

11. Degrees of Revision

To revise or not to revise. That is the question to be considered in this chapter. Will a translation be looked at by a second translator, and if so, will the entire text be revised or just parts of it? Will it be compared to the source or will it simply be re-read? Will all parameters be checked or just some?

If you look hard enough, you will always be able to find more things to change. Imagine that you are taking a final glance through a lengthy English translation. To your horror, you notice that some subheadings have all words capitalized while some have only the first word capitalized. Does this mean that quality control has failed, and that you should immediately set about making the capitalization consistent? No. The question is: just how important was it to catch this problem? With one text, it may be very important; with another, not important at all. Many readers may not notice, and even if some do, it may not create a bad impression in the case of a relatively ephemeral text, one which will be read by only a few people within the organization for information purposes, and then discarded. Tolerance for errors of various kinds, even minor mistranslation, varies with the type of text. It may also vary with urgency: the client will prefer to have an awkwardly worded document *before* the meeting at which it will be used than a beautifully worded document *after* the meeting.

As we saw in Chapter 1, there are a great many things that can go wrong when writing or translating, and consequently there is a very long list of things you might check – or not. In this chapter, we'll look at how to determine the degree to which you will revise a text, and the consequences of less-than-full revision.

11.1 The need for revision by a second translator

Having a second translator look over a translation is costly, especially if a comparison is made with every sentence of the source text and all parameters are taken into consideration. Such revision work is usually done by a senior, more highly paid translator, and every minute devoted to revising someone else's translation is a minute not devoted to preparing a new translation. A 'second look' becomes time-wasting and therefore even more costly if the reviser has not been properly trained and makes large numbers of unnecessary changes. The whole exercise becomes largely pointless if the reviser misses many significant errors, and it becomes positively harmful if the reviser introduces errors – and there is reason to believe that these things happen with alarming frequency.

The predominant view, as expressed in the policies of translation services and agencies, and surveys of translators (see for example Morin-Hernández 2009), is that not every text requires a second look, and that even when it is required, the revision can sometimes be partial (less than the entire text is examined), need not be comparative (a simple reading of the translation is sufficient), and need not cover all parameters.

It should be noted that actual practices may vary considerably from policy

(see for example Rasmussen and Schjoldager 2011). Interviews with revisers show that it is not always practical to do what policies require, usually for lack of time or non-availability of personnel. Or the opposite: the policy calls for less checking work than the revisers think is necessary; they may then ignore the policy. Some translation services and agencies emphasize checking certain micro-aspects of a translation where errors will be immediately visible to clients: spelling, grammar, punctuation, client-specific terminology. However the revisers may not actually follow this preference strictly, and instead devote quite a lot of time to style: smoothness, tailoring, a consistent level of language and phrasing suited to the genre. That is because professional translators tend to think such things are important, regardless of any policy.

How is the decision made about whether to have a text revised? The policy at the translation service of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has been summed up by two of its revisers as follows (Prioux and Rochard 2007):

Translator has→ Text has↓	High reliability	Good reliability	Fair reliability	Poor reliability
High importance	1 / 2 Revision recommended (re-reading)	2/3 Revision important	3/4 Revision essential	5 Retranslate
Medium importance	0/1 No revision	1 Decide case by case	2/3 Revision recommended	3 Revision important
Low importance	0 No revision	0 No revision	1 Decide case by case	1/2 Revision recommended (re-reading)

At the OECD, the need for revision by a second translator (as opposed to reliance on self-revision) is based on risk, with risk being a function of the importance of the text and the reliability of the translator: 0 represents very low risk, 5 very high risk. As can be seen, the main factor is the importance of the text: the top line on the chart, representing texts of high importance, is the only one where the risk ever rises above 3. Even with a translator of poor reliability, revision is not seen as essential (only 'recommended') with texts of low importance. And even with high importance texts, if the translator is highly reliable, revision is also only recommended (not 'important' or 'essential') and it takes the form of re-reading the translation rather than comparing it with the source. The OECD's approach assumes, of course, that one knows who has translated a text, which is not always the case with outsourced material.

