Translation Revision: Fundamental Methodological Aspects and Effectiveness of the EN-15038:2006 for Translation Quality Assurance

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to establish the fundamental methodological aspects required to ensure effectiveness of translations revision. The model presented is based on a previous methodological translation revision proposal (Parra 2005), revisited and completed with the results of later works by the author as well as the contributions of several empirical studies. This methodology integrates the fundamental aspects to be taken into account in the revision of translations (revision principles, revision parameters, the degrees of revision and the reviser's profile), as the result of a descriptive, comparative and critical analysis of translation revision in translation studies, as well as of the assessment of the results of four case studies. To conclude, a brief theoretical reflection on the potential effectiveness of translation revision, as mandatory practice to comply with the EN-15038:2006 for translation services, will be proposed, taking into consideration the requirements of the European Standard on revision.

KEYWORDS: translation revision methodology; basic and general principles for revision; revision parameters; types of revision; degrees of revision; revision procedures; EN-15038:2006

1.   Introduction

The purpose of this work is to establish the fundamental methodological aspects involved in the revision of translations and in their effectiveness. Secondly, we will consider some controversial aspects related to translation revision within the framework of the EN-15038:2006 for translation services (henceforth the Standard). In special, those concerning the concept and the process of revision, the professional qualifications requirements with respect to some of the actors involved in the translation process, and the aspects to verify in the translation process stages.

   With this aim, we would like to begin with two preliminary remarks. The first one concerns the existing terminological diversity to refer to the concept of revision itself, and even inconsistent use of terms (such as *checking*, *editing*, *proofreading*, *reviewing*, *revising, revision, review* and *self-revision*), already dealt with by several authors and researchers (Mossop 2001, 2007; Parra 2005; Allman 2007b;

Robert 2012), that often causes confusion and ambiguity with other procedures for translation quality assessment. For the purposes of this article, the term *revision* is understood as the comparison of the target text (TT) and source text (ST) carried out by a third person (the reviser) with the aim of ensuring translation quality. The term *self-revision*, also referred to as *checking* in the Standard, is the revision of the TT carried out by the translator himself or herself.

The second remark is related to features of revision. The principal general characteristics of the concept of revision are three: 1. Its principal aim is to ensure translation quality, 2. Revision can have an additional or secondary aim: that is, to help translators to improve their competences, 3. The way to carry out revision: that is, comparing or cross-checking the translation against the source text.

Nevertheless, revision is also subject to conceptual diversity or some disagreement on several aspects: 1. The object involved in the task itself (that is, whether it is the entire TT, or whether it is only a part or a percentage of the translation that should be compared with the ST) and 2. The agent responsible for the corrections and improvements. Although in most cases the person responsible for making the changes in the TT is the reviser, when revision has a secondary aim this task is usually performed by the translator.

Before tackling some controversial aspects of the Standard that deal with translation revision, we put forward three premises: one major premise and two minor derived from the former. The major premise is: 1. "Revision is only effective in assuring translation quality if certain principles and conditions are strictly observed." The two derived minor premises are: 2. "Systematic translation revision by a third person (the reviser) is not always necessarily beneficial to translation quality," and 3. "The effectiveness of systematic translation revision depends on the circumstances in which the revision process is performed."

The first premise poses two questions. When can revision assure translation quality? And, in what circumstances can revision be effective in assuring translation quality?

Based on the results of several empirical studies and these of our own work on this matter, in our opinion, the fundamental methodological aspects required to ensure effectiveness of translation revision are three:

a. Translators and revisers must comply with revision principles.
b. Human resources for translation and revision projects must be managed appropriately.
c. A specific and coherent set of instructions for the translation revision should be provided.

In the next sections, we will deal with these three basic aspects focused on: the revision principles, the human resources involved in the translation project

(especially translators and revisers), the aspects to be verified in the translation and how to perform the revision.

2. The Revision Principles

The concept of *revision principle* has been dealt with by several authors and researchers (Hosington and Horguelin 1980; Horguelin and Brunette 1998; Mossop 2001; Künzli 2005, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Parra Galiano 2005, 2006, 2007, 2015; Robert 2012). In simple words, a *revision principle* is a general guideline which limits the interventions of the reviser's work. *General revision principles* are determined by quality criteria established by the translation service provider (TSP) and/or direct customer (organization or company) quality criteria and requirements. Consequently, these can differ from one to the other. As an example of *general revision principles* see the thirteen revision principles indicated in the *Manual de revisión* of the Directorate-General for Translation of European Commission (DGT 2010, 8) and the seven established by the author with the corresponding justification (Parra Galiano 2005, 323–25; 2007, 200–202).

