# 9. The Work of a Reviser

Revising is that function of professional translators in which they find features of the draft translation that fall short of what is acceptable, as determined by some concept of quality (see Chapter 1.4), and make any needed corrections and improvements. With some texts, the reviser's job is restricted to correcting: fixing omissions, major mistranslations, gross translationese, significant terminology errors, and departures from the rules of the standard language. With other texts, revisers must also make improvements: make the writing quality better (i.e. do stylistic editing; eliminate minor translationese) and make minor adjustments in meaning to better reflect the source text.

In this chapter we'll look at revision as an exercise in reading; revision terminology; the revision function in translation services; the relative roles of self-revision and other-revision; contract revisers; revision and specialization; revising translations into the reviser's second language; quality checking by clients; the role of the brief; the problem of balancing the interests of authors, clients and readers; measuring the quality of revision; the trade-off between time and quality, and the quantity of revision that can be expected of a reviser. We'll also look at how revision differs from certain related activities such as quality assurance and quality assessment.

In Chapters 9 to 12, the term 'revision' will be used to include both self-revision and revision of others, unless the context makes clear that only one of these is intended. Chapter 13 looks more specifically at self-revision, and Chapter 14 at revising others.

## 9.1 Revision: a reading task

In Chapter 1, I mentioned that there are various concepts of quality: it may be thought of as pleasing the client, creating a fit-for-purpose text, or protecting and promoting the target language. Under this last concept, revision will be seen as primarily a writing task – almost a literary exercise in improving language and style. Under the other two concepts, however, it is best to think of revision as primarily a reading task, that is, an exercise in spotting passages that may not please the client or may make the text unfit-for-purpose. The key skill of a reviser is an ability to read very carefully. It is a mistake to think that errors will simply jump out at you as you cast your eyes over the draft translation. It is in fact extremely easy to overlook gross problems (more on this in Chapter 12).

In order to have the right mental attitude as you revise (i.e. you are reading, not writing), don't have your correcting pen poised or your fingers on the keyboard ready to make a change. Your aim is not to make changes; it's to find problems, which is very different.

Unfortunately the English word 'revise', as used outside the world of translation, is not helpful when it comes to conceiving of revision as a reading exercise. The OED defines it as 'to look or read carefully over (written or printed matter), *with a view to improvement or correction*; to *improve or alter* (text) as a result of examination or re-examination'. Thus in everyday English, revising a text means making changes in it; it's a writing exercise rather than primarily a reading exercise.

## 9.2 Revision terminology

There is no generally recognized English terminology for revision activities. Terms such as *revise, re-read, check, cross-read, proofread, review* and *quality-control* are each used in a variety of meanings (see Appendix 5). Within a translation service, people will know what is meant by a given term, but when addressing outsiders, it will always be necessary to specify what is meant.

In this book, the terms 'revision', 'quality control', 'checking' and 're-reading' are virtually synonymous. To 'check' a translation is to revise or quality-control or re-read it, unless the context indicates that 'check' or 'quality-control' specifically refers just to the process of finding the errors and does not include making corrections. 'Re-read' is mostly used here in the phrases 'comparative re-reading' and 'unilingual re-reading', where the emphasis is on the distinction between revision that involves a comparison to the source text and revision which does not. Finally, while 'quality control' and 'revision' are synonyms, a distinction is made between 'quality controllers' and 'revisers'. The latter category consists entirely of qualified translators; the former category is broader, including anyone who performs a checking and correcting function. Thus non-translators (such as proofreaders or subject-matter experts) who do only those forms of checking and correcting that do not involve comparing the translation to its source, are quality controllers but they are not revisers. Many people use the term 'reviewer' to refer to a subject-matter expert.

Some translation services distinguish 'revision' from 'quality control', with the latter being used for the business-oriented (as opposed to text-oriented) activities which are discussed later in this chapter under the headings 'quality assessment' and 'quality assurance'. Alternatively, 'revision' may be used to refer to a full re-reading of the translation for accuracy and language quality, with each sentence being compared to the corresponding part of the source text; 'quality control' is then used to refer to less-than-full revision. A designated 'quality controller' may subject the draft translation to a partial check: only portions of the text are read, or there is no comparison to the source text unless a passage of the translation sounds odd, or the check is restricted to copyediting and layout matters. In this book, however, full revision (all aspects of the entire translation are checked, with comparison to the source) is simply the highest degree of quality control; lower degrees of quality control are still referred to as 'revision'. Degrees of revision are the subject of Chapter 11.

'Proofreading' is often used in translation services for any kind of linguistic checking, or in a more restricted way to checking for mechanical slips (typing errors, missing words, errors in page layout). Sometimes it is used specifically for the work done by professional proofreaders who work in a translation office but are not themselves translators. Finally, some people use ‘proofreading’ for the activity here called ‘revision’, i.e. checking and correcting translations.

