Readers of a translated legal contract, an informed consent, or a user’s manual will, however, have quite different requirements, as these documents can directly affect their well-being or their ability to use a particular product. In this article, we will discuss the latter—quality assessment in the normative sense.

The end user reads a translation and not the original because he or she does not understand the language in which the original document is written. It stands to reason that such a person is unable to assess independently the quality of the translation because even if the translated text reads beautifully, it could say something completely different than the original. The only thing comforting the reader is an assurance that the translation was done by a qualified translator and that proper procedures were followed. Such assurances can be offered within a regulatory framework. Typically, regulation is achieved through a combination of standards and certification processes.

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### Three Ps of Quality Assessment

Three distinct areas need to be addressed: provider, process and product.

The provider is a translator or a translation company, that is, a physical or legal person. The process is a sequence of steps used to produce a target text (translation) that corresponds to the source text (the original document). Finally, the product is the translation itself. The quality assessment method will be very different for each of these areas.

We can make quality judgments based on the qualifications of the translation service provider and on the provider's adherence to standards. The competence of providers can be assessed through certification. Processes and products can be subject to both certifications and standards. As specific examples, ATA offers certification in 27 language combinations, which serves as a tool for the assessment of a translator; ASTM International (formerly American Society for Testing and Materials) has a standard that can serve as a guideline for the translation process; and the SAE J2450 standard can serve as a metric for assessing the quality of the product—the translation.

Let us look at these three different aspects of quality assessment in greater detail.

#### Provider

The most common scenario in the U.S. translation market is that the end user of the translation service hires a translation company, which, in turn, hires individual translators and editors. Arguably, both translation companies and individual translators can be considered to be providers of translation services. The competencies required, however, are very different. For translation companies, it is the project management, process manage-

ment, and competence in vendor selection that are needed in order to succeed. For translators, it is linguistic competence.

*tation Profession*. The results of the survey represent 63 professional associations of translators and interpreters in 40 countries.

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Quality assessment methods exist for both translation companies and individual translators, and in both cases the assessment is achieved through certification. For companies, certification is based on a quality standard and the company's compliance with such a standard. These standards, described in detail in the following section, invariably define the processes that should be employed in order to provide good quality translation. For individual translators, certification is based on their ability to translate. For the purpose of this article, individual translators are considered to be the translation providers.

The author of this article published a series of articles on this subject in *The ATA Chronicle* between June 2001 and August 2003. The collected articles later became a book, *International Certification Study*, published by ATA. The study examined the ways in which translators and interpreters earn their credentials in more than 30 countries on 6 continents. In 2005, the study was supplemented by a detailed survey under the auspices of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) and published under the title *Survey of the FIT Committee for Information on the Status of the Translation and Interpre-*

The study showed that certification of translators occurs under three possible scenarios: certification by a professional association, certification by a government, and certification by an academic institution. Certification by a professional association is strongest in common-law countries, whereas certification by a government body is usually employed in civil-law countries. Academic programs exist in both civil-law and common-law countries and are particularly strong in countries where certification is not offered by the government or professional associations.

The three credentialing methods are not interchangeable. Certification by an academic institution is usually an entry-level credential that serves as a steppingstone toward certification by a professional association or by a government. Academic credentials available to translators range from non-degree certificates to Ph.D. programs. For example, Arizona State University in Tempe offers a non-degree certificate in translation consisting of 12 semester hours of coursework and 2 semester hours of in-service practicum. Several bachelor's- and master's-level degree programs in the U.S. are outlined in ➡

two ATA publications, *Park's Guide to Translating and Interpreting Programs in North America* and *Programs in Translation Studies: An ATA Handbook*. A number of Ph.D. programs exist abroad.

Certifications by professional and governmental organizations serve the needs of accomplished translators, but the purpose of a government-sponsored credential is quite different from that of a credential granted by a professional association. Whereas a government-sponsored credential focuses on the moral integrity of the candidate and his or her capability to serve as an "assistant to justice," the professional association's credential focuses on the candidate's linguistic competence. Government certification may or may not include an assessment of the candidate's ability to translate. In the U.S., government

an examination—with a few exceptions of certification "on dossier" used in Canada and Australia. The aforementioned FIT survey showed that almost one half of professional associations participating in the survey offer a certification program for translators and/or interpreters, and of those only one association does not use an examination as an assessment tool. ATA's Certification program is a good example of a credential sponsored by a professional association.