Translation services and agencies often have lists of text types which are deemed to be of high importance. Typically this will include laws and regulations,

documents in which errors could have negative health and safety implications, and documents in which errors could harm the image or reputation of the corporation or government which has commissioned the translation (e.g. the front page of a Web site, or a pronouncement by a Very Important Person). Translations that are for information only (not publications) will have medium or low importance, though they may still require revision by a second translator if the drafting translator was inexperienced (as a translator, or in the field of the text). In addition, translations supplied by freelance contractors will need to be checked to at least some degree in order to determine whether the work is satisfactory before payment is made. Finally, clients may specifically request a full comparative revision by a second translator, though they may have to pay a higher price for this service.

For self-employed translators, the key factor in deciding whether to have a second translator take a look is self-confidence. Are you confident in your own translation, or do you feel uncertain about it? Of course, one can be over-confident, especially if one has years of experience. It is therefore probably a good idea to have your work looked at occasionally, but you will need to find someone with an equal or preferably higher level of subject-matter knowledge.

11.2 Determining the degree of revision

In professional work, one does not have all the time in the world. The client is expecting the revised text by a date which is often not far off. You (or the translation service you work for) must therefore consider whether you are going to do a time-consuming full comparative revision of the text, checking for problems in all four groups of parameters discussed in Chapter 10 (Transfer, Content, Language and Presentation).

If you have several jobs going at once, you must also consider whether they all merit equal attention. Better to devote the available hours to texts which merit more work. There is not much point in spending vast amounts of time on the stylistic editing of a text which is relatively ephemeral. If you do a less than full revision of these texts, you will have more time for a full revision of texts that merit it (those which will be read by many people over a long period of time, or by people outside the organization, or possibly by a few highly placed people who may get an unfavourable impression of the translation service if they find errors).

Here are the choices available to you, expressed in the form of questions:

1. Shall I check for one, two, three or all four groups of parameters?
2. Within each group, shall I examine all parameters or just some of them?
Thus within Transfer, you might decide to focus on Completeness; within Language, you might decide to focus on Smoothness.
3. What overall degree of accuracy and writing quality should I aim at?
4. Shall I check the entire text, or just part of it?
5. Shall I compare the translation to the source text?

6. What degree of consistency shall I enforce, and for which aspects of the text?
(On consistency, see Chapter 7.)

Which parameters will be checked?

How will you decide which parameters to check (Questions 1 and 2)? Here are some of the factors, again expressed as questions:

A. Who will be reading the translation?

With some types of reader, it may be important to pay special attention to Tailoring (see Chapters 4.1 and 10.6): readers who are not experts in the field of the text, those with less than secondary education, immigrants still learning the target language, and readers in other countries who are not native speakers of the target language. If people outside the commissioning organization will be reading the translation (i.e. it's a publication), then all parameters become more important. If the author of the source is likely to read the translation, it may sometimes be necessary to cater to this person by checking that the translation is not only Accurate but also as close as possible to the source in terms of syntactic structure and correspondence of vocabulary items, though obviously there are limits to this.

B. Why will the translation be read?

If some of the readers are going to make decisions based partly or entirely on the content of the text, then Transfer and Content are more important than Language and Presentation. If the translation will have a readership consisting of a single person, who will use it as a source of information for writing a further document in that field, then it may not be necessary to check Sub-language (terminology); readers who are subject experts will know the right terms, as long as the ideas have been correctly conveyed.

C. For how long will the translation be read?

If the text will probably still have readers many years hence, then it is worth looking at all four groups of parameters, and being fussy about Consistency. If the text is ephemeral, there is no point in worrying about Presentation.

D. How will the translation be read?

Will the readers skim through it quickly, or will some of them read very carefully, and possibly re-read? Skimming will be easier if the text is highly readable in the sense of having good inter-sentence connections, and plenty of structural signposts. Careful readers will be disturbed by logical problems that may not be obvious on a quick first reading (a contradiction between two successive sentences; a use of 'therefore' where there is no cause-and-effect). If the text is a manual for consultation (i.e. it will not be read from start to finish), then you

must ensure that each section is understandable on its own, and does not require a knowledge of the preceding sections. If the translation will be read aloud (it's a speech, for example, or repair instructions read aloud by one person to another person who is performing the repair), then Smoothing (including euphony) will be especially important.

E. *Where will the translation be read?*

Will it appear in a book? a manual for consultation while doing something else? on a webpage? on signage? The issue here is whether the readers will be sitting in a quiet environment as they read. Or will they be consulting the text in a busy environment with many distractions, perhaps performing some other task as they read, or walking past a translated sign, or reading their smartphone screen as they amble down the street? In these cases, brevity and simplicity of language will be extra important.

