

Three Crazy Ideas about Translation Standards

I'm a big fan of standardization! That's why I've been using international standards in my classroom for almost 10 years. I believe that a big part of skill-oriented teaching (my own specialties are computer-assisted translation and terminology management) is familiarizing students with industry best practices. And one way of looking at standards is precisely as that: industry best practices! Now here is a crazy idea: how about teaching based on the requirements specified in the same standards that translation service providers certify against?

Fortunately, there is no lack of international standards that deal specifically with the skills and processes involved in translation or post-editing. Here are just a few recent examples:

- ASTM F2575 Standard Guide for Quality Assurance in Translation
- ISO 17100 Translation services—Requirements for translation services
- ISO/DIS 18587 Translation services—Post-editing of machine translation output—Requirements

In the diagram on page 28 I have compiled the skills or competencies identified in each of the three standards for easy reference.

Before I get to the crazy part, let me talk briefly about one standard in more detail. Just a little over one year after its publication, ISO 17100 is already the most widely adopted translation standard in the (English-speaking) world, based on a Google search I conducted.

ISO 17100:2015 TRANSLATION SERVICES—REQUIREMENTS FOR TRANSLATION SERVICES

This new ISO standard is the successor of EN 15038:2006 Translation Services—Service requirement, the previously most widely adopted translation quality standard. That being the case, it's not surprising that the content of the section entitled "Professional competences of translators" in ISO 17100 is almost



I believe that a big part of skill-oriented teaching (my own specialties are computer-assisted translation and terminology management) is familiarizing students with industry best practices. And one way of looking at standards is precisely as that: industry best practices!

identical to EN 15038. However, there is one notable addition in ISO 17100—namely “Domain competence.”

Here are the six translator competencies listed in ISO 17100:

- **Translating competence:** Ability to translate content.
- **Linguistic and textual competence in the source language and the target language:** Ability to understand the source language, fluency in the target language, and knowledge of text-type conventions.
- **Competence in research, information acquisition, and processing:** Ability to acquire any additional knowledge required to understand the source language content and render the target language content.
- **Cultural competence:** Ability to make use of locale-specific information that are characteristic of the source language and the target language culture, respectively.
- **Technical competence:** Ability to use the technical resources that support the entire translation process.

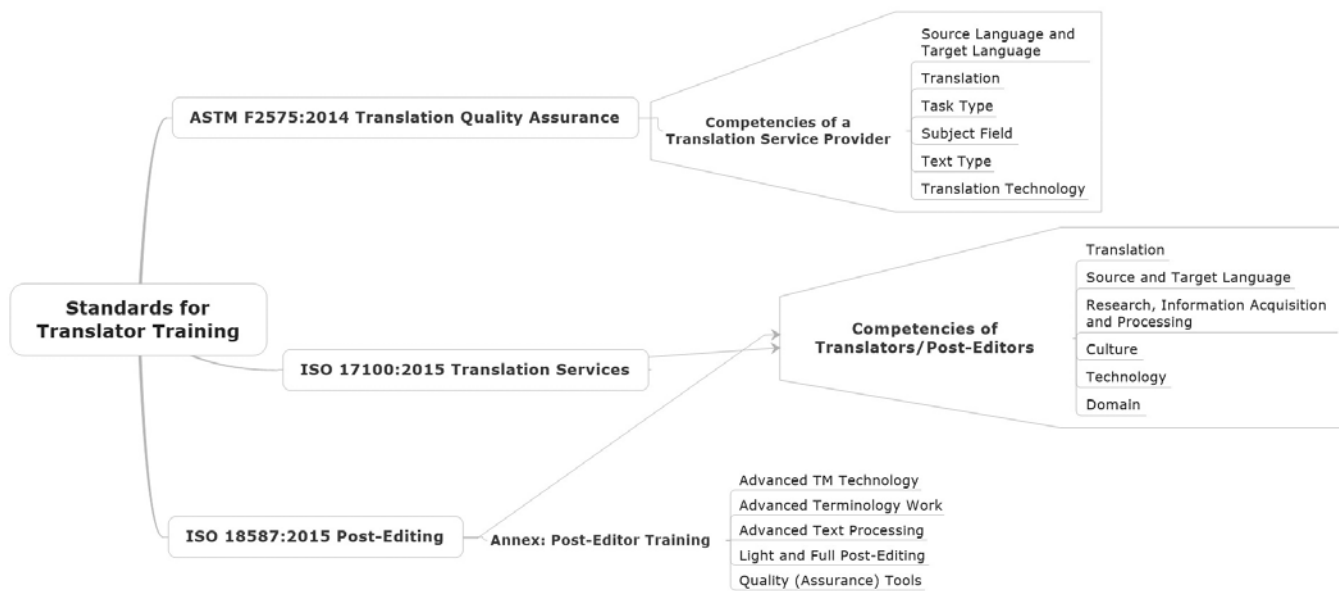


Figure 1: Overview of the translation-related skills identified in ASTM F2575, ISO 17100, and ISO 18587

- Domain competence:** Ability to understand source-language content and render target-language content using the appropriate style and terminology.

It deserves mentioning that in addition to the specifications of translator competences, ISO 17100 also includes competences of revisers and reviewers, as did EN 15038. However, unlike EN 15038, ISO 17100 also includes specifications of the competencies of translation project managers. And that, in my opinion, makes ISO 17100 even more relevant for teaching purposes.

