

26 The European Translation Standard EN 15038 and it's Terminology – A Mirror of Missing Professionalism?

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ABSTRACT

The European Standard EN 15038 *Translation Services – Service Requirements*, approved by CEN on April 13, 2006, has been given the status of a national standard in 29 European countries in November 2006. The purpose of this standard is “to establish and define the requirements for the provision of quality services by translation service providers” and “to provide translation service providers with a set of procedures and requirements to meet market needs” (p. 7).

With the help of the analysis of central terms and concepts such as ‘translate’, ‘translation process’, ‘source text’, ‘target text’, ‘localisation’, ‘proofreading’, ‘style guide’ and ‘added value services’, I will demonstrate that EN 15038 is a compromise amongst the 29 translation cultures involved. It mirrors the semi-professional translational practices existing in many of these translation cultures and the commonly held misconceptions of the market about translation. This means that the terminology of translation used by translators themselves is the biggest obstacle in transforming the trade of translation into a genuine profession. This was exactly one of the goals the EN 15038 is set out to achieve.

Το Ευρωπαϊκό Πρότυπο μετάφρασης EN 15038 και η ορολογία του – Καθρέφτης έλλειψης επαγγελματισμού ;

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το Νοέμβριο του 2006, 29 ευρωπαϊκές χώρες είχαν ήδη υιοθετήσει ως εθνικό πρότυπο το Ευρωπαϊκό πρότυπο EN 15038 *Translation services – Service Requirements*, που εγκρίθηκε από την CEN στις 13 Απριλίου 2006. Σκοπός αυτού του προτύπου είναι «η καθιέρωση και ο ορισμός των προαπαιτήσεων για την παροχή ποιοτικών υπηρεσιών από παροχείς υπηρεσιών μετάφρασης» και «η διάθεση στους παροχείς υπηρεσιών ενός συνόλου διαδικασιών και προαπαιτήσεων ώστε να ανταποκριθούν στις ανάγκες της αγοράς» (σ. 7).

Με την αρωγή της ανάλυσης βασικών όρων και εννοιών όπως «μεταφράζω», «μεταφραστική διαδικασία», «κείμενο αφετηρίας», «κείμενο αφίξεως», «τοπική προσαρμογή», «επιμέλεια κειμένων», «προδιαγραφές» και «υπηρεσίες προστιθέμενης αξίας» θα αποδείξω ότι το EN 15038 συμβιβάζει τις 29 μεταφραστικές κουλτούρες που το υιοθέτησαν· αντανάκλα τις ημιαγγελματικές μεταφραστικές πρακτικές σε πολλές από αυτές και την υφιστάμενη, λανθασμένη αντίληψη περί μετάφρασης της αγοράς. Αυτό σημαίνει ότι η ορολογία της μετάφρασης που χρησιμοποιούν οι ίδιοι οι μεταφραστές είναι το μεγαλύτερο εμπόδιο για την εξέλιξη της μετάφρασης σε πραγματικό επάγγελμα, σύμφωνα και με έναν από τους στόχους του EN 15038.

1 The Translational Status quo

The reality in the translation market seems quite confusing and inhomogeneous. There are different translation providers with different backgrounds and different working principles and concepts of 'translation' – in other words – with a more or less degree of professionalism. There is therefore a global tendency to set standards for translation services. One of these standards is the *European Standard EN 15038 Translation Services – Service Requirements*, approved by CEN on April 13, 2006. This set of standard has been given the status of a national standard by 29 European countries in November 2006 (EN 15038 2006:5). The main purpose of this was "to improve the quality of translation services throughout Europe" (Hübner 2007:13). However, there are also a number of other purposes. One was "to raise the profile of the translation industry by bringing it into line with other 'standardised' industries and giving it a more professional image" (Hübner 2007:13; see also Enrique López-Ebri 2004:11). This can be understood by some means or other as accepting that translation practice is still quite far away from real professionalism and that the translation trade still cannot be seen as a real profession.

Another purpose was "to meet market needs" (EN 15038 2006:7). This purpose has to be seen in contradiction to the other purposes because of the expectations and demands of the market such as cheap prices, often unrealistically short deadlines and delivery dates, combined with demands for high quality on the one hand and the principles (which often haven't yet been fully realized) of professional action on the other hand.

