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**A SECOND PAIR OF EYES—REVISION,
EDITING AND PROOFREADING**

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A Second Pair of Eyes—Revision, Editing and Proofreading

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Abstract: Make no mistake, inadvertent translation bloopers can ruin an otherwise excellent job. In this practical session on how to avoid them, we will review three different types of quality control in English translation: revision, editing and proofreading. Participants will examine short texts and solve a variety of common problems such as accuracy, register, style and consistency. Translation issues will refer to original documents in Spanish. We will also discuss translator resources such as dictionaries, style manuals and using the Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Personal background

This paper is based primarily on my 25 years of experience in translation, revision, editing and proofreading. After studying journalism and translation at French universities, I worked in-house as a translator in a small French publishing company, at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the Press Section at the French Embassy in Washington and in the Translation Section of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). For the past two years, I've been an editor in the IDB Press Section.

In each institution, I had to learn the procedures for document production, which invariably included revision or editing of draft text (and sometimes both) and final proofreading. The purpose of this session is to demonstrate how these processes work in practical terms.

1.2 Quality control in translation

First we need to examine what exactly is quality in translation. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has a standard for quality management called ISO 9000. It defines quality as follows: "In the everyday context, like 'beauty,' everyone may have his or her idea of what 'quality' is. But, in the ISO 9000 context, the standardized definition of quality refers to *all those features of a product (or service) which are required by the customer.*"

What features of translation are required by the customer? In my experience, what the customer wants first and foremost is an accurate translation, that is, one that faithfully expresses the source text, without any errors or omissions, in an idiomatic style that reads as if it were originally written in the target language.

To achieve this standard, a service provider must "manage" quality. Under ISO 9000, quality management is defined as "what the organization does to ensure that its products or services satisfy the customer's quality requirements and comply with any regulations applicable to those products or services."

For practical purposes, quality management in translation—whether in a publishing company, a foreign embassy or an international organization—means having a second pair of eyes (and often a third or a fourth) review each document to make sure it meets the

requirements of accuracy and style. In other words, quality management means following the basic principle of “Two heads are better than one.”

Consequently, a translator checking his or her own work, or “self-revision,” is not enough. A reviser, generally an experienced translator, needs to take a fresh, critical look at the translation and make any necessary improvements in both accuracy and style. Decisions about the appropriate terminology and register for both the translator and reviser depend on the type of document and its author, medium and target audience, that is, the context.

Revised translations may also be subject to editing, especially when they are to be published as a book, an article or website content. Editing is similar to revision in that it involves a second pair of eyes taking a critical look at a text. In addition to correcting any mistakes, such as grammar and spelling, an editor standardizes the style used (capitalization and hyphenation conventions, for instance) and enhances “readability.”

In a recent article, *New York Times* Op-Ed page editor David Shipley explained how *Times* editors make an article more “readable”: “To make a piece as clear and accessible as possible, the editor may add a transition, cut a section that goes off point or move a paragraph. If a description is highly technical, the editor may suggest language that lay readers will understand. If it isn’t clear what a writer is trying to say, the editor may take a guess, based on what he knows from the author, and suggest more precise language.” Shipley also stressed that an edited article must always be cleared by the author before publication.

Proofreading is the last step in the production process before actual printing or posting, a final check to make sure no mistakes have slipped through. Proofreaders do not make any changes in content, but read the text through from beginning to end to verify that the spelling and grammar are correct and the text is properly formatted (no missing headings, misnumbered or upside-down pages, inappropriate changes in font and so forth). They must have focus, an eye for detail and knowledge of the subject matter.

1.3 IDB Annual Report

The examples we’re going to use in our discussion and exercises are drawn from the Annual Report of the Inter-American Development Bank, which I have edited as part of my current duties. The primary purpose of this document is to report to the Bank’s Board of Governors on the year’s activities and present the Bank’s financial statements, as required under the Bank’s charter. The 180-page book also contains an overview of economic development in Latin America, a discussion of progress in the Bank’s main areas of activity and descriptions of the several dozen loans approved during the year.

