



CAPITA

**The Conundrum of Quality,
Time and Cost in the
Language Services Sector**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Businesses looking for a localisation solution usually have three requirements they are aiming to meet: you want a quality service, that meets your timescales, and will work within your budget. This is far from being a new problem, but with customers new to the localisation industry demanding more, the issue should be a top priority for Language Service Providers (LSPs).

For an LSP, overcoming this conundrum can be the difference between securing a new client and losing out to a competitor. As the world becomes more interconnected, and businesses look for opportunities in emerging markets, the demand for language services will increase and put pressure on LSPs to perform consistently at a high level in all three areas...and beyond!

INTRODUCTION

It seems obvious that quality, cost and time are interconnected and that achieving the highest level of each of these elements is near impossible, but we all still expect this to a certain extent.

The balance between cost, quality and time is easily disrupted because all three are interconnected. For example, high quality translation will take longer than if the piece of work is for 'gist' purposes. Gisting is translating content to the point where the end user will be able to catch the basic understanding of the text, even if it is not word for word. Technical documents, for instance, will also cost more due to the potential critical nature of the content.

Similarly, if you have a piece of translation work that needs to be done within a very tight timescale, quality may be affected, as quality checks can be time-consuming, and therefore overlooked in a time-sensitive project. It is also possible to apply more than one linguist to a time-sensitive job, but issues over consistency may then arise, as each linguist may have a different style.

Let's look at each of these factors separately in an attempt to simplify the conundrum.





TAUS, a respected localisation industry body and resource centre, recognises that translation quality depends on the impact that inaccurate translations may have on the customer and on the business, which helps put into context the extent to which this factor should be pitted against the others.

Defining quality

Every business faces time and cost restraints when it comes to their translation requirements. However, there must be a minimum level of accepted quality in order to make the investment in translation worthwhile. With quality being such a subjective topic, this minimum level may be hard for LSPs to identify across their various customers. Quality in the Language Services industry includes many different factors, from the accuracy of the translation itself, to the style of the written content and the level of service that is received.

Customer engagement

A report by the Common Sense Advisory, an independent market research company, "Can't Read, Won't Buy" highlights how **51% of respondents prefer content in their own language**, even if it is poorly translated; questioning the importance of translation accuracy. The report does not specify, however, whether those surveyed are purchasing retail goods or manufacturing equipment, and the results may differ accordingly. The Common Sense Advisory's report entitled "Buyer Defined Translation Quality" shows in contrast that **89.1% of buyers surveyed view technical accuracy** as very important. Documents of a technical nature will therefore require a much higher level of translation accuracy. This could include user manuals, regulations and content from the legal and finance sectors.

Global consumer reach

There is always the danger that companies may become complacent with their standards for quality translation. While consumers may have once largely accepted English as the 'go-to' language for content, this is beginning to change, as more and more content is being launched in languages that may not have been previously catered for. As this proliferates and as competition heightens, customers will be less likely to tolerate poorly translated content.

Factors affecting quality

Whilst budgets and deadlines affect translation quality, additional factors such as Translation Memory (TM), processes, style and people will also bear an impact. These factors are important to consider when striving for high quality and will inevitably add layers to the complexity surrounding cost, quality and time issues.

Accuracy vs. gist

Some translations are less about accuracy and are more focused on getting the general point across. For example, online product reviews need not be as accurate as an instruction manual, and so the impact of an inaccurate translation in an online review is less damaging to the customer and business. In this instance - accuracy and translation quality will be less of a priority to the customer than the two other factors.



When a customer requires any form of service, the cost of that service will play an important role in deciding who will provide it. Cost often dictates the extent to which the other two factors; time and quality, will prevail.

Cost calculations and pricing transparency can often appear confusing for a company who is just setting out on their localisation journey. It is not only the length of translation required and the level of quality that will affect the cost of translation services (although these are key drivers) but a myriad of other inputs, often forgotten about or not fully understood.

