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CHAPTER 04

INSTITUTIONAL AND IN-HOUSE TRANSLATION

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4
INSTITUTIONAL AND IN-HOUSE TRANSLATION

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1 Introduction

Institutional translation, as a broad concept encompassing all translation processes and products in or for institutions, covers multiple facets of and approaches to both in-house and outsourced translation managed by institutions. In-house translation can be considered intrinsic to institutional translation, regardless of the internal procedures and outsourcing levels of each organisation. At the same time, in-house translation is not exclusive to multilingual national or international institutions. It is also found in the translation industry to varying degrees, including language service providers (LSPs) and other private companies.

The translation services of public institutions are traditionally considered the main paradigm of institutional and in-house translation. This is because of the prominence of large institutional translation services dealing with high volumes of in-house translation, and their crucial role in ensuring the sustained multilingual text production of national or international organisations that are typically responsible for multilingual policy- and law-making. The continuity of their text production, in line with established legal frameworks and procedures, and the public impact and accountability of these institutions accentuate the need for in-house translation expertise to guarantee sustainable reliability and consistency in multilingual communication.

Private companies operating across borders also often rely on in-house translation professionals to ensure quality communication. In the case of LSPs employing in-house translators, they may actually provide services to public institutions, but as opposed to institutional in-house translation staff, their work is also aimed at corporate profit-making and is not fully devoted to a single institution, as the content they translate is normally of diverse origins. In such scenarios, the responsibility for the final quality of their translation products, including the conformity to institutional conventions and expectations, ultimately lies with the in-house staff of the commissioning institutional translation services (e.g., Strandvik, 2017).

This chapter examines the current practices in these institutional settings, with a focus on the translation services of EU institutions and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). We will review the main features of institutional translation, the role and requirements of in-house translation professionals, and the various components of institutional translation workflows and quality management, including interactions with stakeholders and external or outsourced

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service providers, translation quality assurance (TQA), and technological developments. These aspects will be illustrated by the practices of several international organisations (IOs), drawing on official data, research findings, and multiple professional consultations. The role of in-house translation professionals in the private sector will also be considered based on several interviews with selected managers within the translation industry. Finally, the challenges and opportunities of recent developments will be discussed from the perspective of quality management and the sustainability of institutional translation. Overall, the chapter draws to a great extent on the practical experience and research work of its co-authors as institutional translation "insiders", including a wealth of data gathered through informal exchanges, observations, and multiple analyses, such as the full mapping of workflows and practices conducted as part of the LETRINT project on translation in international institutional settings, comprising several EU institutions and global IGOs.[1]

2 Features of Institutional Translation

Most studies in the field point to institutional missions and conventions as the most distinctive aspects conditioning institutional translation policies and practices. As noted by Mossop (1988, p.65), "the goals of a translating institution are what determines the general approach taken in the translations it produces". In line with this idea, Koskinen (2014, p.481) argues that "regulatory organizational systems (i.e., institutions) that operate in a multilingual environment can and often do employ translation in performing their governing function. In that case, they *govern by translation*". Indeed, in the case of IOs, the overall goal of supranational governance and policy implementation in multiple areas, including regulatory and monitoring functions, lies at the heart of the common core of institutional missions (Prieto Ramos, 2014).

A comparative study of multilingual text production across major IOs identified several interrelated central functions from a legal perspective: law- and policy-making, implementation monitoring, and adjudication, as well as associated administrative and internal management functions (Prieto Ramos, 2014, 2019). As part of the LETRINT project, a large-scale corpus analysis of text production of the four main EU institutions, the United Nations (UN), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) over three years yielded a more precise picture of the primary genres that typically perform such functions (e.g., EU directives or UN treaties within law-making) and other genres that contribute to the production of primary genres or derive from them (e.g., minutes or press releases) (for a detailed account of translation volumes per genre, see Prieto Ramos and Guzmán, 2021). The findings corroborate the high prominence of law-making at the EU institutions (more than two-thirds of translation volumes, except for the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU), primarily devoted to judicial functions), as opposed to the greater textual production in monitoring processes at the UN and the WTO (approximately two-thirds of translation volumes).

These findings align with official translation statistics and reflect the features of each organisation. Given its unique nature as a supranational political union, the EU produces legislation that is directly applicable in its Member States and has a direct impact on citizens' daily lives to an extent that other IOs do not. In fact, the EU language services translate massive volumes of legal acts and policy texts, as well as a smaller proportion of outreach material that supports public awareness and citizen engagement. For the European Parliament (EP), this is rather obvious, but it applies also to the European Commission (EC) and the Council of the EU (CoEU). For example, in 2022, more than 50% of the content translated by the EC and the CoEU was legislation; another 20%–25% related to the decision-making process; and 20% was outreach material (external communication, brochures, web material, etc.).[2]

In these EU and other international institutional settings, the source texts translated are predominantly drafted in English (with the exception of the CJEU, where French is the working language). For example, in 2022, 84.4% of the source texts were drafted in English in the EP, while this proportion was 91.6% in the EC and 86.5% in the CoEU in 2023. The language of originals can be broadly described as institutional uses of English as a *lingua franca* for institutional needs according to organisation-specific discourse conventions (Prieto Ramos, 2014, pp.317–319). In the case of the EU, this institutional language has been denominated 'Eurospeak' or 'Eurolect' (e.g., Mori, 2018).