The distinction I have made between ‘revising’ and ‘editing’ in this book does not always reflect the terminology used in the professional world. Thus many translators use ‘editing’ to refer to the process of reading a translation without referring to the source text, whereas I call it ‘unilingual re-reading’. Meanwhile, others restrict the term ‘editing’ to the work done by professional editors after translations are submitted to publishers. Finally, many translators, especially in the United States, use ‘editing’ to mean the revision of translations.

Outside the world of translation, the term ‘revision’ is used in ways that may create confusion when revisers interact with non-translators. Writing teachers often use it to mean self-editing. Professional editors use it to refer to changes made in a text by its author. For example, when I wrote this book, I submitted my manuscript to the editor, who returned it to me with suggested changes. The work which I then did in response to those suggestions is commonly called revising. Similarly, the publisher has now decided to bring out what some would call a ‘revised edition’: a new version of the text in which I have made various changes, additions and subtractions in response to new developments in the field and in my own thinking about revision.

In large bureaucracies, documents go though many revisions (in the sense just described) before reaching their final form. If you translate for a multilingual bureaucracy, you may be asked to ‘translate the revisions’; that is, to update an existing translation in order to make it conform to the latest version of a document in the source language.

In literary translation, situations arise when the term ‘revision’ (in the sense of correction and improvement of a translation) should be used but isn’t. A publisher may bring out a ‘new translation’ of Proust, but it is not really freshly translated from the French; it is a revision of a previously published translation, which is treated as a draft.

The terms used in this book are listed and defined in Appendix 5.

## 9.3 The revision function in translation services

Sometimes, a few of the senior translators in a translation service or agency are designated as revisers. They occupy official ‘reviser’ positions and devote all or most of their time to revising the work of other staff translators. Such designated revisers may also have training, administrative and management responsibilities; they may be charged with training new translators, distributing texts to the other translators, and supervising junior translators (writing their annual appraisals, recommending them for leave or promotion and so on).

In other organizations, work is distributed by the manager of the service, a project manager or a member of the administrative staff rather than by a senior translator. Some of the senior translators may be assigned to training juniors or quality-controlling the work of other staff translators. Alternatively, senior translators may simply revise each other ‘on request’ (each translator decides whether to have a given text revised by a colleague).

Revisers may also check the quality of work done by contractors, and make any needed changes. Indeed, in some organizations today, all or almost all work is contracted, so that members of the translation staff spend their time checking the quality of contracted work and co-ordinating the members of teams of contract translators working on large projects.

In some organizations, the manager of the translation service is a qualified translator (rather than a professional administrator) and may act as a second reviser, taking a more or less detailed look at some or all translations. The manager may make changes and then take these back to the reviser or translator for action, or simply give them directly to a member of the clerical support staff for inputting.

## 9.4 Reliance on self-revision

A common issue today is the extent to which a translation service will rely on self-revision as opposed to revision by a second translator.

Freelances working directly for clients (not on contract for an agency) obviously need to pay special attention to self-revision since typically no other translator will see the text before delivery to the client. In recent years, however, especially with the advent of e-mail and translation discussion sites on the Web, freelances are developing contacts with each other, which may include revising each other's work.

For staff translators, things have been moving in the opposite direction. Some translating organizations have sought to save money by reducing the amount of time that highly paid senior translators spend revising the work of juniors. One way of doing this is to emphasize self-revision. Translators are given instruction in revision techniques and then asked to be more methodical about checking and correcting their own work. The result is then subjected to some degree of quality control (as described in Chapter 11), or it may simply go out to the client with no further examination.

One of the well known dangers of putting every text through a full revision by a senior translator is that, subconsciously (and sometimes consciously), juniors do not take responsibility for their own work. They think: "I'm not really sure about this passage, but it doesn't matter, because my reviser will be looking at it." There is nothing wrong with a junior marking specific passages as still uncertain despite research efforts; the problem arises when those efforts are not made in the first place.

A further problem arises when juniors do not know which of several revisers will look at their work, but know that each reviser has certain preferences. The result can be a certain despair about ever getting it right.

Replacing a revision system with self-revision plus quality control can make translators more self-reliant; they will then take greater pride in their work, and most will produce better translations and achieve greater job satisfaction. An interesting side effect is that, having gained more control over their work, staff translators become more like freelances.

A further advantage of reducing the amount of revision by a second translator is that there is less likelihood of unnecessary changes with self-revision. That is because there is a tendency, when revising others, to replace a perfectly good translation with the translation which the reviser would have produced. That is obviously not a problem with self-revision, though a parallel problem may arise with self-revisers who are perfectionists.

The disadvantage of relying on self-revision is that fewer errors will be detected: the translator has a certain blindness to the text. He or she may be especially proud of certain passages and not see an error which someone else will spot immediately. This second translator can act as the first ‘reader’ of the text – a role the original translator is not really in a position to play. Ideally, self-revisers allow time to pass between completion of the draft and self-revision, so that the wording of the translation seems somewhat unfamiliar, but surveys of translators suggest that deadlines often make this impossible; self-revision must begin immediately or at latest the next morning. Still, the translation can even then be made to seem unfamiliar if the font or page layout is changed on screen, or the draft translation is printed out and read on paper rather than on screen, or the draft is read aloud. If you want to focus on linguistic form, you can try reading the text backward, beginning at the last sentence; that way, you won’t be distracted by meaning.