Automation saving costs

One factor that affects translation cost is the application of a Translation Memory (TM). TM is a tool that helps to lower translation costs over time as customers require a more regular service from their LSP. TMs store phrases and sentences from previous projects so the linguist can benefit from previous work and therefore reduce the cost of translation of similar material.

The advent of Machine Translation (MT) will also help lower costs whilst reducing turnaround time and improving consistency. Automation is the main factor in cost reduction in the Language Services market presently, and is a vital tool to many LSPs.

Using the right linguists

The availability of native linguists may also drive up translation costs. If an LSP is experiencing difficulty sourcing the right expertise and the right number of linguists needed to keep within the agreed timescales, they may have to resort to using other linguists who are not on agreed contracts regarding pricing. Sourcing linguists with high expertise might also drive costs up. Customers looking to translate a document in the investment banking sector may find their translation is priced at a higher cost than more generic content, due to the requirement of linguists' experience in this sector.

Quality and price

Interestingly, **68.15% of buyers do not agree that quality changes when the price increases** (Common Sense Advisory, "The Price-Quality Link"). This may mean that LSPs charging for their services based on quality as their USP will not be experiencing the results they desire. The assumption is, however, that if buyers are expected to pay a higher price for their translations, **90.54% expect that quality should be of a higher standard** (Common Sense Advisory "The Price-Quality Link"). The conundrum thus becomes more difficult as a result of conflicting opinions.

73.33% of Language Service Providers believe there is a direct link between translation quality and price, when only 61.38% of buyers believe the same statement to be true.



Generally for businesses, time is money. The longer something takes, the more it is likely to cost, and if something relatively complex does not take much time, the chances are the quality has suffered.

In an ideal world, a translation stage would be built into every project from the outset. The need for translation is often forgotten about until the very last minute, and machines often have to wait to be shipped until its User Manual has been translated. However, quality will inevitably suffer if a translation job is rushed; more than one linguist might be used in order to achieve a deadline, which can affect consistency of the translation. We need to take a realistic view of the length of time it takes to translate documents in order for expectations to be managed.

Turnaround

According to a report by the Common Sense Advisory ("Pick Up the Pace: Speed as a Differentiator for LSPs"), **73.3% of buyers consider turnaround time to be very important.** LSPs that can differentiate themselves on the basis of time will be well-positioned to compete in the industry.

In some instances, time is critical for customers, and turnaround time will be the main priority.

For example, online, user-generated reviews will need to be translated in as close to real-time as possible to allow for conversation between potential customers. Quality may not be of the highest standard here and 'gisting' may be the most appropriate level of service.

When time is critical, it is possible to split the translation piece between 2 or more separate linguists in order to get the job completed faster. This bears an impact on the quality though, as issues over consistency in terminology and style may arise.

Impact of technology

As innovative technologies sweep across the industry, the time it takes to provide quality translations should start to reduce. MT and TM tools speed up the translation process, and are becoming more widely adopted as time goes by. However, the Common Sense Advisory suggests that Machine Translation is not yet a key factor in the price-time-quality challenge, but that will grow in importance as the technology becomes more widespread ("Translation Future Shock").



HOURS



MINUTES



SECONDS

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHETHER TIME, COST OR QUALITY SHOULD TAKE PRIORITY FOR EACH REQUEST?

The time-quality-cost conundrum is only a problem when a high-quality piece of work is to be completed within time and cost restraints. When this happens, it is the responsibility of the LSP to understand the customer brief and help in the decision-making process.

Managing customers' expectations is often about educating people as to what can be realistically achieved. Each request will be unique, and it is down to the LSP to identify which factor is of the most importance to the customer, if not already specified.

Frequent communication will help both parties to fully understand the requirements of a project. Establishing regular dialogue will reduce the chances of a customer looking elsewhere for services, and will increase the chances of both sides working in collaboration and towards the same expectations.



THE DANGER OF NOT BALANCING EACH FACTOR

Some LSPs may decide that the best way to balance the triangle is to focus on two of the factors, almost ignoring the third. Surely delivering two out of three is better than only partially delivering on each factor, right? **Wrong!**

If we think about what this would mean in practice, a long piece of work that is relatively cheap is usually not very well presented and has careless mistakes throughout. The time taken to check or rework the piece would only increase the time to market anyway.

