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Standard Practice for Language Translation¹

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¹ NOTE—Fig. 1 was editorially updated in April 2023.

² NOTE—Fig. 1 was editorially updated in November 2023.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice addresses only language translation and excludes language interpreting. (See Practice F2089, Practice for Language Interpreting.)

1.2 This practice identifies factors relevant to each phase of a translation project (pre-production, production, and post-production). It is intended for use by all stakeholders who may have varying levels of knowledge in the field of translation.

1.3 This practice is designed to provide a framework for agreement on specifications for translation projects that will meet the needs and expectations of the end user.

1.4 This practice addresses the processes involved in professional translation services and does not provide specific translation quality metrics.

1.5 This practice covers various types of translation, including conventional translation and translation in localization and transcreation (see Section 3).

1.6 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*²

F2089 Practice for Language Interpreting

F3130 Practice for Language Service Companies

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F43 on Language Services and Products and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F43.03 on Language Translation.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

2.2 *ISO Standards:*³

ISO 1087: 2019 Terminology Work and Terminology Science

ISO 17024/IEC 17024: 2012 Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 *audience, n*—person or group of people to whom content is directed.

3.1.2 *audio translation, n*—the process of rendering recorded speech in one language into a written text in another language.

3.1.3 *bilingual editing, n*—process of comparing the initial translation to the source language content to verify that the translation fully conveys the source content in adherence to project specifications and generally accepted standards of professional practices.

3.1.4 *bilingual editor, n*—translator different from the original translator, proficient in the same language pair, who performs bilingual editing.

3.1.5 *client review, n*—see *third-party evaluation*.

3.1.6 *client reviewer, n*—see *third-party evaluator*.

3.1.7 *content, n*—written or spoken material and associated non-linguistic material, such as images and video.

3.1.8 *correspondence, n*—the extent to which a translation conveys the intended meaning of the source text.

3.1.9 *desktop publishing, n*—see *formatting*.

3.1.10 *end user, n*—person or entity perceived to have a need or desire for the completed translation.

3.1.11 *fluency, n*—property of a text that is cohesive, coherent, comprehensible, idiomatic, and uses syntax and vocabulary that appears natural to the intended recipient.

3.1.12 *formatting, n*—process of reviewing and modifying, as necessary, the typography and layout of content.

³ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036.

3.1.12.1 *Discussion*—Examples of elements that could be changed include font (color, size, and style), margins, pagination, and spacing.

3.1.13 *glossary, n*—terminological list of designations from a subject field, frequently with equivalents in one or more languages (see ISO 1087).

3.1.14 *integration, n*—process of setting translated content into its environment.

3.1.14.1 *Discussion*—Examples of integration environments may be documents, videos, applications, and websites.

3.1.15 *locale, n*—geographic region of a given target audience.

3.1.15.1 *Discussion*—Locale often accompanies the language(s) of that locale relevant for the translation project, for example, Spanish for Colombia or French for Canada. The locale for translated content may also require changes in non-linguistic content, such as images, time and date formats, units of measurements, currencies, methods of payment, legally binding format restrictions, and international telephone codes.

3.1.16 *localization, n*—translation approach that follows conventions of the target-language locale and adapts textual and non-textual content to meet the cultural, technical, and regulatory requirements of that locale.

3.1.16.1 *Discussion*—Localization is often used when adapting web content and software applications.

3.1.17 *monolingual editing, n*—process of conducting a monolingual review of a translation without reference to the source to ensure fluency of expression, including style, cohesiveness, coherence, adherence to text type conventions, and accepted usage in the target language.

3.1.18 *monolingual editor, n*—person with high-level proficiency in the target language responsible for performing monolingual editing.

3.1.19 *proofreader, n*—person responsible for conducting a final monolingual check of the target text to detect and correct any typographical and formatting errors.

3.1.20 *requester, n*—person or entity placing the order for translation services.

3.1.21 *subject matter expert, n*—person responsible for conducting a monolingual review of the target text to ensure domain accuracy and appropriateness of terminology and cultural nuances in the target language.