The need for other-revision is discussed in Chapter 11.1.

## 9.5 Contract revisers

Some organizations award contracts for revision, and the contract reviser’s work must then be assessed before payment can be made. Sometimes a quantified assessment will be required, and you will need to count the number of errors missed and the number of errors introduced. (The number of unnecessary changes is not relevant to the final quality of the product. However, if you think the presence of many unnecessary changes may be the reason why the job was submitted late, and you had to levy a substantial financial penalty, you might give the contractor examples of unnecessary changes.)

If revision work is contracted out, it is vital that the external revisers have a very precise idea of what the translation agency or service expects. This can be achieved in two ways. First, you can hold a one-day session which contractors must attend. At the session, a text is revised in a group, and a representative of the translation agency or service explains what is expected and what is to be avoided. Alternatively, you can prepare a revision manual which you send to contractors. This contains examples in the appropriate language pair of do’s and don’ts. In addition, for each individual job, you will need to specify the aspects of translation which are important and those which are not (for example, do not check field-specific terminology; do check accuracy of figures). Make sure you define all terms (if you use ‘proofread’, say exactly what you mean by it).

## 9.6 Revision and specialization

With specialized texts, that is, texts written by and for experts, and often concerned with the latest developments in some area of science or technology, revisers will need to decide whether they are qualified to revise the draft translation. If the translator is known to be, or seems to be, highly experienced in the field, the reviser probably does not need to check field-specific concepts and terms. However if that is not the case, then unless the reviser has some independent knowledge of the field, or considerable experience with specialized texts in that field, then it is best to find another translator who does have such experience or, failing that, discuss the translation with a subject-matter expert. With some assignments, you may be told that a subject-matter editor will check the field-specific content, so that you only need to check other aspects of accuracy. If you have occasion to discuss the text with a subject-matter expert who does not know the source language, be wary. Some of them insist on the interpretation which fits in with their own ideas on the topic; they may reject unorthodox concepts which are in fact present in the source text, or notions with which they are not familiar even though these may be commonplace among experts in the country where the source language is spoken.

If you are a salaried translator, you may find yourself wishing that the manager had declined to accept the job. By the time it reaches you, it's too late; the job has been accepted and time has been spent preparing the draft. If you do not feel qualified, and you cannot find another reviser, or a subject-matter expert, you must signal to the client that the translation may well contain conceptual errors and needs to be seen by a subject-matter specialist for content and terminology before it is published. If you are a freelance, of course, you can accept or reject a revision contract.

## 9.7 Revising translations into the reviser's second language

It is often said that revisers should be native speakers of the target language, but this may in fact not be necessary. It depends on which features of the translation are important. If revision is mainly for accuracy and completeness, it does not matter which language is the reviser's native language. Indeed, it may be easier for a native speaker of the source language to spot a mistranslation! However, if writing quality is important, and the translation is to be published, then the reviser should be a native or near-native writer (not just speaker) of the target language.

## 9.8 Quality-checking by clients

Often clients treat translation as a professional service and therefore rely on the translator (and indirectly, a professional certifying body if any) to ensure quality. However many clients may also subject the translations they receive to some kind of quality check, using their own criteria. In addition, clients may put the completed translation through an editing process. For example, if the client will be publishing the translation of a scientific work, there will usually (but not always) be a scientific editor to check the content and terminology. It is a good idea to determine whether a subject-matter editor will be looking at the text you are revising.

One form of quality checking sometimes used by clients is backtranslation: the client has someone translate your revised translation back into the source language. Backtranslation may have its place in the process of testing questionnaires that are to be answered in several languages, but otherwise it is a dubious method, even for checking accuracy, let alone other aspects of translation. For one thing, the backtranslator may well make a mistake, and then any discrepancy between the original source text and the backtranslation will be the backtranslator's fault. For another thing, the first translation may have been so literal that the backtranslator will arrive at a wording almost identical to the original source text; the client may then think the translation must be very good, when in fact it is almost unreadable because it is so literal.

If you hear from the client's subject-matter editor before you complete your revision work, and discover a conflict between the wording they want to see and the wording you believe reflects the source text, then you must keep to the wording you believe to be correct, especially if you are certifying a translation under your country's legislation. The Translator's Charter approved at the Dubrovnik Congress of the International Federation of Translators in 1963 makes the following statement that is relevant to these cases:

> The translator shall refuse to give to a text an interpretation of which he/she does not approve.

Since the final translation belongs to the client, they are of course free to change what you have written (unless you are being identified as the translator, or you have signed a certification of the wording you submitted). However you should never yourself make a change to reflect a view (about intended meaning, terminology, language usage or any other matter) with which you do not agree after careful consideration of other views. The function of a professional in society is to give his or her informed opinion, not repeat someone else's.

