

A new tool for measuring translation quality

A common perception about quality is that it is expensive. To increase quality, you need to add to the project process steps. The common approach has been to add process steps and quality checks to improve on delivered quality. How

much value are additional linguistic steps adding? How can this be quantified? Is an editor adding or detracting from the quality? Why are so many errors being caught at the tail end of the project, and how can a language-service provider (LSP) systematically reduce these and drive quality upstream? How do you know the quality of the products being delivered, other than knowing that standard translation processes have been followed?



Measured Translation Quality

In reality, a focus on measured quality can dramatically reduce cost and turnaround time. The methodology and case study presented here demonstrate how a paradigm-shift, with regard to quality, changes the way localization projects are managed.

Why measured quality?

Measured translation quality on its own has limited benefits. Though it is helpful to have an objective assessment of the linguistic quality levels, it can only have wide-scale benefits when integrated into a robust quality system. As an example, linguistic evaluations are only as accurate as the instructions provided to both the linguists and the evaluator. In the absence of an approved terminology glossary, the original translators and evaluators may have differing opinions on what "correct" translations of key terminology are. The evaluation is only of limited benefit in this case, as this adds a subjective element to the measurement process.

When integrated into a translation quality system, however, measurable quality can dramatically improve results. Delivered quality can be increased, and project costs and turnaround times reduced. As mentioned previously, the typical approach to delivering translation quality has been to add steps. In the absence of an accurate measurement, LSPs and end clients have approached this by adding a combination of additional manual QA steps, as well as automated QA's, end-client review cycles, and more. The assumption is the more people that review the translation, the better it will be. To the contrary, by involving too many people, it is very possible that these QA resources may have less knowledge of the linguistic requirements for that particular project or product, and may in fact add to the errors.

By way of example, ForeignExchange Translations has been able to realize a savings of 23% and more in cost and turnaround time by utilizing a measured quality system. This was done through measurement of all translation tasks using an objective, customized linguistic quality system called *METRiQ*. This system was integrated into the existing translation workflow, allowing for automated notification of evaluations to the relevant parties. The biggest gains were seen on those client

accounts where strong partnerships exist, and where the project teams can work together with the clients (primary contacts as well as reviewers) to ensure a comprehensive linguistic quality strategy is in place. These accounts also have long-term linguistic teams assigned to them. These linguists are trained on both client products, as well as on use of the client-specific style guides, glossaries, and translation memories.

The data generated from *METRIQ* is used to identify improvement needs, and to measure improvements and efficiencies. Improvement opportunities are identified both at a corporate level, as well as on an account or project level. Benchmarks are determined, and targets for improvement identified. For example, we may identify a need to improve quality outputs for client ABC in Portuguese only. An analysis of the gap drives definition of corrective or preventive action plans. These actions may include process modifications, adjustment of long-term team members or training of existing members, enhancement of translation memory (TM) or glossaries, and more. The root cause of many translation quality issues is the lack of high quality support materials for the translators, or lack of a comprehensive linguistic quality strategy.

Garbage in, garbage out is frequently seen in translation. TMs and glossaries that have evolved over the years (updated with differing attributes, by different LSPs and single-language translators) require clean-up and maintenance. It is often difficult to justify funding TM maintenance projects. Consider the ROI of a TM cleanup vs. quality issue re-work on multiple projects. TM cleanup is a one-time cost, and can be highly automated using technology such as APSic or Olifant. The quality errors that result from a poor TM on the front end of a project can heavily impact time to market, and add re-work costs on each project completed.

In an ideal environment, end-clients and LSPs collaborate closely on developing and implementing long term linguistic quality strategies. Terminology management is central to this and ensuring buy-in from the end-client's in-country team on core terminology to be used in the translations is critical. Once this is established, a comprehensive review of the translation memories is typically needed. Inconsistencies between glossaries and TM's need to be addressed; duplicate segments in TM and inconsistent translations need to be cleaned up to ensure the highest possible quality input to translation.

