"Strategies for Revising Translations: Two Scenarios"

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Welcome everybody to this workshop about "Strategies for Revising Translations."

There are two parts. In Part I, I would like to discuss what it entails when you are revising others.

In Part II, I will discuss what can happen when you are being revised and also touch on the infamous and dreaded in-house or in-country review.

Let's start Part I with a couple of statements:

"It is very difficult to be objective."
"It is easier to spot someone else's errors than your own."
"No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else's text."
H. G. Wells.
Would you agree?

I want to point out that I mostly work for agencies. I will touch on revisions for direct clients later.

So, let's revise!
First a word about the term "revising". I have thought long and hard about it, especially since we usually call it "editing" among colleagues, which is not correct. Editing is more creative than revising. And "proofreading" is also not correct since it is the final check before publication and usually done by the original translator. The term "proof" dates back to the early printing process when every letter or character was a small block of metal or wood that had to be lined up for each page. A trial sheet or "proof" would be printed and checked against the original for errors before printing.¹ There is no standard terminology with agreed meanings. In English, the following verbs are used: revise, review, check, re-read, proofread, edit, and quality control.

Having taken several workshops about this subject, I am convinced now that the correct terms are: Revise, Revising, Reviser, Revision. My definition of revision: The process of checking a translation and possibly making corrections or improvements.

But this presentation is not about quibbling and hair-splitting over a term - my intention is to discuss the process of revising and what it entails. It is about the four-eye principle because two heads are better than one and not to revise a translation - your own or somebody else's - is almost a mortal sin.

In the first scenario you are revising others. I want to emphasize that your job is to do no harm! If in doubt, make no change - you may introduce an error. So what exactly is your job then?

Let's start way in the beginning:
A translation agency contacts you and inquires whether you would be available to revise a translation. Unless you have a gift for telepathy you should be briefed about the subject, the word count, the deadline, the audience, and the register and hopefully told who the translator is. That is one of my requirements: I want to know who the translator is. If I feel comfortable I will accept the assignment. Ideally, the agency sends the source text over so you can take a look and make sure you have the expertise before you commit.

Sometimes they give me the name of a translator I do not know and have never worked with, but the agency assures me that they have worked with this linguist for many years and there won't be a problem.

Sometimes the agency refuses to give out the name. Then I reject the job. I strongly believe that we can deliver the best job if translator and reviser work hand in hand. Besides it saves the agency a lot of time.

Let's assume you were talked into taking on the revision of a file from a translator you have never worked with. After a few paragraphs you realize that the translation cannot be used. You stop immediately and inform the agency about your findings. Send the file back with markups and comments right in the beginning of the translation and not after several pages into it - the quality and correctness should be obvious fairly quickly. Add your invoice with your minimum charge. It is up to the agency to decide what to do. It is now no longer your circus - these are no longer your monkeys.
Apropos charge. I charge revising by the hour. It makes total sense: If the translation is good, it won't take an extraordinary long time. If you get a good translation, you should be able to revise at least 1000 words per hour up to 2000 or even more, especially if there are repetitions. If it is mediocre, it will take longer. Therefore, I feel that going by the word count and charging by the word could be a problem.

Hopefully you received a good translation, you make only necessary corrections with track changes (preferably not in red, choose a different color), make no stylistic changes and insert very few comments. Keep comments short, positive and professional. Be aware that the end client might see the comments if the translator does not remove them during finalizing the file. It is up to the translator to check your revisions and accept or reject them, finalize the file and send it to the agency, ideally with a copy to you for your records. This is the best scenario.

The fact that no stylistic changes should be made cannot be stressed enough. You must never dictate your style. It is not your translation. Your job is to correct obvious mistakes, wrong terminology, omissions or additions, inconsistency, wrong register, syntax problems, punctuation errors, wrong quotation marks, typos, numbers....these things you need to keep in mind.