F. *Am I familiar with the work of this translator?*

If you have looked at the translator's work before, you know the kinds of error they are prone to. If you are self-revising, then you already have considerable knowledge about the kinds of errors that are likely to be present in the draft.

G. *Was the text translated in a hurry?*

Generally speaking, the faster one works, the more mistakes one is likely to make. Consequently, if the deadline is very tight, and the translator had to work very quickly, then *more* rather than less quality control is needed.

H. *Will anyone else be quality controlling this translation?*

If a proofreader will be looking at your revised translation, then you can ignore house style sheet matters and the Presentation parameters, except for those aspects directly related to meaning (commas to signal sentence structure, bolding for emphasis).

Determining which parameters to check for is a matter of experience and common sense. Theoretically, one could attempt to set up a complicated system based on the above eight questions (A to H) about user and use. Such a system would tell you that if the answer to the first question is such-and-such, and the answer to the second question is such-and-such, and so on through the questions, then quality control should consist of spot-checking for Language and Presentation parameters. However, in the absence of any empirical evidence that a given degree of revision is best suited to a particular answer to the eight questions, such a complicated approach seems pointless.

Knowing the answers to questions A to E amounts to knowing the brief. Before you revise someone else's translation, it is vital that you know at least the answers to questions A and B: who are the readers and why will they be reading?

Here's a chart showing the OECD's policy on which parameters to check.

Parameter→ Text has↓	Accuracy	No additions or subtractions	Grammar	Style	Terminology
High importance	H	H	H	H	H
Medium importance	H	L	H	L	L
Low importance	H	L	L	--	L

As can be seen, the decision about which parameters to check depends primarily on the importance of the text. The letter H means that there is a high requirement to eliminate problems; the letter L means a low requirement; in other words, undiscovered problems related to that parameter can be tolerated. Thus errors in terminology can be tolerated in medium and low importance texts. As for writing style, it receives no attention at all in low importance texts! Problems with accuracy, on the other hand, require careful attention at all levels of importance.

Bear in mind that this policy is being applied to the particular type of text that is translated at the OECD. For example, it seems that the audience of the translation always consists of the same type of individuals as the audience of the source, so tailoring to a different audience is not an issue.

What degree of accuracy and what writing quality is required?

Aside from picking out the parameters of interest (Questions 1 and 2), you need to consider how accurate the translation needs to be and what writing quality is called for (Question 3). Here are four possible levels, though you may want to define your own:

Commissioner's Purpose	Accuracy	Writing quality (read- ability and clarity)	One-word descriptor
For speedy, basic understanding	Roughly accurate	Minimally readable and clear	Intelligible
For information	Fully accurate	Fairly readable and clear	Informative
For publication	Fully accurate	Very readable and clear	Publishable
For image	Fully accurate	Finely crafted word- ing and very clear	Polished

The third column covers two aspects of writing quality: readability (the smoothness of the reading experience and the degree of tailoring to readers) and clarity (the logic of the sequence of ideas). The table does not apply to adaptations such as marketing materials, where a high degree of writing quality may be required, but correspondence to the source text is not a consideration. The table also does not distinguish degrees of accuracy beyond ‘roughly’ versus ‘fully’ accurate. Legal texts typically require accuracy down to very small details, whereas other texts often require accuracy only with respect to primary and secondary elements of meaning. In addition, decisions of high courts may deserve finely crafted wording.

So to be really complete, one might add two rows to the table:

For court use	Accurate down to very small details	Very readable and clear or Finely crafted wording and very clear	
For marketing	Accuracy not an issue	Finely crafted wording and very clear	

Let’s look in more detail at the first four degrees of writing quality.

Intelligible

Depending on the user and the use of the translation, you may be aiming for a revised translation which is merely intelligible, that is, it has a bare minimum of readability and clarity, and is roughly accurate (it will not seriously mislead the reader about central aspects of the message of the source text). There may be question marks in the final product indicating passages where meaning remains uncertain because you decided that additional research was not worthwhile. At this level, there is no point applying house style rules, worrying about Presentation, correcting unidiomatic expressions, or creating even text-internal consistency, never mind consistency with other texts.