## 9.9 The brief

The work of both translator and reviser is ideally governed by a brief from the client. The brief is a set of specifications including such matters as who will be reading the translation, whether it is a publication, and preferred terminology. It may include instructions about revision (e.g. a full comparative revision is expected) but even if it does not, you still need to be familiar with the instructions that were given to the translator.

The various parts of the brief may be obtained in three ways:

- They are explicit: the client states them orally or in writing when the request for translation is made.
- They are unstated but already known from previous similar jobs from the same client.
- They are elicited by the translation service, which takes the initiative of inquiring about this or that aspect of the brief.

The brief needs to be known in order to decide on the appropriate translation strategy. Many clients simply 'want a translation'. The idea that there may be several ways of carrying out this task does not occur to them. Or they may think that the nature of the source text implies the brief. As a result, they fail to specify who will be using the translation and why.

Suppose for example that an immigration official wants a translation of a prospective immigrant's medical records. To him, the purpose of the translation is obvious: it will be used by doctors to determine whether the person will be a burden on the country's health care system. However the translator and reviser may or may not find this obvious. It depends on how much information accompanies the text. It may not even be clear who is asking for the translation. If the request for translation comes with a form mentioning that the client is a 'hearings board', or if the form mentions an upcoming hearing date, it can probably be assumed that the translation will be used to make a decision. But questions still remain: Will someone with medical training read the translation and then summarize it for the board? Or will the translation go directly to the board members for their use before or even during the hearing, and if so, does the board include people with medical training?

It is hard to revise successfully or efficiently unless you have familiarized yourself with the brief. For example, as we'll see in Chapter 11, some briefs dictate much more thorough and time-consuming revision work than others. That said, cases will certainly arise where you simply cannot find anyone able to tell you who will be reading the translation and for what purpose. You will then have to make an educated guess, perhaps in consultation with other more experienced revisers.

As a reviser, you may or may not be the one whose job it is to actually determine the brief, in case it is not explicit. When you are distributing work to a trainee, or to a team of translators who are working together on a job, determination of the brief may be up to you. In other cases, it may be up to the translator, the project manager or the manager of the translation service. You may then find that you disagree with the translation strategy that has been adopted, but by the time the text reaches you, it may be too late to do anything about it, since the revision stage is not a good time to change strategy. Turning formal writing into informal writing, or a free translation into a close one, would be a very time consuming and wasteful exercise.

Some clients actually specify a translation strategy in the brief but this is really a matter for the translator to decide. Analogy from dentistry: it's up to the patient to decide whether she wants root canal work on a decaying tooth or a simple extraction, but once that decision is made, she does not tell the dentist how to perform the work. Given the users and use, the client's specified strategy may not be appropriate. For example, it may be better to use a less formal style than the source, rather than preserve the same style; or to summarize extremely verbose writing rather than write a verbose translation. Other specific instructions may also have to be politely ignored, or discussed with the client with a view to altering them. It may be best not to use the terminology requested by the client, if you believe it is liable to confuse the readers. And obeying the client's instruction to exactly follow the paragraphing of the source text may be disorienting if paragraphing habits in the target language differ. The client is not always right.

Consider this scenario. A written request is received for a 'verbatim translation' of a sworn statement related to an immigration matter. But how can a translation be verbatim, that is, 'in the same words'? Perhaps the intent was 'word-for-word'. But this would be in conflict with professional standards: translators render messages, not words. A call to the client is unhelpful; the only person available is a clerical go-between who cannot clarify matters (this is a common situation). The text is to be handled by a new translator or student trainee, so the supervising reviser provides advice on strategy. One solution might be to prepare a translation which is as close as possible to the lexical-grammatical structure of the source text while still being readable. The word 'verbatim' is then being interpreted as reflecting a view of translation very common among the general public – that a translation is a kind of transparent transcript of the source text, perhaps even slightly unidiomatic precisely to point to its status as a translation.

Postscript to the scenario: the originator of the translation request is finally reached. It turns out that 'verbatim' means a complete as opposed to a summary translation. The client has had bad experiences with court interpretation in immigration matters: the interpreter has summarized, and lawyers have argued that this invalidates the proceedings. Of course, in written translation, completeness is the norm; summaries are usually provided only on special request.

## 9.10 Balancing the interests of authors, clients, readers and translators

The final text a reviser produces may be seen by several people: the translator, the author of the source text, a proofreader, a subject-matter expert, an editor, the client, the employer, the project leader and of course the readers. Depending on their expectations and needs, their reactions may differ considerably. One task of the reviser is to reconcile interests if possible, or if it is not, then decide whose interests to favour.

Suppose you are revising a draft translation that is not close to the source (the translator has engaged in considerable stylistic and structural editing while translating, and perhaps even done some adapting). You realize that the translation will be communicatively successful, but you also know that the source author will see the translation and will probably not be pleased. As long as the source author is not also the paying client, then his or her pleasure is a minor consideration. But if the author is the client, then you have a real conflict. If you cannot persuade the author that a close translation is undesirable, then you may have to either decline to do any more work on the job (and risk non-payment) or revise the translation back to a close one. Ideally, such conflicts are cleared up before translation starts; for example, perhaps the job is not accepted unless the author/client agrees to editing and adaptation.