A more appealing combination is a timely translation that is of high quality. This kind of work will cost you though, because at the end of the day- there is truth in the saying - you get what you pay for.

7 STEPS TO OVERCOME THE COST, QUALITY, TIME CONUNDRUM

7 LEARN

If the below 6 steps are followed, a culture of learning will develop for both you and your LSP. Your LSP will learn how to juggle cost, quality and time requirements so that you feel you are not having to compromise.

5 MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

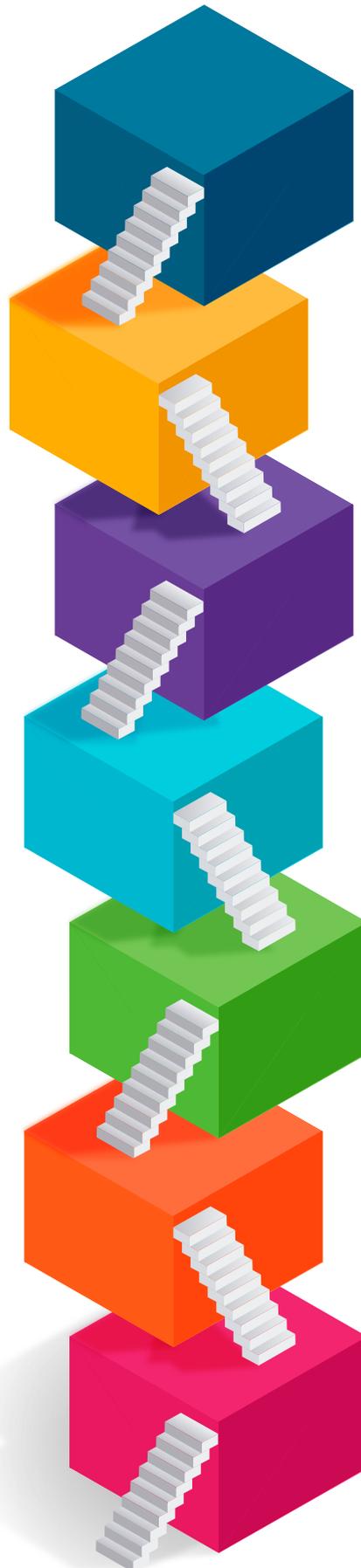
Set out a plan right from the start with your LSP to better manage expectations of feasibility and timescales. This will avoid confusion and unnecessary conflicts of interest.

3 COMMUNICATE

Communicate frequently with your LSP. That way, you will always be aware of how your work is progressing and what issues may arise from anything unexpected so that you can plan ahead.

1 LISTEN TO YOUR LSP

In order to avoid miscommunication and unfulfilled expectations - listen to your LSP - they understand project scope and possible time lines.



6 PLAN

Plan in partnership with your LSP from the beginning. Obtaining a thorough understanding of their capabilities should help you to meet your objectives.

4 NEGOTIATE

There isn't a 'one size fits all' approach in localisation, so enter into regular discussions with your LSP to help negotiate around potential difficulties. It is much better to do this from the outset to help set realistic targets.

2 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Build relationships with your LSP so they become more receptive to your requirements and will understand your needs.

DIFFERENT SERVICE LEVELS FOR DIFFERENT REQUIREMENTS

A 'one size fits all' approach to Language Services is not appropriate. A possible option would be to consider a 'tiered' approach for services. Your LSP should advise you as to the most appropriate level of service, based on what the end use of your translated material will be.

LEVEL 1 - GISTING

Outcome & quality required:

Overall understanding of the message is conveyed in order to help the reader make an informed decision. An exact and precise translation is not required as the content only needs to be generally understood. The impact to a customer of some inaccurate translations is minimal.

Turnaround time:

Almost instant, as a machine can be used, and the workflow can be fully automated.

