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Translation and Quality Management: some implications for the theory, practice and teaching of translation¹

Abstract

The aim of this article is to consider the issue of quality in translation. Specifically, the question under consideration is whether quality assurance in relation to translation is feasible and, if so, what some of the implications for translation theory, translation practice and the teaching of translation would be. To provide a backdrop against which the issue may be discussed, I present an overview of the two areas which seem most likely to hold potential answers, viz., that of translation theory and that of quality management. Section 1. gives a brief outline of some contributions to translation theory which would seem likely to be of interest in this connection and section 2. gives a linguist's introduction to the part of the area of quality management which I consider relevant for present purposes. Section 3. is devoted to the case study of a small translation firm which has been certified under the ISO 9001 standard, and section 4. discusses the implications which quality management seems to hold for the field of translation in a broad sense. Finally, section 5. concludes the article.

Introduction

Quality is a term which has attracted much attention in recent decades, and quality assurance, in particular, has become a significant concept in business contexts. Given that much professional translation, not least in terms of turnover, actually takes place in such contexts, it seems a

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reasonable undertaking to examine whether the concept of quality assurance might be applicable to translation, and, if so, what some of the implications for translation theory, translation practice and the teaching of translation would be. This is precisely the aim of this article. For this purpose then, I shall first present a brief outline of a few contributions to translation theory. The choice of contributions is based on an *a priori* assessment of their importance to current translation practice and of the likelihood that they may be of interest to the subject dealt with in this article. I then give a linguist's introduction to the field of (total) quality management, largely, but not exclusively, focusing on what would seem to be of interest for present purposes. Both the area of translation theory and that of total quality management have been selected on the assumption that they are likely to hold potential answers to the question under examination and that, consequently, they will serve as a useful backdrop against which the issue of quality assurance in the field of translation may be discussed.

1. Translation theory: a brief outline of a few contributions

As asserted in Bell (1991:10):

“It is no exaggeration to say that the programme followed by most translation theorists, in the English-speaking world at least [...], has been, and still is, dominated by the thinking put forward in an essay written two centuries ago in 1791.”

The essay referred to is that of Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, who established three ‘laws’ of translation (quoted in Bell 1991:11), which stated:

- I. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- II. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- III. That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition.”

Much discussion on words versus ideas, the style of the original versus that of the translator has followed, and it was not until 1964 with the publication of *Towards a Science of Translating* by Eugene A. Nida, the American scholar and Bible translator, that the focus in translation theory shifted, if ever so slightly, from absolute concern with the relationship between source texts (ST) and target texts (TT) to at least

some consideration of the effect of the target text on its recipient(s). In a later work, Nida (1975:33) describes his approach to translation as follows:

“A definition of translating will inevitably depend in very large measure upon the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question. However, since in Bible translating the purpose is not to communicate certain esoteric information about a different culture, but to so communicate that R_3 may be able to respond to M_3 in ways substantially similar to those in which R_1 responded to M_1 , a definition of translating which is in accord with the best traditions of Biblical scholarship could be stated as follows: “Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style.””²

As this quotation reveals, Nida’s concern with meaning and style subsumes concern with the *purpose* of the translation and with the *response* of the recipient to the target text. Basically, this has given rise to at least two different schools in translation theory. One school is primarily concerned with equivalence and the other with functionalism (very much in the sense of “the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question”).

A prominent representative of the former school is Katharina Reiss. In Reiss (1976:20), a text typology based on the possible communicative functions of source texts is set up, with corresponding standards of equivalence to be applied to target texts:

Texttyp	Textfunktion	Kennzeichen	Äquivalenz-Maßstab	Übersetzungs-Methode (Primär-funktion)
1 informativ	Vermittlung von Information	sachorientiert	Invarianz auf der Inhaltsebene	sachgerecht (= “schlicht-prosaisch”)
2. expressiv	künstlerische Aussage	senderorientiert	Analogie der künstlerischen Gestaltung	autogerecht (= “identifizierend”)
3 operativ	Auslösung von Verhaltensimpulsen	verhaltensorientiert	Identität des textimmanenten Appells	appellgerecht (= “parodistisch” später: “adaptierend”)
4. audiomedial	(1-3)	(1-3)	(1-3)	medien- bzw. “verbundgerecht” (= suppletorisch)

² where M = message, and R = receptor.