Thus when looking at the status quo of the translation market, a number of key questions arise: Do translators, clients, commissioners and users of translation products ('the market') understand the terms 'translation' and 'translate' in the same way? How do translators practice their profession? Is it really professional or is it rather semi-professional? What do practicing translators (and translation scholars) understand by the term 'professional'? How do other (the so called) "real" professions define 'professional' for themselves?

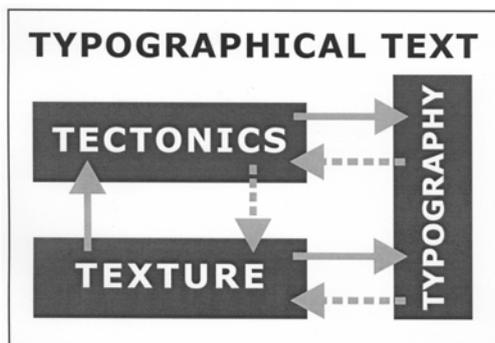
Looking closer at the market, there is a growing tendency for global activity of the translation industry, among them the so called 'envelop switchers' – smart business people who are buying cheap translation services from freelance translators and selling them to their clients without any quality control. In this way, translators are increasingly becoming academic slaves of the translation industry paid per word or character.

The main reasons for the status quo are misconceptions about ‘translation’ among clients, commissioners and users of translations and also misconceptions about ‘translation’ and ‘professionalism’ among practising translators and translation scholars. The governing customs are often not very professional – translation as a profession is still in the developing process.

2 Different Concepts of ‘Translation’ and the Professional Translation Process

Among practitioners as well as translation scholars, the term ‘translation’ is used to mean differing things: (1) the systematic substitution of elements from two language systems (‘language translation’ or ‘linguistic translation’); (2) the intercultural communicative action per se; (3) the production of only the verbal form of the text in the target language, often practiced by translation teachers themselves as a job on the side, and finally (4) the complex professional process of producing a communication tool which transfers a message in (primarily public) intercultural communications.

To understand the translated text as a communication tool as such, we must consider that every text consists of several levels: (1) the communicative structure (tectonics), (2) the verbal content (texture) and (3) the visual form (see Schopp 1996). This last characteristic has traditionally been called *typography* when the text was distributed in printed form (see picture 1). To this we must nowadays also include texts which are published in electronic mode (WWW, CD-ROM, DVD, etc.).



Picture 1:
The TT+T-Model (see Schopp 2005:61)

Often the 'translation process' has been seen as a purely formulating process of the target text, in other words, as a mere verbal operation based on the text analysis of the source text and not on a holistic analysis of the commission. But in recent times, translators have been faced more than ever with issues related to typography and layout. Text-processing and desktop publishing software are now part of the daily routine of almost all translators. The use of such software has resulted in a new type of translation product – the *ready-to-print* or *ready-to-publish* translation (see Schopp 2002:271). The fact is that translators nowadays are being required to take over functions that previously were the responsibility of trained experts in typography. So translators must deal with typography and layout in several parts of the translation process. Source texts are usually in printed (i.e. typographic) mode. Target texts (translations) in most cases will be published either traditionally as a printed document or often nowadays as a digital, or electronic document. Thus in many cases nowadays the translator is also producing the visual form of the text (typography, layout).

In my opinion, every translation process begins with the request of the client. After the analysis of the task, the cost calculation, the offer, the confirmation of the order and the contract – Mackenzie (2004:162f) calls this "pre-translation" – follows the production of the verbal form of the target text (including text analysis, terminological work, revision, etc).

One central question is the scope of the translation service. The translator has to know whether the translation is an intermediate product which gets its final shape with the help of other text experts (editor, graphic designer, typographer etc.) or whether it is an end product which will be received by the addressee in just the same mode as the translator handed it in (corresponding to the scope between 'rough' and 'ready for publication').

One very important but often forgotten part of the whole production process is the final proofreading by the client so as to get his/her approval to begin the printing process. If the target text or the print medium consisting the target text is produced in the source culture, then this should be done by the translator because usually only he/she knows (or should know) the typographic conventions of the target culture, the correct spelling of words and names, the correct word divisions etc.

Finally follows the billing and other post-translation stages including drawing conclusions to improve the quality system (see Mackenzie 2004:167).