Basic revision principles are those present in all theoretical studies analysed and usually shared by every TSP (Parra Galiano 2015). These basic revision principles are:

1. Revision cost-effectiveness: the relationship between necessity, usefulness, effectiveness and cost. In other words, cost-effectiveness is the balance between human resources, time and cost involved in the revision process on the one hand, and necessity, usefulness and effectiveness of the revision on the other.
2. Minimal corrections: the reviser should modify the TT as little as possible and, of course, avoid retranslation.
3. Justification for the changes performed: the reviser should be able to justify any correction and improvement made in the translation.

The observance of these three *basic revision principles* by the reviser is of fundamental importance to avoid, for example, the results of erroneous revision processes such as: 1. Under-revision: the failure to detect errors, 2. Over-revision: the introduction of errors by the reviser in the translation draft, and 3. Hyper–revision: the insertion of unnecessary changes. Therefore, and considering that the results of various empirical studies shows that hyper-revision and over-revision are not unusual (Allman 2007a, 26; Brunette et al. 2005; Conde Ruano 2008; Horváth 2009, 11; Künzli 2007a, 33–44), the first condition for translation quality assurance is that revisers comply with the *general and basic revision principles*.

3. The Management of Human Resources

The results of erroneous revision processes or inappropriate translation revision arise, basically, from revisers' interventions in the target text, but may also derive from other factors related to translation project management.

Even if ideally TSPs should work with experts for every translation project, this is not always possible. However, when selecting translators and revisers for a project, TSPs should take into account, at least, the following aspects regarding the professional profile of both translators and revisers: appropriate qualifications and competences, experience, domain or subject knowledge and language pair (both revisers and translators should be native speakers of the target language).

In this sense, the empirical study by Allman (2007a) shows how the acknowledging and establishing the "hierarchy of expertise" in translator-reviser scenarios can be of help in the process of revising translations. According to Allman (2007a, 28), the notion of *expertise* is understood here as a person with proven qualifications (through academic study, specific training or successful examination results) and continuous and proven professional experience of over ten years in a specific field. On the other hand, the establishing of a "hierarchy of expertise" by using six typical translator-reviser situations may also help TSPs to "determine or negotiate the specific revision tasks to be performed by the reviser" and "avoid TSP's having possible conflicts between translators and revisers" (Allman 2007a, 18–24).

In this sense, the studies by Allman (2007a, 2007b) confirm our second condition to ensure effectiveness of translation revision, "Human resources for both translations and revisions should be managed appropriately," so that translation quality is not merely improved but also assured, and to avoid possible conflicts between translators and revisers and their resulting repercussions with regard to cost, delivery deadlines and the business relationship with the final client.

As Allman (2007b, 36–46) points out on the task of the reviser:

> 1. Usually, the accuracy/reliability, typos and style (enhancement/improving readability) would seem to fit the reviser's remit in normal circumstances. 2. Nevertheless, they are other areas (terminology, layout and factual information) by which I mean that there is no general consensus as to whether they fall within the set of responsibilities of the reviser. 3. And, of course, they are three categories to consider precisely on what the reviser should not do: Under-revision . . . ; over-revision . . . ; and hyper–revision.

4. Integrated Methodology for Translations Revision: Key Aspects

Having dealt with the general and basic principles of revision and the importance of an appropriate management of human resources, the question now is to decide how translation revision should be performed? The answer to this question involves deciding on the following fundamental aspects related to translation revision methodology: the *revision degree*, the *revision mode* and the *revision procedure*.

4.1 Revision Degree (Revision Types and Revision Modes)

Some of the most frequent types of translation quality assessment (TQA) procedures used to determine and measure translation quality (Brunette 2005) involve the comparison between a part or a percentage of the TT with the ST. Therefore we consider that these TQA procedures entail a *partial translation revision* or the practice of revision in varying degrees (see table 1).[1]

Revision type	Translation Quality Assurance (TQA) procedures	Part of TT revised	Comparison of ST and TT	Revision degree
1. Bilingual revision	Pragmatic and Formative Revision	Entire text (100%)	Always	Complete or full revision (superior degree)
2. Monolingual revision	Fresh look	Entire text (100%)	Sometimes (if necessary)	Part revision (intermediate degree)
3. Sample revision	Quality Control (QC)	Sample/s (usually 10%)	Always	Part revision (lower degree)
4. Absence of revision	Simple lectura (DGT) Spot-check (Cala)	– Reading of TT (100%) – Part control	No	Revision absence (zero or nil degree)

Table 1: Revision Types, TQA Procedures and Revision Degrees
(Parra Galiano 2005, 2015).