3.1.22 *subtitling, n*—process of transferring recorded speech or signs from one language into another in written format for the purpose of projecting on a screen.

3.1.23 *summary translation, n*—process of understanding, analyzing, and condensing content in one language to produce a concise version in a written format in another language.

3.1.24 *termbase, n*—terminology database containing data related to concepts or their designations or both (see ISO 1087).

3.1.25 *testing, n*—process of evaluating the functionality, linguistic appropriateness, and cosmetic aspects of target content.

3.1.26 *third-party evaluation, n*—process of verifying that target content meets specifications conducted by a person or group of people that did not perform the translation, bilingual editing, monolingual editing, or proofreading tasks.

3.1.27 *third-party evaluator, n*—content expert consulted for their feedback on the finalized translation.

3.1.27.1 *Discussion*—Third-party evaluators should have similar credentials to the translator.

3.1.28 *transcreation, n*—translation approach that often adds, subtracts, or adapts textual and nontextual content to produce a particular effect on the target audience.

3.1.28.1 *Discussion*—Transcreation is often used for marketing content.

3.1.29 *transcription/translation, TT, n*—process of writing down recorded speech in one language (transcription) and then transferring the resulting written content into another language (translation).

3.1.30 *translation, n*—process of transferring content from one language into another in written form; also, the product of this process.

3.1.31 *translation error, n*—lack of correspondence between the source text and the target text or failures in use of the target language according to standard norms.

3.1.32 *translation grade, n*—level of correspondence and fluency.

3.1.33 *translation service provider, n*—person or organization that specifically manages the provision of translation services, regardless of organizational form.

3.1.33.1 *Discussion*—Businesses providing such services are known as language service companies (LSC) (see Practice F3130).

3.1.34 *translator, n*—person who performs the translation of the source content into a target text written in another language, according to the agreed-on specifications and generally accepted standards of professional practice.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is intended to apply to all translation projects regardless of the translation service provider selected (see Section 7). This practice does not apply to spoken or signed interpreting services. For interpreting, please consult Practice F2089, Practice for Language Interpreting.

4.2 Every translation project consists of three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production (see Section 6). Needs and requirements vary from project to project, hence not all roles listed in the swim lane diagram provided in Section 6 or all of the processes outlined in Sections 9 and 10 will be required necessarily in every project. Requesters should conduct a Needs Analysis (see Section 5) to determine what type of translation is needed and to select a translation grade.

4.3 A translation project applying this practice shall develop specifications according to Section 8 in the pre-production phase, follow those specifications during the production phase, and evaluate the translation project according to those specifications in the post-production phase.

4.4 The process of translation begins with source content in one language and results in the creation of a target text in another language. The aim of the process is to produce a target text (called the translation) that corresponds to the source content, according to specifications agreed upon in advance following the steps provided in Section 8.

4.5 This practice provides a list of parameters in Section 8 that shall be addressed and documented in writing to obtain a set of specifications used to create and evaluate the translation. Specifications are defined in terms of the purpose of the translation and the needs and expectations of the requester and end user. There can be many correct translations, depending on the specifications defined for a given product and the choices made by the translation service provider.

5. Needs Analysis

5.1 This section describes the initial factors that a requester of translation services should consider when planning a translation project. The involvement of a translation service provider in selecting a translation grade is strongly recommended, except in the case of a seasoned requester.

5.2 Identifying the Use Case:

5.2.1 First, the use case, also known as the scenario, is identified, which is necessary to select the minimum translation grade required. A use case is comprised of subject field, type of text, topic, audience, and purpose.

5.2.2 Source Content and Format:

5.2.2.1 What are the subject field, type of text, and topic of the source content (for example, a chemical engineering journal article about fertilizers or a financial report about company status)?

5.2.2.2 Is the source content machine-processable text (for example, a Word, Excel, or HTML file)? If not, what is it (for example, a paper document, such as a fax or a scanned image, an audio or video recording, etc.)? Text that is not machine-processable may require pre-processing, such as transcription.

