# Chapter 1

# Translators' aids: User profiles

## 1.1 User profiles

Translation has traditionally been seen as the work of professional artisans who diligently translate other peoples' text in the best possible manner. It has been considered separate from other activities such as marketing or research and development — if not even subordinate to them. In some respects translation has been a buffer between the internal activities of an organisation and its international contacts.

With the dramatic increase of international contacts the picture has changed. More and more people other than translators or interpreters are personally involved in translation and dealing with people in a foreign language, be it orally or on paper. The amount of text to be translated is growing and so is the number of languages involved. Furthermore, the level of translation that is expected is allowed to vary as information is sometimes needed more for its general contents than for reading pleasure. That is, the translation can be less than perfect in style. All this is starting to make a mark in the arrangement of translation activities in different organisations.

Thus, translation is no more just the activity of individuals but rather a collective process of an organisation. Therefore the concepts of *user* and *user profile* are used in this text to denote collective entities, that is organisations. The actual users of any translators' aid are individual persons, who could also be classified, but this perspective is given less attention here.

Finally, it should be noted that the user profiles and other aspects discussed here are based on a relatively small sample of user organisations, which could not meet statistical standards for reliability. Therefore, it should be treated as an exploratory study of the field, subject perhaps to considerable revision and refinement in the future.

### 1.1.1 Dimensions of translation

Translation activity can be described along several dimensions. These dimensions can be divided into those describing the translated text, the arrangement of translation activity and the external context of translation.

Translated text itself can be described along the following dimensions:

- Quantity of translated text;

- Quantity of text produced directly in a foreign language;

- Quantity of translation work;

- Text type;

- Domain of text;

- Characteristics of source text;

- Languages involved;

- Translation quality;

- Extent of translation work.

The arrangement of translation activity, on the other hand, can be described along the following dimensions:

- Type of translation organisation;

- Job descriptions of people involved in translation;

- Size of translation organisation;

- Medium of translation work.

Finally, the external context of translation in an organisation can be described along the following dimensions:

- Nature of the enveloping organisation;

- Size of enveloping organisation;

- Amount of international activity;

- Nature of international activity;

- Language policy of the enveloping organisation;

- Medium of information production and exchange.

Often, some of these dimensions have more than one value and these different values have varying weights. Therefore, the aforementioned dimensions are most conveniently considered as primary dimensions, which in their turn can be described by secondary dimensions. These secondary dimensions are statistical in nature:

- Set of values;

- Frequencies of values;

- Average value;

- Variance of values;

- Minimum value;

- Maximum value.

### 1.1.2 Relationships between different dimensions

All the dimensions mentioned above are certainly not independent of each other. Relationships of various degrees exist between them, which may be both one-way implications or two-way correlations. Appendix X contains a detailed discussion of these relationships.

On a general level, the dimensions can be divided into two groups according to their level of interdependence in the aforementioned relationships. Firstly, there are dimensions that are independent of the rest. Not surprisingly, this group includes all the dimensions describing the enveloping organisation except the language policy. Secondly, there are dimensions which depend partly on the independent dimensions but which also influence other dimensions. These dimensions include all the rest, describing the translated text itself and the arrangement of translation activity. These dimensions are actually quite interdependent and are entwined in a complex web of relationships. The only exception is the one describing the job descriptions of the people involved in translation which seems not to influence any other dimension.

However, it must be noted that the dimensions describing the enveloping organisation are not wholly independent, either. The external environment of the enveloping organisation, that is the chararacteristics of the country or countries of operation, certainly has an influence on the organisation. For instance, at least the following aspects could be mentioned:

- Size and strength of the internal market of the country;

- Ratio of exports of the economy of the country;

- Global status of the language(s) of the country.

These national aspects, though worth noting, form a level of their own and go outside the scope of this study. Therefore, they will not discussed further here.

### 1.1.3 Trends in dimensions

The general trend of internationalisation of any activity or business is one of the main factors influencing translation and its dimensions. The amount of international activity in organisations is definitely on the rise. Thus, the overall quantity of translated text and text produced direcly in a foreign language is bound to grow with an ever increasing rate; so will the quantity of translation work. The languages involved are also on the increase. It is, however, practically impossible to translate directly from all possible languages to others. Therefore, some languages are emerging as universal focal languages, in which text is often produced directly. For example, instead of carrying out a translation directly from Finnish to Japanese, a text may be produced directly in English, from which it is in turn translated to Japanese — or any other language for that matter.

As the quantity of translated text is growing, the characteristics of source text is shifting from creative to repetitive. More and more texts are 'mass-produced' manuals and the like. At the same time, the new terminology is invented at such a rate it is difficult to keep track of or control it. Updating and revision of old texts are becoming ever more typical activities. In general, the level of translation quality can vary greatly, as not all texts warrant high quality. On the other hand, the extent of translation work is spreading outside pure translation to editing and layout of the text.