CRAZY IDEA #1
USE TRANSLATION STANDARDS TO GUIDE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT/REVIEW

The efforts of international standardization organizations like ASTM and ISO are typically directed at industry, and ISO 17100 is no exception. So, it may sound crazy to take a document designed explicitly for implementation by translation service providers and propose the development of translator training curricula against this standard.

If you take the competencies listed in ISO 17100 as a reference, many translation programs probably already cover translation, linguistic and textual, as well as cultural

Another thing I like about ISO 17100 is the fact that it applies to “all aspects of the translation process directly affecting the quality and delivery of translation services.”

competence. But what about research, technical, and domain competencies? It amazes me how even recent graduates lack basic Internet search skills. The same is true for basic translation technologies, such as machine translation or terminology management systems.

Another thing I like about ISO 17100 is the fact that it applies to “all aspects of the translation process directly affecting the quality and delivery of translation services.” In fact, the main part of ISO 17100 does an excellent job illustrating that translation projects involve many tasks in addition to translation proper. In my opinion, students would benefit from being familiarized with all types of tasks involved in a translation project, including the administrative and technical activities during pre- and post-production. That is particularly true for those students seeking in-house employment. The vast majority of the students in translation/interpreting/

localization programs I taught who found a salaried job after graduation didn’t work as linguists, but as project managers and localization engineers.

CRAZY IDEA #2
USE TRANSLATION STANDARDS TO GUIDE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT/SELECTION

Translator training programs that aim at producing graduates who can find well-paying jobs in industry after graduation need to teach the competencies that the industry requires. Some will argue that these competencies are best taught by instructors who themselves have industry experience. To this I would add that “faculty with industry experience” certainly includes instructors who work as freelance translators, but should also include those with agency or client-side experience.

So, how does a translation program align the competencies of their faculty with market needs? Here is my second crazy idea: look no further than the relevant international translation standards in general, and ISO 17100 in particular. The competencies and processes outlined in these standards can be used to guide curriculum development, but also to serve as guidelines for faculty development/recruitment.



USE TRANSLATION STANDARDS TO GUIDE INTERNSHIP DEVELOPMENT

As someone who has completed three internships as part of his translator training, I know from personal experience that internships can add a lot of value to an academic education. I've also learned that not all internships are created equal. In some internships, students go through a progression of trainings, are guided by a mentor, and by the end of their internship have created a portfolio of meaningful work. In other internships, there is none of the above and interns just do the work no one else wants to do.

Unfortunately, many translator training institutions are taking a "hands-off" approach to internships management, offering little in the way of guidance to students and potential host companies. The thinking at the leadership level of some translator training programs seems to be that any practical experience students might get out of an internship is better than none. And so educational institutions may limit their internship-related efforts to attracting companies willing to offer internship opportunities to their students.

However, without guidance on what skills their interns need in addition to those necessary for the project at hand, potential host companies might never get an internship program started. Likewise, it's often difficult for students to know exactly what kind of learning experience they can expect from an internship.

So, here is the third crazy idea: model translation internships using the competencies and processes outlined in ISO 17100. That should be particularly easy for—and relevant to—the many organizations that already are ISO 17100-certified. And students, as well as educational institutions, would have objective criteria for selecting and evaluating internship opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps it may not be such a crazy idea after all to have the leadership of translator training programs take a good look at international translation standards.

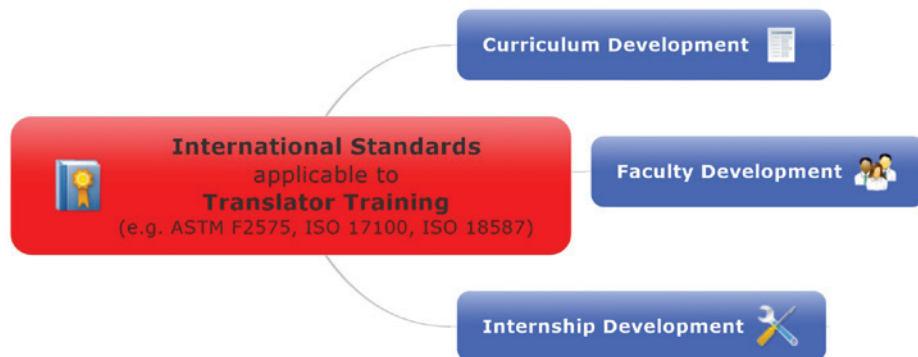


Figure 2: Diagram of possible educational uses of translation standards.



Figure 3: Product-centric translation, where a text to be translated is not only connected to a product, but to earlier versions of the same text, earlier versions of the product, and other texts that are connected to the same product, as well as earlier versions of those other texts. These relationships that are typical for technical translation projects raise a variety of consistency issues, which are absent from the translations of stand-alone/literary texts.

The competencies and processes outlined in standards like ISO 17100 can be used as a roadmap for (re-) orienting their curriculum and faculty—not to mention internship—development efforts.

What should leaders in translator training institutions base the future course of their programs on? Hearsay and the diverging opinions of a local guru? Or an international standard developed by experts from dozens of countries that is being deployed by companies all over the globe—the same companies that hire the graduates from these programs? ●



Uwe Muegge has more than 15 years of experience in translation and localization, having worked in leadership functions on both the vendor and buyer sides of the industry.

He has published numerous articles on translation tools and processes and taught computer-assisted translation and terminology management courses at the college level in both the U.S. and Europe. In addition, he has been active in several standardization efforts; most recently as chair of ASTM F43.03 subcommittee on language translation. Contact: info@muegge.cc.