The Efficient Translation Flow, a Key to Successful Business

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Abstract: The language industry, including translation services, grew significantly in the last decade in Romania, as well. To cope with increasing and competing market demands, both independent and in-house translators must produce quality translations and focus on volume, speed, and efficiency at the same time. An efficient translation process allows companies to achieve their objectives with the minimum amount of time, money, people, or other resources. For companies, this means maximizing the use of resources with reduced or optimum costs. To be successful, we recommend each translation business to consider developing, including, using, and continually adapting in their daily activities a translation flow, which may differ in complexity depending on the size of the translation project or company.

Keywords: translation process, translation flow, translation company, cost effectiveness

1. Introduction

To be successful, every translation business should set up an efficient translation flow in its activity, which may be formulated under the form of a detailed written procedure, or a simple set of steps to be followed by employees and translators. Such procedures should be implemented by all translation bodies, regardless of whether they are small or medium sized, public or private, independent or a department in a larger company.

An efficient translation flow consists of a clearly defined series of steps, from analysing and accepting the order, until delivery of the final product. Translators

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should get used with the concept of a translation flow, no matter the size or type of their business. A translation flow tailored to the size and type of the company will help companies reduce costs, use time efficiently, offer higher volumes and a more qualitative output, which will ultimately increase the prestige and professionalism of the company on the labour market. Last but not least, the existence and implementation of a translation flow in a company is usually associated with the existence of standards (Dejica 2016), which, for clients, is a proof of quality translation. The present paper presents some research-based recommendations which can be used by professionals to set up an efficient translation flow in their translation companies.

2. Method and design

We identified several types of translation flows in companies of different types and sizes. Some of the characteristics of the translation flows we identified are that they are public and published in different types of informative materials available either in printed format or on their websites (especially in the case of public companies, DG Translation, 2012, 2016, and in some cases, private companies), that only in some of the cases all the steps of the translation flow are detailed, and that in some of the cases, freelance translators do not have or use a fixed or established translation flow, but they adapt it depending on each translation situation. An important number of early-stage freelance translators admitted of not being used with the concept of translation flow, but that they follow a series of steps in the process of translation, which they developed and used by themselves. We have also encountered some cases in which private companies admitted having and using a translation flow but did not want to make it public or share it with us for confidentiality reasons.

3. Basic principles for an efficient translation flow

We set up a repository of the translation flows we identified which we synthetised in the following set of recommendations, grouped under three stages: pre-production, production and post-production.

3.1. Pre-production

The main aim of this stage is to understand the translation commission (Nord 1997), analyze the client's requirements and the feasibility of the project (volume, deadlines, quality of the source text), so as to offer the client a quote associated with a realization schedule.

First, the project manager, which in the case of small-sized companies may be the translator himself/herself, needs to make sure that the document to be translated is in full, and to clarify the type of translation requested by the client (interdependent, dependent, full-content, selective or reduced) (Sager 1997). The

manager fills out an application or translation sheet, which includes information on the quantity of text to be translated (number of characters or words), deadline, billing and delivery information. The information in the translation sheet may be filled out by the project manager himself/herself (face-to-face, by phone or using a video-conference system with the client), or even by the client. The discussions with the client in this stage are diversified and depend on the size and complexity of the project. For a competitive quote, the manager may use dedicated software such as word count tools.

Other information which may be clarified with the client is related to the mode of delivery of the translation (gradual delivery of parts of the document based on interim deadlines, or full delivery, at the end of the project), type of delivery (electronic or printed format), channel (online transfer, by snail mail, etc.) payment methods (number and dates of instalments, upfront payment for part or all the service, etc.), confidentiality policies, deadlines (including failure to follow the deadlines, the possibility to extend the deadline) or quotes for extra working hours to meet a tight deadline, etc. Depending on the size and nature of the translation project, this information may also be part of a contract between the client and the translation company.

Finally, once all the necessary information is clarified and gathered, the manager will offer a quote and based on the client's decision will continue with the next step.

3.2. Production

Once the conditions of delivery have been set and the quote accepted, the project manager launches the project by assigning it to one or several translators. Depending on the size and complexity of the translation job, the team may be enlarged with other specialists, including terminologists or IT specialists. One of the first steps in the production stage is to define the software applications or packages needed for the project, which may include word editors, image processing tools, translation memory tools, terminology management tools, concordance tools, reference tools, or any other dedicated software for the successful completion of the project. During this stage, the translation project manager continuously monitors the progress and if necessary, facilitates the communication between the client and the translator(s) for any possible questions or clarifications. Once the translation is done, a quality check needs to be performed, which may be externalised or assigned to a professional proof-reader or reviser within the same company. In some cases, the quality check may be done by the translator himself/herself or by a peer translator, and may be cross-checked by the project manager himself/herself, if they are also translators. The quality check usually focuses on language errors, including punctuation and spelling, appropriate use of translation strategies, use of proper layout, and last but not least, compliance with the client's requirements.