Apart from a high level of standardisation, institutional discourses are also highly specialised and hybrid as a result of the diversity of subject matters, drafting inputs, and interactions between bodies and with Member States or other stakeholders. Their thematic heterogeneity is reflected, for instance, in the distribution of terminology and phraseology in institutional documents (for the first corpus-driven breakdown of its kind, see Prieto Ramos and Cerutti, 2022). As an example, the translation of an EU legal act or a WTO agreement will not only typically require knowledge of the applicable legal framework, its legal terminology, and the drafting conventions for each genre, but also some knowledge (or translation-oriented research) of the subject matter, which can be as diverse as the operations of nuclear power plants or the use of phytosanitary products in agriculture.

Semantic accuracy and (intra- and intertextual) consistency are key quality requirements of institutional translation in order to ensure reliability, uniform interpretation in the different language versions, and, therefore, legal certainty (e.g., Prieto Ramos, 2014, p.314; Robertson, 2015, p.41). This entails observing institutional reference material, such as style guides and terminological databases (e.g., Stefaniak, 2017; Svoboda, 2017). Contributing to building and updating such resources and maintaining their quality are therefore among the functions of institutional in-house translation staff. However, the translation services of smaller organisations may not have the capacity or the need to build such resources to the extent of those of larger institutions.

In fact, many of the practices found in large translation services (e.g., diversification of in-house profiles, tool development, and TQA strategies), or their level of sophistication and systematisation, remain a model for other organisations with more modest resources or needs. Whereas the pursuit of translation quality in line with institutional conventions and priorities emerges as a commonality in all institutional settings, specific policies and practices may vary significantly across organisations, for example, when translating for national courts or government departments in officially monolingual countries (e.g., Killman, 2020; Schäffner et al., 2014) as opposed to an international court (e.g., Tomić and Beltrán Montoliu, 2013), or for a non-governmental organisation (e.g., Pym, 2008; Tesseur, 2018) as opposed to the legislative bodies of a multilingual State (e.g., Canavese, 2023). Yet, regardless of the specificities of each translation service, the core features described here apply to all these settings and the input of in-house translators is critical across the board, as we will elaborate in the next section.

3 In-House Translation Professionals

In large and medium-sized institutions, the bulk of the translation work has traditionally been carried out by in-house translators employed on a long-term basis, with a proportion of temporary staff integrated into the same in-house translation teams, usually for regular periods of time. There are many reasons for this. Being part of the organisation makes it possible to build expertise and long-term relationships, and understand and absorb the 'corporate culture' of the institution, to provide high quality consistently, and speak with one institutional voice in each language.

Moreover, for institutions dealing with sensitive information, in-house translators give rise to fewer confidentiality issues. In-house translation also provides the flexibility to keep fast turnaround times, which is particularly important in political institutions.

In addition, interacting directly with the drafters of the source texts, or experts inside the institution, in a way that is often impossible in the private sector, makes project communication more simple. For example, in a survey of the commissioning of outsourced translations including 387 participants from 41 countries, Scott (2019, pp.122–141) found that 91% of legal translation assignments reached translators without any specifications about the purpose and 94% without specification about the end user. In contrast, institutional translation is actually a 'quality filter' in the processes of multilingual text production, as in-house translators detect imperfections that may lead to corrections in institutional drafts (Prieto Ramos, 2014, pp.320, 326).

Overall, the size and needs of translation services normally determine the level of profile diversification and specialisation for the distribution of tasks within in-house translation teams. Large organisations often have the human resources to conduct in-house revision work according to TQA criteria (see Section 5), and individual staff members may develop domain expertise in specific policy areas or contribute to tasks such as terminology management, tool development, or quality monitoring. Some in-house translators or revisers may also eventually work as, for example, terminologists, project coordinators, quality advisers, outreach focal points, or training convenors (see, e.g., Strandvik, 2020). The title, nature, and rank of each function vary across institutions (see also Prieto Ramos and Guzmán, 2022). For example, in most IGOs, reviser positions are hierarchically higher than translation positions and require a certain level of in-house experience, while translation service managers are normally staff with an advanced career in the field. In the EU institutions, however, translation expertise and experience are not acknowledged similarly for management and revision duties. The prevailing approach is to consider that all translators can also work as revisers, so there is no hierarchical difference between them, and in some institutions, translation managers might not be experts in translation (see also Section 5.3).