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1 The left column of table 1 shows the corresponding names of the three types of revision, according to the revision degree (see the right column) and considering whether the reviser reads and compares the entire TT with the ST or only a part or a percentage of it (Parra Galiano 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2015). In the last line, there are two examples of other TQA procedures used in the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) of the European Commission, unrelated to revision.

On the other hand, revisers may do a *partial revision* because they use only certain parameters or groups of related parameters to verify translation quality. In simple words, a *revision parameter* is a criterion which answers the question: which aspect/s of the translation must be verified? Thus, before performing a revision it is also necessary to establish the revision parameters that the reviser should use, that is the *revision mode* (method) or the general aspects of the translation that the reviser should focus on, check and how to go about it.

Given that a *part translation revision* may involve the practice of revision in varying degrees, the *revision degree* is the variation regarding the intensity with which the translation revision is performed, taken into account both the part or percentage of the target text to be verified and compared to the source text, and the parameters or types of parameters used to assess translation quality and make appropriate corrections and improvements, considering the specifications of the translation brief (Parra Galiano 2015). Therefore decisions on the *revision degree* required for the TT entail determining both the *type of revision* and the *revision mode*, and should be made in accordance with three main factors: 1. the dissemination and use of the translation, 2. the qualifications and experience of both the translator and the reviser, 3. the resources available in terms of time, money and human resources.

Taking into account the interaction between the above mentioned factors, the most appropriate *revision type* should be chosen for each translation project, from the following:

1. a *bilingual revision*: comparing the entire TT with the ST;
2. a *monolingual revision*: a reading of the entire TT and comparison with the ST only if necessary, that is, when the reviser detects quality problems in the translation;
3. a *sample revision*: reading parts or samples of the TT (usually 10%) and comparing only those samples with the ST.

For *revision mode*, it is important to consider that revisers normally use several revision parameters at the same time because there is certain affinity between them. For this reason, we decided to group the parameters that are usually used simultaneously by revisers to check specific aspects of the translation into four groups giving as a result four revision modes (see table 2):

1. *revision of the content* (logic, facts, specialised language);
2. *linguistic revision* (specialised language, correct use of TL, target audience appropriateness);
3. *functional revision* (target audience appropriateness, accuracy, completeness);
4. *revision of the presentation* (completeness, layout and typos).

In this respect, we would make two remarks:

1. The name of each revision mode and the corresponding parameters are for mere reference, given that the most important issues are: what has to be checked in the translation, how to go about it and what is the most appropriate professional reviser profile for the revision in question (taking into consideration qualifications, experience and thematic competence of both the translator and reviser, and the dissemination and use of the translation).
2. Considering that some parameters are used in several modes of revision, in our methodological proposal, containing a total of nine parameters classified into four groups, the last parameter of each group is the first one (repeated) in the next.

The *Integrated Methodological Proposal for Translation Revision* presented in table 2 is the result of a descriptive, comparative and critical analysis of translation revision in translation studies literature, as well as the overall results from four case studies and our experience as translator and reviser. This methodology shows and integrates part of the fundamental aspects to be taken into account in the revision of translations (the most common revision parameters and the most appropriate reviser profile for each revision mode), in accordance with basic and general revision principles, degrees of revision and revision procedures.

4.2 Translation Revision Procedures

Revision process is a set of interrelated activities that the reviser performs to verify the quality of the TT in accordance with a translation brief. The revision process may involve several activities: the reading of the TT and ST, the comparison between the TT and ST, the search for terminology and documentation, the detection, identification and correction of errors, and the final verification of the translation. During the revision process, according to Mossop (2001, 121–26), the reviser may order and distribute the revision tasks in different ways: number of re-readings of the TT (one or two?) and use of parameters (type of revision); order (if more than one): bilingual/monolingual first or last?; reading order during bilingual revision (TT or ST first?); size of the unit to read during bilingual revision (whole page, paragraph, sentence).

Thus, the *revision procedure* can be defined as the specific way in which the reviser sequences, orders and distributes the different activities to verify and assure translation quality during the revision process. Consequently, the revision procedure is closely associated with the reviser's professional and psychological profile but, nevertheless, it also depends on the *revision brief* (Parra Galiano 2015).