We all have our own approach. I tend to read the translation first and mark all the red flags, then do an exact comparison between source and target text. But avoid perfectionism - no unnecessary changes! Not: CAN this passage be improved? But rather: Does it NEED to be improved?
A colleague of mine told me a story and gave me permission to tell you about it: She had translated 7000 words about banking law and when the translation came back to her....everything was red. She realized quickly that she did not make any mistakes. The reviser just made many stylistic changes. She didn't have the time to compare sentence by sentence, so she clicked on "Accept all" and delivered the job in time. She informed the project manager that both styles were good, but she would prefer never being linked up with this reviser ever again. The project manager laughed and understood.

The same colleague relayed another incident when the reviser did not only make numerous changes, but introduced errors. The reviser happily ignored the fact that this text was to be spoken and therefore she, the translator, had used brief and concise sentences. It took her 8 hours to change the text back and she was largely not reimbursed for the additional time. Sad, but true.

Recently I accepted the assignment to revise the translation of a company newsletter. The name of the translator sounded familiar. I just had a good feeling about it and accepted it and it worked. The translation was good. I did not change style, but I tried to improve a very good translation just a tad more when he was too wordy and tightened it a bit. There were no mistakes, but the end result could be improved, albeit only slightly. I sent the corrected file to the agency and copied the translator. I praised the translation and stated that I only made suggestions. The translator sent me an email and thanked me and told me he accepted everything. This was a successful cooperation. Both of us were fair.
Register is very, very important. You need to know who the audience is. Is this manual for all employees of the company or is it for the executive leadership. Once I had to retranslate a software manual for field personnel. I assumed that these are highly trained and knowledgeable people and used the appropriate register. The manual came back with the remark: "The translation is not wrong, but many of our employees do not quite understand everything." I had to retranslate it and instead of saying "implement" (implementieren in German), I used "introduce" (einführen), etc. They paid me twice.
Again, suitability for the purpose of the translation is important.

There is something what I have named "Ubertranslation". It might read fluently and masterful, but the accuracy is questionable. That is why it is necessary for a reviser to check the translation very carefully. A reviser might be intimidated by Ubertranslation because it sounds so much better than anything the reviser would have accomplished. It reminds me of a quote by Bernard Shaw: "Women are like translations: The beautiful ones are not faithful and the faithful ones are not beautiful." I am sure there are exceptions.

There is so much more to say about revising, but I only have an hour. Ideally there should be a translation project flow chart and everybody adheres to it, especially with large projects.

In an ideal world and if the project is large or several translators are involved, a glossary should be established before translation even begins. I love glossaries and have called myself the Queen of Glossaries. One
translator involved in the project creates a glossary by extracting the most critical terms from the file or files. This glossary is forwarded to the end client, possibly to the in-country subsidiary to check and bless and somebody who knows the company jargon and the specific terminology approves it. Once the most important terms and their translation are approved, the translation project starts. This would eliminate that the infamous and dreaded in-country review goes sour.

There is also self-revision. It goes without emphasizing: You must check your work very carefully before you submit it. You do not leave anything out, leave anything unchecked, thinking that the reviser will catch it. Your translation should ideally be nearly perfect. Even commas are very important. (I prepared a little handout just about commas.) Brian Mossop, a Canadian expert on revising who presented at CHICATA conferences twice, if I remember it correctly, quoted Oscar Wilde as follows:

"I was working on the proof of one of my poems all morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon, I put it back."²

And an English professor wrote the words....

"A WOMAN WITHOUT HER MAN IS NOTHING" on the chalkboard and asked his students to punctuate correctly. All of the males in the class wrote: "A WOMAN, WITHOUT HER MAN, IS NOTHING."

All females in the class wrote: "A WOMAN: WITHOUT HER, MAN IS NOTHING."

I mentioned in the beginning that you should not insert many comments. It takes time for the original translator to read them, to make a decision, to
delete them or, God forbid, forget to delete them. Instead, I suggest that you send on the revised translation with an email and add some notes. Something like this:

"The three terms - self assessment, self evaluation and self rating - seem to be used like synonyms in the English source text. I suggest to use as the German translation throughout: Selbsteinschätzung." This is the literal translation of "self assessment".