### Process

The best-known standard defining the process is the widely accepted International Organization for Standardization's ISO 9000 series of standards, which specify requirements for a quality management system. Originally drafted by the British Standards Institute, it was adopted as

9000. Although commonly referred to as ISO 9000:2000 certification, the actual standard to which an organization's quality management can be certified is ISO 9001:2000. The trouble with this standard and certification is that it applies to any industry, including manufacturers. Of course, when all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail, and application of the ISO standard forces companies to apply processes that might not be appropriate in areas requiring creativity, such as translation. Translation companies often acquire this certification either because they are forced to do so by their clients or in an effort to boost their image in the marketplace.

In the past 10 years, industry-specific standards defining the translation process have started to fill the existing void. These standards are either national or regional. This poses a problem in the translation and interpretation industry, which is, by definition, international. An international industry-specific standard is therefore desirable, and it can be expected that the ISO will draft such a standard in the foreseeable future. It will then be up to the individual national or regional standards bodies to bring their expertise to the table. The following standards have appeared on the scene since 1996. Standards developed specifically for interpreters are not included.

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programs are limited to interpreters and include a rigorous examination. Outside the U.S., particularly in South America and Europe, governmental certification of both translators and interpreters is quite common. In some countries the certification is based on an examination, and in others it is based on meeting certain criteria unrelated to the candidate's linguistic competence.

Certification by a professional association is almost always based on

an international standard in 1987 and went through multiple revisions. Today, many translation companies around the world are ISO 9001-certified. ISO 9001 provides a number of requirements that an organization needs to fulfill if it is to achieve customer satisfaction through consistent products and services that meet customer expectations. This is the only implementation for which third-party auditors may grant certifications. It is not possible to be certified to ISO

- UNI 10574, Definition of services and activities of translation and interpreting enterprises. Italian standard, 1996.
- DIN 2345, Translation Contracts. German standard, 1998.
- EUATC, Quality Standard for translation companies. European Standard, 1999, the basis for development of the EN 15038 standard.

## A Comparison of Existing Standards and Their Applications

Standard (by date): Application:	UNI 10574	DIN 2345	EUATC	ÖNORM D1201	ÖNORM D1200	GB/T 19363.1	ASTM F2575-06	EN 15038
Translation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Interpretation	Yes	No	No	No	No	No <sup>1</sup>	No <sup>2</sup>	No
Individuals	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Companies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Basis for certification	No	No	No	No	Yes	No <sup>3</sup>	No	Yes
Voluntary compliance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mandatory compliance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	N/A
Audit required	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A	Yes

1. A separate Chinese standard for interpreters, "Specification for Translation Services: Part II Interpretation," was not available in English at the time this article was written.  
2. A separate ASTM standard for interpreters is "F2089-01 Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services."  
3. A Chinese standard that will serve as a basis for certification of translation companies is being developed.

- ÖNORM D1201, Translation Contracts. Austrian standard, 2000.
- ÖNORM D1200, Requirements for the service and the provision of the service. Austrian standard, 2000.
- GB/T 19363.1, Specification of Translation Service, Part 1: Translation. Chinese standard, 2004.
- ASTM F 2575 – 06, Standard Guide for Quality Assurance in Translation. U.S. standard, 2006.
- EN 15038, Translation Service—Service Requirements. European standard, 2006, to replace country-specific European quality standards.

The table above compares the individual industry-specific standards. It shows whether they apply to translation only or include interpretation as well. It also shows whether they are

geared toward individuals or translation companies and whether they can serve as a basis for certification of the translation process. If certification is available, the table shows whether compliance with such certification is voluntary or mandatory, and whether an audit is required for such certification.