3 EN 15038 – an Attempt to Raise the Profile of Professional Translation?

As mentioned above, one central purpose of EN 15038 was to raise the profile of professional translation. But the questions are the following: To what extent will this standard help translators to become better professionals and to work more professionally? To what extent may the adaptation to “market orientation” consolidate the commonly held misconceptions about translation?

In a real profession, the individuals are experts who are better informed and more knowledgeable than the client. They do not merely fulfil the client’s or customer’s wishes; but they analyse the whole situation, advising the client about what type of product is best for his/her needs, which characteristics should the product have or what is or is not feasible under the actual specific circumstances. Real professionals have something what could be defined as “know-how margin”. In other words: In a real profession there is a “know-how gap” between the expert and the client.

Many translators, however, do not (or cannot) think and work independently. They are trained to only carry out the client’s wish without reflecting on the actual task – how unrealistic these may be. These translators apply not carefully thought out working principles e.g. preparing a translation which is to be published into the B-working language without getting it checked and/or edited by a native speaker text expert. They have a limited comprehension of the scope of the translation process and regard it as a mere linguistic action (for example when referring to “language mediation”). These translators work more like linguistic encoding modems instead of experts of intercultural communication. And last but not least, they show insufficient solidarity with the profession through dumping prices (Prunč 2003:86: “Dumping spiral”). These are not characteristics of a real profession.

Asking now what is the level of professionalism in translation practice? The answer is as following: Many translators and in part also translation companies are working more in a semi-professional rather than a professional manner. Thus the purpose of EN 15038 to develop a real professional translation trade is well motivated.

But to fulfil this purpose, the concepts of EN 15038 should be based on ideas about professional translation. This doesn’t yet seem to have been accepted by many of the 29 European countries involved in formulating the text of the European standard. And the terminology used in the standard should be free of contradictions and the terms used should be defined clearly and unambiguously.

4 Key Concepts and Terms in EN 15038

The central concept and term in EN 15038 is 'translate', defined as "render information in the source language ... into the target language ... in written form." (EN 15038 2006:11). As long as 'information' is not defined in the standard, it is not clear whether it means the verbal content or the meaning of the source text or perhaps both together. Looking closer at the description of the translation process, it becomes evident that 'information' is used as a synonym for 'meaning': "The translator shall transfer the meaning in the source language into the target language in order to produce a text that is in accordance with the rules of the linguistic system of the target language ..." (EN 15038 2006:19). This is still a mere traditional concept of 'translate' and 'translation' which limits the professional action of the translator to a "linguistically correct transfer" (Snell-Hornby 2000:72) – a fact which also mirrors in the concept of 'translation service' versus 'added value service'.

From a terminological viewpoint it is questionable to use the term 'translation' as a hyponym and 'translation process' as a hypernym. Because in both cases 'translation' is used in a different meaning. In point 5.4 (Translation process) as the holistic process to get a target culture print medium and at the same time in point 5.4.1 (Translation) as the part of the 'translation process' in which the target text will be formulated ('translation' in the same range as 'checking', 'revision', 'review', 'proofreading', and 'final verification').

Thus the main feature the translator shall pay attention to are terminology, grammar, lexis, style, local conventions and regional standards ("locale"), formatting, and at least target group and purpose of the translation (EN 15038 2006:19 & 21). No word about the possible necessity to add or to omit verbal information, or to formulate a target text on the base of source culture material. No word about the communicative function of translation to build "a text that transmits a certain message" (Mackenzie 2004:158).

And another point: Talking about "source text" and "target text" (without defining what 'text' means) is like not taken into account that a text never exists without a physical medium. It always appears whether in an aural or visual mode (handwritten, machine written, printed or in digital-electronic mode, sometimes as 'cross-media' in both modes). The typography of a text cannot be taken for granted. It is often the result of a special design process carried out by experts.

There are indeed some typographical phenomena listed in Annex D (“Style guide”), but not systematically – the whole annex is an unsystematic mixture of verbal and visual phenomena. It would be more professional to make a distinction between the verbal/linguistic and the visual/typographic dimension of the translation.