According to the results of an empirical study by Robert and Van Waes (2014), and based on previous explorative studies (Robert 2008, 2012),

translation revision procedures have an impact on both the process and product of revision. Given that the translators and revisers employ a wide variety of revision procedures in their daily working practice, Robert and Van Waes (2014) have formulated some practical recommendations on selecting revision procedures, taking into account quality and time. In this sense, it is important to point out that the study focussed on the number of times and order in which translators and revisers read the TT to compare it with the ST, with the aim of verifying the quality of the translation. The four most commonly used procedures are: monolingual revision, bilingual revision, bilingual followed by monolingual revision and monolingual followed by bilingual revision.

Parameters	General aspects to verify (in TT)	Mode of revision	Reviser profile
– Logic – Facts – Specialised language	Content	Revision of content	Thematic reviser [reviewer]
– Specialised language – Correct use of target language – Audience appropriateness	Linguistic	Linguistic revision	Linguistic reviser
– Audience appropriateness – Accuracy – Completeness	Function	Functional revision	Translator–reviser
– Completeness – Layout – Typos	Presentation	Revision of presentation	Editor–reviser

Table 2: Integrated Methodology Proposal for Translation Revision
(Parra Galiano 2005)

5. Specific Instructions for the Revision: The Revision Brief

The third condition for ensuring the effectiveness of translation revision is to have specific instructions for the revision. The specification for these instructions is what could be called the *revision brief*. To ensure that a revision brief is coherent, on the one hand, it is evident that it should be based on the TSP/client quality criteria and the translation brief,[2] take into account the use and dissemination of the translation, whether the revision has an additional aim (translator's competence development) and the professional profile (qualifica-

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2 As Künzli (2005, 40) points out, revisers often receive the same task description as the translator.

tions and competences) of translators and revisers involved in the translation project.

On the other hand, in our opinion, the revision brief should specify at least four aspects:

1. time available for the revision;
2. who should perform the correction of the detected errors (the reviser or the translator);
3. the translation revision degree (bilingual, monolingual or sample revision);
4. the revision mode (general aspects on which the reviser should focus on).

In summary, the revision brief depends on the factors already mentioned, but there are other complementary and important questions to address: Who should decide on how to perform the translation revision? Who is responsible for giving or drawing up these specific instructions related to revision? Should it be the TSP, the reviser or the project manager (PM)?

The revision brief may be provided by the TSP, the PM or the client. For the revision brief to be coherent, it should include instructions on the revision degree and the revision mode (revision parameters) that the reviser should follow. In the absence of a revision brief, the reviser herself or himself should make the decision on these issues. With regard to the revision procedure, the reviser should decide how to organize the necessary activities involved in the revision, in accordance with the time available, the aim of the translation or, if available, the revision brief.

6. Some Controversial Aspects Regarding Revision in the EN-15038:2006

After a detailed analysis of the official Spanish version of the Standard (UNE-EN 15038:2006; AENOR 2006) and a comparison with the official English version (BS EN-15038:2006; CEN 2006), we have noticed that both versions contain three controversial aspects with regard to translation revision. These aspects will be discussed briefly in the next sections in order to reflect on two more questions.

The first one, related to our second premise, is whether (or not) "Systematic translation revision by a third person (the reviser) is always necessarily beneficial to translation quality." The second question to think about, related to our third premise, is whether (or not) compulsory and systematic revision, within the framework of the Standard, can assure translation quality.

As we know, "The purpose of the European standard EN-15038:2006 is to establish and define the requirements for the provision of quality services by translation service providers" offering both TSP "and their clients a description

and definition of the entire service" with the aim of providing TSP "with a set of procedures and requirements to meet market needs . . ., with regard to human and technical resources, quality and project management, the contractual framework, and service procedures" (CEN 2006, 4–5). In this sense, it is important to point out that the Standard focuses on the entire translation service rather than on the translation as a product.

6.1 The Definition of the Term *Revise* and the Description of the *Revision Process* in the EN-15038:2006

Although the standard defines the term *revise* as "(2.10) examine a translation for its suitability for the agreed purpose, compare the source and target texts, and recommend corrective measures" (CEN 2006, 5), according to the description of the *revision process* (5.4.3), it is unclear if the reviser shall examine always the translation comparing the source and target texts: "The reviser shall examine the translation for its suitability for purpose. This shall include, as required by the project, comparison of the source and target texts for terminology consistency, register and style" (CEN 2006, 11; our emphasis).

This lack of clarity, on the one hand, involves ambiguity with regard to the type of revision (as to whether the revision should be bilingual, monolingual or sample revision) *required by the project*; on the other hand, it entails doubts and may even lead to confusion with the use of other translation quality assurance (TQA) procedures that do not involve any revision degree. Consequently, in this last situation, the use by revisers of TQA procedures not related to revision will not comply with requirements of the EN-15038:2006 in this sense (compulsory revision).