A word about direct clients. Direct clients are often unaware of the translation process. They know nothing about revising or why it is necessary. You must do client education. When you accept a translation project from a direct client the revision is always included. The client must be aware of the fact that two linguists are involved and both need to be reimbursed. I have had projects when the client agreed to reimburse the reviser of my choice separately, but the norm is that you include the fee for the reviser in your quote and that you pay the reviser. Most direct clients do not want to be bothered with details.

By the way, the ATA provides a neat little booklet suitable for client education: "Translation Getting it Right - A guide to buying translation." The text is by Chris Durban, a well known American translator who lives in Paris. ATA members may request free copies. I brought an example for you to look at and occasionally I send this booklet to new prospective direct clients.
Now let's get to the more delicious Part II of the presentation:
You are being revised. Most likely by a stranger. And very likely by somebody who is an employee at the company your translation has been commissioned for. In my case, and translating from English into German, my revised translation has been sent to somebody in Germany. The sequence leading up to this step is usually: Agency sends revised translation to client for review. The client could be a company in America, for instance headquarters, with subsidiaries in other countries. The translations I do, especially if it is my specialty, surveys, can go into a dozen other languages. So, they will be sent to Spain, to France, to Italy, to Poland, to Germany, etc. And then we wait. Sometimes a long time. Here is an example from February 2015. I received an email from the Managing Director of an agency:
"Hello Karin, early this month we received client reviews of 8 languages from our project XXX [the topic was Broking and the word count over 10,000 words], which we did early last spring. Why they waited so long is a mystery, but they want us to analyze the changes before they give us the next project.

Given the magnitude of last year's project, and future projects, we are committed to a "review of reviewer" changes and to build a glossary of key terms in the nine languages.

We have reviewed the "reviewer changes" in-house and built a draft glossary for four of the nine languages. My take on the German (which admittedly is the weakest of my five languages) is as follows:
It is an excellent translation. Reviewer changes are almost all stylistic and/or introduce some new material. See attached file which contains the reviewer changes and let me know if the reviewer actually fixed any real translation errors.”

So far, so good. I will be paid for reviewing the reviewer changes and, of course, I want to see them since I have this glossary and might have to update it.

In this example, everything went well. I admitted where I failed: I got the translation of EPL = Employment Practices Liability….wrong, was not consistent with the term "carrier" and had some typos despite having an excellent reviser! However, I found so many questionable corrections and jotted some down for the agency and sent them in as examples of "Scent-Marking", a term I coined:

1) seamless access
my translation: nahtloser Zugriff, a literal German translation
Reviewer: umfassender Zugriff - back translation: comprehensive access

2) comprehensive
my translation: umfangreich
Reviewer: reichhaltig - back translation: extensive

I also listed examples of mistranslations: 7
Examples of omissions: 5

I admitted that it was all in all a good review and that the reviewer knew the subject and terminology.
The client continued the relationship with the agency.

What if the in-country review does not go well?
What to do when a translation client complains?
The first to know will be the agency. The agency will then contact their translators to get their input. One of my agencies has a very good approach. I kept a note I received many years ago from one of their project managers: "I don't know what is going on with these people. Some people will never be happy with things. One thing we do to help our clients (who usually speak English only) understand what's going on with the reviewer is to classify the changes in several broad categories."

This agency created a template for their translators to assist them with the response. I prepared a handout for you and if you ever get into a situation like this, you will be prepared.

Essentially, the agency will ask you to look at the corrections the reviewer made and assign a number to each correction. For instance, a ONE means a correction of a translation error. A TWO means a correction of a grammar/spelling error. A THREE means an introduction of a translation error by the reviewer. A FOUR means an introduction of a grammar/spelling error by the reviewer, etc. It goes up to TEN.

