

# Institutional Translation and Interpreting

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Assessing Practices and Managing  
for Quality

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## Introduction

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# Assessing Practices in Institutional Translation and Interpreting

*Fernando Prieto Ramos*

What are the daily tasks of institutional translators in international translation services and what kind of tools do they use? What types of errors are more often overlooked in their work and when do they require formal correction after translations are published? How can issues of clarity, consistency and accuracy in particular be tackled? What is the impact of speech delivery speed on simultaneous interpreting performance? How do small organizations and local administrations without institutionalized language services deal with translation and interpreting needs? How can they improve the quality of multilingual communication in cost-effective ways? What are the risks of outsourcing and non-professional arrangements? What can be learnt from the latest developments in translator and interpreter certification schemes and quality guidelines? These are some of the most relevant questions addressed in the chapters of this book. The authors share the common aim of shedding light on institutional translation and interpreting settings in order to identify quality gaps, needs, best practices and actions for improvement. All contributions thus revolve around the central concern of quality, more specifically, by examining the multiple aspects of translation competence and institutional processes that can have a bearing on the final product. In other words, the overall approach adopted is a holistic one that recognizes that process, competence and product are inextricably intertwined (Prieto Ramos 2015, 23–27).

Focus is placed on public institutions and administrations at the regional, national and international levels, including legislative bodies, court settings and certified translation for official purposes more broadly. The national and regional contexts selected cover a wide range of illustrative translation policies in multilingual and monolingual administrations (see, e.g., Meylaerts 2011). The following table provides an overview of the specific settings, themes and main quality aspects examined by each chapter.

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### Overview of settings, themes and main quality aspects examined

<i>Institutional setting</i>	<i>Main theme</i>	<i>Main translation/interpreting quality aspects</i>		
		<i>Competence</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Product</i>
<i>Part I. National and regional institutions</i>				
1 Finland (certified translation)	Assessment criteria in certification examination	X	X	X
2 Switzerland (legislative bodies)	Lexical readability as quality indicator in legal translation			X
3 South Tyrol (provincial administration)*	Non-professional translation profiles and practices*	X	X	
4 United States (courts)*	Translation policies and qualification requirements*	X	X	
5 Italy, Spain (courts)*	Questionnaire for quality control in court interpreting*	X	X	X
<i>Part II. International organizations</i>				
6 European Commission (EU)	DGT translators' practices and tools	X	X	
7 EU, UN, WTO	Consistency and accuracy of legal terminology in translations		X	X
8 EU (law-making institutions)	Correction rates and nature of corrigenda of EU legislative acts			X
9 International organizations (anonymized)*	Impact of translation competence on processes and product quality*	X	X	X
10 UN	Effects of speed on simultaneous interpreting quality	X	X	X

\* Settings that include some form of non-professional translation or interpreting (by un-qualified translators or interpreters).

All authors offer insights from their original research, drawing on a diversity of angles and methods, which include direct observations, corpus analysis, interviews and surveys. Far from stereotypes and debates about the divide between academic and practical perspectives, all contributions present applied research that is supported by the authors'

professional experience or is the result of close cooperation between researchers and practitioners in the observed settings. This illustrates a trend of maturity in the collaboration, as well as converging interests, between academia and the translation industry, as new market and technological developments call for innovative approaches and data-driven adaptations.

In the case of large international organizations, cooperation has reached unprecedented levels and is nurturing fruitful dialogue between stakeholders and a growing wealth of studies on institutional translation and interpreting, in particular in the EU institutions (see, e.g., Svoboda *et al.* 2017; Prieto Ramos 2018). Well-established language services in this kind of setting are ideally positioned to monitor and refine their practices as exemplars of institutional translation and interpreting. The same applies to national multilingual bodies with long traditions in the field such as Canadian or Swiss institutions.

However, fully-fledged language services are far from being the norm among national and international institutions that have translation and interpreting needs. In many situations, these needs are addressed in a diversity of alternative ways, ranging from outsourcing (to freelance translators or interpreters) to other informal arrangements involving non-professional in-house or external supports, for example, through crowdsourcing and volunteer translation (see, e.g., Antonini *et al.* 2017; Jiménez-Crespo 2017). In our experience, these informal solutions apply to a myriad of small institutional entities where ad hoc multilingual arrangements are shaped by limited funding and lack of relevant in-house expertise in the field.