In performing revision functions, the reviser indicates any errors detected and suggests improvements. The translator implements the corrections or discusses with the reviser in case of disagreement. In many EU institutions, the translator can even disregard the reviser's suggestions. The rationale behind this approach is that for the reviser to overrule the translator, the reviser would need to dive as deeply into the file as the translator, and that would not be efficient (see also Riondel, 2021). Furthermore, in the case of the EU's interinstitutional legislative procedure, the lawyer-linguists of the EP and the CoEU carry out a final legal revision where they normally do not consult the translators.

As for the competences required of translation professionals in institutional settings, a comparative analysis of 224 vacancy notices issued by multiple organisations (the main EU institutions, the UN and its International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the WTO) between 2005 and 2020 revealed that core language and translation (or strategic) competences are systematically required (100% of vacancy notices), followed by interpersonal and professional management competence (97.92% for reviser positions and 84.65% for translators), thematic (or domain) competence (91.94% and 78.37%, respectively), and instrumental (or technological) competence (88.39% of translators' notices and 86.38% of revisers' notices) (Prieto Ramos and Guzmán, 2022).

As also elicited in multiple interviews conducted as part of the LETRINT project, adaptations to technological developments have been gradual, and it is generally considered that institution-specific translation tools can be learnt on the job. As corroborated by a recent large-scale survey of translation professionals of 24 IOs (Prieto Ramos, 2024a), the relevance of this instrumental competence has increased with the popularisation of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and neural machine translation (NMT),[3] but this competence remains less critical than language, translation (or strategic), and thematic competences to ensure translation quality. These core competences seem to have become even more relevant, as post-editing and other forms of text reuse and editing interventions have become an integral part of daily translation practice and require core translational skills (Prieto Ramos, 2024a, 2024b, 2025; and Section 6).

The enhanced accessibility of institutional translation resources and the possibilities of remote work have facilitated the combination of in-house and external inputs in institutional translation workflows (see Section 4), even within the same translation projects. While the risks associated with outsourcing largely depend on external contracting approaches and conditions, the interaction between in-house translation staff and external translators has become increasingly prevalent in institutional settings. A recent examination of approaches to institutional translation quality management (Prieto Ramos, 2020) showed that smaller organisations with unstable translation needs or institutions with limited human resources for particular language combinations often heavily rely on external translation. In such cases, in-house staff might even be limited to a single translation professional, whose role focuses on project management and TQA, including assigning translations, developing materials to promote consistency and compliance with specifications, and implementing quality control. In other words, a smaller in-house service will entail a more limited distribution of in-house tasks and a greater concentration of high-impact functions among those who manage translation workflows relying on external service providers. The translation expertise of those in-house staff therefore becomes the more critical.

In fact, fully-fledged language services and translation expertise are not always found in small institutions where translation needs are sometimes addressed through more informal arrangements. Action research conducted in this kind of setting (Prieto Ramos and Sperandio, 2020) illustrated the very positive impact of employing a translation professional to manage translation matters in two institutions that initially employed no in-house qualified translator. The impact on translation quality was dramatic as shown by a comparative error analysis of target texts produced before and after the in-house expert interventions. The changes represented no additional cost for the organisations, as in-house translation expertise also enabled a more quality- and cost-effective management of outsourcing.

Similar approaches including in-house and external inputs are found in private companies, including large international corporations who regularly need to adapt their communication for multiple language regions. Likewise, in-house translators also play a key role in LSPs in the commercial sector, although they usually account for a small portion of the translation work. In line with market and technology developments, the translation industry evolves towards a situation where large, medium, or even small LSPs increasingly act as 'brokers' or intermediaries buying and selling a wide range of language services, matching client needs with the language experts who carry out the actual translation, revision, post-editing, or evaluation tasks. As formulated by Slator (2024),

> to survive, LSPs have learned to keep internal costs for project management, sales, and operations tight, and carefully manage spend on (typically only a few) in-house linguists while using their freelance expert linguist cost as the main variable absorbing fluctuating client demand.

In other words, LSPs are careful about hiring in-house translators. Where in-house translators remain, they tend to focus on tasks other than translation proper, including, in particular, project management, TQA, and translation quality evaluation (TQE); or are involved in the translation of the most sensitive or confidential content. Sometimes it is on the client's explicit request to collaborate closely with the client's marketing team or subject matter experts. Having in-house translators as a point of contact or taking care of quality management can be a vital way for LSPs to build trust and ensure a solid understanding of client expectations (see Chapter 24). It can boost engagement of in-country service providers, enabling people to communicate in languages other than English, which can be important from a cultural efficiency perspective if the company interacts with local offices of global clients or local clients in countries where such sensitivities exist. Finally, for languages or countries with lesser resources, having in-house translators can be a means to building a talent pool to cope reliably with all localisation and quality requirements over time.

4 Institutional Translation Workflows

Institutional translation workflows vary depending on the specificities of each institution, including their translation volumes, the availability of resources, and the applicable quality requirements, i.e., the stakeholders' needs and expectations, which in the case of large institutions, are expressed in legal provisions, mission statements or guidelines (see Chapter 5). In fully-fledged translation services, the workflows generally correspond to those described in translation standards, such as ISO 17100:2015, ISO 11669:2024, or ASTM F2575-2023, comprising three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production.