5.2.3 Audience and Purpose:

5.2.3.1 Who is the intended audience of the translated text?

5.2.3.2 What is the intended purpose of the translated text? This can differ from the purpose of the source content (for example, a translation may be intended to help students learn about a topic even though the source was written for an entertainment purpose.).

5.3 Translation Grades:

5.3.1 This standard suggests using three grades of translation: high, medium, and low, and is focused on high-grade translation. A translation grade is selected in terms of required levels of correspondence (consisting of accuracy and terminology) between the source and target text and fluency of the target text (conformity with target-language writing standards), relative to the use case identified.

5.3.2 High-grade translation is defined as a target text that completely corresponds to the source text or has no significant translation errors and is fully fluent or at least highly readable.

5.3.3 Low-grade translation is defined as a target text where either there are significant deficiencies in correspondence, or the fluency of target-language expression is so deficient that

only the general topic of the text can be understood. However, even low-grade translation must support the use case.

NOTE 1—Grade selection is made independently of the means by which the translation is produced.

5.4 Risk Analysis:

5.4.1 What risks are associated with the selected grade for a given use case? Selecting a grade also involves considering risk of damage to people, reputation, or equipment caused by translation errors. Potential distribution of confidential data is also an aspect of risk. Low-grade translation, by definition, is much more likely than medium-grade or high-grade translation to contain significant correspondence and fluency errors.

5.4.2 The following are examples of types and levels of risk: *high legal risk*: a translation error in a legal document changing the ownership of an asset, which company bears liability, etc., or a translation error in a user manual causing potential personal injury or property damage; *high reputation risk*: a translated text intended for prominent advertising in a wide-spread medium; *low legal risk*: translated online software help).

NOTE 2—The parameters laid out in this standard assume high-grade translation.

6. Overview of a Translation Project

6.1 Three Phases of a Translation Project:

6.1.1 *Pre-Production Phase*—The requester and the service provider discuss requirements and expectations to ultimately agree on specifications for the translation project (see Section 8).

6.1.2 *Production Phase*—Translation project team members carry out the work according to the specifications agreed upon during the pre-production phase (see Section 9).

6.1.3 *Post-Production Phase*—Translation project team members review and evaluate the translation against updated specifications (see Section 10).

6.2 Translation Project Process:

6.2.1 The swim lane diagram shown as Fig. 1 is a graphic representation of the typical flow of a translation project, including the typical roles that may be needed in the order of typical process flow.

NOTE 3—Some roles may not be necessary depending on the complexity of the translation project. Not all roles are mutually exclusive, and, in some cases, the same individual may perform multiple roles.