Post-editing of machine translation output may aim at this level (see Chapter 14.4). In some situations, it may also be the level expected of translators working into their second language. For example, if a salaried translator has been hired to translate mostly from language X into his or her mother tongue, but must occasionally translate in-house texts into language X, the key criterion may be intelligibility. With these texts, no one will be comparing the translation with the source; unidiomatic expressions and even certain kinds of ungrammatical expression may be acceptable, and accuracy may only be needed with respect to primary aspects of meaning (the central message).

Informative

At this level, the final product avoids misleading the reader about primary or secondary aspects of the message of the source text, but it need not be more than fairly readable and fairly clear. This might be acceptable, for example, when

the first draft of a document is being translated; there is no point in creating a nice smoothed version of a sentence which may later be deleted or completely altered. Again, do not apply house style rules or spend much time on Consistency or Presentation.

Publishable

The final translation is fully accurate, clear, well tailored and smoothed. House style rules are applied, Presentation is checked and corrected, and a reasonable level of text-internal Consistency (and perhaps some degree of consistency with other texts) is sought.

A clarification about 'publication' is in order. A 'publication' is to be understood as a document which will be available to an audience outside the organization which commissioned it. As the term suggests, it's a document for the 'public', or some segment of it. To put it another way, there is no such thing as an 'internal publication'. An organization may well publish full-colour documents on expensive paper that are distributed only in-house, but this glossiness does not turn such documents into 'publications' as understood here.

Polished

At this level, the reading experience is in itself interesting and enjoyable, quite apart from the content. Creating such a finely crafted text can be *extremely* time consuming even if you are not aiming at that ultimate level of craftsmanship where you become the new Flaubert, re-writing a dozen times until each sentence is *just perfect*.

You will also be aiming for this level if you are self-employed and your pricing strategy is to charge a high price and become known for exceptional writing quality, for example in commercial translation.

To clarify the concept of levels, here's an example from a translation of an in-house newsletter that discusses a company's response to public complaints about a possible removal of trees from their property:

The firm does not intend to remove the lime trees but it is necessary to carry out pruning of the trees to keep them healthy

Does this need to be revised? Perhaps you could change it to:

The firm does not intend to remove the lime trees, but to keep them healthy, they will need to be pruned.

This is certainly a better quality of writing, in particular because it places the key word 'pruned' in focus position at the end. But there is no need for the change, because the translation will not be published; a 'fairly readable' translation will do. There is a tendency for revisers to enter an abstract mental space in which they are always aiming at the 'publishable', or worse, the 'polished' level, when this is not at all necessary.

Most revisers will mainly find themselves working at the 'informative' and 'publishable' levels, but it can be useful to have the other two levels in mind to

help you keep your bearings. If you are aiming at ‘publishable’, you need to have in mind that you are not aiming at ‘polished’. If you are aiming at ‘informative’, you need to have in mind that you are not aiming at ‘publishable’. ‘Informative’ is perhaps the hardest level to revise for, because you need to refrain from making a great many improvements that occur to you. To help you refrain, it may be useful to have the ‘intelligible’ level in mind: while you are indeed not making sentences smoother or more concise, you are certainly not sinking to the merely ‘intelligible’ level!

As ‘language people’, translators may find it hard to refrain from improving writing quality. You see that that a sentence is wordier than it needs to be; the idea could be expressed in 13 words instead of 20. But will you stop to ask whether any useful purpose is being served by making the sentence more concise? It’s important to bear in mind that the people who read our translations, especially those who are subject-matter experts, are interested in the world, not in words. If an agronomist is reviewing the literature to see what work has previously been done on wheat yields, and finds something in a language she cannot read, she may ask you for a translation. You must keep in mind that she is interested in crops, not in language. It probably does not matter to her whether the sentence you are revising has 20 words or 13.

There may be a problem justifying less-than-publishable quality if clients are paying a set rate per textual unit, whether it be the word, the character, the line or the page. Why would someone pay a certain amount for ‘informative’ quality when ‘publishable’ quality costs the same? Ideally, a client who submits large numbers of texts for translation could be persuaded, at a given price level, to accept ‘informative’ quality for certain pre-determined text types. However a ‘levels’ approach is most easily justified with in-house translation departments where clients do not pay, or when billing is by the hour, since generally it will take less time to achieve ‘informative’ than ‘publishable’.