The pre-production stage, before translation starts, typically comprises activities such as managing incoming translation requests; pre-processing of source content, including performing content analysis and technical quality checks, preparatory monolingual or multilingual terminology work; and allocating the tasks, including decisions on outsourcing and quality control unless such decisions are pre-established.

The production stage typically entails workflow management, using more or less advanced translation management systems (TMSs). It may include, apart from translating, tasks such as revising, proofreading, and evaluating translations, using CAT tools topped up with MT, termbases, quality assessment (QA) tools, and – for outsourcing – some kind of evaluation tools or scorecards (see Part III: Resources and management). It may also involve a varying amount of project communication: consulting internal or external subject field experts where relevant; consulting requesters with queries for clarifications or informing about detected errors and inconsistencies; and sharing the corresponding replies from requesters with in-house translators or external contractors. For the outsourced production, TQE typically takes place before the institution's release to the internal requesters, to enable escalation of the quality control where needed.

Finally, the post-production stage, after release of the translation product to the requester, typically includes activities such as follow-up on feedback, including complaints and correction requests; providing feedback to contractors on performance; regular or occasional ex-post monitoring of translation quality; and adopting corrective measures and improvement actions accordingly, such as linguistic data management, including the curation of translation memories, termbases, and updates to templates and guidelines. In turn, these actions may also be used for lessons learned exercises and, ultimately, for benchmarking and exchange of good practices across language units within the institution or within each language community across similar organisations.

Institutional translation workflows thus comprise webs of numerous potential interactions, where project communication takes place between actors in different roles, when needed. The complexity of the workflows requires flexibility to ensure efficiency and quality. In smaller organisations or in particularly urgent scenarios, the processes in each stage may be simplified and reduced to the most essential service provision tasks of request processing, translation and, to the extent possible, quality control.

In practice, the frequency and conditions of the above interactions may vary not only between institutions but also between production processes and language departments. For example, in the EU's legislative procedure, the EC's translators have more privileged access to the requesters for queries and clarifications than the translators in the CoEU and the EP, where amendments of the draft legislation are often the result of political negotiations between the Member State representatives or MEPs, respectively, and therefore more difficult to influence linguistically. In contrast, in the CoEU and the EP, translators have a more direct access to their lawyer-linguists.

Furthermore, the way in which language departments organise their query interaction with national experts also depends on the Member State concerned. Some official EU languages are spoken in more than one Member State, which adds complexity. In multilateral organisations such as the UN, this complexity increases considerably where contacts for Spanish or Arabic, for example, need to take all Spanish- and Arabic-speaking countries, respectively, into account.

An extreme example of a complex workflow in the EU context is the so-called ordinary legislative procedure for the adoption of EU regulations and directives. The EC prepares the draft legislation, which is subsequently negotiated, amended, and voted on by the EP and the CoEU. This procedure involves a translation workflow in each of the institutions. The EC produces the draft legislation. Its legal service revises the legislative drafting of the source language version, and thereafter the translators draft the translated equally authentic language versions. Once the EC has adopted the draft legislation in all the official language versions, the other institutions negotiate and propose amendments, and their language services translate these amendments. After that, there is a final legal revision stage of all language versions carried out by the lawyer-linguists in the legal services of the EP and the CoEU (for more details, see Ringe, 2022, pp.205–210).

5 Translation Quality Management

As mentioned above, the implementation of translation processes is crucially conditioned by resource allocation and quality requirements. In this sense, the management of institutional translation workflows is primarily shaped by translation quality management policies and decisions. As described by Vlachopoulos (2009, p.17), "the improvement of translation quality is as much a managerial challenge as it is a linguistic and technical one". The 33 interviews conducted with institutional translation service managers as part of the LETRINT project pointed to three major interrelated translation management challenges with regard to TQA across settings (Prieto Ramos, 2017, pp.71–72): resource availability and related productivity pressures; scales and procedures of outsourcing; and workflow changes and expectations derived from technological developments. We will briefly examine the first two challenges and other aspects of institutional translation management in this section, while technological developments will be the subject of a separate section.

5.1 Institutional Approaches to TQA and Cost-Effectiveness

For many years, institutional translation services were to some extent protected from the harsh return-on-investment constraints under which most of the private translation sector operates. During the last two decades, however, this has gradually changed, and institutional translation settings are no longer such an exception. While working conditions in these settings remain generally privileged, institutional translation services are exposed to the same efficiency requirements and cost-cutting trends as other operators in the translation market. They must often cope with increasing translation volumes while relying on fixed or even decreasing financial or human resources.

As noted by Görög (2014, p.388),

> [t]he only way to offer large amounts of information and goods in multiple languages fast while staying within reasonable budgets is by making a compromise and provide content with different levels of quality using new translation channels and translation technology.