6.2.2 The following is a description of the swim lane diagram in narrative form:

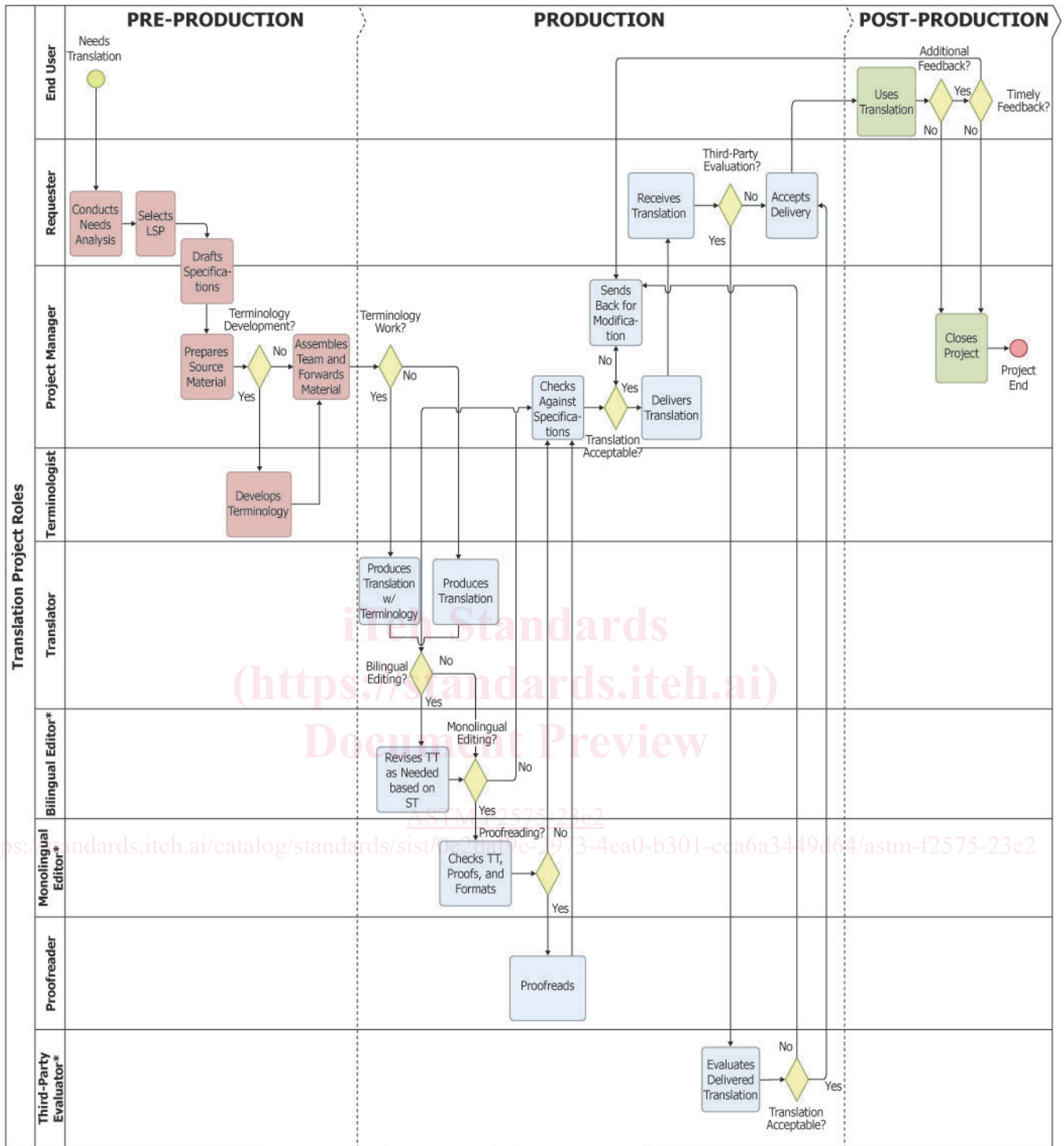
(1) The end user and the requester (who may be the same individual) determine that there is a need for translation.

(2) The requester conducts a needs analysis (see Section 5).

(3) The requester selects a translation service provider (see Section 7).

(4) The requester provides source content and works in consultation with the translation service provider to draw up specifications for the translation project (see Section 8).

(5) The project manager prepares the source content for translation (see 8.4.1.1). In the course of this preparation, the decision is made whether terminology development is necessary.



*The bilingual editor, the monolingual editor, or the third-party evaluator can act as a subject matter expert when specifications so require.

FIG. 1 Three Phases of a Translation Project

(6) If terminology development is necessary, the project manager sends the source content to the terminologist for development of terminology (see 8.3.8).

(7) The project manager assembles the project team and forwards the content to the translator. This may include the terminology work from the terminologist, if specified.

(8) The forwarded content will specify whether or not the translator will also produce terminology in the course of the translation.

(9) The translator receives the forwarded content and produces the translation with terminology work (see 9.3) or without terminology work (see 9.6), according to specifications.

(10) If bilingual editing is specified, the translated content is forwarded to the bilingual editor.

(11) The bilingual editor revises the target text as needed based on the source content (see 9.7).

(12) If monolingual editing is specified, the content is forwarded to the monolingual editor.

(13) The monolingual editor checks, proofreads, and formats the target text (see 9.8).

(14) After translation and any specified editing, the target text is delivered to the project manager.

(15) The project manager checks the target text against the specifications (see 9.14) and decides whether it is acceptable.