Full or partial check?

Will you read the entire text or just parts of it? Rasmussen and Schjoldager (2011) found in interviews with revisers that although a company’s policy may be to always compare source and target, the revisers do not necessarily perform a comparison for the entire text. Similarly, the revision manual of the Spanish department at the European Commission’s translation service (EC 2010) says that “In principle, the whole text must be revised, but in certain circumstances (e.g. if the translator is an expert in the subject) partial revision may do”. The Canadian Government’s translation service used to have a policy of checking one, two or three 400-word segments of outsourced work (depending on the length of the text); if these were satisfactory, no further checking was done. Now it is up to the reviser to decide how much of the text to check, unless the client is paying extra for full revision. Here are some of the possibilities:

A. Full reading

Read the translation in full. If you are checking for Accuracy and Complete-

ness, compare each sentence to the original text. Otherwise do a unilingual re-reading, that is, refer to the source text only when a passage is questionable (you suspect a Transfer problem, or you have found a Logic error and you need to see what the source says). When self-revising, you should always do at least a full unilingual reading

B. Spot-check

Read the title or the cover page and the first paragraph, then read either at regular intervals (e.g. the first paragraph on every other page) or randomly selected paragraphs or pages spread over the entire text. Compare the selected passages to the original, or just refer to the original when a passage is questionable.

C. Scan

Read the title or the cover page and the first paragraph, then read by 'following your finger' across each page, focusing on just one or two parameters. Refer to the original when a passage is questionable.

D. Glance

Read the title or the cover page, and the first paragraph.

Reading the title and first paragraph is a bare minimum. Why? Because if there are any typographical errors or missing words at the very start of the text, that will immediately create a bad impression on the reader or client.

When a text was translated in a hurry, and the translator did not have much time for self-revision, there may well be more errors toward the end of the text. So spot-checking might be focused on the last quarter of the text.

The choice of scanning or spot-checking is only a starting point. If you are using one of these methods and discover several language errors, or several cases where a check with the original reveals mistranslation, then you will want to revert to method A, or even return the job to the translator for further self-revision.

If time permits, it is a good idea to scan the text for accurate reproduction of numbers in any text where numbers are important to the message. Scanning can also be used to look for those errors that you know are common in translations from language X into language Y. For example, when I am scanning an English translation from French, I keep a lookout for the expression 'by (verb)ing', because very often the formally similar French expression 'en (verb)ant' does *not* indicate 'how' something was done (the manner or the means used). 'He gave a speech during the opening conference at the university, by presenting the historical context' is nonsensical: presenting historical context was not the manner or means of giving the speech. Either the 'by' should be deleted or it should be replaced by 'in which (he presented)'.

Compare or re-read?

Unilingual re-reading (i.e. not looking at the source text unless a passage seems suspicious) can be very effective. At workshops, participants who have never tried it are often surprised at how many errors can be detected in this way. In particular, one can get quite good not only at spotting probable mistranslations in

the draft but also at avoiding the introduction of mistranslations while correcting. You may at first worry, while making a change, that you have departed from the meaning of the source. However if you regularly check the source to avoid this, and keep track of your findings, in all likelihood you will discover after a while that almost all your changes are consistent with the source. You will develop a sixth sense about when you really do need to check the source.

That said, it is true that with unilingual re-reading, you may miss omissions and mistranslations. The text may read smoothly even though a sentence or paragraph has been omitted, and it may make perfect sense – but not be at all what the source-text author intended.

If you keep discovering mistranslations when you check the source during unilingual re-reading, then you will of course switch to comparative re-reading. However while comparative re-reading does no doubt increase the number of mistranslations and omissions that will be caught, it has its own disadvantages. The back-and-forth between source text and translation creates an unnatural reading process which may make it difficult to properly monitor readability and clarity. Comparative reading tends to focus attention at the sentence and sub-sentence level, so that errors in ‘macro’ features of meaning or grammar (e.g. pronouns referring to a previous sentence, the logic of an argument) may not be noticed. Consider the following translation about the problems which ship crew members may have when they are under stress because they are trying to get passengers into lifeboats in an emergency:

Negative effects of stress

- Lack of concentration
- Recourse to improvisation at the expense of established procedure
- Focused attention
- Alternative solutions ignored
- Inability to solve complex problems
- Inflexibility

If you are doing a unilingual re-reading, and paying attention to meaning, it will be fairly easy to notice that ‘focused attention’ does not fit because it is not ‘negative’. However during comparative re-reading, you will probably compare each item in the list with its source-text counterpart. If the source text contains the same error, you will likely accept it as a good translation of the source, and not notice its lack of fit with the other items in the list. (Perhaps the intention was ‘overly focused attention’, that is, not seeing the forest for the trees.)