6.2 Professional Competences and Experience of Revisers

For human resources management (3.2.1), the Standard specifies that "The TSP shall have a documented procedure in place for selecting people with the requisite skills and qualifications for translation projects" (CEN 2006, 6).

According to the Standard the professional competences of translators (3.2.2) are: 1. Translating competence, 2. Linguistic and textual competence in the source and target language, 3. Research competence, information acquisition and processing, 4. Cultural competence and 5. Technical competence:

> should be acquired through one or more of the following:
> - formal higher education in translation (recognised degree);
> - equivalent qualification in any other subject plus a minimum of two years of documented experience in translating;
> - at least 5 years of documented professional experience in translating (CEN 2006, 7).

As to the professional competences of revisers, the only difference that seems to exist between translators and revisers professional competences (3.2.3) is the level of translation experience in the field concerned: "revisers shall have the same competence as translators, as defined in 3.2.2 and should have had translation experience in the field concerned" (CEN 2006, 7).

In this regard it is important to point out that the EN-15038:2006 recommends but does not require the reviser to have more domain or thematic competence than the translator. On the other hand, the Standard does not specify what this experience should be (for example, in years or number of words translated in the field). As this experience is neither quantified nor determined, a literal interpretation of the Standard would allow a novice translator to intervene as a reviser in any project after having translated only one text (with a small number of words) in the field concerned. From this perspective, in practice, any translator could assume the function of reviser for a TSP to be able to certify compliance with the Standard.

Nevertheless, to guarantee the quality of a translation through an effective revision, in our opinion, the reviser should have more (or at least the same) domain knowledge, translation competence and experience in the field as the translator.

6.3   The Aspects to Verify in Translation Process Stages

Now we will deal with other controversial question regarding the aspects to verify in translation process stages (5.4): translation (5.4.1), checking (5.4.2), revision (5.4.3) and review (5.4.4).

As we have seen (6.1), "The reviser shall examine the translation for its suitability for purpose" and focus on "terminological consistency, register and style." In practice, the three criteria mentioned are limited to the partial checking of two general aspects which the translator shall pay attention "in order to produce a text that is in accordance with the rules of the linguistic system of the target language and that meets the instructions received in the project assignment" (CEN 2006, 10) of a total of seven. The seven aspects which the translator shall pay attention to are: 1. Terminology, 2. Grammar, 3. Lexis, 4. Style, 5. Locale, 6. Formatting and 7. Target group and purpose of the translation (CEN 2006, 10–11).

As we can see, in fact the reviser's task consists of a part verification of the translation using three revision parameters: the first parameter (terminological consistency) is mentioned in the group of related parameters named *Terminology* and the second and third parameters (register and style, respectively) are included in the group four, denominated in the Standard as *Style*.

For the task of the reviewers, who "shall be domain specialists in the target language" (CEN 2006, 7), the Standard states (5.4.4) that "The review can be

accomplished by assessing the translation for register and respect for the conventions of the domain in question" through "a monolingual review to assess the suitability of the translation for the agreed purpose and recommend corrective measures" (CEN 2006, 11).

   In short, according to the Standard, the only *revision mode* that the reviser shall perform corresponds to the use of linguistic revision parameters, and therefore to a partial revision, related to what we named *linguistic revision* (see 4.1 and table 2). On the other hand, we think there is some overlapping between reviser and reviewer tasks (limited to verifying linguistic aspects). Furthermore, the intervention of a reviewer in a translation project performed from the beginning according to the EN-15038:2006 would be unnecessary, considering the respective competence requirements of both revisers and reviewers, unless it involves the review of translations from third parties.

7.   Conclusions

As it is evident that translation revision by a third person involves additional translation costs in terms of money, human resources and time, we would like to point out that in our opinion:

1. Revision can provide added value if it assures translation quality, for which it must be effective, that is to say, a balanced relationship between cost, usefulness and necessity must exist. Mere improvements to the quality of the translation are not sufficient.
2. Revision can only be effective in assuring translation quality when the following conditions are fulfilled: i. basic revision principles are respected by both translators and revisers, ii. human resources (especially translators and revisers) involved in the translation project are managed appropriately and iii. the revision of the translation is carried out in accordance with a coherent revision brief.

Therefore, and given that translation revision is not always necessary nor effective for translation quality assurance, we believe further thought should be given to the potential effectiveness of systematic translation revision, as a mandatory practice to comply with the EN-15038:2006 for translation services. With this aim, we would like to conclude with a final question. Why is revision a compulsory activity in the framework of the EN-15038:2006?

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