Reiss' contention is that the communicative function of any source text determines the standard of equivalence to be applied and, consequently, determines the method of translation (see Arndt (1993), for a critical review of Reiss' approach). It follows from this and also implicitly from the table above that the essence of any translation is the rather suspect notion of equivalence, in this case equivalence of communicative function between a ST and a TT³.

Another author representing this school and one who has actually explicitly addressed the issue of quality in translation is Juliane House. The exclusive aim of House (1981) is to establish a model for translation quality assessment. However, like Reiss' approach, House's model centres on the notion of equivalence: translation quality is assessed on the basis of the relative match between source and target text-internal features, the standard applied being the notion of equivalence. Specifically, House (1981:unnumbered page) states in the abstract of her book that

“a TT, in order to be equivalent to its ST, should have a function — consisting of an ideational and an interpersonal functional component — which is equivalent to ST's function. Moreover, TT should employ equivalent pragmatic means for achieving that function.”

This quotation shows that, like Reiss, she is concerned with the concept of function but, again like Reiss, she sees the function of the target text as being subordinate to that of the source text in the sense that the latter has to be equivalent to the former. Whether 'equivalence' is to be interpreted as 'equal to' or as 'roughly equal to' makes no difference of course: the priorities remain the same in that the source text function determines the function of the target text.

The model set up in House (1981) involves analysing a given ST for the linguistic correlates of a set of eight situational dimensions and then using the resulting textual profile as a norm against which the target text is measured, the linguistic correlates being the means by which the function of the text is realized. Subsequently, a similar analysis of the corresponding target text will lead to a textual profile of this text and the extent to which this profile does not match that of the source text is the extent to which the “translation text is inadequate in quality”. More precisely, House (1981:49) writes that “a translation text should not

³ Snell-Hornby (1988:15ff) discusses the notion of equivalence and shows it to be a highly suspect one.

only match its source text in function, but employ equivalent situational-dimensional means to achieve that function, i.e., for a translation of optimal quality it is desirable to have a match between source and translation text along the dimensions [...].”

House (1981:190f, 204ff) modifies this position slightly in the case of “overt translations”; an overt translation being (according to House, 1981:189) “one in which the TT addressees are quite “overtly” not being directly addressed; thus an overt translation is one which must overtly be a translation, not, as it were, a “second original”.” In essence, however, her model for translation quality assessment continues to centre on the notion of equivalence and the standard set by the source text.

The school of functionalism, on the other hand, has implicitly taken Nida’s concern with the *purpose* of the translation and the *response* of the recipient to the target text a few steps further and thus contributed strongly to the shift of focus in translation theory. One representative of this school is Hans J. Vermeer. In Vermeer (1983, first published as Vermeer 1978), the framework of a general translation theory (which subsumes both translation and interpretation) is established. In setting up the framework, Vermeer (1983:48ff) discusses the theoretical basis of such a theory, organizing *translation* as a hyponym of *transfer* and of *reden*, *reden* in turn being organized as a hyponym of *handeln*, which itself forms part of a *situation*. In the words of Vermeer (1983:49, a work which makes no use of upper case letters), “jedes handeln verläuft in einer gegebenen situation, ist teil der situation [...] reden ist teilverbalisierung von situation [...]”, and he goes on to write that “entscheidend für translation ist, daß das verhältnis “situation :: verbalisierter situationsteil” kultur- und damit sprachspezifisch unterschiedlich ist. damit wird es unmöglich, in der translation nur den verbalen (sprachlichen) teil zu berücksichtigen.”