Appendix 4 contains a sample unilingual re-reading with commentary.

11.3 Some consequences of less-than-full revision

Levels of risk

Obviously, any quality control system which allows for less than full revision

contains a risk of letting errors pass uncorrected. Your system may assume that if there are no errors on pages 1, 5, 10, 15 and 20, then there are no errors elsewhere. Of course, this is just a probability; in reality, there could be a serious error. The translator's attention may have lapsed on page 13, with the result that a whole paragraph was omitted. Furthermore, this can happen to anyone; even an experienced translator working on an easy text of a familiar type can make such mistakes. To err is human.

It is true that if the translator is experienced and working under the best possible conditions, the likelihood of error is reduced. But ultimately, the only way to be sure that the whole of a translation is good is to give it a full re-reading.

Both forms of full re-reading (comparative and unilingual) have their attendant risks, as discussed in the previous section. So if you are doing anything less than a full comparative plus a full unilingual re-reading, you will need to define an *acceptable level of risk*. This may be done on economic grounds: are clients coming back or going elsewhere? Or it may be done on professional grounds: what will the impact of an error be on the translation's user? The worse the potential impact, the higher the degree of quality control you should apply. An error in a document that will be used as evidence in court is more likely to have negative consequences than an error in the minutes of a routine meeting. An error in a document that will be used by many people over a long period of time is more likely to have negative consequences than a document used only once by a single person.

Generally speaking, unilingual re-reading can be justified as a time-saver unless the longer comparative procedure is dictated by a combination of serious consequences and a greater likelihood of mistranslation or omission being present (the text was a difficult one, the translator's ability is unknown, the text was translated very quickly).

Types of error sought during partial revision and unilingual re-reading

In addition to the problem of errors in passages that are not checked, there is the problem of the type of errors found in passages that *are* checked. There is a great temptation, when doing partial revision, to devote one's time to looking for relatively superficial, easy-to-spot errors. How satisfying to have found another case where the translator left a space between the last letter of a sentence and the period! But just how important a find was this? Perhaps it would have been better to notice the mistranslation in that sentence.

The same danger arises with unilingual re-reading. It can easily degenerate into proofreading, in the sense of a hunt for errors in Mechanics and Presentation: typos, wrong indentations, grammar mistakes and the like. *Re-reading means reading for meaning* first and foremost, and secondly for writing quality. Does the argument, description or narrative make sense and is it easy to follow and suited to its intended readers?

What is the psychology behind the tendency to look for proofreading errors?

Perhaps unconsciously one is thinking: “I’ve been assigned to find mistakes, so I must find some. I’m not earning my pay if I just leave the text the way it is. But there’s not a lot of time available, so I’ll look for things that are easy to spot.”

If you do spend most of your time searching for errors in Presentation and Mechanics, then you are definitely *not* earning your pay. This is work that can be done by a copyeditor or proofreader, whose time is probably much less expensive than yours. Your services are required only if the quality control includes at least one of: Accuracy, Completeness, Logic, Smoothness, Tailoring, Sub-language or Idiom. In some circumstances (if you are a freelance working alone), you will have to check Mechanics and Presentation because there is no one else to do so, but if you are combining this with unilingual revision, make sure you are still reading for meaning. Ideally (if you have time), you will proofread in a separate step.

Research during revision

How much term and concept research will you do while revising the work of others? If you are training a newly hired translator, or checking the first text submitted by a contractor, then unless you are fully familiar with the field, you may need to repeat much of the translator’s research in order to check that it is being properly done. In other cases, you should strive to minimize research. For example, junior translators could be asked to indicate their sources; experienced translators could be asked to put a checkmark beside any passage where they believe you might have doubts, to indicate that the translation, despite appearances, is correct.