3.3. Post-production

Once delivered to the client according to his/her requirements, the project is usually saved and stored in the agency. This activity may be performed for the client, for a period mutually agreed with the client, during which it may be made accessible to him/her if requested (this service may be free or paid, as established in the pre-translation stage or after delivery), or it may be performed based on the internal archiving policies of the company. The post-production stage may also involve the classification of any other side-products resulting from the translation project (glossaries, term bases, translation memories, etc.) for quick and easy access in the future. Finally, it is not unusual in this stage for the translator or translation team, especially in the case of complex or challenging projects, to produce a brief report highlighting the problems encountered (language specific, translation problems, technical problems) and the solutions offered. Such reports may prove to be extremely useful for future similar projects.

4. A basic checklist for an efficient translation flow

Based on the principles presented in the previous section, we synthetise some of the most frequent questions which may be addressed during the translation flow to ensure its efficiency. The list is open and by far exhaustive, should be regarded in a flexible way, and may be used as a source for designing specific translation flows for projects of different sizes and scopes.

Translation stages	Checklist
Pre-production	*Source / target text related* ☐ What is the source / target language? What is the language pair of the project? ☐ Who authored the text? A native / non-native speaker? ☐ Is it written in a good language? ☐ What field does it belong to? How specialised is it? ☐ What type of target text is requested (Full, selective translation? For a different type of audience? Etc.)? *Audience, users* ☐ Who is the intended audience? ☐ How will the translation be used? As a public document, as a confidential document, internally (in a company), etc.? *Technical* ☐ If the file you receive from the client in final form, or is it a working version which will suffer modifications? ☐ Is the source text clear? Is it a good quality print / scan? Are there any portions which are not visible?

	☐ If the source text in full, or you have access only to a part of the text for evaluation and quotation purposes?
	☐ What is the size of the text (number of characters, words)?
	☐ For larger projects, is a count tool needed to check repetitions?
	☐ What is the form of the source text file? Printed, electronic? If electronic, which format (docx., pdf, jpeg, etc?)
	☐ Is there any specific software application requested by the client for the project?
	Delivery
	☐ What is the form of the target text to be delivered? Identical to / different from the source text? Does the client have any special requirements?
	☐ For larger projects, can the translation be delivered gradually or in full?
	Time-management
	☐ What is the deadline? Can an extended deadline be established?
	Payment
	☐ Is there a billing policy? Are upfront payments required (especially in the case of large translation projects)?
	Client based
	☐ Who recommended the client? Do you have a history together? Does he follow payments?
	[similar questions may be addressed by the client: Is the translation provider serious and professional? Are deadlines followed accurately? Does the agency use in-house or external translators? Are they professional or certified translators? Is there any quality check?]
Production	[to be decided as soon as the quote is accepted by the client]
	☐ Will one or several translators do the translation?
	☐ Depending on the complexity and size of the translation task, should there a team be established? Who else is needed in the team: terminologist, IT specialist, Web designer, etc.?
	☐ Will the team use existing translation memories, termbases? Create new ones?
	☐ Can any threats be identified, which will prevent timely delivery of the translation (interpersonal, technical, different time zones, etc.)?
	[to be addressed during the translation process]
	☐ How is the progress monitored by the project manager?
	☐ How is communication facilitated between the client and translator(s) if needed?
	☐ How is communication facilitated between the translator and other specialists in the field of the translation if needed (for

		clarification purposes)?
	☐	Once the translation is done, who performs the proofreading? Internal, external proofreaders?
	☐	How is communication between the proof-reader and translator ensured, if needed (for example, for clarification purposes of certain text segments)?
	☐	Who performs the final check (after revision, or desktop publishing, if needed)?
Post-production	☐	Is there a sustainability policy in the company?
	☐	In what ways are translation memories, terminological term-bases reused / developed?
	☐	In what ways are existing translations used?
	☐	Is there any confidentiality policy?
	☐	Is there an archive management system? Are the translations kept for clients? If yes, for how long? Is this a free or paid service for the client?
	☐	Do translators draft a report as soon as the translation task is done? What does it consist of? Translation problems / solutions?

Table 1 A basic checklist for an efficient translation flow

5. Conclusion and future steps

We started from the hypothesis that an efficient translation flow is a prerequisite for a successful translation project on a competitive market characterised by speed, volume, and quality. Our search showed that some companies do use elaborate translation flows, which are made public in various printed informative materials or on their websites, yet others, especially small businesses or freelance translators use only simplified versions of such translation flows. In some isolated cases, we noticed that freelance translators are not familiar with the concept, even if in time they developed their own system, based on their experience.

One of the purposes of this article, which is part of a wider research project, is to raise awareness of the importance of an efficient translation flow, to familiarize freelance translators and small businesses with the concept and to encourage them to implement it in their daily translation activities. We consider that the existence of a public translation flow in a company is a mark of professionalism and a proof of quality.

The basic principles of an efficient translation flow, which we described and illustrated in this article, represent a synthesis of existing translation flows on the market and are combined with our experience as translators and the recommendations from the specialised literature in the field (Biel 2017, Chartier-Brun 2018, EAMT 1998). The principles refer mainly to the translation of written texts but may be extended to or adapted for any other form of multidimensional translation (Dejica, D. & A. Dejica-Cartis, 2020).

The list is open and by far exhaustive, should be regarded in a flexible way, and may be used as a foundation for anyone who intends to implement or update such a flow in their companies. This is also in line with our goal, as we want to come up with efficient models of translation flows designed for everyone who is working in the language industry, from freelance translators to large translation companies.

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