Besides the Board of Governors, the Annual Report readership includes government officials in all 47 member countries of the Bank in the Americas, Western Europe, Croatia and Slovenia, Israel, Japan and Korea, nongovernmental organizations, academics, researchers and students. The report is published in book format and on CD-ROM, and is posted on the IDB website. Any mistakes in such a high-profile document, for instance in its financial tables, economic charts or listings of senior officials, could have serious consequences.

We’re now going to take a closer look at these different stages of the quality control process, based on examples from the report.

2. REVISION

We mentioned that revision means checking a translation for accuracy and style. It involves answering two questions: (1) Does the translation accurately reflect the original in content and register? (2) Is the style idiomatic in the target language? In other words, does it read like original English (in this case)?

To do a thorough job on a revision, I recommend reading the translation sentence by sentence, using a ruler to mark your place in the original and checking the translation as you go. First of all, you want to make sure that everything is there. Under the pressure of a ticking clock, especially with telephone calls and other interruptions, even a seasoned translator can inadvertently miss a word, a phrase, a line or an entire paragraph.

While you're checking that everything is there, verify that it's correct. Besides mistakes in spelling and grammar, look for inverted figures and dates, for instance, which may happen as fingers fly over the computer keyboard. Sometimes decimals are misplaced or the wrong style. For example, change "\$10.000" to "\$10,000." Be on the watch for typos in the original, such as omitted diacritics, that may distort the meaning. For instance, one missing accent in Spanish can make the difference between "will total" and "had totaled."

Specialized terminology requires knowledge of the field in question. The first chapter of the Annual Report, for example, is an essay on economic development in Latin America during the year that gets quite technical. The reviser needs to know, for instance, that *inversión extranjera directa* should be "foreign direct investment" (**not** "direct foreign investment").

Always bear in mind the author, target readership and medium to determine whether the terminology, register and style of the translation are appropriate. For example, in a document like the Annual Report, which is written in a very formal style, snappy journalistic writing is inappropriate: change "Fiscal positions have been beefed up" to "Fiscal positions have been strengthened."

As you check for accuracy, make any necessary stylistic adjustments. Capitalization, hyphenation and punctuation seem to be the most recurring headaches because many different options are correct. Follow corporate or institutional guidelines if they are available or any other guidelines the client may refer you to, such as the Chicago Manual of Style. Otherwise, decide on your own personal preferences and stick to them. The key here is consistency, which is easier said than done in a document like the Annual Report that has multiple contributors.

Among the many stylistic questions that came up in the English version of the Annual Report were whether or not to use accents on place names ("Bogotá" or "Bogota"?). We also had to standardize hyphenation, for instance changing "sub-regional" to "subregional," and remember to alphabetize lists of country names, taking into account that alphabetical order will be slightly different in English and Spanish.

Revisers have little leeway to improve an original that might be inconsistent, ambivalent or unclear. However, they should avoid the "garbage in, garbage out" approach: there is nothing wrong with a translation reading better than the original, provided there is no change in meaning. No one will complain, for instance, if you

eliminate redundancies. Dividing or combining sentences can also help make a text more readable.

3. EDITING

Editing is more creative work than revision in that you have the freedom to make improvements in the text for readability. As in translation and revision, the three main criteria for editing are context, context, context: Who is the author? What is the purpose of the document? Who are the target readers? What medium will the text be published in, an internal document, newsletter, journal, book, website or other?

The key question to ask yourself when editing is simply, “Does it sound right?” Besides not containing any errors in spelling or grammar, the text should flow smoothly, that is, have no awkward, ambivalent or unclear passages. In the Annual Report, for example, a phrase such as “teacher training centers at the national level” could be rendered more idiomatically as “teaching schools throughout the country.”

Taking that basic question a step further, ask yourself if the text conveys all the necessary information. Given the target audience, does anything need to be added, deleted or reshuffled to achieve the desired effect? For instance, the draft version of a section on social inclusion originally described publications and meetings before operations. However, since the main concern of our primary readership, the IDB Governors, is Bank lending, we decided to move the paragraph on operations to the top.

