FINAL
DRAFT

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

ISO/FDIS 5060

ISO/TC **37**/SC **5**

Secretariat: **DIN**

Voting begins on:
2023-10-20

Voting terminates on:
2023-12-15

Translation services — Evaluation of translation output — General guidance

Services de traduction — Évaluation des résultats de traduction — Recommandations générales

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Reference number
ISO/FDIS 5060:2023(E)

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Translation, interpreting and related technology*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Globalization, the accompanying growth of the translation market, the professionalization of translation services and the growing availability of online machine translation tools have driven the demand for standardized and harmonized principles and procedures for the evaluation of translation output.

In an industrial world in which products have to comply with legal regulations and client specifications, translation output has to be regarded as a product that has to fulfil certain requirements. The systematic comparison of a target language content with the source language content giving regard to the translation project specifications provides the means to arrive at a valuable and objective judgement of achievement.

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Translation services — Evaluation of translation output — General guidance

1 Scope

This document gives guidance on the evaluation of human translation output, post-edited machine translation output, and unedited machine translation output. It also provides guidance on the qualifications and competences of evaluators. The role of sampling is also discussed in this document.

This document focuses on an analytic translation evaluation approach using error types and penalty points configured to produce an error score and a quality rating.

A further focus is the human evaluation of translation output only. This document follows an approach designed to reflect minimum complexity. The rationale behind this approach is to keep this document applicable for as many users as possible in the translation sector.

The guidance provided in this document can also support the evaluation of source texts intended for translation.

This document is applicable to translation service providers (TSPs), including individual translators, translation companies or in-house translation services, their clients and other interested parties in the translation sector, such as translator education and training institutions.

This document does not apply to related elements such as the processes of assuring the quality of translation output and corrective actions.

This document does not apply to interpreting.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO 20539, *Translation, interpreting and related technology — Vocabulary*

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO 20539 and the following apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

— ISO Online browsing platform: available at https://www.iso.org/obp

— IEC Electropedia: available at https://www.electropedia.org/

3.1 General concepts

3.1.1
translate
render *source language content* (3.1.6) into *target language content* (3.1.7) in written form or signed language

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.1.8]

3.1.2
translation
set of processes to render *source language content* ([3.1.6](#)) into *target language content* ([3.1.7](#)) in written form

Note 1 to entry: A translation can refer to formats other than text-based formats (e.g. an audio file, image, etc.).

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.1.2, modified — "may" has been changed to "can" in Note 1 to entry.]

3.1.3
revision
bilingual editing
examination of *target language content* ([3.1.7](#)) against *source language content* ([3.1.6](#)) for its suitability for the agreed purpose

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.2.6, modified — "bilingual examination" has been replaced by "examination in the definition and Note 1 to entry has been changed into an admitted term.]

3.1.4
evaluation of translation output
evaluation
bilingual examination of *target language content* ([3.1.7](#)) against *source language content* ([3.1.6](#)) while classifying any *errors* ([3.4.1](#)) with respect to *translation evaluation specifications* ([3.3.5](#)) and for the purpose of reaching a *quality rating* ([3.3.10](#))

Note 1 to entry: The term "assessment" is frequently used as a synonym for evaluation. While both involve inspection, "evaluation" is the preferred term, since formally there are some differences. Evaluation is product-oriented and judgmental (to accept or reject a product), whereas assessment is process-oriented and diagnostic (to provide feedback on how to improve the process used to produce the product). The preference for "evaluation" is also to avoid the confusion that the abbreviated term "QA" gives rise to, mostly referring to quality assurance.

3.1.5
corrective action
action taken to eliminate the cause of nonconformities or *errors* ([3.4.1](#)) during *translation* ([3.1.2](#)) or in *target language content* ([3.1.7](#))

Note 1 to entry: Corrective action involves an investigation to identify what went wrong and what action can be taken to ensure that it does not happen in the same way again.

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.5.5, modified — Plural has been deleted in "nonconformity" and "in the translation process" changed to "during translation".]

3.1.6
source language content
language content to be *translated* ([3.1.1](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.3.2]

3.1.7
target language content
language content *translated* ([3.1.1](#)) from *source language content* ([3.1.6](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.3.3]

3.1.8
translation output
result of *translation* ([3.1.2](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2023, 3.3.3]

3.1.9
client-TSP agreement
arrangement between a client and a translation service provider (TSP) which specifies the conditions of a *translation service* (3.1.10)

Note 1 to entry: This can take the form of a contract, memorandum of understanding, oral agreement, email, etc. Oral agreements can be documented in writing.

3.1.10
translation service
production and delivery of *target language content* (3.1.7) according to a *client-TSP agreement* (3.1.9)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2019, 3.3.4, modified — "specifications issued by a client" has been changed to "client-TSP agreement".]

3.1.11
segment
unit of text produced for a computer application to facilitate *translation* (3.1.2)

Note 1 to entry: A segment can be a sentence, heading or other unit of text, such as phrase, word or a single character.