In particular, Vermeer argues that the way in which a situation is perceived is in part culture-specific as is the status of a given situation. Thus translation is a cross-cultural phenomenon, which, given that a text occurs in a situation, takes as its object the *text-in-situation* (Vermeer 1983:50). So, as distinct from Reiss (1976) and House (1981), which do not transgress the borders of the text, Vermeer introduces an approach which is highly situation-oriented. The three rules governing translation which Vermeer (1983) sets up are in full

accord with this theoretical basis. The first rule reads as follows (Vermeer 1983:54):

“regel 1 (skoposregel): interaktion (und als deren sondersorte: translation) wird von ihrem zweck (skopos) bestimmt, ist eine funktion ihres zwecks”.

This rule clearly emphasizes the importance of the *purpose* of the translation, while its subrule (Vermeer 1983:55):

“unterregel 1’ (soziologische regel): der zweck ist als empfangenabhängige [funktion] beschreibbar:
Sk = f(E)”⁴

stresses the importance of the target text recipient.

Likewise, Vermeer’s second rule (1983:57):

“regel 2 (kohärenzregel): geglückt ist eine translation, wenn sie vom empfangen als hinreichend kohärent mit seiner situation interpretiert wird und kein protest, in welcher form auch immer, zu übermittlung, sprache und deren gemeintem (sinn) folgt”.

draws attention to the recipient but also to the situation in which the target text will be interpreted.

Finally, the third rule (Vermeer 1983:59):

“regel 3 (fidelitätsregel): eine translation strebt nach kohärentem transfer eines textes”.

which is subordinate to the first and second rules, has more in common with the age-old considerations in translation theory mentioned at the beginning of this article than do the first two rules. Vermeer (1983:58) explicitly states that what is at issue in the third rule is “kohärenz des translat mit dem ausgangstext, so wie er vom translator (nach bestem wissen und gewissen) verstanden wird”.

Another representative of the school of functionalism is Christiane Nord, whose work clearly reveals her indebtedness to Vermeer. Thus, in accord with Vermeer’s skopos rule, Nord’s “concept of translation is basically functional” (Nord 1991:4) and the aim of her model for translation-oriented text analysis is ultimately to enable the translator to “choose the translation strategies suitable for the intended purpose of the particular translation he is working on” (Nord 1991:1).

It is worth noting that the intended purpose is not to be understood as a purpose “equivalent” to that of the source text but as “the prospective

⁴ where Sk = *Skopos* and E = *Empfänger*.

function or skopos of the target text as determined by the initiator's needs" (Nord 1991:9), the initiator being the person who approaches the translator "because he needs a certain target text (TT) for a particular target addressee or recipient" (Nord 1991:4). In addition, like Vermeer, Nord emphasizes the occurrence of the text in a situation: "the text can only be understood and analysed within and in relation to the framework of the communicative act-in-situation" (Nord 1991:12) and, in accordance with this view, she devotes some 40 pages to a general introduction to the analysis of extratextual factors (Nord 1991:39-79).

Discussing the relationship between source and target texts, Nord (1991:28f) launches the concept of functionality plus loyalty. Specifically, she states that since the target text is supposed to fulfil a certain function in a target situation and "the target recipient has to rely on the functionality of the target text", "functionality is the most important criterion for a translation", which is why "the translator is bound to maintain a certain loyalty towards the TT recipient" (Nord 1991:28). At the same time, however, the translator should also observe "loyalty towards the ST author or sender [...]. The translator is expected not to falsify the author's intention" (Nord 1991:29). In fact, according to Nord, it is a *sine qua non* to translation that TT-required and ST-provided material are compatible and that ST intention and TT functions are likewise compatible.

As Nord explicitly states that loyalty is a moral principle as opposed to fidelity, which "is a rather technical relationship between two texts" (Nord 1991:29), her functionality plus loyalty principle takes translation theory a long step from the dogma of faithfulness, be it to the words or style or form of the original.

In sum, Reiss (1976) and House (1981) focus on the relationship between source texts and target texts and take equivalence between these to be of the utmost importance, House even using this as a standard of quality. By contrast, Vermeer (1978) and Nord (1991), like Nida (1964, 1975), are concerned with the purpose of the target text, both of them giving priority to the purpose or function of the target text and emphasizing the importance of the *text-in-situation* or the communicative act-in-situation.