(16) If the target text is unacceptable, the project manager returns the target text to the bilingual editor or the monolingual editor, or both, for revision. In this case, the process repeats starting at point 11.

(17) If the target text is acceptable, the project manager delivers the translation to the requester.

7. Selecting a Translation Service Provider

NOTE 4—If you have already chosen a translation service provider, please go to Section 8.

7.1 The most important factor in ensuring success of your translation projects consists of selecting the appropriate translator service provider(s) and tools for the job.

NOTE 5—A translation service provider can be either an individual or a company (aka language service company [LSC]), and the selection of the tools will depend largely on the type of project.

7.2 Translation is a team effort. The first task for the requester is to select a translation service provider.

7.3 *Factors to Consider when Selecting a Translation Service Provider:*

7.3.1 Are the requester's translation needs ongoing or sporadic?

7.3.2 Can the translation service provider handle the type and size of translation project in question (for example, multiple language pairs as opposed to one, content requiring specialized expertise)?

7.3.3 Does the translation service provider have the necessary human resources (for example, bilingual editor, monolingual editor, subject matter expert)?

7.3.4 Does the translation service provider have the necessary technical resources (for example, required tools, ability to output to specified formats)?

7.3.5 Does the requester wish to perform some of the activities related to the translation project (for example, terminology management, translation memory management, internal review, formatting)?

7.3.6 Are there any special security and confidentiality requirements (for example, background checks on translation team members, a specific work location)?

7.3.7 Is your source content correctly written in the source language, compliant with grammatical and spelling rules without slang, regionalisms, or dialect? (See 8.2.11.)

7.3.8 Does the translation service provider have the specified competencies? (See 7.4.)

7.4 *Translator's Competencies:*

NOTE 6—If you choose to work with a language service company (LSC) rather than an individual service provider, the LSC may be responsible for verifying the qualifications of translators for your project, so you do not have to manage it (see Practice F3130, Practice for Language Service Companies).

7.4.1 *Translation Competence*, also known as congruity judgment, is the ability to comprehend source language content and then choose an equivalent expression in the target language that both fully conveys and best matches the meaning intended in the source language for the audience and purpose of the translation. Not all individuals who exhibit language proficiency skills in two languages have the ability to do this. Indicators of translation competence may include one or more of the following:

7.4.1.1 Years of experience translating in the requested language combination and direction.

NOTE 7—It is generally recommended (with some exceptions) that translators translate into their language of habitual use.

7.4.1.2 Number of years studying translation.

7.4.1.3 A degree in translation from a recognized institution of higher learning.

7.4.1.4 Competency-based certification in the spirit of ISO 17024 from a government agency or nonprofit professional association (for example, American Translators Association) ideally belonging to the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (International Federation of Translators).

NOTE 8—Unfortunately, translator certifications are available in only a limited number of language pairs. While certifications cover the most common language pairs, they are not available for many languages of limited diffusion.

7.4.1.5 Translation skills testing by a government agency or testing company.

7.4.1.6 References from someone in a position to attest to the quality of the translator's work.

7.4.1.7 Sample translations produced previously by the translator.

7.4.1.8 Test translations assigned by the requester.

NOTE 9—To prevent abuses, it is recommended that the text to be translated be short and that the translator be compensated for the translation.

7.4.2 *Linguistic Competence*—If none of the indicators above are available, linguistic competence may be used as a proxy for translation competence, with the caveat that linguistic competence does not always imply translation skills.

NOTE 10—Individuals may show great variability in specific language skills (for example, an individual may have a strong reading proficiency in the source language, but not be able to speak it well). Indicators of source language and target-language competence may include any of the following:

7.4.2.1 Language proficiency test scores, such as the following:

(1) American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Writing Proficiency Test (ACTFL WPT) and Reading Proficiency Test (ACTFL RPT). If the project involves audio translation or transcription/translation, a score from the ACTFL Listening Proficiency Test (ACTFL LPT) should be considered an indicator of source language competence.

(2) United States Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) or similar language proficiency tests (including those administered by foreign governments or international organizations). If the project involves audio translation or transcription/translation, a listening proficiency score should be considered an indicator of source language competence.

