

# Myths in Technical Translation and Its Quality Assessment



**SILLY THINGS CLIENTS OFTEN  
BELIEVE IN AND REQUIRE**

**Presentation at the 7th ProZ.com  
Conference - Prague 2010**

**MARTIN JANDA**

**[www.czechtranslation.services](http://www.czechtranslation.services)**

# Outline



- About me
- Disclaimer
- What is quality
- Myths in quality
- Takeaways

# About me



- Full time translator since 1994
- 6 years in literary translation
- 5 years as the Czech Language Specialist (the QA person) for the most hated SW company worldwide
- Localizer and SW QA tester for IBM (4 years)
- 12 years as a medical translator (with a bulk of projects being clinical trial documentation and medical device manuals/medical software manuals)
- Conference interpreter since 2000
- Decent translator, poor guitar player and extremely bad accountant

# Disclaimer



- The following presentation is based on my 15+ years of experience as an English to Czech technical translator/localizer.
- 100% applicable to technical /medical translations into Czech.
- Probably mostly applicable to other Slavic languages
- May or may not be applicable – to some extent - to other languages (not verified)
- Open to discussion - please don't kill me if you think otherwise 😊

# What Is Quality?



Sometimes, it is easy to tell...



# What Is Quality?



Sometimes, it is harder....

“ქარგით” — თყვა მამამ — “თყვენ აყ იყავით, და არ იდარდოთ. მე მას დავეჭევვი” — ო.

ამ სიტყვებით იგი გაფრინდა ბუდიდან.

მან იფრინა ტყეში, გადაუფრინა გზის მოსახვევს და ცოტა ხნის შემდეგ ლომს ჭამოქია.

მაგრამ ბელურას სულაც არ შეშინებია. ის დაეშვა ლომის ზურგზე და ჩხუბი დაუჭყო: “რა საყმე გყონდა ჩემს სახლში რომ მოხვედი და ასე შემიშინე ბავშვებიგ!” — ო.

ლომმა მას ყურადღება არ მიაყცია და გზა განაგრყო.

# Quality? Perspectives Differ



## TYPICAL Scenario – Translating a Manual

- Translator: Doing the translation within the shortest timeframe granting no complaints from the end client/ translation agency
- Agency (LSP): The lowest costs that grant no complaints/quality claims from the end client
- End client: The lowest possible costs and hassle free!
- **End USER: A manual that is clear and easy to read and understand**

# Why Does the End User Suffer?



## **Právo užívání Rucní do F15 Cely Dálkový ovládač**

Být zavázán tebe do na prodej člen určitý LCD celý dálkový ovládač. Ono rysy jeden z člen určitý štědrost infračervený kód knihovnik do fungující autobus až k 8 neobvyklý aparát. Báže dále náš ( autorské osvědčení až do ) tvořivý cíl , nastavení is bezstarostný – dokonce bez člen určitý rucní. Spravedlivý doprovázet člen určitý hlášení v rozhlase LCD zástěna.

Člen určitý LCD celý dálkový ovládač pocínovat být opotřebovaný do skoro celek cejch of Televize ( televize DVD - herec DVD ), ( číslicový ) Satelit nádrž CBL SAT ), Kabel krabice CBL SAT ), Obrázkový terminál Archivář ( videorekordér ), Ladič nádrž ( ladič ), Pásek nádrž ( pásek CD - herec ( kompaktní audiodisk ), zesilovače AMP ) a druhý Audio AUX ).



# Why Does the End User Suffer?



„The problem with most of the many, many poor translations I’ve seen in my 14 years in the business is that they’re only “half-translated.” The target-language words are there, but the rhetorical conventions and discursive structures are still those of the source language. The reader finds these documents awkward, irritating, difficult to understand, and unpleasant (or unintentionally funny) to read because they don’t conform to the patterns of how ideas are expressed and texts composed in the target language. These are subjective factors, but they’re very real and always present.“

*(Michael Grant, Blue Danube, Inc.)*

# Why Does the End User Suffer?



- Go to New York City, that's a large city in the US, and buy yellow tropical fruit called 'bananas' there.