2. (Total) quality management: a linguist's introduction

The origins of quality management are largely attributable to W. Edward Deming, who in 1950 began teaching plain-words quality method courses to Japanese managers. An American statistician, Deming had taught similar courses in the U.S. during the second world war, but in Japan, unlike what had been the case in the U.S., industrial leaders listened to his teachings and committed themselves and their companies to quality management. In fact, the rise of Japan's postwar industry and, in particular, the rising quality of her industrial products reflect this focus on quality.

Essentially, Deming's message to managers focused on the *reduction of variation*, which is arguably what has been formalized in the BS 5750 and ISO 9000 series. His message went further, however, and was developed into what has become known in the West as total quality management, or TQM, whose quality concept is the one on which this article builds.

What then is quality? In the standard ISO 8402 (1991), it is defined as:

“The totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.”

It is worth noting that, although the ISO 9000 series was originally intended for standardisation in manufacturing firms and has only recently come to be applied to service firms, the ISO definition of quality explicitly covers the quality of a service, i.e., by implication, the quality of a translation.

The literature on TQM is extensive and prolific. A clear and concise introduction to TQM is provided in Bank (1992), however, in which quality is defined as follows (Bank 1992:15)⁵:

“Quality is: Fully satisfying agreed customer requirements at the lowest internal cost”.

In the following pages, the lowest internal cost is not directly under consideration, whereas stated or implied needs, agreed customer requirements and specifically customer requirements are addressed since these cannot be consciously satisfied until they have been uncovered.

⁵ The outline of total quality management given in this section is largely based on Bank (1992).

In TQM, customers are expected to be concerned with five issues, cf. Bank (1992:14):

- the specification of the product or service,
- the conformance to the specification,
- the reliability, i.e., the conformance through time,
- the price compared to the value,
- fast, on-time delivery,

and the producer (i.e., the provider of the product or service) which satisfies these concerns most satisfactorily will be the one which best meets customer requirements. Consequently, *agreement* on customer requirements is essential: if the producer and its customer are not in agreement on what the customer requirements are, quality, on Bank's definition, cannot be attained. Likewise, quality, on the ISO definition, is hard to attain if implied needs are not made explicit.

Some companies implementing TQM have actually subdivided the quality concept into two parts in that they require both producer requirements and customer requirements to be satisfied: on the one hand, the producer should meet its own specifications for the product or service and, on the other hand, the producer should satisfy customer expectations, cf. Bank (1992:142). Of course, by implication, this amounts to a claim that quality is not attained until both producer and customer requirements have been satisfied.

Before turning to an example of quality management as applied to a translation firm, I would like to make it clear that certification under the ISO 9000 series is merely seen as the base camp in relation to TQM. Under TQM, a firm will be expected to subject all parts of its activities to quality management, which the ISO series does not require. However, ISO certification requires management commitment to quality and to continuous quality improvement and if this is taken seriously, the likelihood is that all parts of an ISO certified firm will eventually be subjected to quality management, which, in the long run, should reduce costs through standardisation of procedures, to the benefit of both customers and the producer. I use the term "standardisation" on purpose: ISO certification implies consistent quality due to standardisation and documentation of procedures, but it is no guarantee of *high* quality. Each firm decides what its standards should be, but they must be seen as being directed towards continued

improvement.⁶ So even if a firm does not at first deliver high quality, the constant drive for improvement, if taken seriously, will, other things being equal, ultimately lead to high quality.

The following section shows how one British translation firm has attempted to satisfy both explicit and implied customer (and producer) requirements.

3. The case of Comtec Translations

This case study concerns Comtec Translations of Leamington Spa, a small enterprise whose ISO 9001 certification serves it as an efficient management tool which ensures sustained growth and internationalization. The firm supplies translation, interpreting and support services (e.g., DTP).