Here's a scenario where the draft translation seems to be successful from the reader's point of view but not a success from the client's. A request has been received from the head of a company's building maintenance department to translate a new edition of a repair manual. You observe that the translator has not used the new terminology which has just been decreed by a terminology-standardization body. The translator tells you that the technicians who will be the sole readers are not familiar with the new terms, so she has used the old, no longer approved terms with which they are familiar. However, the organization for which both you and the head of the maintenance department work has decided to introduce the new terminology, and the translators' association to which you belong supports the goal of having translators help disseminate new official terminologies. So in order to meet the standards of the client and your professional association, you must use terms which the readers will not understand. What will you do? The solution in this particular case might be to ask the translator to add the new standard terms, with the familiar ones following in brackets. Or prepare a temporary pull-out glossary, to be removed a year later once the new terms have been learned; the glossary would list the familiar terms in alphabetical order, with the new standard terms in a column opposite. That way the needs of all parties can be met.

Translators and revisers have an interest in creating respect for their profession, and this will place a limit on the degree to which they can comply with instructions from clients, even if it means some clients may go elsewhere for future jobs. Thus as a reviser you could not let pass a draft translation that reproduces inadvertent nonsense in the source text simply because the client has asked for a very close translation. It happens not infrequently that people end up unintentionally writing the opposite of what they clearly mean. The revised translation must then convey the clearly intended meaning, though a note might be sent to the client signalling the presence in the source text of such problems.

Apart from inadvertent nonsense, there is the question of how very poorly written source texts are to be handled. What should the reviser do if the translator has tried to reproduce the poor quality of writing in a job application, arguing that he wanted to help the reader by making clear the poor quality of the writing in the source text. But this is not a proper function of translation: if a multilingual organization is hiring, and one criterion for the position to be filled is writing ability in language x, all the members of the panel judging the application must be able to read language x. If any of them are reading a translation of the applicant's writing, they will be forming an opinion about the writing ability of the translator rather than that of the applicant. Also, it is next to impossible to create an equivalent that reflects the degree and nature of the poor writing. Translators who attempt this generally end up merely producing translationese, but a poor target-language writer would not produce translationese.

A distinction must be made between poor writing or careless mistakes in the source text on the one hand and factual or conceptual errors on the other. If the latter are discovered or suspected, neither the translator nor the reviser should simply correct them, with the idea that they are helping to smooth the passage of the source author's "true" message into the target language. If the source author is also the client, then there is no problem; one can simply ask the author about changing the wording of the problematic passage. But if the client is not the source author, then the reviser's duty is to the client, not the author: if the translator has made a "correction", then it must be undone, for the client (and the reader of the translation) has the right to see the factual and conceptual errors that were made; these are part of the message. In official multilingual contexts in particular, people who are reading a document in translation have as much right to see factual and conceptual errors as people who are reading the document in the original language.

You can be sure that situations will arise when you cannot satisfy everyone. You will have to decide whose requirements take priority; you may even have to decide whether your economic interests (as an employee or freelance) will always take precedence over other considerations. Will you always give preference to the interests and wishes of whoever is paying you? Or will you sometimes give preference to the interests of other parties? Or seek a balance where possible, with something for everyone as in the case of the repair manual discussed above?

## 9.11 The quality of revision

A translation agency or service may want to know how much value it is deriving from the time translators are spending on other-revision. For every hour of revision effort, how many necessary changes are being made? How many errors are being introduced? How many errors are being overlooked? How many inadequate corrections are being made? How many unnecessary changes are being made? Of particular importance is the question: how many of the *serious* errors are being corrected?

To answer these questions, a translation service may find it useful to conduct audits. To conduct a simple audit, collect a sample of revised translations delivered to clients over the past few months and count the number of errors (or better: the number of serious errors) that were not caught in a chunk of convenient size, perhaps 500 words. To find out more, you will need to arrange to have draft translations saved so that they can be compared to revised versions. You can focus either on 'good' revision work or 'bad' work. For the former, count the number of errors per 500 word chunk that were properly corrected during revision (or, if you want to examine entire texts, count the percentage of all errors that were properly corrected). If you feel more ambitious, you can distinguish types of error and assign weightings to the types. For example, you could count all the properly corrected mistranslations in a 500 word chunk and separately count the properly corrected linguistic errors in that chunk, and then calculate a score as 2M + L/2: double the number of properly corrected mistranslations plus half the number of properly corrected linguistic errors.

Rather than consider the value that was added, you might want to look at the value that was not added, or was actually subtracted. A simple audit of this kind will count the number of errors introduced by the reviser in a chunk of given length (good translations made bad, or bad ones made worse) plus the number of errors not noticed. A more complex audit would consider not just errors introduced or not noticed, but also unnecessary changes and inadequately corrected errors. And once again, you could distinguish mistranslations from errors in language, style and terminology, and give these different weightings.

