

## **Training translators or translation service providers? EN 15038:2006 standard of translation services and its training implications**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper presents an overview of the EN 15038:2006 standard, *Translation services—Service requirements*, and analyses its implications for the translation industry and specialised translator training in tertiary education institutions. It is the first pan-European standard which addresses the quality of the translation process specifically and establishes translation service requirements. Among other things, it establishes an independent third-party revision as an obligatory component of the translation process. Its significance for the translation industry is that it raises its profile as one of the standardised industries and contributes to the professionalisation of the translator and, more importantly, the reviser. With the growing number of translation agencies seeking to obtain the 15038:2006 certification, the standard gains increasingly wider recognition, which exerts certain pressure on educational institutions. It promotes a broader view of translation as part of the translation service, reflecting the market expectation to train translation service providers rather than translators. It sees the training of translation service providers as a life-long learning process and stresses the importance of continuous professional development. The standard may be considered as a guideline for market-oriented training.

### **KEYWORDS**

EN 15038:2006, translation quality, quality assurance, provision of translation service, translation service provider, specialised translator training, European Master's in Translation.

The EN 15038 standard "Translation services—Service requirements" is the first pan-European standard which regulates the quality of the translation process specifically, as opposed to general quality standards such as ISO 9001. It was prepared on the initiative of the European Union of Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC) by Technical Committee CEN/BT/TF 138 "Translation services," work on the standard being commenced in 2000 (Arevalillo 2005). The standard was approved by the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) on 13 April 2006 to be implemented as a national standard in 29 member countries<sup>1</sup> by November 2006. With the growing number of institutions using the standard in tenders as a point of reference and the growing number of translation agencies seeking to obtain the 15038:2006 conformity assessment and certification,<sup>2</sup> the standard gains increasingly wider recognition all over Europe, which exerts certain pressure on educational institutions to train translators in line with its requirements. The aim of this paper is to discuss implications for specialised translator training at tertiary education institutions, which will be preceded by an overview of the standard and its significance for the European translation industry.

## 1. Overview of the standard

EN 15038:2006 is intended to standardise the translation service and applies to all translation service providers (TSP), both large translation companies and individual translators in the CEN countries. In general, the translation profession is unregulated, except for court or other official translation in some European countries. This means that there are no entry requirements to the profession and anybody can call themselves a translator until the market verifies their translation skills. The market is not always able to assess the quality of translation since in most cases clients commission a translation because they do not know either a source language (SL) or a target language (TL). It is therefore clear that some standardisation was needed to provide both clients and TSPs with a framework of reference for quality translation services.

### 1.1. Purpose

The overall objective of the standard is to enhance the quality of translation services, in particular: 1) to introduce and describe the requirements for the provision of translation services, including translation and other related processes, and 2) to define procedures for TSPs necessary to meet market needs (European Committee for Standardization, 2006: 4). The requirements concern:

- human and technical resources,
- quality and project management,
- contractual framework,
- service procedures. (*Ibid*: 5)

The standard focuses on the entire translation service rather than on a translated text as a product. It provides TSPs with procedures to ensure quality and motivates them to improve services. It does not however tell clients how to evaluate the target text itself, but may help them identify TSPs who are more likely to provide quality services. The certificate of conformity with the standard may act as a competitive advantage to TSPs, evidencing their commitment to quality. As emphasised on the website of one of the accredited audit organisations, TÜV SÜD AG, the certification functions as a “unique selling proposition (USP) in corporation communications” and increases clients’ confidence. (See TÜV SÜD America Inc.).

Besides the objective to improve the quality of translation services, the standard was intended “to raise the profile of the translation industry by bringing it into line with other ‘standardised’ industries and giving it a more professional image” (Hübner 2007: 13). This aim is promoted, *inter alia*, by an attempt<sup>3</sup> to clarify main terminology related to the provision of translation services, which “will help all of us be able to speak the same

language” (Arevalillo 2005). The following terms are defined: *added value services, competence, document, interpreting, locale, proofreading, register, review, reviewer, revise, reviser, source language, source text, target language, target text, text type convention, translate, translation service provider, and translator*. What is notable is the unification of terminology related to revision (*checking, revision, review and proofreading*), which will be discussed below. This terminology has been used inconsistently and interchangeably by translation companies, translators, revisers, as well as in the professional and academic literature. Time will show whether it will become widely used; if not, it will at least serve as a point of reference.