Like many other small entrepreneurial enterprises, Comtec Translations began as a firm which was run from the home of its owner. It was founded in the mid-eighties and did not acquire premises of its own until 1990. It has been growing steadily, however, and has recently moved into even larger premises. Today Comtec Translations has a staff of eleven full-time employees and has 600 freelance translators in its database, of whom 300 are used on a regular basis. This development is in part the result of support from the Training and Enterprise Council, which sponsored 50 per cent of the material costs related to the computerization of the company's operations. More importantly, however, Mrs Isabella Moore, the founder and managing director of Comtec Translations, has benefited substantially from a one-year entrepreneurial course sponsored by the Council. The course was offered to small dynamic firms which had been in business for several years, and was run by the Business School of the University of Warwick.

ISO 9001 certification

The certification of Comtec Translations in accordance with the ISO 9001 standard was a process which lasted for 18 months. A major reason why the process did not take any longer and why it was successful is that the consultant allocated to Comtec Translations was fully capable of translating the wording of the standard into the realities

⁶ See Younger (1994), for a brief outline of ISO certification requirements.

of Comtec Translations and that cooperation with him worked smoothly. One particularly valuable outcome of the meticulous analysis of all aspects of Comtec Translations was that it increased Mrs Moore's awareness of the way to do business.

The following list includes some of the major aspects of the activities of the firm which were covered in the certification process:

- formalized and documented customer control,
- evaluation of suppliers including freelance translators,
- sourcing of translators,
- internal processing of orders,
- data-based document control,
- disk storage,
- predelivery checks,
- customer feedback,
- internal auditing by an external specialist,
- management review,
- internal training.

For the purpose of ensuring consistent good quality in translations, Comtec Translations has developed procedures for selecting translators, constantly reviewing their work (e.g., as regards grammar and spelling) and comparing it to their previous performance; it likewise carries out predelivery checks which allow it, among other things, to match translations against customer specifications (e.g., specific word processing program requirements). In addition, customers and translators are listed in a database which categorizes them along relevant criteria and allows them to be matched appropriately. All of these procedures and lists are handled by means of standardized forms.

The last three items listed above all aim at ensuring constant improvement. The auditing of internal procedures by an external specialist results in a report by the auditor, which the company uses for its further development. Management review has to take place twice a year, but Comtec Translations actually has review meetings every six weeks. These meetings are staff meetings at which quality figures and functions are reviewed and any difficulties or problems are handled. If a problem is a recurrent one, the way of handling it will be specified and

taken down as a work instruction (e.g., the company has a work instruction on the handling of large projects). Finally, the company has drawn up an individualized theoretical training schedule for each member of staff.

Effects of the ISO 9001 certification

To Comtec Translations the certification was a watershed: it has been a catalyst and a growth promoter and has transformed Comtec Translations into an entirely professional, future-oriented business. From being a reactive firm characterized by the stressed atmosphere which seemed inherent to the profession and which constituted a major reason why Mrs Isabella Moore became involved in the management course and the certification process, Comtec Translations has developed into a proactive firm in its handling of customers, translators and translation tasks, with a markedly increased ability to handle urgent jobs. In addition, because the handling of orders, etc., has been computerized, the certification has also made the company much more cost-effective, its paperwork having been reduced by some 50 per cent. This has all contributed to making the company much more self-confident so that today it allows itself to handle substantially larger customers than it did previously.

The certification has also changed the conception of the translation process which the company had. Today the process is explicitly seen as covering three stages: planning, operations and quality control. This may be illustrated in terms of the following value chain of translation⁷:

*Figure 1 The value chain of translation**



Note *: π = profit margin

As a result of this explicit change of perspective, Comtec Translations has become much better at finding customers, defining their requirements - although it still needs to ask its customers more questions than it does now - and allocating translators to the jobs received. Consequently, operations have improved. At the same time, the quality control stage, which includes predelivery checks, has ensured an

⁷ Cf. Porter 1985:36ff and references cited there. Porter's value chain is an original development of the business system concept developed by McKinsey and Company.

increase in the quality level of translations delivered and a corresponding decrease in the number of customer complaints received. In fact, the cost of putting jobs right after delivery has decreased drastically so that the focus on satisfying customer requirements has become a financial advantage to Comtec Translations.