Of course you could also combine the good and the bad, using a formula such as 2MC + LC/2 – 3MI – U/3: double the number of mistranslations properly corrected plus half the number of language errors properly corrected minus triple the number of mistranslations introduced minus one-third the number of unnecessary changes. And to repeat: you could count all errors, or only serious errors, though the latter will take more time since you will have to keep stopping to decide whether an error is serious. (See Appendix E on major, minor and critical errors.)

Individual revisers can also audit their own work for self-development purposes. If you are new to revising other people's translations, and there is no senior reviser who can look over your work, or no one with the time to do so, make a copy of a draft translation and then, a couple of months later, revise it again. Then compare the two revisions. The changes should be at more or less the same locations in both revisions, though of course the new wordings you selected on the two occasions may well differ. If the changes are at very different locations, then your work is clearly unsystematic.

## 9.12 Time and quality

A central issue for all translators, and in particular for revisers, is the trade-off between time and quality. From an economic point of view, time is money, and the faster a translation is completed, the better. The problem is most easily seen in situations where clients are billed (as opposed to situations where they receive translation as an apparently free service from the company's or ministry's translation department). Billing may be in textual units (the number of words or pages) or in time units (the number of hours spent on a given job). If a job takes 15 hours, someone will be worse off economically than if it takes only 12. If the client is being billed in hours, the bill will be 25% higher, and the client may look elsewhere next time. If the bill is so much per word or per page, the freelance translator (or the staff translator's employer) will have less total income over a given period of time. Suppose translator and reviser together take

15 hours to complete a 3000 word job. They are then working at 200 words an hour, whereas if they take 12 hours, they are working at 250 words an hour. If the client is paying 15 cents a word, the first pair are bringing in $30.00 an hour, the second $37.50.

But is the text completed in 12 hours as good as the text completed in 15 hours? Does it serve its purpose adequately? Are there more undiscovered errors in it, possibly serious ones? There is no getting around the fact that *quality takes time.* Achieving accuracy in particular is time-consuming for both the first translator and the revising translator. On the other hand, it does seem to be false that the longer you spend on a translation, the better it will become; there is a point beyond which no further significant improvement is being made, and time is simply being wasted. If you have been given a revision contract, your client does not want to be billed for pointless re-readings and unnecessary changes!

A full revision, covering all the features to be discussed in Chapter 10, is very time-consuming. Sometimes, as discussed in Chapter 11, less than full revision is perfectly acceptable. Also, time can be saved if revisers learn to avoid unnecessary changes. Finally, translators may be able to produce higher quality drafts more quickly, and leave more time for self-revision, if they have access to (and training in!) the latest technological aids, or if they can use the services of documentalists to track down quotations, titles and the like. However there are limits to these efficiencies. For example, when a new technology is introduced, the translation process may speed up: the research process was certainly speeded up by the advent of Internet search engines in the final years of the 20th century. However, after a while a limit is reached in what the new technology can achieve. Meanwhile, expectations about speed will now be higher. As a result, there will continue to be a conflict between ethical demands for quality and economic demands for speed.

There is a temptation under these circumstances to define quality in terms of client complaints. A translation is of adequate quality if the client does not complain about it. This is a very weak argument, indeed an unethical one that evades the professional responsibilities of revisers. Most obviously, few clients have independent bilingual checkers. As a result they may well not notice if, say, the forty-fifth paragraph of the text is missing (the transition from paragraph 44 to 46 of the source text may make sense). They may be in no position to recognize a major mistranslation (the translation as it stands may make sense, but not the sense the source-text writer intended). And if the text contains odd uses of target-language vocabulary, they may think that, well, all translations are like that.

In the struggle between time (that is, money) and quality, revisers face a dilemma: as employees or contractors, they must consider their employer's financial concerns, but as professionals (perhaps certified under legislation or by a professional association), they must give priority to quality. Freelance revisers are in the same position: they must earn a living, but they also have a professional duty. Clearly, there is no easy answer.

## 9.13 Quantity of revision

How much revision of someone else's translations should an experienced reviser be expected to complete per hour or day? This is a difficult question to answer: someone who spends much of the day revising translations in a single field, with well written source texts, and very good translators, will get a lot more done per hour than someone who spends much less time revising and often works with less than excellent translators, poorly written source texts, and materials in a variety of fields, some of them unfamiliar. Still, a reasonable answer can I think be given in terms of a multiple of translation time. With most European languages (those that do not have very long compounds that are written as single words), a translator with at least 5 years of full time experience, working with a mix of familiar and unfamiliar, poorly written and well written texts, should be able to complete (i.e. draft, research and self-revise) 1600-2000 words of source text in an 8-hour day, or between 200 and 250 words an hour (this is an average taken over a lengthy period such as a year). It should be possible for an experienced reviser to do comparative re-reading and correction of such a mix of texts at three times the translation speed (600-750 words an hour), and unilingual re-reading and correction at five times the translation speed (1000-1250 words an hour), assuming a reasonably competent translator. Comparative re-reading does not take twice as long as unilingual, even though there is about twice as much text to read. Using the above figures, a comparative re-reading of 1000 words would take somewhere between 1 hr 20 and 1 hr 40 minutes, or a third to two-thirds more time than unilingual re-reading at 1000 words an hour. One researcher (Robert 2012) timed her subjects and obtained a figure of just a third more time to do comparative re-reading than unilingual. It would be interesting to see further studies of this question.