The process standards described above do not use metrics, but rather specify and define the processes needed to achieve quality translation. It is known that process standards such as the ISO 9000 series will assure that certain processes will be followed, but that the processes can be flawed. To assess the quality of the translation itself, product standards or metrics are used.

### Product

Several product standards are available today. What they have in common is that they provide statistical assess-

ment of a number of errors per specified amount of text. Unlike in the previous scenarios for provider certifications and process standards, in the case of product standards it is the end user who dictates what a "quality translation" is. A U.S. manufacturer who needs a translation merely to satisfy requirements for use in the European Union without actually planning to use any of the translated materials will have very different demands on the quality of the translation than a U.S. importer who needs to translate and localize documentation for an imported product.

The idea of developing such metrics for assessment of the quality of translation has an economic basis. In some industries, product and service documentation is so extensive that a traditional quality check would be prohibitively expensive and exceedingly time-consuming. Translation quality metrics make it possible to ➡

assess overall quality and identify recurring problems. The end user states his or her tolerance for errors in the translation, and a statistical sample of the translated text is then evaluated.

U.S. consumers and translation service providers in the automotive industry are familiar with the SAE J2450 Translation Quality Metric, which was first introduced in October 2001 as a recommended practice. The latest version is dated August 2005.

reviewers, and predefined metrics to define a Pass/Fail grade (see [www.lisa.org/products/qamodel](http://www.lisa.org/products/qamodel)). This model also supports the J2450 Translation Quality Metric, automating some of the tasks and providing a convenient user interface. Other metrics and standards are available, for example, the Chinese standard “Target Text Quality Requirements for Translation Services”—available only in Chinese,

assessment, and it is important to view these as a complementary system rather than as stand-alone solutions. To achieve the best possible quality, all three Ps need to be covered: provider, process, and product. The regulatory landscape is becoming increasingly complex, and new standards and certification programs are being developed. Certification of individual providers—the translators—is gaining ground around the world, and with this leveling of the playing field, the creation of international credentials or reciprocal recognition of credentials is coming closer to becoming a reality. ATA is investigating the possibility of having its certification program accredited by the American National Standards Institute, an ISO standard-based process that could serve as a basis for reciprocal arrangements among those countries whose certification programs are accredited.

The translation process standardization is undergoing a particularly exciting period, with the new ASTM and CEN standards now in place and a new ISO translation-specific quality standard on the horizon. Translation quality metrics are also undergoing rapid development, with the SAE task force looking into possible collaboration with the ISO and extending the use of the existing standard, and with LISA constantly upgrading its own quality assurance model. Translation quality standards and certification programs are becoming popular conference topics, as was evidenced by the first-ever Language Standards for Global Business conference, held in Berlin in December 2005—with a second conference held in Barcelona in May 2006—as well as a growing number of presentations worldwide.

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This standard is applicable to translations of automotive service information into any target language. The metric may be applied regardless of the source language or the method of translation—that is, human translation, computer-assisted translation, or machine translation. The current version of the metric does not measure errors in style, thus making it unsuitable for evaluations of material in which style is important, such as marketing literature (search on “J2450” at [www.sae.org](http://www.sae.org)).

A similar metric is the LISA QA Model, currently in version 3.1. It was developed by Pierre Cadieux and is distributed by the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA). Used in localization projects, this model is a customizable set of templates, forms, and reports built into an Access database. It contains a list of language codes and language names, a predefined list of severity levels and weights, a list of error categories, a list of tasks performed by

though an English version is being contemplated—but the J2450 Translation Quality Metric and the LISA QA Model appear to be the most widely used at present.

Other metrics are available as well. ATA developed its own metric, which is used for the grading of certification exams and which has been adopted by several academic programs in the U.S. The ASTM standard can also be applied to the product—the translation. It lists translation-specific parameters that, when given project-specific values, provide a set of specifications against which the quality of a translation can be evaluated. By adding weighted points and a threshold, an ASTM specification becomes a metric. The ASTM standard thus provides a framework for defining a multitude of project-specific metrics.

### **Pulling It All Together**

Standards and certification play a crucial role in translation quality