In sum, despite investments in equipment, certification and audits, total profitability has increased due to increased turnover, decreased costs and a larger customer base - quality has proved profitable.

4. Discussion

The case of Comtec Translations clearly illustrates that quality assurance in relation to translation is a feasible undertaking. However, the implications that quality management seems to hold for the area of translation in a broad sense still need to be addressed. I shall split the discussion of these into three subsections dealing with translation theory, translation practice, and the teaching of translation for professional purposes, respectively.

Quality management and translation theory

In principle, any attempt to combine quality management and the approach to translation advocated in Reiss (1976) or House (1981) is doomed to fail⁸. Given that Reiss (1976) and House (1981) disallow any extratextual considerations, which, of course, include customer considerations, any customer satisfaction arrived at on their approach will be not just unintentional but also a chance result. In effect, their approach precludes satisfying customer requirements, except by chance. It follows, of course, that a translation theorist adopting this approach also discards quality management in translation.

The same cannot be said if the approach of Vermeer (1983) or Nord (1991) is adopted. In essence, the focus of quality management on customer requirements is in fact reminiscent of the functionalist view of translation. It might even be argued that quality management is just a further step in the development of the functionalist approach, although possibly a somewhat unexpected one in that it relates translation to a

⁸ As Reiss (1976) and House (1981) are representatives of the same school, I shall refer to their approach to translation as being of the same kind even if a valid argument can be made that there are differences to be considered. For present purposes such differences are of no consequence.

business context. Let us take a look at the extent to which the functionalist approach may successfully be combined with quality management.

The first rule set up by Vermeer (1983:54) was the skopos rule, which, *mutatis mutandis*, states that translation is determined by its purpose and is therefore a function of its purpose. Now, no customer is ever likely to want a TT which does not serve the function for which it is needed. Consequently, the skopos rule is not only fully consistent with satisfying customer requirements but is a *sine qua non*. This also holds of its subrule (Vermeer 1983:55): if the TT does not serve its purpose in the TT situation, customer requirements, be they stated or implied, will not have been satisfied. Likewise, the second rule by Vermeer (1983:57), the *kohärenzregel*, also meets a customer requirement since, again, no customer is likely to want the target recipient(s) to have problems interpreting the TT, in the sense stated in this rule. However, the third rule (Vermeer 1983:59), the *fidelitätsregel*, does not necessarily correspond to any customer requirement. Instead, this rule could usefully be categorized as a *producer* requirement and thus still be consistent with quality management as interpreted by some of the companies which have implemented this management approach.

A similar picture emerges if quality management is combined with the approach of Nord (1991). As mentioned previously, Nord (1991:9) is concerned with “the prospective function or skopos of the target text as determined by the initiator’s needs”. In the case of professional translation, the initiator will typically be the customer, so, given this context, “initiator’s needs” are also customer requirements. Similarly, functionality (Nord 1991:28f) is covered by customer requirements, too, since no customer wants a TT which does not serve the intended function in the target situation. By contrast, the concept of loyalty is not necessarily covered by customer requirements. As in the case of Vermeer’s *fidelitätsregel*, it would be appropriate, instead, to consider the principle of loyalty a *producer* requirement.

On this basis, it may be concluded that the general rules or principles set up in Vermeer (1983) and Nord (1991), respectively, easily match similar fundamental considerations in the field of quality management, and that it would be appropriate for the field of translation to split the requirements to be satisfied into producer and customer requirements, respectively. It should be noted, though, that it does not follow that

customer requirements have been satisfied if Vermeer's first two rules or Nord's target text skopos and initiator's needs have been satisfied. In general, there will be more customer requirements than these, and translation theorists should at least consider whether they want to address them as an interesting field of investigation.