It is also believed that the standard may foster more collaboration between certified translation companies (Arevalillo 2005).

## 1.2. Basic requirements concerning human resources

Another attempt at raising the profile of the translation industry is to specify formal education and/or experience requirements TSPs (translators, revisers, reviewers) should meet to be regarded as professionals with relevant competences. The requirements for translators include: formal degree studies in Translation, or degree studies in the domain plus 2 years of experience in translating, or at least 5 years of professional experience as a translator (see Table 1).

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<b>Formal education requirement</b>	Recognised degree in translation	Equivalent degree in another domain	-
<b>Experience requirement</b>	-	2-year documented experience as a translator	5-year documented experience as a translator

**Table 1. Education and/or experience requirements.**

Therefore, a recognised degree in translation (it is unclear whether a first-cycle and/or second-cycle degree is meant) is equivalent to 5 years of translation experience or a specialist degree and 2 years of translation experience. This combination of education and/or experience is considered to ensure that TSPs possess requisite professional competences, which should be further updated through continuing professional development.<sup>4</sup> The competences are as follows (European Committee for Standardization, 2006: 7):

- **Translating competence:** ability to translate in line with the standard requirements and client instructions, analyse ST comprehension and TT production problems;

- **Linguistic and textual competence in the SL and the TL:** the latter involves familiarity with a broad array of text type conventions and their application in practice while the former is the ability to comprehend the ST and “mastery of the target language.” Interestingly, the standard does not make an explicit requirement that translators should be native speakers of the TL, which for example is obligatory for members of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting,<sup>5</sup> but instead uses a less restrictive term similar to that in the FIT’s Translator’s Charter.<sup>6</sup>
- **Research competence, information acquisition and processing:** ability to quickly retrieve additional linguistic/specialised information to comprehend the ST and prepare the TT, optimum use of research tools and information sources.
- **Cultural competence:** ability to apply knowledge of ST and TT conventions (i.e. locale), behavioural standards and values.
- **Technical competence:** ability to use technical resources to prepare the TT.

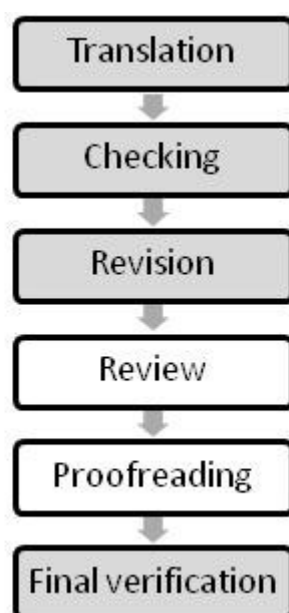
The topic of the translator’s competences is one of the most discussed ones in the Translation Studies literature (cf. Pym 2003 or Kiraly 2000 for a detailed overview). The most in-depth and professionally-oriented recent model of competences was proposed by the EMT expert group, established by the Directorate-General for Translation, European Commission (EMT stands for European Master’s in Translation; its objective is to raise the quality of translator training). The EMT model of competences was prepared as a guideline for Master’s level translation programmes and includes: translation service provision competence (central), language competence, intercultural competence, information mining competence, technological competence, and thematic competence (Gambier 2009). The EMT model and the EN 15038 model are quite similar, except for two differences. First of all, the latter does not have a separate thematic competence, which certainly is a curious omission. The thematic competence, also known as domain/subject-specific competence (Schäffner 2005: 243) or subject competence (Cao 2007: 41), is well established in the literature and may be frequently found as a requirement in translation companies’ vacancy postings. With the growing specialisation of translations (cf. Gouadec 2007: 334) and improved knowledge of foreign languages, translators tend to specialise in a limited range of domains as “translation quality is far more dependent on the translator’s technical knowledge than on his language capabilities” (Meersseman 2004: 36). The thematic competence should therefore have been included in the EN 15038 model of competences as a separate competence rather than a mere ability to acquire specialised knowledge. Secondly, the standard does not require translators to have the

translation service provision competence, which in the EMT model includes the translating competence but also business-oriented skills, referred to in the literature as the translator competence (as opposed to the translation competence, cf. Kiraly 2000: 13-19).