While private LSPs may thus offer various levels of translation quality and prices according to client needs and cost-profit principles, in institutional translation it is more difficult to implement less-than-optimal quality, especially as high-quality standards are a condition to preserve legal certainty and equal access to information in all official languages. In fact, the reputational, legal, and even financial costs of bad translation quality in multilingual organisations can be extremely high (see, e.g., Directorate-General for Translation [DGT], European Commission, 2012). In this context, the motto – as for most sectors of public administration – has rather become 'to do more with less' by adopting more nuanced approaches to TQA, and by embracing the efficient use of translation technology to support productivity gains. For example, in its resolution 75/252 of 31 December 2020, the UN General Assembly approved an increase of the workload standard for translators from 5 to 5.8 pages per day based on "productivity gains, enabled over the years by new working methods and technologies".

As a result, traditional models of systematic quality control have evolved into TQA models where the level of quality control is modulated according to content type, and revision is not applied by default, but based on risk assessment (see, e.g., Prioux and Rochard, 2007; Hanzl and Beaven, 2017; Strandvik, 2015, 2018, 2020). relevance of risk management has accordingly become one of the pillars of the translation quality management systems. This more conscious and systematic approach to quality management has implied a rethinking of business models and streamlining of working methods, very similar to what is taking place in the private sector, with more emphasis on cost-effectiveness, translation quality management, risk management, and project management. This trend is most often coupled with expectations of higher productivity supported by technological developments, and also, in certain organisations, with the gradual downsizing of in-house staff (increasingly centred on the higher-risk content and higher-value tasks) while simultaneously outsourcing a growing proportion of the translation work.

As an example of staff reductions, the EC had roughly 100 in-house translators per language 25 years ago, compared to approximately 50 today. In the CoEU and the EP, there were around 50, compared to some 25 today. The trend is similar in all EU institutions. The downsizing process was initiated by the so-called big bang enlargement of 2004, where nine new official languages were added overnight bringing the total to 20 (see, e.g., Strandvik, 2018). At the time, it was politically impossible to argue for a doubling of the translating in-house staff, as the amount of translators over the total number of EU officials would have become disproportionate. It was also a challenge to find that amount of qualified translators in all the acceding countries. Considering that the number of official languages has more than doubled since then, however, this does not mean that the total amount of in-house translators decreased immediately. The total figure including all EU institutions and official languages dropped from roughly 4,000 to 3,000 over a period of 20 years.

In parallel to this development, translation demand has continued to increase. For example, in the EC, from 2017 to 2022, the total production increased by 28%, while outsourcing increased by 53% and in-house staff decreased by 12% (European Commission, 2023). A similar pattern emerges, to varying degrees, in other EU institutions, except for cases such as the CoEU, with stable volumes to translate and practically no outsourcing. While the above trends apply across the board, changes in the IGOs tend to be more gradual, as their language regime has remained globally stable. For example, in the UN, the total translation workload increased from 235 million to 243 million words in the 2017–2022 period, i.e., only by 3.4%. As a crucial factor contributing to stability, more than 90% of documents submitted for processing over this period were in line with the mandated or agreed word limits (United Nations, 2023, p.13).

In fact, apart from streamlining and downsizing measures, many organisations have also adapted their demand management with a view to identifying document types that might not need to be translated, setting caps for lengths and versions, and to systematically use service level agreements specifying requirements and conditions (see, e.g., European Commission, 2016). While measures such as these sound practical, in a political organisation they are still difficult to enforce unless additional billing strategies are introduced, since the internal translation service is there to deliver what needs to be translated, regardless.

5.2 Outsourcing Practices

As outlined in Section 3, institutional translation services have traditionally resorted to temporary contractual and external translators for part of their translation work. The combined management of in-house and external inputs, with variable proportions and formulas, is the norm rather than the exception in large and medium-sized institutional translation services. In this context, outsourcing levels have registered an upward trend in recent years. This has been facilitated by enhanced remote accessibility to institutional resources and translation tools, which are critical for ensuring conformity to institutional practices. As an example, in 2023, the outsourcing rate in the EP was 32% and in the EC it reached 40% (it was 23% ten years ago). An exception in the EU context is the CoEU, which hardly outsources 1% of its production.

The volume of outsourced translation may vary depending on changing translation needs (e.g., production peaks derived from specific events or processes), specific demands for which suitable expertise is not available in-house (e.g., for particular language pairs or certain specialised subjects), or managerial decisions to cope with increasing translation volumes at no additional cost for the institution. In fact, outsourcing is typically associated to lower cost but also higher risks for translation quality in particular. As noted by Sirovec (2020, p.205), "the outsourced translations more often than not need to be adapted to 'in-house lingo' or to internal linguistic and stylistic conventions", and "in-house translators work on outsourced translations beyond the contractual obligation of evaluating the quality of the service paid and beyond the strict correction of errors", which actually represents "an additional burden on internal resources". From a broader perspective, ISO 37500:2014 (guidance on outsourcing) argues that there is also a risk for an outsourcing organisation to be gradually drained of key competence with potentially problematic long-term consequences when it is the core business that is being outsourced.