In addition, despite the overlap observed between functionalist translation theory and quality management, one essential issue in quality management remains unaddressed in translation theory, viz., that of standardisation. It is entirely possible that the "model for translation-oriented text analysis" proposed in Nord (1991) should be viewed as the standardisation of one aspect of translation. However, standardisation as a quality management concept, be it related to ISO certification or TQM, goes further than this. It requires standardisation of all procedures: from the moment when the first contact is made between customer and producer and even beyond the delivery of the translation since customer feedback is regarded as essential to the continued drive for improvement. The fact that quality management of translation covers this entire process is precisely what is reflected in Figure 1.

Now, it is not entirely clear to me what the purpose of much theorising related to translation actually is. With one notable exception, viz., Bell (1991:4), very few well-known translation theorists make this explicit. However, if we assume that most theorists did not and do not aim at describing or explaining the process of translation in the sense of Bell, it seems a fairly plausible assumption that, instead, the aim ultimately was and is the laying down of normative rules and principles which are to lead to the attainment of (good) quality in translation. On this assumption, quality management is worth turning to since it offers an explicit definition of quality and a method and means of attaining consistent and constantly improving quality, as witnesses the case of Comtec Translations. This, in turn, would imply that translation theory should not restrict itself to the translation process *per se*, but should also take into consideration the stages of planning and quality control. (Planning would, e.g., include the explication of customer requirements and the preparation of glossaries⁹, while conformance to stated customer requirements and the checking of spelling, grammar, etc., would

⁹ In his article on quality assurance in connection with the translation of LSP texts, it is, in effect, the glossary issue which Nielsen (1994) addresses.

be covered in the quality control stage.) In addition, it may be worth some effort considering how procedures can best be directed towards continued improvement.

One issue still remains, however, viz., that of non-agreement on requirements to be satisfied. As was mentioned in the preceding discussion, the *fidelitätsregel* and the principle of loyalty do not necessarily correspond to any customer requirements but may instead be viewed as producer requirements. The discussion has shown, however, that the rules or principles set up by Vermeer (1983) and Nord (1991), respectively, probably to some extent overlap with customer requirements. Nevertheless, if, for the sake of argument, we assume that Vermeer's and Nord's frameworks in fact sum up *producer* requirements, then a situation in which producer and customer requirements are incompatible is not entirely inconceivable. For instance, customer requirements might involve violation either of the part of the *fidelitätsregel* which specifies "*kohärentem transfer eines textes*" or of the principle of "loyalty towards the ST author or sender". Thus, the question which immediately poses itself is: how far can the producer of a translation go? The answer to this question is fundamentally an ethical one (as, incidentally, is the issue of loyalty, cf. Nord 1991:29), which means that combining the functionalist approach with quality management makes it imperative for translation theory to address the issue of translation ethics.

In sum, if applied to the area of translation, quality management holds various implications for translation theory in that it adds to or extends the ground to be covered. For instance, customer requirements become essential (by contrast, producer requirements seem to have been a standard concern in translation theory), and the issue of standardisation with a view to continued improvement needs to be included as do the various stages involved in the translation process in a broad sense. In addition, developing the field of translation ethics becomes absolutely necessary.

Quality management and translation practice

Mutatis mutandis, the implications for translation theory also hold for translation practice with the crucial exception that practitioners opting for quality management have to implement it and cannot restrict themselves to consider it as an abstract phenomenon. However, corresponding to what was the case for translation theory, practising

translation on the basis of Reiss (1976) or House (1981) precludes quality management since extratextual factors are excluded from their approach to translation. By contrast, if translation is practised on the basis of Vermeer (1983) or Nord (1991), quality management is not just feasible, but may indeed prove both useful and profitable.

As will be clear by now, applying quality management to the practice of translation involves focusing on customer requirements: uncovering and explicating customer requirements is essential, and satisfying them is imperative - customer focus becomes the governing principle of translation. Furthermore, explicating producer requirements is a helpful exercise and satisfying them further enhances the quality of the translation delivered¹⁰. In brief, translation practice is best served by attending to both producer and customer requirements. However, as argued in the preceding subsection, the requirements may clash, so, in order to avoid having to make *ad hoc* decisions, the practice of translation should be based on detailed and explicit translation ethics. In this connection, translation practice might gain from developing deliberate Teaching-Your-Customer policies, since these might contribute to the reduction of tension between conflicting requirements.