### 1.3. Translation process

The major input of the standard is an attempt to define stages in the translation process which ensure a quality translation product. As already noted, the standard describes the entire translation service, the concept of which is broad: it consists of pre-translation, translation and post-translation processes as well as value-added services. Hence, translation itself is only one of the stages, albeit the core one. This section will focus on the components of the production process proper, i.e. the translation process related to the production of a target text.

The translation process consists of three stages (Chart 1): 1. Translation; 2. Checking of a TT by the translator; 3. Revision of a TT by another translator. If requested in the job specification, the full translation process cycle may also include: 4. Review by a third-party domain expert, and 5. Proofreading of proofs before publication, which are followed by the final verification.



**Chart 1. Stages of the translation process.**

- **Translation** is defined as rendering of information in the ST into the TT (European Committee for Standardization, 2006: 6) and is described as “transfer [of] the meaning in the source language into the target language in order to produce a text that is in accordance with the rules of the linguistic system of the target language and that meets the instructions received in the project assignment” (*ibid*: 11).

The process should involve the correct and consistent use of terminology, grammar, lexis, local conventions, style and register, and formatting, and should account for the target group, purpose or final use of the translation (*ibid*: 11).

- **Checking** is self-revision carried out by the translator before the TT is submitted to the TSP; it is intended to check accuracy against the ST, eliminate omissions or errors, and verify fulfilment of specifications (*ibid*: 11). The checking stage is commonly used by professional translators as part of their quality assurance procedure to ensure that a translation is of deliverable quality.
- **Revision** is obligatory and checks a TT against the ST “for its suitability for the agreed purpose” (*ibid*: 6) and may involve a check of terminology consistency and register/style (*ibid*: 11). It is carried out by another translator who knows both the SL and the TL and has translation experience in the relevant domain (*ibid*: 7). If necessary, the reviser recommends corrective measures, which may include retranslation (*ibid*: 11). Hence, the core translation process should involve at least two parties: a translator and a reviser.
- **Review** is optional and is carried out upon the client’s request. It is also a check of a TT “for its suitability for the agreed purpose and respect for the conventions of the domain to which it belongs” (*ibid*: 5) but the crucial difference from revision is that it does not verify the TT against the ST but is a monolingual check which treats a TT as an independent text. It is carried out by a TL domain specialist who does not need to have translation experience or know a SL (*ibid*: 7). If necessary, the reviewer recommends corrective measures (*ibid*: 11).
- **Proofreading** is also optional and involves a check of proofs before they are published (*ibid*: 6). It is, however, unclear what type of check is involved: whether it is a substantial check which upgrades a TT quality from deliverable to publishable or rather a quick post-DTP check of technical aspects, such as the proper display of diacritics, or omissions (cf. Schopp 2007: 8). The term *proofreading* should have been elaborated in more detail as it is frequently used in the industry to mean ‘revision.’
- **Final verification**, an obligatory step, is carried out by a TSP to verify if “the service provided meets the service specifications” (European Committee for Standardization, 2006: 12).

It should be emphasised that the standard acknowledges and promotes the importance of revision and its role in quality assurance. The translated text should be checked at least twice: by the original translator (checking) and by another translator (revision). Ideally, its content should also be

reviewed by a domain specialist; the review increases quality but also increases the cost of the final product and turnaround time (“quality/price/deadline—pick any two”, Bonthron and Fry (2004: 28)). It is the requirement of obligatory third-party revision that is of historic significance to the translation industry. It is regarded as a major success of the standard as it establishes “a mechanism to provide increased quality of the translated text through increased objectivity” (Arevalillo 2005). This ‘four-eye principle’ also creates a significant demand for revision services and transfers some liability for translation quality and accuracy from the translator to the reviser. Independent revision marks out translation companies from translation agencies which merely act as ‘envelope switchers,’ i.e. intermediaries which buy translations from freelancers and sell them to clients without quality control (cf. Schopp 2007: 2, Arevalillo 2005). However, as emphasised by Martin, revision is not the only cost-efficient and “perhaps not even the most effective” component of translation quality assurance as all the processes contribute to translation quality, including recruitment, training, and technical resources (2007: 61-62). As he further notes, the real strength of revision lies in feedback “that allows its results to be channelled back into the whole cycle of translation production in order to eliminate or reduce problems at source” (2007: 62).