(3) Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), or similar English proficiency test.

NOTE 11—It is important to keep in mind that language competence diminishes over time with little or no use. Old test scores may no longer be an accurate reflection of current competence in the source or target language.

7.4.2.2 Number of years of second language study.

7.4.2.3 Years of residence in the countries where the second language is spoken.

7.4.3 *Subject Matter Competence*—Translators should have a deep understanding of the particular topic addressed in the source content.

NOTE 12—Subject matter competence is very important. Texts associated with many disciplines involve specific terminology, sentence structures, formats, and practices. They demand a good understanding of the subject matter for the translation to be accurate.

7.4.4 *Text-Type Competence*—In addition to subject matter, the type of text involved in a given translation task places different demands on the translator. Some translators specialize in specific text types, such as patents or scientific articles. It is important to determine a translator's expertise and preferences before assigning a given job. The following are some examples of text types:

- (1) Treaties, contracts, powers of attorney,
- (2) Engineering blueprints, installation and maintenance manuals, and user and product manuals,
- (3) Patient records, patient instructions, and informed consent forms,
- (4) Annual reports and financial statements, and
- (5) Creative texts, such as advertising, marketing, or books.

7.4.5 *Task Competence*—Translators should have the knowledge or experience to tailor the translation and formatting for specific uses (for example, transcription/translation, subtitling, script writing, legal pleadings, software localization, etc.).

7.4.6 *Technology Competence*—It is advisable that translation service providers have competence in the following technologies:

7.4.6.1 Electronic data storage and retrieval,

7.4.6.2 Word processing with appropriate fonts and formatting,

7.4.6.3 Computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools (translation memory, terminology databases, etc.),

7.4.6.4 Electronic data transfer (for example, e-mail, FTP (file transfer protocol), etc.).

8. Pre-Production/Specifications Phase

8.1 *Translation Parameters:*

8.1.1 This section provides parameters that may be used to develop checklists and templates to facilitate the negotiation of specifications. Before a translation project starts, the requester and the translation service provider should agree on relevant information about the content to be translated, specifications for project deliverables, and other aspects of the project. A set of specifications is not a metric but could be used as the basis for defining a metric.

NOTE 13—Even if the requester provides initial requirements to the translation service provider, the requester is encouraged to work with the provider to develop mutually agreed-upon, clear specifications in order to avoid a mismatch of expectations concerning the final product.

8.2 *Source Content Parameters*—The requester should provide the content to be translated. If not available during the specifications phase, a detailed description is needed from the requester. Preliminary specifications should be developed based on that description, subject to confirmation when the actual content becomes available, and should address the following factors:

8.2.1 *Language and Locale*—For example, English, UK.

8.2.2 *Audience*—For example, newspaper readers as opposed to employees within a company.

8.2.3 *Origin of Source Content*—The following questions should be answered:

8.2.3.1 Was it originally written in the source language?

8.2.3.2 Is it a modification of a previous version?

(1) If yes, is there a translation of the previous version?

8.2.4 *Subject Field and Topic*—For example, chemical engineering, reduction of carbon emissions.

8.2.5 *Type of Text (also Known as Genre)*—For example, employee manual, contract, advertisement.

8.2.6 *Purpose*—End use for which the content was created, for example, information as opposed to training.

8.2.7 *Register*—For example, informal or formal, use of honorifics, etc.

8.2.8 *Physical Format*—For example, PowerPoint presentation, video, website, brochure, etc.

8.2.9 *Volume*—For example, word count, audio minutes, number of slide or pages, etc.

8.2.10 *Terminology*—The following questions should be answered:

8.2.10.1 Is there a monolingual or bilingual glossary?

8.2.10.2 Are Internationalization Tag Sets (ITS) used?

8.2.11 *Additional Complexity*—For example, rewriting of source content for translation purposes, text embedded in graphics, regionalisms, slang, jargon, defects in the text, etc.

8.2.12 Does the requester have a style guide in the source language? Will this style guide be provided?

NOTE 14—If the style guide provided by the requester is written for the