Overall, the ultimate level of risk will fluctuate according to several factors, including the volume and type of texts outsourced, the external contracting approach and the risk-mitigation mechanisms implemented. Efforts are made to identify parts of the production that are more suitable for outsourcing. Nowadays, practically anything can be outsourced, with the frequent exception of very urgent, politically sensitive or confidential documents. In some institutions, an increasing number of document types are no longer translated in-house at all. Another implication of growing outsourcing proportions is that, as mentioned above, the role of in-house staff is being diversified so that they do less translation and more TQE tasks, apart from tasks such as preparing and pre-processing the files for outsourcing.

As for the approaches to outsourcing, IGOs have traditionally relied on a pool of individual external translators whose competence has been tested by the translation service and whose profiles meet particular institutional needs. These translators often work for the same organisation on a regular basis and, at times, even exclusively. This approach reduces quality-related risks in that the external translators are integrated into the translation workflows based on their individual expertise, they are directly accountable for their work and regularly interact with their in-house peers. Feedback can also be more direct, which contributes to longer-term specialisation, quality improvements, and relationships of trust. In this model, the institutions invest in highly competent individual translators through testing and competitive rates.

This contrasts with outsourcing approaches where contracts are assigned to (often large) translation companies for a segment of the translation work and it is the external contractors, rather than the institutional translation service, that select individual translators for specific assignments. Given the profit-making aims of the intermediary contractors, the actual rates for individual translators are normally less competitive than in the previous model, while risks tend to increase significantly, including more unpredictable product quality and more uncertainty as to the level of post-delivery interventions required (Prieto Ramos, 2017, p.71).

In order to mitigate the risks associated with outsourcing, efforts are made to improve the pre-treatment of files, job specifications, knowledge sharing, and access to resources to enable contractors to deliver high-quality translations; and specific TQE procedures apply to outsourced translations (e.g., Strandvik, 2017; Sirovec, 2020; and next sub-section). In the second outsourcing model in particular, other measures to promote quality include dynamic ranking, with a limited number of contractors, where the highest ranked get the jobs, and where performance over time can change the ranking; and framework contracts where the winner is retained as the primary contractor for a particular language combination and other contractors are only engaged as backup.

5.3 Monitoring Quality

In a context of rapidly changing working methods, it is increasingly important to monitor quality not only of internal production, but also of the outsourced translations, to ensure that efficiency is improved without compromising quality, despite higher risk-taking. However, it is difficult to establish indicators – absence of errors or complaints, customer satisfaction surveys, or other data – and to interpret and apply them consistently so that they are valid and meaningful measures of quality. To address this challenge, the EC can serve as an example, having opted for monitoring several proxies for quality, which, in conjunction, are useful to monitor the overall trends. This broader monitoring approach encompasses the following areas: degree of understanding and implementation of the translation quality policy and the operational guidelines; monitoring of working methods (work assignment, translation, revision, risk logs, risk management, evaluation, validation); availability, uptake, targeting, and updates of IT tools; feedback and correction requests; ex-post evaluation of production and processes; and user and staff satisfaction surveys (Strandvik, 2020, p.479).

Around 2018, in an attempt to adapt to increasing outsourcing, the EU institutions decided to make efforts to move towards a more common understanding of how to evaluate translation quality. This led the EP and the EC to develop very similar models for analytic TQE, based on similar simplified customisations of the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM)[4] approach, also drawing inspiration from the standardisation initiatives that led to ISO 5060:2024 and ASTM WK46396 (Directorate-General for Translation [DGT], European Commission, 2020; European Parliament, 2024). These implementations include important features for ensuring inter-rater reliability, such as training material in the form of decision trees, e-learning modules, and, in the EC, a validation workflow with validators checking the evaluations to ensure the consistency of error annotations and applied evaluation principles. These models are now also used for other TQE processes, such as analyses of corrigenda requests, ex-post evaluation exercises, and studies to measure machine translation (MT) quality. The EP's methodology has been adopted by most of the other EU institutions. All this contributes to more consistency and better comparability both internally and in relation to other institutions and external LSPs.

In other institutions with fewer official languages and a more hierarchical role of revisers, this staff function has a major role in monitoring processes, including TQE, with particular attention to the work of new staff and outsourced translations. In turn, translation unit managers have a key role in supervising all these processes, including work allocation, risk assessment, competence management, and performance appraisal (for an inventory of TQA-related duties of translation service managers, see Prieto Ramos, 2017, pp.63–66). As noted in Section 3, translation managers have traditionally been staff with an advanced career in translation and an in-depth knowledge of the activities they manage. However, a growing trend in the EU context is to appoint not just senior managers from other fields, but also line managers with no translation background or no experience of translation into the target language of the unit at hand. This trend is similar to what we have witnessed in parts of the commercial sector, where LSP managers sometimes come from other sectors, such as IT.