It should also be mentioned that ‘orthotypography’ is named as a part of grammar beside spelling, punctuation and diacritical marks (see EN 15038 2006:19). This phenomenon shows another difficulty of the standard and its translations. While in the English version of the EN, the term ‘orthotypography’ is used (EN 15038 2006:19), in the Finnish version the term ‘typografiset konventiot’ is used (SFS EN 15038:18), which in English means ‘typographic conventions’. This, however, does not precisely mean the same as ‘orthotypography’. The term ‘typographic conventions’ refers to the culture-specific use of typographical elements. The term ‘orthotypography’, on the other hand – seen from the viewpoint of readability – means the correct use of typographic signs. In the German version, the term ‘Rechtschreibung’ is used (DIN EN 15038:11), which in English means ‘orthography’. Again, this does not mean exactly the same as ‘orthotypography’ (‘orthography’ refers to the graphic level in general whereas ‘orthotypography’ refers to the typographic level). This is a proof of the tendency in the standard to use words which meaning is not perfectly understood.

Failing to distinguish between the verbal and the visual dimension of the translation is a weak point of the Translation Standard. Yet another far reaching weak point of the Translation Standard is deliberately making a distinction between ‘translation services’ and ‘added value services’.

From the viewpoint of the traditional translation, it is understandable to show the client that translation is more than just transferring words from one language to another. But from a modern translational aspect and seen with the purpose to develop a real translational profession, this is not an optimal solution. The Austrian translation standard – hitherto the most progressive and professional translation standard I know of – defines text procedures like ‘adaptation’, ‘rewriting’, ‘localisation’, ‘technical writing’ and others as typical services of the translator („Transferleistung“, ÖNORM D1200 2000:4). Defining these in EN 15038 (2006:31) as ‘Added Value Services’, this standard shows clearly the restricted understanding of the tasks of a professional translator and strengthens the public picture about translation as an act of pure linguistic transfer/transcoding.

But also a number of other concepts and terms show the semi-professionalism of EN 15038. On the one hand Annex E gives a non-exhaustive list of 'added value services', besides the already named e.g. 'DTP, graphic and web design'. On the other hand the standard demands that the translator should be able to offer for added value services "the same level of quality to those services as to the services covered by this standard" (EN 15038 2006:21). Again there is a contradiction: Most translators are not able to do this because they do not have professional competence in this services –, let alone knowledge about the typographic conventions of the source culture ... Thus how can they offer DTP, graphic design and web design without professional competence, based on a special training?

And what is meant by defining "proofreading" as "checking of proofs before publishing"? (EN 15038 2006:9). Under some circumstances (for example, when the specific print media for the target culture is produced in the source culture), this service should always be a part of the translation process and the translator should insist upon getting the proofs. But is it that what is meant by "proofreading" in the EN 15038? 'Proofreading' is a fuzzy term used for different stages in the production process of a printed or in electronic mode published medium. So "checking of proofs before publishing" could be understood as "checking that the text has the verbal quality which a published text should have". But it could also (and in this context should) mean "last checking of the proofs through the client and/or the translator before beginning the printing process". Another question is: Is the translator at all apt to proofread a translation or publication both orthographically and orthotypographically? The description of the "professional competences of translators" (EN 15038 2006:13) do not enumerate such knowledge and skills. And many printed translations show that these things are not yet applied by all translators.

5. EN 15038 – A Mirror of Semi-Professionalism

This all shows that terms and concepts in the European Translation Standard EN 15038 are clearly based on the semi-professionalism of the translation trade at this moment.

The European standard on translation services cannot be seen as a way to full professionalism in the field of translation, since it is based on a too limited understanding of 'translation' and 'translation process' and further more shows an ignorance of the whole production process of a publication or medium. In addition to this the standard contains a number of not clearly defined terms.

The standard must be seen as a compromise between the 29 translation cultures involved of which a bigger part does not yet follow real professional working principles. It shows the non-homogeneity of the profession and the semi-professional working principles of practising translators as much as the semi-professionalism of “added value services” like graphic design and web design.

And what is worse: The standard assigns the translator the passive role of being an academically trained assistant for bilingual writing often undervalued and underpaid – and not somebody who is an expert in intercultural communication. Therefore EN 15038 is lacking in comparison to the much more professional ÖNORM D 1200 standard.

It is to be feared that the standard adapting to “market orientation” may consolidate more the existing commonly held misconceptions about translation rather than stop the ongoing global development to make translators “word slaves” of a translation industry that does not really work in professional manner. Against this background, EN 15038 is more a mirror of the semi-professionalism of the translation trade today than the right way to develop full professionalism.

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