#### **1.4. Project Management**

The standard emphasises throughout the need to ensure compliance with the client-TSP agreement, which rests with the project manager. The document defines necessary components of project management. The project manager:

- monitors the preparation process, including project registration, provision of technical resources, pre-translation processing to prepare a ST for translation, preparation of reference materials, ST analysis at the macrostructural and microstructural levels;
- assigns translators, revisers, reviewers for the project;
- sends them instructions which may concern a client style guide, translation adjustment to skopos or end users;
- monitors consistency;
- ensures that the work schedule is met;
- maintains contacts with the parties involved;
- signs the project off for delivery (European Committee for Standardization, 2006: 9-10).

In addition to the normative part, the standard also includes annexes of an informative nature which specify project registration details, components of technical pre-translation processing and source text analysis, style guides, and a non-exhaustive list of added value services.

### 1.5. Value-added services

The added value services which may be additionally offered by a TSP include related services ranging from text processing to technical and consulting services. Table 2 proposes a grouping of services based on Annex E of the standard (European Committee for Standardization 2006: 17).

<b>Text preparation</b>	Technical writing
<b>ST/TT adjustment</b>	Pre- and post-editing Transcription Adaptation, rewriting Updating Internationalisation Localisation, Globalisation Transliteration Legalisation, notarisation
<b>Quality control</b>	Review and revisions from third parties Back-translation
<b>Audiovisual</b>	Subtitling Voice-over
<b>Translation memories and terminology work</b>	Translation memory alignment Alignment of bilingual parallel texts Terminology database creation and termbase management Terminology concordance
<b>Technical services</b>	DTP Graphic design Web design Camera-ready artwork
<b>Consulting</b>	Language consultancy Culture consultancy

**Table 2. Added value services.**

The inclusion of these services turns a TSP into a 'one-stop shop' for clients. Added value services help translators to increase their service offer and, hence, their employability.

To sum up, despite some voices that EN 15038 is a mirror of semi-professionalism (cf. Schopp 2007: 8)<sup>7</sup>, the pan-European standard that specifically addresses translation services does raise the profile of the translation industry as one of the standardised industries and contributes to the professionalisation of the translator and the reviser. It offers a common ground for translation-related terminology. It serves as a holistic benchmark for good practices and helps TSPs ensure quality of the translation service; however, it is more a measure of a process than a product. Last but not least, it establishes an independent third-party



revision as an obligatory key component of translation quality assurance: translation and revision are inseparable as two sides of the same coin.

## **2. EN 15038:2006 and translation teaching: training translators or translation service providers?**

In addition to the above mentioned functions, the standard may be a point of reference to educational institutions engaged in the training of specialised translators. It has some implications for the market of educational services, content and teaching approaches, which will be discussed below.

### **2.1 Implications for the market of educational services**

The standard acknowledges the importance of formal higher education for translators as a proof of the requisite translation competences. Yet in some countries Translation Studies is not recognised as an independent academic discipline in national educational standards, which imposes certain restrictions on curricula and content design. This is the case for example in Poland, where Translation Studies is a sub-component of the Linguistics component of Philology in the national legislation laying down curricula requirements for tertiary education institutions. The separate European standard for the translation industry, implemented as a national standard, may help to raise educational authorities' awareness of Translation Studies as an independent discipline and, consequently, emancipate first-cycle and second-cycle Translation Programmes from Philology, especially in Eastern European countries.<sup>8</sup>

There are many first and second-cycle translation programmes in Europe; as at 2006 the number of bachelor's and master's degree programmes in translation was estimated at circa 285 (Gambier 2009: 1). As noted by Pym, the geographical distribution of programmes does not always correspond to the market demand and results in the oversupply of trained translators in some countries, e.g. Spain, Germany and Italy, and undersupply in others, especially China and India (2009), as well as in Central and Eastern European countries. Concerned about the quality of translator education, the European Commission set up an expert group with a view to standardise master's degree translation programmes by developing quality guidelines. High-quality programmes which meet the criteria will be admitted to the EMT network. The EMT recommendations for curricula, translator profile and translator competences, as well as its broad perception of translators as experts in multilingual and multimedia communication, are an educational counterpart of the EN 15036:2006 standard for master's degree programmes.