As organisations are becoming more international, so are their employees. This is leading to multi-lingual organisations in which text is produced directly in one or more foreign languages. At least in smaller countries, such as Finland, a basic requirement for employment in many organisations is the sufficient knowledge of at least two foreign languages.

The arrangement of translation is on its own part affected by a more general trend towards buying services from external sources instead of generating them internally. This is leading to the dismantling of heavy centralised arrangements for translation in favour of subcontracting translation companies and freelances. Another form of this development is making internal translation departments independent, self-sustaining business units and making them compete against external competitors.

### 1.1.4   Typical user profiles

Different users and user organisations naturally have different needs. In translation, however, it often seems not as much a question of differing needs but of differing resources and capabilities. A translator's or translation organisation's main task is translation, not the development of new tools. Many translators' aids demand extensive internal development, which are often outside the capabilities of smaller organisations or individuals. Furthermore, the cost of this development is warranted only when the level of ultimate use exceeds some certain critical point.

There are, in fact, no *typical* user profiles. Most organisations resort to a combination of arrangements of translation, which vary greatly according to the peculiarities of each organisation. Therefore, user profiles could be based on a variety of combinations of different key dimensions of translation. The following user profiles are based on the arrangement of translation activity and the size of the enveloping organisation. This classification is rather descriptive and straightforward, but its weakness is that variance within a particular user profile grouping can sometimes be disturbingly great. In addition, some of these user profiles, such as organisations with centralised translation activity, are certainly more potential users of translators' aids than others, such as bi/multilingual organisations. Furthermore, it is clear that organisations that have subcontracted all of their translation activity outside represent no direct potential at all in this classification. However, by adhering to this line of thinking at least the following user profiles can be presented:

- Freelance translator;

- Small translation company;

- Large translation company;

- Mid-sized organisation with centralised internal translation department;

- Large organisation with centralised internal translation department;

- Bilingual organisation;

- Multilingual organisation;

- International organisation.

These user profiles a discussed in further detail in appendix X.

Another approach can also be taken, which is maybe somewhat simpler. From the point of view of translators' aids, perhaps the single most significant factor within an organisational entity is the overall quantity of documentation produced — whether directly or through translation. Of equal significance is how this amount breaks down between different text types and domains, and how it varies on a long-term time-scale. These on their own part depend greatly on the size of the enveloping organisation, its nature and fields of activity and its amount of international activity. It is clear that the more translation of some type and domain is done within an organisation, the more an organisation will eventually be able to profit from translators' aids — especially the high end ones.

In this context, the way translation is organised within an organisation would no longer have to be a starting point in classification, since an organisation could have people translating documentation in a central translation department, or writing text by themselves anywhere in the organisation, or even outsiders doing subcontracted translation, as long as they all have access to the same translation tools, and use them, too. This all, of course, depends on a fully functional information network, high computer literacy, and successful indoctrination in the use of new exciting systems, which is maybe utopia for now. Anyway, an ideal organisation could unite all employees in the documentation process and tap into their collective knowledge, instead of isolating translation from the rest of documentation and communication. In this respect, translators' aids could also be considered documentation aids. You can already now, for example, use the same electronic dictionary both for translating text and for writing text directly in that language.

It is another thing to transform this approach into distinctive user profiles, since there are no quantum leaps between the quantities of translations of different organisations. In addition, one has to bear in mind that text produced within some organisations is by its nature more suitable for particular translators' aids than text produced in others. There are, however, certain critical quantities for the usefulness of certain translators' aids which could serve as milestones. With these in mind, the following rough classification could be presented (using familiar baseball terms):

- Little-league user of translators' aids;

- Middle-league user of translators' aids;

- Major-league user of translators' aids.

These groupings are naturally only reference points on a continuum. They are discussed in further detail in appendix X. In addition, appendix X contains case examples of six different archetype users of translators' aids.

## 1.2   Correlations between user profiles and translators' aids

At the present time, it can be said, as a rule of the thumb, that the larger the translation organisation or unit, the more probable it is that it is using or experimenting with sophisticated translators' aids such as machine translation. In other words, it is these translation organisations that believe that they have the most to gain from the use of these aids — and they are probably right in their belief. This applies the other way, too. The more sophisticated a translators' aid is, the more resources for development and fine-tuning are required to make it fully operational. This is again only possible to achieve in the larger translation organisations.

This situation should change in the future, but it will require extensive work to make these high-end translators' aids truly available to the small users. Affordable prices, proven results, ready-to-use systems, ease of use and compatibility with other systems are just some of the things that will make translators' aids as commonplace as the spread-sheet programs of today. The change is already under way, as tens of thousands of people in the United States are starting to use machine translation on their personal computers for non-work purposes.

At the moment, there are some prerequisites for the use of different translators' aids. At the same time, there are also incentives to start using some of these aids. Sometimes, the choice of a particular aid can be defined rather negatively: that is, if some characteristic of translation is missing. Appendix X contains a detailed discussion of these relationships.