In parallel to this development, we have witnessed the emergence of translation standards aimed at ensuring trust and predictability in rapidly changing and increasingly diversified translation services: the umbrella standard for high-end translation ISO 17100:2015, the post-editing standard ISO 18587:2017, and more recently, ISO 5060:2024 on evaluation of translation output, and ISO 11669:2024 on translation project management. These standards focus on several key elements that contribute to ensuring quality translation: workflow specifications, definition of key concepts and roles, and competence requirements for the different actors involved. Among them, ISO 11669:2024 is the first ISO standard to focus specifically on clients and how to analyse client needs and risk tolerance levels to develop structured translation project specifications that can be used throughout the translation projects.

These standards are not explicitly applied in IOs, as it would be difficult to guarantee, for example, systematic revision of all translations (a requirement in ISO 17100:2015). However, they are increasingly used as a relevant reference for developing internal guidelines. For instance, the translation quality guidelines of the EC, the EP, and the CoEU, which have been a source of inspiration for other translation services in the institutional landscape, make explicit references to ISO 17100:2015 and, as already mentioned, the TQE methodologies of most EU institutions heavily draw on the MQM and ISO 5060:2024.

6 Technological Developments

By the very nature of their work, institutional translation services have always been aware of the importance of data and data quality, both for process efficiency and product quality. Consequently, producing, collecting, and reusing multilingual data is nothing new. The use of data management technology has always been part of working methods to ensure consistency, given the large component of intertextuality in institutional text production. Content normally builds on previous texts, be it existing legal provisions, policy documents, or case law. This means that source texts are put together using specific formulations from reference documents, which the new text must be consistent with or even quote. Moreover, institutional text production – in any administrative context – is to a considerable extent based on style guides and templates (see Section 2). As a result, in a multilingual institutional setting, you rarely translate from scratch. Instead, the translations are built up in the same way as the source text has been created, retrieving terminology and formulations from previously translated reference texts, and, where appropriate, style guides and templates are applied for the target language.

State-of-the-art CAT tools are extremely useful for this kind of translation. They make it possible to check large masses of text swiftly to ensure intra- or intertextual consistency and conformity to established terminology and genre conventions (see Chapter 10). The translation can thus be built step by step in subsequent iterations, and this work rarely starts with empty segments. MT is integrated into the workflows as an add-on to translation memory (TM) retrievals of segment matches from previous translations (see Chapter 11). In addition, translators use many other tools, such as term extraction tools to identify terms and phraseology before or during the translation process; text corpora with specific reference documents to look up terms and formulations in context; and termbases, not only institutional databases such as IATE in the EU institutions or UNTERM in the UN but also local ones created for specific sets of documents to ensure consistent and accurate term use in a translation project.

Such tools are often used as plug-ins to the CAT environment and can be shared among translators working on the same file. Automated QA tools also contribute to both effectiveness and efficiency by helping to check the translated output for spelling, numbers, formatting, and recurring expressions. By working in this way, the actual volume to be translated from scratch can be reduced, efficiently reusing specific content and ensuring reliability at each step. For example, in 2023, the reuse rate of translated content was 44.5% at the EC, 49.8% in the EP, and 41.1% in the CoEU. The increasing use of TMs and MT have also entailed significant changes in working methods, as translators must devote increasing attention to segment match verifications and segment editing or retranslating as part of their daily work (see Prieto Ramos, 2024b, for a survey of practices in 24 IOs).

Ever since NMT replaced statistical machine translation (SMT), especially since the late 2010s, huge efforts have been made in the institutional contexts to exploit the expected efficiency gains of NMT at best, just as in the rest of the translation sector. Post-editing, as defined by ISO 18587:2017 (i.e., editing and correcting retrieved TM content and MT output), is embedded in a large proportion of today's institutional translation work. Nonetheless, it is up to the translator to decide the most efficient combination of machine inputs in each case, and as noted in Section 3, the process remains human-driven and requires advanced human translation competence to ensure translation quality. Underestimating the need for this core expertise in today's translation environments can be extremely counterproductive and a challenge for quality management. For the same reason, outsourced translations continue to be processed as translation assignments rather than post-editing, regardless of the tools employed.

ISO 11669:2024 on translation project management points in the same direction, stating that the distinction between post-editing and translation is becoming increasingly blurred, and that what matters for the choice of production method and tools are the quality requirements, on the one hand, and the quality of the output of available technological resources, on the other. In line with this approach, practically all IOs are agnostic about the types of tools they or their contractors should employ when translating, provided that they work properly, they use the appropriate data, and the end result complies with the quality requirements.

Some institutions are also looking to use unedited MT output for low-risk communicative purposes, with different approaches and results. The EC has developed its own NMT engine, eTranslation, specialised in EU texts. The institution promotes the use of this tool among its different departments and offers it to all EU institutions and public administrations in the Member States. In 2023, 196 million pages were translated with eTranslation (of which 70 million were by people outside the EU institutions). By 2023, the EC had incorporated eTranslation in 88 different EU platforms, such as ODR, SOLVIT, RAPEX, and the widget on 119 Europa websites. Other institutions such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions have adopted a similar approach. However, for legislative translation, which remains the bulk of the translation work, clear-cut MT workflows have so far not proven to be efficient because of the specificities of institutional text production described above.