Being an indirect but indispensable dimension of quality assurance, continuing professional development is frequently required or recommended by professional bodies, such as translator associations. In EN 15038, this type of training is intended to maintain and upgrade translators' and revisers' five competences. Experienced translators would naturally be more interested in less formal narrowly-focused short-term courses rather than long-term first/second-cycle general translation programmes. Pym notes a recent increase in short-term courses that "offer translators the skills they require to move from one professional niche to another" (2009). Although the demand for short-term courses is significant, especially from freelancers who have much fewer training opportunities than in-house translators, there is still a dearth of courses for experienced translators or revisers that would enable them to develop competences (see 2.2.2) rather than move to another niche. The only exception is training targeted at technical competence, offered willingly, *inter alia*, by (CAT) software providers. It is an opportunity for and a challenge to tertiary education institutions to fill in this market niche.

## **2.2. Implications for content**

In this section it is necessary to make a distinction, as signalled above, between programmes addressed at novice translators to build their competences and continuous professional development addressed at practising translators/revisers as an update of skills.

### **2.2.1. First/second-cycle programmes**

To be consistent with the standard, first-cycle and second-cycle translation programmes should be oriented at training translation service providers rather than translators<sup>9</sup>. Some students will work as in-house translators/revisers, some as individual freelancers, yet others as project managers or translation company managers. Trainers should aim at developing the professional competences specified in the standard (see 1.2) and cover all phases of the translation service provision, that is not only those included in the translation process itself (translation, checking, revision, review), but also those related to translation project management (project registration and documentation, pre-translation processing, ST analysis, consistency monitoring, financial settlements; see 1.4), and, optionally, value added services (see 1.5). Students may be trained in versatile roles: translator, reviser, reviewer, proofreader, project manager, DTP publisher, or graphic designer. Going beyond the traditional scope of translation improves their awareness of the translator's place in the project cycle and the role of each step.

It is envisaged that "much greater sectoral and technological expertise will be required in the future" in the translation industry (Bon throne and Fry 2004:28). This requirement will also apply to translation programmes and,

as noted by Pym, the need for highly specialised programmes that “cater to specific market niches or skill sets” should in particular be met at the master’s level, e.g. localisation, audiovisual translation, literary translation, or applied terminology (2009). One example of such specialisation is focus on revision: with the emergence of revision as an obligatory component of the translation process, it might be useful to establish separate training in revision (cf. Hansen 2009). Analogically, separate courses in translation project management should also be taken into consideration.

Undoubtedly, students should become familiar with the standard itself to raise their understanding of translation quality and quality assurance. It is worth noting that one of the components of the Translation Service Provision competence in the EMT expert group’s model of competences referred to above is “knowing the standards applicable to the provision of a translation service” (Gambier 2009: 4). Likewise, students should also become familiar with the terminology advocated by the standard.

### **2.2.2. Continuous professional development**

Continuous professional development addressed at practising translators and revisers, who already have professional experience and frequently have unpredictable working time, should ideally be short-term and flexible. In this respect online courses are an excellent option, although face-to-face training offers added social value, such as networking with colleagues during coffee breaks, information exchange and experience sharing, and establishing business contacts<sup>10</sup>.

In respect of content, tailored, highly-specialised courses tend to be the most attractive. Such courses are:

- organised around text types (textual competence), e.g. translation of articles of association, balance sheets, prospectuses;
- focus on domain-specific terminology, phraseology and concept systems;
- build up domain-specific knowledge;
- improve linguistic competence related to language A (native language), which tends to be neglected during the formal training at universities, especially in countries with the inverse translation tradition. This type of training may be sought after by translators working also in the capacity of revisers;
- improve linguistic competence related to language B, in particular in markets where inverse translation is the norm;

- prepare for professional examinations (sworn translator certification, IOL, etc.);
- prepare for the provision of added value services;
- improve business skills: accounting or tax issues, marketing.