[SOURCE: ISO 18587:2017, 3.2.9]

3.2 Concepts related to the people involved in the evaluation process

3.2.1
evaluator
person who performs *evaluation of translation output* (3.1.4) in accordance with the *translation evaluation system* (3.3.4) of the *evaluating entity* (3.2.2)

3.2.2
evaluating entity
person or group of people who determines a *translation evaluation strategy* (3.3.3)

3.3 Concepts related to the evaluation process

3.3.1
requirement
need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.6.4, modified — Notes to entry have been deleted.]

3.3.2
translation project specifications
set of agreed upon and defined *requirements* (3.3.1) for producing *translation output* (3.1.8)

Note 1 to entry: ISO 17100:2015, Annex B, lists a set of sample project specifications.

3.3.3
translation evaluation strategy
organization-wide policy implemented based on the specific purpose for the *evaluation of translation output* (3.1.4)

Note 1 to entry: The purpose for the evaluation of translation output can vary from project to project. Therefore, it can be necessary to apply various translation evaluation strategies.

3.3.4
translation evaluation system
set of steps and actions performed during the *evaluation of translation output* (3.1.4) implemented based on the *translation evaluation strategy* (3.3.3)

3.3.5
translation evaluation specifications
principles for the *evaluation of translation output* (3.1.4), based on the *translation project specifications* (3.3.2)

3.3.6
translation evaluation sample
sample
amount of content taken from *target language content* (3.1.7) to be submitted to an *evaluation of translation output* (3.1.4)

3.3.7
sampling
procedure whereby a part of the *translation output* (3.1.8) is selected to provide a *translation evaluation sample* (3.3.6)

3.3.8
translation evaluation scorecard
translation evaluation scoresheet
table containing all relevant *error types* (3.4.3) with their assigned *penalty points* (3.5.1), for the purpose of producing an *error score* (3.3.9) and the *quality rating* (3.3.10) for the evaluated *translation output* (3.1.8), and for documenting the evaluation

3.3.9
error score
evaluation penalty point total (3.5.3) in relation to the number of characters, number of words or number of lines evaluated in the *translation output* (3.1.8)

3.3.10
quality rating
classification of evaluated *translation output* (3.1.8), based on comparing the *error score* (3.3.9) with an applicable *error score threshold* (3.5.6) and rating system

3.3.11
risk assessment
process of identifying potential risk based on the likelihood that an *error* (3.4.1) will occur and analysing and evaluating its risk level according to the perceived severity of its impact

3.4 Concepts related to errors

3.4.1
error
failure to adhere to *translation project specifications* (3.3.2)

3.4.2
error typology
classification system of *errors* (3.4.1)

3.4.3
error type
class of translation *error* (3.4.1) identified by name, definition and position in an *error typology* (3.4.2)

3.4.4
main error type
superordinate *error type* (3.4.3)

3.4.5
error sub-type
subordinate *error type* (3.4.3)

3.4.6
severity level
rating of the impact of an *error* ([3.4.1](#)) on the *target language content* ([3.1.7](#)) and its suitability for its intended purpose

Note 1 to entry: Example of severity levels: minor, major and critical.

3.4.7
neutral item
annotation pointing out an element that is not an *error* ([3.4.1](#)) but is flagged for further attention.

3.4.8
minor error
error ([3.4.1](#)) that does not prevent the *translation output* ([3.1.8](#)) from fulfilling its intended purpose

3.4.9
major error
error ([3.4.1](#)) that can prevent the *translation output* ([3.1.8](#)) from fulfilling its intended purpose

3.4.10
critical error
error ([3.4.1](#)) that does prevent the *translation output* ([3.1.8](#)) from fulfilling its intended purpose

3.4.11
repeated error
error ([3.4.1](#)), recurring within a text, that is annotated, and that can be but is not always assigned *penalty points* ([3.5.1](#))

3.4.12
severity multiplier value
numerical value reflecting *severity levels* ([3.4.6](#)) of a given *error* ([3.4.1](#)) multiplied with *error counts* ([3.4.13](#))

3.4.13
error count
number of *errors* ([3.4.1](#)) found during an *evaluation of translation output* ([3.1.4](#))

3.5   Concepts related to penalty points

3.5.1
penalty point
numerical value calculated for each *error type* ([3.4.3](#)) based on the *severity multiplier value* ([3.4.12](#))

3.5.2
error type penalty point total
sum of *penalty points* ([3.5.1](#)) for a given *error type* ([3.4.3](#))

3.5.3
evaluation penalty point total
sum of *error type penalty point totals* ([3.5.2](#)) of an *evaluation of translation output* ([3.1.4](#))

3.5.4
error type weight
numerical value used to modify the unweighted *error type penalty point total* ([3.5.2](#))

3.5.5
weight, verb
apply *error type weights* ([3.5.4](#))