*(The lesson: Translators often translate words, not the message.)*

# Myths in Quality



- 1. You can get a good translation if you hire a cheap translator to translate and then ask an expensive one to do the editing. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality



- For best results: Expensive translator + expensive editor (+a final review by the translator)
- With a restrained budget: Expensive translator + no editor. (Better to miss a few minor typos than have the whole translation messed up by a poor editor.)
- But NEVER EVER use a cheap translator – if the initial translation is a mess, even the best editor can't make it a good translation

# Myths in Quality



- 2. LSP certifications such as ISO improve translation quality. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality



- ISO certifications are great for marketing LSP's services to clients
- May eliminate some process-related issues
- No improvement in translation quality for good LSPs
- The quality may even suffer – translators are frustrated with an extra paperwork and complex processes
- Good translators (have enough other clients) may even quit if the load is too high

# Myths in Quality



- 3. The more levels of the quality assurance process, the better the translation. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality



## Elderly patients¶

The effects of age on the pharmacokinetics of lenalidomide have not been studied. Lenalidomide has been used in clinical trials in multiple myelomas patients up to 9586 years of age. Of the 395 (see section 5.1). The percentage of patients in MDS clinical trials who received 10 mg lenalidomide, 72.2% were aged 65 and over more was not significantly different between the lenalidomide/dexamethasone and placebo/dexamethasone groups. No overall differences in safety and efficacy were observed between these patients and the younger patients. Consequently, there, but greater pre-disposition [ 8] of older individuals can not NOT be ruled out. Lenalidomide is substantially excreted by the kidney, and the risk of toxic reactions to the medicinal medication product is expected to be greater in patients with impaired renal function. Because elderly patients are no specific more likely to have decreased renal function, care should be taken in dose recommendations in elderly patients selection and it would be prudent-good to monitor renal function.¶

- Every editor/proofreader introduces his/her style, preferences and tracked changes



# Myths in Quality



- Too many QA levels result in lack of individual responsibility
- $1+1(+1)$  is probably the best model
- Any extra step just increases bias and costs

# Myths in Quality



- 4. We require translators to 100% match source formatting (bolding, italics, upper case, product names present). This makes sure we produce a high quality translation. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality - Examples



- When illuminated, the *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family Ventilator Compressor AC LED* indicates the *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family* ventilator is receiving AC power AND the *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family 34*, and *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family Ventilator Compressor 35 BPS* and battery backup systems in the *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family Ventilator Compressor Mount Trolley* and the *Burberry Stonehenge 1500 Family Ventilator Pole Trolley* WILL be recharged as needed.
- ¿How should you use your microwave oven?

# Myths in Quality



- 5. Backtranslation makes sure you get the best quality translation with no mistakes. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality



- He is a fan of Juventus Torino.  
Il est un ventilateur de Juventus Turin.  
He is a fan of Juventus Torino.
- Na zahradě seděla na lavičce tetička.  
On garden sat on bench little aunt.  
Na zahradě seděla na lavičce tetička.

# Myths in Quality



- Backtranslation does not eliminate any extra mistakes that a good editor would not spot
- Attempts to do a creative, natural-looking translation result in a target text quite different from the source ....
  - ....and trigger a looong list of time-consuming PM questions, so ...
  - ... annoyed translator gives up quality and closely follows the source next time, and ...
  - ... quality suffers

# Myths in Quality



- Reason for BT: PM/client do not trust the forward translator and editor.
- What to do: carefully choose your translator and editor but once you do, trust your team – you will save a lot of time and money!