11.4 The relative importance of transfer and language parameters

This chapter has been concerned with how the features of a particular translation job determine the appropriate degree of revision. However there is a factor that goes beyond the particular text at hand. Revision is traditionally thought of as being concerned with two things: accurate transfer and good writing in the target language. Or to put it negatively, the elimination of mistranslation and of unidiomatic or incorrect language. Now, the relative importance of these may vary not just with the particular text but with the general social-historical situation in which translation is being done. For example, there have been times in history when accuracy was not deemed especially important; what was important was to create a beautifully written text in the target language.

The situation in Canada is interesting in that while accuracy is important whether one is translating from English to French or in the opposite direction, things are different when it comes to the importance of the language parameters. This is partly a matter of different attitudes toward language in the French- and English-speaking worlds. In English, we have long accepted a more relaxed (some would say sloppy) approach in non-literary writing, where language is seen as a means to an end, not something important in itself. In the French-speaking world, language has been valued more for itself (some would say it has been

excessively and obsessively fussed over), though this is now changing as U.S. cultural norms become ever more influential.

In Quebec, however, there is an additional factor at work. To simplify somewhat, revision in Quebec has traditionally been first and foremost concerned with the quality of French. This is partly because such a large percentage of what Quebecers read has been translation rather than original French, so that the quality of language in translations has a significant effect on the quality of language in Quebec society generally. In addition, the writing of Francophones (including junior translators) has often been laden with anglicisms to an extent unknown in Europe – and this has met with strong disapproval by French-speaking members of the translation profession. Defence of the quality of French has therefore been the central concern of revisers with all texts, not just the more important ones.

The situation in English-speaking Canada is completely different. Only a very small percentage of what people read is translation, and (with the exception of the small English minority in Quebec) people's speech and writing are hardly influenced at all by French. So revisers of French-to-English translations need only be concerned with eliminating those linguistic features that arise from the influence of the source text. They can focus on Accuracy, on Language, or on both, as the brief dictates.

You would do well to consider the relative importance of the language parameters in the social/historical context within which your readers will be receiving the product of your revision efforts.

11.5 A “good enough” approach to revision

During workshops on revision, a few people always express shock at the idea of ‘degrees’ of revision and varying quality targets. Their goal, they proclaim, is excellence or even perfection. The first thing to say about such proclamations is that if most of the translations produced in the world were ‘good enough’ for their purpose, that would represent an enormous improvement on the current situation. Making ‘fit-for-purpose’ a reality is a difficult enough goal without aiming for the best possible translation every time. Second, a distinction needs to be made between self-revision and other-revision. If some translators want to make excellence their personal goal with their own translations, that's fine, but when they are revising others, they should take the goals of the first translator (or the first translator's employer or the commissioner) as given. If the first translator was aiming to create a translation that is fit-for-purpose, then the reviser must accept this.

Practice

1. If you currently use varying degrees of revision, try to formulate the factors you consider.

2. Scenario. You find that the translation you are revising (the introduction to a manual used by workers in a repair shop) contains this wording:

follow the manufacturer's recommendations (General Motors) closely

In the source language, the structure was '...recommendations of the manufacturer...' so that 'manufacturer' was right next to 'General Motors', but the translator chose the above structure. Now, will you stop or not stop to make this read more smoothly:

follow the recommendations of the manufacturer (General Motors) closely

or more smoothly still:

closely follow the recommendations of the manufacturer (General Motors)

What factors will determine your decision? Suppose the text is a very long one, and you keep coming across such awkward wordings in your draft. If you decided to make a change the first time, will you continue to do so?

3. Suppose that Google informs you that the expression 'black, dense smoke' occurs 60,700 times, while 'dense, black smoke' occurs 2,060,000 times on the portion of the Web which Google searches. If you encounter the former in the translation you are revising, will you change it to the latter? Why? Will you be more likely to make a change if English is not your first language?
4. Exercise on revising to different levels. Take the draft translation given you by your instructor and make it 'informative'. Thus you will consciously ignore awkward wordings for example, or wordings that are not very concise. Stop for discussion. Then continue revising to make the text 'publishable' (but not 'polished').

Further reading

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

Quality in relation to purpose: Samuelsson-Brown (1996 and 2010 ch. 8.2); Wagner (2005).

Revision policies: Bertaccini and Di Nisio (2011); Prioux and Rochard (2007); Rasmussen and Schjoldager (2011); United Nations (2003), Annex 6.

Types of revision: Matis (2011).