Since good agencies include in their translation project budget possible in-country reviews and extra time and pay for their translators there won't be
any moaning and groaning about this. We all keep our cool, take a deep
breath, check the corrections and respond professionally.

But there are occasions when it gets ugly! I have received files back with so
many red track changes that it looked like the reviewer wrote them with his
own blood! Not all reviewers are fair. There are cases when an employee of
a company feels that he could have done a better job doing the translation
himself and he or she will now try to find fault even though the translation is
good. We might be dealing with jealousy, eagerness, overzealousness....God
knows what is going on. I have names for them like "prima donna",
"vulture", etc.

Claudia Thomshek wrote a wonderful paper about Editors, as she calls
them, but it is in German. I wished it was in English. She categorized the
revisers into four groups:
A) Der Raublektor, freely translated into: The Predatory Reviser
He does not really want to proofread, but tries to pretend to be an expert by
making cunning changes in order to run down the translator.
B) Der Schöngeistlektor, freely translated into: The Esthetic Reviser
He knows that he would have made a great writer. Inflections of speech are
extremely important to him. If he cannot find it beautiful then it is wrong.
C) Der Empathielektor, freely translated into: The Empathy Reviser
He expects the translator not to translate the original sentence, but should be
able to guess what the author meant to express or in other words: what the
Empathy Reviser would like to read. He will cross out entire sentences and
writes new ones. Instead of "Please save your work often", he will write
"Install a backup solution and save your data periodically."
D) Der Kontrolllektor, freely translated into: The Controlling Reviser
He just cannot bear to not change a sentence. He introduces errors just for the sake of changing something around. In one sentence he might change "cleaning" to "sanitizing" and in the next sentence "sanitizing" to "cleaning."\(^4\)

Enough fun with this.

I have permission from the Managing Director of Inline Translation Services, Inc. in California, Richard S. Paegelow, to use any of the material in his PowerPoint presentation at the ATA Conference in New York in 2009: "What to do When a Translation Client Complains."\(^5\)

While he initially thought that this approach to the problem of difficult client reviews that threaten the total relationship appeals only to language service providers, I feel that freelancers can learn a great deal from it and will help them dealing with their agencies, especially when the agency's project managers do not speak the language of the translation being attacked.

Complaint Resolution - what does not work?
It does not work if you ignore, neglect or reject a complaint. Clients will only get irritated.

Complaint Resolution - what works?
The general advice is to take a hands-on approach.
Be prepared to spend significant time.
DON'T GET MAD!
Depersonalize the conflict.
Allow everyone to save face.
Make everyone feel part of the team.
Use a template to analyze the reviewer's corrections and assign a number to each one. Depending on the length of the translation, analyze and respond to each one if under 30. Otherwise analyze and respond to the first 30.
You might want to write up a summary.

To summarize:

**Revising** is the process of checking a translation and possibly making corrections or improvements, without changing style.

**Proofreading** is the final check before printing for publication and usually done by the original translator.

**Editing** is more creative work than Revising. Does it sound right? Editors in publishing houses will often check with the author of the source text to make sure that the text flows smoothly and has no awkward, ambivalent, or unclear passages.

**Reviewing** is often done in-house or in-country by an employee of the end client who is familiar with the subject matter and company jargon.

Translation is always an interpretation. I have even heard statements like: "You don't have to be mad to translate, but it probably helps."

I would like to close with a quote from Umberto Eco, the Italian writer who died in February: "Try as you might, a translated text will never equal the
original. You can come close to conveying the meaning and feeling, but you can never capture it completely. And yet, it's wonderful to try."

NOTES
1  "A Second Pair of Eyes: Revision, Editing, and Proofreading."
3  "Translation Getting it Right - A guide to buying translation." By Chris Durban.
4  Claudia Thomaschek - About Editors.
5  Richard S. Paegolow, Managing Director, Inline Translation Services, Inc.
   "What to do When a Translation Client Complains."

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