Various institutions have also developed or are developing their own MT tools, such as WIPO Translate for the translation of patents at WIPO, while others such as the UN have integrated commercially available NMT systems into their customised CAT tools (e.g., eLUNa at the UN, together with UNTERM and other resources). The diversification of tools is particularly useful when MT results vary significantly between NMT systems and language pairs (see, e.g., Stefaniak, 2023). As NMT engines are regularly retrained and AI evolves quickly, it is expected that translation services will further benefit from these developments in the near future, including, e.g., for translation-oriented legal or linguistic research (see, e.g., the CJEU's AI Strategy in Court of Justice of the European Union [CJEU], 2024).

7 Concluding Discussion

As the translation services of public institutions are tasked with ensuring effective multilingual communication of their organisations, they remain the paradigm of both institutional and in-house translation. As we have illustrated, institutional translation, regardless of the size and specificities of each service, cannot be understood without the in-house expertise required to safeguard *translation quality* according to the core principles of *continuity, reliability, and consistency* in multilingual text production. In-house translation professionals are the central pillar of institutional translation excellence, which has traditionally been a reference of quality in the field. This has become more evident with the heightened focus on in-house quality assurance that increasing outsourcing and technological developments have gradually brought about.

This trend represents a clear *convergence with the private sector*, especially as regards cost-effectiveness, working methods, and more modular approaches to quality, even if the employment conditions of institutional in-house staff are generally still privileged compared to those of freelance translators. To some extent, the alignment with the translation industry is having positive effects, leading to more streamlined, harmonised, and even standardised workflow processes, and a more sophisticated management of translation service provision, including resources management, project management, risk management, and quality management. Efficient use of new technology plays a decisive role in this process.

However, with regard to *purpose* and *quality requirements*, there is a major difference between the bulk of the translation that takes place in the translation industry and the translation work managed by IOs (and comparable multilingual national institutions). As public administrations, these organisations have an obligation to ensure legal certainty and equal access to information in all their official languages. For this reason, purpose and quality requirements must be put at the fore and there is a limit to how far the alignment with the private industry can go. The quality requirements for a chat box on an online e-commerce portal are not the same as for a website of a multilingual public administration or for equally authentic language versions of binding law. In the latter examples, the quality of all the language versions is a matter of equal language rights and equal access to reliable information, legal provisions, official bodies, and procedures.

Without the use of technology, it would be practically impossible for institutional translation services to cope with new efficiency requirements. As the scope and effects of *technological changes* are expanding rapidly, it is difficult to predict the longer-term impact that AI will have on workflows and practices. Three *challenges* have emerged in this context: (1) keeping up with the pace and complexity of technological developments; (2) managing expectations regarding what the technology can and cannot do; and (3) ensuring the quality of the data for reliable reuse and sustainability. This calls for systematic monitoring and evaluation with 'experts in the loop'. Ultimately, all stakeholders have an interest in such monitoring processes to ensure that their needs and expectations are being met. In doing so, as in other fields of institutional work impacted by AI, decision-makers should also acknowledge the risks of underestimating the persistent need for in-house expertise to adapt to changes while preserving quality.

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List of Related Topics

Freelance translation; Translation quality; Perspectives on computer-assisted translation software; Perspectives on machine translation, post-editing, and automation; Human resource management; Risk and trust

Notes

1 "Legal Translation in International Institutional Settings: Scope, Strategies and Quality Markers" (https://transius.unige.ch/en/research/letrint/), led by the first co-author of this chapter and supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation through a Consolidator Grant.
2 All the statistics mentioned in this chapter were obtained directly from each institution, including in particular from annual activity reports.
3 As noted in Prieto Ramos (2024b), while tests with large language models (LLMs) have been reported in a few institutions, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered MT is not regularly used in the settings examined, but was included in the concept of MT for the purposes of the survey.
4 See www.themqm.org.

Further Reading

Prieto Ramos, F. ed. 2018. *Institutional translation for international governance: Enhancing quality in multilingual legal communication*. London: Bloomsbury.
A collection of studies with a focus on legal communication and translation issues in law- and policy-making, implementation and judicial procedures in international organisations.
Prieto Ramos, F. ed. 2020. *Institutional translation and interpreting. Assessing practices and managing for quality*. New York: Routledge.
This book examines best practices and questions of translation quality and management in a broad range of regional, national and international institutional settings.
Svoboda, T., Biel, Ł. and Łoboda, K., eds. 2017. *Quality aspects in institutional translation*. Berlin: Language Science Press.
A volume on multiple approaches and challenges to translation quality mostly in, but not limited to, EU institutions.

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An overview of the roles and requirements of translators in the various EU institutions and bodies.

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