A case study

ForeignExchange has been doing work for a pharmaceutical client for over six years. The work for this company is very repetitive (similar content, consistent language set), leveraging highly from the TMs. Terminology glossaries and style guides are also in place. The quality was measured, and exceeded our threshold for quality overall.

The team integrated QA tools such as APSic into the edit and QA processes, ensuring consistency of the translations with the TM and with the source text, and streamlining the time needed for the edit, proof, and QA steps. As an added safety net, the translation quality is also sampled at project completion (prior to shipment), ensuring adherence to the source text. The results of these project process revisions

included an upward trend in the sampled quality levels, combined with a 23% reduction in project costs and two-day average turnaround time savings.

Implementing a measured quality system

Step 1: Define your quality requirements:

What is it that you need to measure? What is critical to the quality of the end product? This may be different for different translation users within your organization. For example, style is likely more important in your marketing collateral than in your technical manuals. Can you account for both needs in your one metric? Some questions to ask your product teams include:

How does your organization define types of errors in your current systems? CAPA or nonconforming product procedures may have definitions already. Some systems classify errors as major or minor; others may have three categories: critical, major, or minor. What types of products and materials will you be evaluating – documentation, software, websites, training, on-line help? You may need to determine your evaluation criteria for each of these types of products.

What types of customer complaints are you receiving about your translation quality? Do you have primarily errors with accuracy or mistranslations, or readability or stylistic issues? If you have an in-country review team, what type of feedback are they providing? What is important to them?

How important are style and format to your definition of quality? Do you have an existing team in place that can measure quality?

Step 2: Selecting or creating a translation quality metric

Once you have completed this definition, review off-the-shelf measurement systems to see if they meet your needs. A few to consider are the LISA QA model and the SAE J2450 metric. The LISA QA model is setup to measure a wider variety of project types (software is included, for example). SAE J2450 was created for the automotive industry, and measures specifically on accuracy of the text (does not include style, for example). Once you have defined your requirements and investigated the existing tools, you can determine whether any of these off the shelf tools meets your needs, or if you need to customize to create your own metric.

In the case of ForeignExchange, we created our own tool (*METRIQ*) that we could integrate into our online workflow and automation tool. This was done for a variety of reasons, including our need to be able to collect evaluations online, ensuring ease of use for our evaluators and timely collection of feedback. Once evaluations are collected, our project managers and linguistic quality coordinator are automatically notified, allowing for remedial actions where needed on project deliveries. This data feeds into our resource performance management systems, supplying an ongoing flow of data surrounding their performance. Reports are generated from this data, on a per language, per client, or per supplier basis, providing the management team with visibility into areas for improvement.

Step 3: Integrating the quality metric into a robust translation quality system

Translation metrics and evaluation data in a vacuum are of little value. Integrating these into a linguistic quality system turns this data into a valuable tool to drive improvements in quality and efficiency. The adage of garbage-in garbage-out applies to this system as well. If the TMs or glossaries are in poor shape, the resulting

translation will not be much better. Evaluators who are evaluating against sub-standard or non-existent glossaries will not be adding value.

These systems can be effectively implemented on the LSP or end-client environment. If implemented on the client-side, these translation metrics can be utilized to measure your LSP's end quality. One option is to identify in-country reviewers within your organization to review the quality of the translation. Utilizing a translation metric, this will also help to control the scope and changes your reviewers are making. Each change made is classified (for example, two major accuracy errors in 3000 words),

Define your quality requirements. Then, utilize the data from your translation metric to measure and benchmark where you are with quality now. This is most effectively done on a client-by-client basis (as quality definitions may vary), though can be applied more broadly across the organization. Analyze the data to determine root causes of issues you are having, and to assess areas to focus on improving.

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, the cost-time-quality trinity can co-exist through smart implementation of a measured quality program. Measuring quality allows for focused, surgical improvements rather than siege-style QA processes. The adage, "that which receives attention, grows" applies here. By measuring the quality of your translations, you set the bar to the high standard you want and hold it there. It is no longer that black box at the end of a process. Measuring quality will actually serve to improve the end result without sacrificing time or cost. In a competitive marketplace and tough economy, that makes everyone happy.

Links

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