Both translation firms, be they translation companies or agencies, and translators need to take a broad view of translation so as to include stages in the translation process which are not part of translation *per se* but which are essential to customer satisfaction and, consequently, to perceived quality (see figure 1.). In order to ensure consistent quality, they need to set up standardised procedures for their activities and, for the purpose of being able to assure both themselves and their customers of consistent quality, their procedures need to be documented and directed towards continued improvement, as laid down in the ISO 9000 series. Of course, quality consistency also depends on products and services delivered by suppliers and subcontractors, so procedures for ensuring that the quality delivered by them is known and consistent have to be put in place, too.

In addition, it is important that translation firms use the right translators for the right jobs and that translators only accept the jobs for which they are qualified, i.e., those which match their language combination and subject specialization. As in the case of clashing require-

¹⁰ Of course, producer requirements are often likely to be implied customer requirements if the customer has not actually stated them explicitly.

ments, this is of course a subject that has to be covered by translation ethics.

In sum, to a large extent the implications of quality management for translation practice parallel those for translation theory. Customer focus has to be the governing principle of translation but translation practice needs to satisfy both producer and customer requirements. In addition, translation practice needs a broad view of the process of translation, and procedures have to be standardised to ensure consistent quality throughout the process. Finally, detailed and explicit translation ethics are required.

Quality management and the teaching of translation

The teaching of translation for professional purposes ideally covers both translation theory and translation practice. Again, if the theory covered restricts itself to the equivalence school, as represented by Reiss (1976) or House (1981), quality management has no consequences for the teaching of translation since the approach of this school precludes quality management in relation to translation.

However, if the teaching of translation is to cover, *inter alia*, quality management in relation to translation then the implications discussed in the two preceding subsections should also be addressed in translation courses. In particular, students should be made familiar with the concepts and possible contents of producer and customer requirements, and they should learn to use customer satisfaction as a governing principle of translation. In addition, they should adopt a broad view of translation so as to include the stages preceding and following translation *per se* in the translation process (see figure 1.). If students become accustomed to handling these stages and the tasks involved both consciously and with discrimination, their skills as text producers and, consequently, as translators are likely to improve considerably. Of course, the issues of consistency and continuous improvement should also be addressed, as well as, by implication, that of standardisation of procedures. Last, but not least, translation ethics should feature prominently in such a course.

5. Conclusion

Like much writing in the field of translation, this article has not sought to describe or explain the process of translation. Instead, it has focused

on the feasibility of quality assurance in relation to professional translation and on possible implications of quality management in relation to translation.

The case of Comtec Translations illustrates that quality assurance, a result of quality management, is indeed a feasible undertaking in relation to translation and that it may even be very successful and profitable. This being the case, some of the implications which quality management has for the field of translation have been addressed in the preceding pages. In particular, I have considered the areas of translation theory, translation practice and the teaching of translation. It has emerged that all three areas need to address issues which are new to them or increase their concern with issues which are known but rarely given any prominence.

First and foremost, quality management shifts the focus of translation from translation *per se* to the customer. This might be seen as a logical next step in the development of the functionalist school, although possibly a somewhat unexpected one. Traditionally, and functionalists have in principle constituted no exception to this rule, translation has been concerned with what would amount to producer requirements. However, the shift of focus resulting from quality management means that satisfying customer requirements becomes essential. As a result, translation should be seen as covering not only translation *per se* but all stages from the moment when the first contact with the customer is made and even beyond the delivery of the target text so as to include customer feedback. Likewise, continued improvement aimed at customer satisfaction is a must in translation practice and should be included in translation theory and the teaching of translation as well. The issue of consistent quality, which implies standardisation of procedures, has to be addressed, too, as does, in the case of translation practice, that of documentation with a view to quality assurance. Finally, the discussion in section 4. has shown that the strong customer focus and the need for satisfying customer requirements may at times prove to be incompatible with producer requirements. For this reason, translation ethics should feature prominently in all three areas, but I leave this issue for further research.

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