## Myths in Quality



- 6. When translating a device manual AND UI, the best workflow is: Glossary first, then UI and finally the Manual. TRUE or FALSE?*



# Myths in Quality



- Glossary and UI give little or no context – translating those first takes more time and often produces a worse outcome
- The best possible workflow: start with the manual (the best context) and then use it to generate the glossary and UI
- Multi-translator project: have the best translator translate several pages of the manual that include glossary items

## Myths in Quality



- 7. For a good translator, perfect mastering the source language is the most important thing. His/her target language skills are excellent anyway because s/he is – or should be – a native speaker. After all, literary style is not important because we are in technical translation. TRUE or FALSE?*

# Myths in Quality



- To translate, you have to be able to understand the source language, but a perfect knowledge is not needed, and you can learn it more with time.
- Mother tongue (MT) skills widely vary among native speakers, and learning these skills is close to impossible for adults.
- Good MT skills = crisp and clear translation with a native look and feel
- A good translator is able to think out of the box – translate the message, not words

# Myths in Quality



- Each device is for one (1) use only
- Dieses Instrument ist nur für den Einmalgebrauch bestimmt; Chaque dispositif est à usage unique ; Cada dispositivo es válido para un (1) solo uso; Ogni dispositivo è monouso; Cada dispositivo destina-se apenas a uma (1) única utilização; Varje enhet ska användas endast en (1) gång; Elk hulpmiddel is uitsluitend bestemd voor éénmalig (1) gebruik; Hver enhed er kun til én (1) anvendelse; Κάθε συσκευή προορίζεται για μία (1) μόνο χρήση. 各デバイスの使用は1回限りです ; Każde urządzenie przeznaczone jest tylko do jednorazowego (1) użytku; Minden eszköz kizárólag egyszeri (1) használatra szolgál; Každý výrobek je jednorázový.; Her cihaz tek (1) kullanımlıdır; Hver enhet skal kun brukes én (1) gang; Всеки уред е само за еднократна употреба; Fiecare dispozitiv este de unică (1) folosință; Каждое устройство предназначено только для одnorазового использования; Kukin laite on vain yhtä (1) käyttöä varten

# Myths in Quality



- Each device is for one (1) use only
- **Dieses Instrument ist nur für den Einmalgebrauch bestimmt; Chaque dispositif est à usage unique ; Cada dispositivo es válido para un (1) solo uso; Ogni dispositivo è monouso; Cada dispositivo destina-se apenas a uma (1) única utilização; Varje enhet ska användas endast en (1) gång; Elk hulpmiddel is uitsluitend bestemd voor éénmalig (1) gebruik; Hver enhed er kun til én (1) anvendelse; Κάθε συσκευή προορίζεται για μία (1)**

Comment: According to Czech glossary, ¶  
this should be ¶

„Každé zařízení je pouze pro jedno (1) použití.“

¶  
→ **výrobek je jednorázový.**; Her cihaz tek (1) kullanımlıdır; Hver enhet skal kun bruges én (1) gang; **Всеки уред е само за еднократна употреба;** Fiecare dispozitiv este de unică (1) folosință; **Каждое устройство предназначено только для однократного использования;** Kukin laite on vain yhtä (1) käyttöä varten

# Takeaways



- Technical translation quality is the quality for the end user – a text easy to read and understand.
- Quality is then more about literary style than about 100% term/ formatting consistency
- A good translator is the one with a good writing style and out-of-the-box thinking. You can learn terminology but never your mother tongue
- A team of a good translator and a single good editor is enough – complex multilayer QA processes just add costs and hassle with little or no added value
- For the best translation results, a LOT of context is needed. Avoid translating lists of loose words/strings as the first step of your project

# Takeaways



- Translators: The source text is not the Holy Bible – use your common sense, **THINK** and **LOCALIZE**.
- PMs: Make sure you choose good translators with excellent writing skills only – but once you do, **TRUST** them!

# References/Acknowledgments



- Michael Grant's blog on backtranslation  
<http://bdanube.com/category/translation/>

Thanks go to

**Helga Humlova** and **Lenka Mandryszova**

For their valuable inputs, suggestions and feedback when working on this presentation



Thank You!



Thank you!

??????



Questions?

Martin Janda, [martinjanda@volny.cz](mailto:martinjanda@volny.cz)

[www.proz.com/translator/1889](http://www.proz.com/translator/1889)