### **2.3. Implications for teaching approaches**

The standard promotes looking at translation through the broader concept of the translation service. It implies that translation is part of the project cycle and requires team work and collaboration of the parties involved. This view is in line with the idea of professional realism of training recommended recently in several approaches, e.g. the Professional Approach to Translator Training (Olvera Lobo et al. 2007), Gouadec (2007), Kiraly's social constructivism (2005), Kelly (2005). The basic assumption behind professional realism is that translator training should correspond to market demands and be practice-oriented. The professionalisation of training may be achieved through simulations of professional practice and its basic components, as proposed by Kelly, include: relating teaching to professional environments, role-playing, practising technical aspects of the profession, visits to translation agencies and work placements, as well as real-life projects (2005: 75–76). An element of this approach is project-based learning (Gouadec 2007, Kiraly 2005), where students simulate the work of a translation company and simultaneously practise a whole range of skills involved in the provision of translation service, similarly to professional translators in real life. It enables coordination and integration of skills: translation and technical skills as well as business skills (project planning and management, quoting, invoicing, taxes, documentation, customer relation management). Introduced gradually at later stages of training (Kelly 2005: 199), projects seem to be ideally suited for training translation service providers as they practise all the five competences in a single assignment and focus on all aspects of translation project management.

To conclude, the standard is of significance not only for the translation industry, but also for institutions training specialised translators. By raising the profile of the translation industry, it also raises the status of Translation Studies as an independent academic and training discipline. The standard may serve as a guideline for training institutions with practically-oriented programmes. It promotes a broader view of translation as part of the translation service, which reflects the market expectation to train translation service providers rather than translators. Secondly, it sees the training of translation service providers as a life-long learning process and stresses the importance of continuous professional development. Finally, EN 15038 recognises third-party revision as a

crucial element of the translation service, which should be addressed with more vigour by training institutions. All in all, the standard may be considered to contain the minimum requirements which must be accounted for by training institutions if they want to ensure market-oriented training.

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (European Committee for Standardization, 2006:1).

<sup>2</sup> From March 2007 to July 2010 Bureau Veritas Polska Certification Sp. z o.o., one of the certification agencies, certified 12 major translation agencies in Poland. Monika Popiołek, President of the Polish Association of Translation Agencies (PSBT), estimates the number of certified Polish agencies at ca. 20, with additional 20 agencies having self-certification or non-accredited certification.

<sup>3</sup> For a criticism of proposed definitions see Schopp (2007: 6-8).

<sup>4</sup> The assumption that every fresh graduate with a recognised degree in translation will be capable of providing a translation which fully complies with the standard seems to be too optimistic. Additionally, the meaning of 'recognised' is vague, given the fact that some 'recognised' translation programmes are theoretically rather than practically oriented. In this light, recent efforts of the Directorate-General for Translation (European Commission) to recognise quality translation programmes (European Master's in Translation, EMT) are worth noting. (See EMT)

<sup>5</sup> Article 4.1.1 of the *Code of professional conduct*: "members shall translate only into a language which is either (i) their mother tongue or language of habitual use, or (ii) one in which they have satisfied the Institute that they have equal competence".

<sup>6</sup> Article I(6) of the FIT *Translator's Charter*: "The translator shall possess a sound knowledge of the language from which he/she translates and should, in particular, be a master of that into which he/she translates." (See FIT)

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<sup>7</sup> Schopp claims that the standard will not be able to ensure full professionalism as “it is based on a too limited understanding of ‘translation’ and ‘translation process’,” uses vague terms, is a compromise between the 29 translation traditions, and “shows the non-homogeneity of the profession and the semi-professional working principles of practising translators” (2007: 8-9).

<sup>8</sup> This problem concerns Eastern European countries with ‘the Philology tradition’ (understood broadly as Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies).

<sup>9</sup> Recent literature on translator training emphasises the need to extend the scope of translator training with neighbouring skills; for example, the EMT guidelines refer to translators as “experts in multilingual and multimedia communication” (Gambier 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Martin (2007: 61) for his prediction that the standard may contribute to increased “informal pairings and collectives” among individual service providers to meet the third-party revision requirement.