## 9.14 Quality assessment versus revision

In addition to performing quality control work, your duties as a reviser may include the very different task of quality assessment. Unlike quality control, which always occurs *before* the translation is delivered to the client, quality assessment may take place *after* delivery. Assessment is not part of the translation production process. It consists in identifying (but not correcting) problems in one or more randomly selected passages of a text in order to determine the degree to which it meets professional standards and the standards of the translating organization.

Quality assessment may be done on single texts, to assist with hiring or promotion for example. It may also take the form of quality auditing: a sample of texts produced by a translation service is assessed in order to determine how well the service as a whole is doing. The purpose may be to identify areas that are weak so that training can be provided, or it may be to report to the senior body which funds the translation service.

Sometimes assessments must be quantified (for example to compare the results of candidates during a competition). On other occasions, assessments are qualitative; for example, as the supervisor of a translator, you may have to formulate their strengths and weaknesses (such diagnostic work is discussed in Chapter 14).

Note that contracted work needs to be both quality controlled (prepared for the client) and quality assessed (in order to determine, for payment purposes, whether the contract conditions have been met). These two tasks may be performed simultaneously by the same person, who assesses the text and also makes any needed amendments.

Whereas quality control is text-oriented and client/reader-oriented, quality assessment is business-oriented. It is a part of the work of managing the organization's current and future operations (payments to contractors and monitoring of their performance with a view to future contracts; hiring, firing and promotion of staff translators; determination of training needs; deciding on the balance of in-house versus contracted work, and so on).

Some of the problems of quality assessment are discussed in Appendix 2.

## 9.15 Quality assurance

Quality assurance is the full set of procedures applied not just after (as with quality assessment) but also before and during the translation production process, by all members of a translating organization, to ensure that quality objectives important to clients are met. Quality control and quality assessment are in part contributions to quality assurance. Quality assurance includes procedures to ensure:

- Quality of service: Are deadlines met? Is interaction between clients and translators or support staff pleasant? Are complaints dealt with in a satisfactory manner? Is each job tracked so that the client can be given a progress report? If the client has lost the electronic version of a translation done a few months ago, can the translation service provide a fresh copy?
- Quality of the physical product: Is the page layout satisfactory? Is it in side-by-side multilingual format if so requested? Has it been delivered in the manner specified – by fax, by e-mail, as a Word document, as an HTML document?
- Quality of the translation: Is the client satisfied with the terminology and with the writing (language and style)?

To improve quality, it may be useful (albeit time-consuming) to keep records that provide measurements of success: how many late texts? how many complaints from clients per month? how many unsatisfactory jobs from contractors as opposed to in-house translators?

In organizations which have cut back the quality control function (less time is allowed for quality control; fewer texts are given a full comparative re-reading), it is important to assure quality by *preventing errors from occurring in the first* *place*. This means paying extra attention to the earlier stages in the translation production process: Does the translator have the names of resource persons, access to the best possible documentation, a clear idea of the brief, and suitable computer technology? Errors can also be prevented if the right translator is chosen for the job. This may mean looking at a translator's record with previous texts (in general or for texts in the same field) or looking at their credentials: are they certified or otherwise recognized by some professional association or educational institution?

There is now a trend toward standardizing procedures for the contractual relationship between the client and the translation provider (freelance or translation company). The idea is that if certain procedures are followed before and during production of the translation, that will increase the likelihood of good quality. To this end, some translating organizations are applying a variety of standards and guidelines which have been issued in recent years. It should be noted that the documents in question tend to originate from committees which in the main represent owners/managers of translation services as well as major buyers of translations; input from organizations of professional translators and from translation schools may have been minimal.

These standards and guidelines typically cover such matters as: qualifications of translators and others working on a project; the process of negotiating a translation contract; interactions between the translation provider and the client during and after the project; and steps in the translation process, including of course the various types of checking work.

China's General Administration of Quality Supervision issued a document in 2003 entitled "Specification for Translation Service" (GB/T 19363, revised 2008). It is based in part on the 1996 German standard for the conduct of translation projects DIN 2345 (which has been superseded by EN-15038, described below). Concerning revision, the Chinese standard provides that "the intended use of the translation as specified by the client will determine how many times the translation is revised" (and, interestingly, that "the reviser should use a pen of different coloured ink from the translator"!).