Suitable for:

Online reviews, emails, legal (eDiscovery), internal communication.

Lingusitic assets:

None.

LEVEL 2 – LITERAL

Outcome & quality required:

Accurate translation of the source text but with no consideration on style or localisation.

Turnaround time:

Relatively quick, as a machine or a professional linguist could be deployed, and workflows can be partly automated.

Suitable for:

Knowledge base, FAQs, Wikis, low risk technical content, software, internal documents.

Lingusitic assets:

Basic translation memory.

LEVEL 3 - LOCALISED

Outcome & quality required:

Accuracy and style are both important as this service is most suitable for professional and marketing content. High quality, accurate translation localised appropriately for the specific content type, considering terminology and style, and adheres to on-brand messaging.

Turnaround time:

A professional linguist and a proof-reader will work on this content, so allow for this when planning projects.

Suitable for:

Software, legal, financial, manufacturing, medical, press releases, HR, eCommerce.

Lingusitic assets:

Translation Memory + customised Machine Translation as well as Glossaries and Style Guides provided by client.

LEVEL 4 - CREATIVE

Outcome & quality required:

The translated content will appear as though it has been created specifically for the country being targeted. The translation quality will be high as the content will have been adapted to appeal to the emotive side of the reader. There will be a strong emphasis on brand and all messages will be fully adapted to local markets.

Turnaround time:

Timescales will be extended to allow for careful adaptation and proof-reading of content.

Suitable for:

Brand messages, marketing material, advertising campaigns, PR.

Lingusitic assets:

Translation Memories, Glossaries and Style Guides.

The tiered approach is a move away from LSPs selling traditional translation and a move towards developing a solution based on each individual customer's needs, and this approach offers many benefits. You are no longer required to pay more than you need to for your translation requirements, and the right tools and technologies can be deployed depending on the end use of the translation.

CONCLUSION

Providing a low cost, high quality, efficient service is a tall order for any business. This becomes even more prominent when the service is translation and the customer has never before factored in the need for such services.

Only when buyers of translation services have measures in place to determine quality of translations will they see a stronger link between price and time.

One key take away; it is a mistake to assume every business is the same in their expectations around cost, quality and time – LSPs need to be aware of all factors being considered by their customers and their motivations for applying pressure in one area or another, and then be the experts in offering the best solution.

For now, however, the issue surrounding cost, time and quality is here to remain – mitigating the effects is the first step to take.



F.A.S.T.

Capita Translation and Interpreting provides a F.A.S.T range of language and localisation services:

FAST - We understand that in a fast moving, international industry where dynamic and urgent content is becoming the norm, the turnaround times for many projects can be very tight, and that customers cannot often predict the volume of work required in advance. Our worldwide network of linguists, combined with our innovative technologies and agile workflows, ensures we are ideally placed to respond to the need for additional capacity in short time-frames.

ACCURATE - We use linguists that are experienced in specific sectors and in translating certain types of content, ensuring your message is accurately conveyed in your target language, protecting your brand from any PR or legislative nightmares.

SECURE - We take privacy and confidentiality very seriously, and ensure that your Intellectual Property is protected at all times. All the documents we handle remain under strict privacy guidelines, in line with our ISO27001 accreditation. Our clients trust us implicitly with their work and return to us time after time.

TWENTY-FOUR-SEVEN - We recognise that as your staff are located worldwide, requirements may arrive at any time of the day, 365 days a year. Our 24 hour support team based in Manchester is supported by Project Managers in different regions.

www.capitatranslationinterpreting.com

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By working closely together we can develop solutions that are right for your business.

Capita Translation and Interpreting provides a comprehensive range of language and localisation services, such as interpreting, human translation, machine translation, proofreading and transcription. Public sector customers include police forces, healthcare organisations and central government agencies, whilst in the private sector we provide language services to a number of large, blue-chip accounts.

Our success is built on a combination of traditional translation methods, innovative technology and a clear focus on quality, and unlike some other language service providers that specialise in particular industries, we support all business verticals – irrespective of size or geography.

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