While it is difficult to empirically map practices in such a diverse and fragmented landscape, it seems apparent that the combined translation and interpreting needs of this heterogeneous category are massive. At the international level alone, there are 41,772 active organizations, of which 5,630 are intergovernmental (including supranational institutions) and 36,142 are non-governmental, according to the latest edition of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (Union of International Associations 2019, 27). Three chapters of this book shed light on the under-researched reality of institutions without “conventional” in-house translation services, as illustrated by a regional administration, the court systems of three different countries and two international organizations (see the table above).

**Part I** of the volume is devoted to national and regional institutional settings. In Chapter 1, Leena Salmi and Marja Kivilehto describe the rationale behind revising the error-based scoring chart of the Finnish Authorized Translators’ Examination, which is a requirement for certifying official translations (most often for judicial and administrative bodies – for an overview of practices in other countries, see Vigier *et al.* 2013). To that end, they analyzed feedback from assessors and two corpora of

translations assessed according to the new chart and its previous version. The comparison of these data and with the holistic assessment approach of the Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) signaled potential avenues for further development. Chapter 2, by Paolo Canavese, focuses on lexical readability as an indicator of linguistic clarity of Italian translations within Swiss trilingual legislation. The findings of lexical analyses show the benefits of promoting clear legal drafting as a good practice to make legislation more readable.

In Chapter 3, Flavia De Camillis presents the design and results of a survey conducted among civil servants who translate administrative documents in the bilingual province of South Tyrol, Italy. The study provides insights into the profiles and practices of these non-professional translators (following the features defined by Antonini *et al.* 2017, 7) as a first step to identify priority needs and actions for improvement. The last two contributions in Part I concentrate on judicial settings. In Chapter 4, Jeffrey Killman explores the diversity of approaches to translation in federal and state courts in the United States, and highlights the implications of varying qualification requirements, still underdeveloped compared to court interpreting. By contrast, as contended by María Jesús Blasco Mayor and Marta Sancho Viamonte in Chapter 5, there are no certification systems for court interpreters in EU countries such as Italy and Spain, despite Directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings. In order to fill this gap, the authors propose INTER-Q, a questionnaire for legal professionals to assess the directly observable aspects of legal interpreters' performance such as manners and knowledge of legal terms and procedures.

**Part II**, on translation and interpreting for international organizations, starts with a study by María Fernández-Parra (Chapter 6) on the day-to-day tasks of translators at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT). The data obtained from observation of a sample group of translators, and supported by retrospective interviews, provide empirical evidence of the nature and duration of their translation, revision and terminological activities, and of the tools they use in these processes. The results reveal swift interactions with technology to "make every second count" under tight time constraints, and corroborate the crucial relevance of revision and terminological resources in ensuring quality. Chapter 7, by the editor, also addresses the latter aspect. It centers on terminological consistency and accuracy as conditions for semantic univocity, and on the instrumental role of institutional resources in improving these quality indicators with regard to legal terminology, which usually requires research during the translation process. The diachronic scrutiny of English-Spanish translations of three illustrative terms in the main EU institutions, the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization suggests significant

correlations between legal asymmetry and translation accuracy levels, and between intertextual consistency and accuracy fluctuations. The study also discusses the low congruity of the renderings with the limited guidance of institutional terminological resources on legal system-specific terms.

In the following contribution (Chapter 8), Łucja Biel and Izabela Pytel explore similar issues through the lens of corrigenda of EU legislative acts. They investigate the number and nature of corrections in light of the maturity of the Polish Eurolect since Poland's accession to the EU. The findings highlight a growing trend of corrigenda in Polish, in line with previous research on corrigenda in French and Spanish (Prieto Ramos 2020), as well as the prominence of terminological and phraseological issues as the largest category of errors corrected. Terminological inconsistencies are also part of the error analyses conducted in two cases of action research reported in Chapter 9 (co-authored with Mariam Sperandio). Both cases entailed “taking action and creating knowledge” about the actions (Coghlan and Brannick 2001, xi) in two institutional settings that initially had no in-house service or staff devoted to managing translation. The interventions included professional project management and revision in the first setting (versus review in the initial approach) and professional translation (versus prior non-professional translation) in the replication study. The correlational examination of error score reduction against profile changes empirically shows the benefits of introducing translation expertise in each setting. Finally, in Chapter 10, Lucía Ruiz Rosendo, Mónica Varela García and Alma Barghout take us to the interpreting booths of the UN in order to assess the performance of ten staff interpreters in their simultaneous rendering of three speeches at different speeds. They measure the impact of high speed on the severity of information omissions, as opposed to less critical omissions at more moderate delivery rates.

All the findings presented in the volume have important implications for professional practices and quality assurance in particular. They hold many lessons for practitioners, trainers, researchers and institutional decision-makers which will be further elaborated in the concluding remarks.

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