Internal consistency is another factor to bear in mind. For example, in the sections on the key areas of Bank activity, the one on poverty reduction did not have information on lending: those figures had to be added so that it would be consistent with the other sections. Any redundant passages should be eliminated: for instance, an analysis of current trade negotiations had to be deleted from the section on regional trade because it had already been included in a previous chapter.

Finally, ask yourself if the information provided is accurate. As mentioned by the *New York Times* editor, the editing process also means fact-checking (and double-checking). For example, the photograph of the Board of Executive Directors in the front section of the Annual Report lists all the names and constituencies of the Directors. You can be sure this editor checked them against their office listings numerous times. Special attention was also paid to such key figures as yearly and cumulative lending.

4. PROOFREADING

As mentioned above, proofreading is a final check before publication. 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. Even though the process is now electronic rather than mechanical, we still use the term “proofreading” for that final check.

Here the question is, “Does it look right?” Once the document is laid out in its final format, you may notice a few stylistic inconsistencies, such as capitalization, hyphenation and punctuation, that were overlooked. Proofreaders also check the format, for instance fonts and font sizes, use of italics and alignment (indents, footnote format), and so forth. When proofreading the Annual Report, for instance, we had to standardize the decimals

used in the figures cited in the project descriptions, making sure they were all just one decimal (for example, “\$1.9 billion” instead of “\$1.89 billion”).

The pressure to finish intensifies at this stage because of time constraints for printing and shipping the document. The 2004 Annual Report, for instance, had to be produced in time to be shipped to the site of the IDB Annual Meeting, which that year was held in Okinawa, Japan. That meant allowing two weeks for shipment of the book from the United States. Several members of the editing team were involved in proofreading, from the managing editor to the proofreader, at several stages: the master text file, which was also forwarded to IDB management for clearance, several versions of the laid out text, and the “bluelines” or proofs from the printer.

Each member of the Annual Report team would contribute towards improving the final product. For shorter documents, like a one-page press release, this collaborative process may take the form of an informal exchange with a colleague. Freelance translators working from home may want to do likewise.

5. MANAGING QUALITY

According to the ISO standards for quality management, you need to “plan and manage the processes necessary for the continual improvement of your quality management system” (9001:2000). How do we do this as translators? By improving our knowledge, skills and resources on an ongoing basis. Below are some suggestions.

- **Keep up to date on current events**

Read daily newspapers and other periodicals, particularly journals in your area of expertise. For practical purposes, it is unrealistic to expect to read an entire newspaper in both your source and target languages. With the overwhelming quantity of information available now, focus on your target language and on news headlines, especially in your field. Many newspapers are available online free of charge. Radio and television can also be good sources of news.

For example, in editing the financials in the Annual Report, it helped to be aware of the Enron scandal fallout, from accounting standards to financial reporting to the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which was mentioned in the section on regional integration, had been in the news as well. You should also follow your inclinations and read about culture, which in addition to giving you a break from drier topics like business and economics, enriches your general background and may even come in handy in your work.

- **Learn**

Of course, professional development events such as the ATA Annual Conference help improve your knowledge and skills, giving us a chance to get away from our routines and stimulate those grey cells. They also provide an invaluable opportunity to meet other professionals.

- **Network**

Meeting other linguists can help do more than find potential clients. You never know when you might need to share an urgent assignment, refer a client looking for another language combination, ask a question or find a reviser or editor.

- **Be prepared**

Lastly, have all the necessary tools at your fingertips. Invest in some solid general monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, a few key specialized ones, a style guide or two and a thesaurus. Bookmark useful websites. The bibliography below lists just a few of the resources an English translator may need.

- **Take responsibility for your work**

A former supervisor of mine used to urge his staff to translate "in self-defense." Imagine being questioned by a client on your choice of a term or sentence structure and having to present your case. Our goal should be to produce documents we would be proud to have our names on. Enlisting a second pair of eyes will help us get there.

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