The ASTM (formerly known as the American Society for Testing Materials) published a "Standard Guide for Quality Assurance in Translation" (ASTM F2575) in 2006. It "identifies factors relevant to the quality of language translation services for each phase of a translation project". Its definition of quality is contractual: "the degree to which the characteristics of a translation fulfill the requirements of the agreed-upon specifications". Regarding checking of translations, the document distinguishes editing, proofreading and quality control. The editor does a comparative reading for accuracy and completeness, as well as terminology, and also does a complete reading for readability. The quality controller reads randomly selected passages, or may read the entire text again. The proofreader checks for errors in formatting, typos and the like; proofreading can be combined with either editing or quality control.

The CEN (European Committee for Standardization) issued standard EN-15038 entitled "Translation Services – Service Requirements", also in 2006. It defines quality indirectly, in its statement about the task of the reviser: "the reviser shall examine the translation for its suitability for purpose". The wording is unclear as to whether the revision must include a comparative re-reading. The document does however specify that every translation must be revised by a second translator.

In 2009, the Canadian General Standards Board issued CAN/CGSB 131.10, entitled "Translation Services", which is an adaptation of EN-15038. It differs from the European standard in some interesting ways, most notably in not requiring revision of every text by a second translator. Instead the standard says "The Translation Service Provider shall identify the need for revision, taking into account the abilities of the translator, the requirements of the client and the nature of the assignment". However the wording is clear that if there is a decision to have a second translator revise the translation, then a comparative re-reading is required.

In 2012, the International Organization for Standardization issued ISO/TS 11669 entitled "Translation Projects – General Guidance". Like the ASTM guidance document, it defines quality by the degree to which the translation conforms to a project's pre-determined specifications. Specifications are to be agreed with the client for 21 suggested parameters. Thus the parameter "file format" might be specified as "HTML"; the parameter "in-process quality assurance" might be specified as "review" (the target content is evaluated by a subject-matter expert). Concerning revision, which is defined as comparative re-reading for content, this is one of the things that may or may not be identified as a requirement for a given project. It should be done by a second translator, but self-revision is acceptable if the first translator is the most qualified person available for that project. Concerning revisers, the guidance document suggests that they should ideally have subject-matter knowledge.

The ISO is currently preparing a standard ISO/DIS 17100 "Translation Services – Requirements for Translation Services".

## Practice

1. Write out the sequence of quality assurance measures which you use (if you work alone) or which are used by the institution you work for (translation agency or department). Think carefully about each and every aspect of the work, from receipt of a request for translation to post-delivery (response to complaints from the client).

2. Scenario. You work for an organization which has moved from full revision of most texts to less complete forms of quality control together with more emphasis on self-revision. The result is that more text is being produced per employee-hour (income is up!), but when you look through a file of completed translations, you see several serious mistranslations. One day you tell the manager of the translation service that the text you

are quality-controlling requires a full comparative re-reading rather than a cursory scan. You suggest informing the client that the text will be two days late. The manager is not happy and lets it be understood that you might want to spend a couple of evenings doing (unpaid) overtime. You discover that other quality controllers have received similar hints. What do you do?

3. Describe a time-versus-quality conflict that has arisen in your work. What was the resolution? If the problem was one that arose frequently, did you decide (or did your agency or employer decide) to make some changes in policy or procedure? If you are attending a workshop or taking a course, present the problem as a case study to the other participants.

4. Scenario. A client has in the past complained about overly free translations of the decisions of a semi-judicial administrative tribunal, and also about unwanted translator's notes suggesting alternative translations. In one passage of the decision now being translated, the tribunal states that a Spanish-speaking appellant had complained about not being able to understand the documentation used against him, because it was in French:

    il a déclaré ne comprendre que la moitié des textes français
    [he stated he understood only half the French documents]

    The draft translation reads

    he stated that he could only half understand the French documents

The translator explains her reasoning as follows: "It's hard to see how he could have understood half the documents but not the other half, or half of each document and not the other half. Also, this text is a transcription from dictation. The transcriber may have made an error, and heard 'à moitié' as 'la moitié'; the former would mean 'half understand', i.e. not fully understand the meaning. This must therefore be the intent. If we write 'half the documents', the readers will be puzzled."

Bearing in mind the client's previous complaints, what will you do: leave the translator's draft or change it to 'half the documents'? Why?

5. If you work in a translation department, arrange a revision auditing session. Each participant examines a 500 word chunk of one already delivered translation before the session, and then presents it sentence-by-sentence to the group, first mentioning whether the translation was for information or for publication, and then pointing out problems that were not caught. Other participants then contribute.

## Further reading

(See the References list near the end of the book for details on these publications.)

Quality of revision: Arthern (1983, 1987, 1991); Künzli 2009.
Quality assurance and assessment: Drugan (2013); Williams (2009); Colina (2008 and 2009); Picken (1994).
Briefs and approaching translations on the basis of their future function: Allman (2008); Nord (1997, especially chapters 3 and 4); International Organization for Standardization (2012).
Reviser's loyalty: Künzli (2006c and 2007b).
Revisers' domain knowledge: Allman (2008).
Office procedures: Risku (2004), Mossop (2006); Nordman (2003).
Balancing interests: Ko (2011).
Revision manual: European Commission (2010).