

# Institutional Translation and Interpreting

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Assessing Practices and Managing  
for Quality

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## Conclusion

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Practical Lessons from Research Insights

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# Managing for Quality

## Practical Lessons from Research Insights

*Fernando Prieto Ramos*

Our research-driven journey through multiple national and international institutional settings offers a comprehensive overview of current practices in the pursuit of quality in translation and interpreting. If we review the common underlying threads and themes, and bring further perspective to the prismatic reflections that have been presented, the opening questions of the introduction resonate with renewed significance and nuance – that of the lessons learnt. These lessons emerge from assessing working methods, requirements and results as a condition for confronting deficits and driving toward better practices. In the holistic approach to quality adopted in this volume, one of the first cross-cutting lessons is that ensuring quality requires, above all, *advanced competence* in translation as a decisive catalyst for the assessment of processes and textual products according to institutional needs. Quality translations are the result of expert decisions made under variable workflow conditions, so a holistic lens is needed to (1) identify and foster the talent, resources and procedures that will lead to the best possible outcomes in each situation, and (2) reduce the risks that derive from less-than-optimal solutions.

This process is to a large extent a question of management. As expressed by Vlachopoulos (2009, 17), “the improvement of translation quality is as much a managerial challenge as it is a linguistic and technical one.” From a *quality management* angle, the practices assessed in this book can support improvements in the same or other similar settings, by adapting human and material resources to the goals of each institution. It is presumed that, as opposed to profit-driven service providers, for institutional language services, the quality of translation and interpreting is aimed at *effective and reliable communication*. In many cases, as illustrated by most chapters, not only at large international organizations but also in more modestly sized institutions (such as national legislative bodies, the courts and other public departments), translation and interpreting quality is a requirement to ensure legal certainty and protect citizens’ rights.

In identifying needs and priorities, international standards such as ISO 17100:2015 for translation services can serve as an aspirational model

for core aspects of competence and workflow management, even if this instrument is not mandatory for institutional language services. While such needs and priorities can be extremely diverse, the bottom line is comparable in all contexts examined and the lessons can be extrapolated between them. *Well-established institutional language services* at the national and international levels can build on existing strengths and address specific weaknesses by, among other measures: (1) promoting translators' domain specialization, workplace customization and technological competence; (2) ensuring revision and quality checks to the extent possible (especially if outsourcing is necessary); (3) providing and improving resources that can contribute to terminological and phraseological consistency and accuracy, as well as to clear drafting; and (4) raising awareness of the added value of language professionals as assets for quality communication and educating service users about how they can contribute to it (e.g. deadline-setting for translations, consultations on subject matters, reminders on speed for speakers in simultaneous interpreting). Much can also be learnt from ex post quality monitoring processes and from errors formally corrected through corrigenda, especially as increasing automation may have an impact on the inaccuracies and issues that are overlooked.

In the case of institutions with *smaller language services* or even a single professional profile responsible for managing translation or interpreting, the role and impact of this staff in promoting quality will generally be more critical. As also illustrated in the book, entities that have limited or unstable translation or interpreting needs are often fully dependent on outsourcing and might not always secure service provision by qualified translators and interpreters. In those scenarios, the benefits of introducing specialized competence in the process can be particularly dramatic through different *remedial actions*, be it establishing professional screening and monitoring practices, or simply by correcting unprofessional arrangements. As previously noted with regard to international non-governmental organizations (see Pym 2008; Tesseur 2018), budget constraints tend to be the overriding factor in such informal solutions. However, as action research has shown in two institutional environments of this kind, relevant expertise can be more decisive than cost. In light of this research, some institutional decision-makers would be keenly interested in moving from "low cost" approaches to "value for money" by investing in skills (or recognizing in-house talent) in translation and interpreting. The "money" part of the equation demands resources, while the "value" component relies on competence management. Put simply, having a language professional in teams with multilingual communication needs (albeit not necessarily devoted to these functions only) can be both the most quality- and cost-effective, even without accounting for the potential damage to

image and reputation that may derive from non-professional ad hoc arrangements.

In fact, the *risks of outsourcing* without sufficient quality control apply to all the settings. Contrary to ISO recommendations on subcontracting tasks (ISO 2015, 5), and despite the expert capacity of large institutional language services, these cannot not always guarantee full *revision* of all outsourced translations. Quality requirements often vary depending on text purposes and strategic priorities (see, e.g., the DGT fit-for-purpose approach in Strandvik 2018), and may justify simplified quality control mechanisms for non-sensitive documents. However, as also learnt from this volume, *preliminary testing* of individual translators can be equally fruitful to avert risk in outsourcing procedures, by limiting the unpredictability of quality and preventing disproportionate post-delivery interventions (see also Prieto Ramos 2017, 71; Sirovec 2020, 205).

For the cases where in-house expert management or quality control is not possible, *certification or other qualification requirements* emerge as a minimum safety net. These requirements, in turn, need to be regularly assessed in order to secure effectiveness, as exemplified by the Finnish examination for authorized translators. In the case of interpreting, service provision by freelancers tends to be the norm, so for institutions with no in-house expert evaluation procedures (mostly typical of large multilateral and EU institutions), quality evaluation tools for institutional users, such as the INTER-Q questionnaire for court interpreting, may offer the only means to spot major quality issues.

In all the organizations examined, regardless of their sizes and structures, *consistency and conformity to institutional conventions* constitute, together with accuracy, the most distinctive feature to be preserved in managing translation and interpreting quality. Consistency is perhaps the quintessential component of quality assurance in institutional communication in that it requires an overarching insider's vision in accordance with the primary aims of *institutional continuity and reliability*. Those who strive for excellence in conveying their message across regions or take multilingual rights seriously can only benefit from placing these insights at the center of their strategies. In this endeavor, trainers and researchers have a crucial role to play: building new knowledge and expertise to grapple with persistent and emerging challenges.

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