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Translation-oriented writing — Text production and text evaluation

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Foreword

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The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*.

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.

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Introduction

0.1 Overview

As goods and services are increasingly distributed across international markets, specialized content must be made available in the languages required for each target market. Such content may be translated by human translators, with or without computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, or by machine translation (MT) systems, with or without subsequent post-editing by a human translator. In this context, translation-oriented writing can reduce the number of translator queries, lower costs, minimize translation errors, and shorten delivery times, particularly when translation technologies are used.

Technical documentation in particular (e.g. product manuals, online help, safety data sheets or assembly instructions) as a form of specialized content is intended to ensure that products are used safely, efficiently and effectively. Standards such as IEC/IEEE 82079-1 define the requirements for technical documentation. In-house style guides supplement these requirements by codifying enterprise-specific writing conventions.

This document provides recommendations for authoring or editing specialized content in the source language intended for translation into one or more target languages and for the evaluation of translation-oriented texts. Some clauses can, however, also be useful to non-specialized texts intended for translation.

0.2 Notations

This document uses structured examples to illustrate textual features to avoid because they can cause problems in translation. The examples in this document have been chosen for illustrative purposes and are not necessarily equally applicable to every language pair (e.g. recommendation in 4.2.2.4. is not applicable to Japanese).

The examples are each laid out and formatted to support the recommendations in question. Due to the variety of issues covered, the layout varies throughout this document. However, an attempt has been made to use as consistent a layout as possible.

— Every example contains at least source language content and an explanation. The explanation points out any issues with the source language content and their possible effect on translation. Target language examples are provided only when they provide added value for the explanation and understanding of the issue at hand. The explanation gives information on errors in the target language content that would otherwise not be understood due to readers' lack of proficiency in the target language.

— The symbol (+) is used for positive examples and the symbol (–) is used for negative examples.

— Numbers in parentheses such as (1), (2), (3) indicate possible variants of target language content.

— Characters in parentheses are only used to specify the example type (positive, negative, variant). They do not represent a part of the source or target language content displayed.

— No specific symbol is used for neutral examples.

— The source language of examples is always English; therefore, the source language is not indicated.

— The target languages of examples vary, but are mainly German, French and Italian. The target language is indicated in square brackets in the column or line marking the target language content. Italian target language content, for example, is marked with [it] in accordance with ISO 639.

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EXAMPLE 1

Source language content	**Target language content [it]**
(–) A negative example in English to highlight source language content issues.	(–) A negative example (in Italian) to highlight possible translation errors resulting from the issues in the source language content.
(+) A positive example in English of translation-oriented writing avoiding the issues of the negative example.	(+) A positive example (in Italian) containing no translation error.
Explanation: An explanation pointing out the issues with the source language content and their possible effect on translation.	

EXAMPLE 2

Source language content	**Target language content [fr]**
(–) A negative example in English to highlight source language content issues.	(1) One possible translation (in French) to highlight possible translation variants. (2) Another possible translation (in French) to highlight possible translation variants.
(+) A positive example in English of translation-oriented writing avoiding the issues of the negative example.	(+) A positive example (in French), containing unambiguous target language content.
Explanation: An explanation pointing out the issues with the source language content and their possible effect on translation.	

Examples in 4.2 are more complex than other examples, since they display the effects of formatting in the text editor on translation with CAT tools. In addition, segments are displayed for the target language content if segmentation is relevant.

EXAMPLE 3

Source language content in text editor	(–) A negative example in English to highlight source language content formatting errors as they would appear in a text editor. (+) A positive example in English, containing no formatting errors.
Source language content in TM system	Source language content examples as they would appear in a TM system during translation. (–) A negative example to highlight the issues CAT tools have with incorrect formatting. (+) A positive example to show how correct formatting avoids negative effects on translation using CAT tools.
Target language content in TM system [de]	(–) A negative example (in German) to highlight possible translation errors in the target language content in the TM system resulting from the formatting errors in the source language content. (+) A positive example (in German) of correct target language content in the TM system resulting from correctly formatted source language content.
Target language content in text editor [de]	(–) A negative example (in German) to highlight possible translation errors in the target language content in the text editor resulting from the formatting errors in the source language content. (+) A positive example (in German) of correct target language content in the text editor resulting from correctly formatted source language content.
Explanation	An explanation pointing out the formatting issues with the source language content and their possible effect on translation with CAT tools.

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Translation-oriented writing — Text production and text evaluation

1 Scope

This document gives guidance on authoring, editing and evaluating specialized source language content intended for translation. In addition, this document addresses handover recommendations in connection with the production and translation of specialized content. This document is meant as a practical guidance and recognizes that not all clauses are equally applicable to every use case.

This document is applicable to authors and editors of specialized content intended for translation. It also enables translators and translation service providers to assess the suitability of specialized content for translation. This document is also applicable to tool providers (e.g. to develop and improve automatic source language testing and verification procedures).

This document does not apply to authoring, editing and evaluating fictional, journalistic, advertising and other non-specialized content.

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
automatic line break
software feature that automatically adapts the *line break* (3.5) of digital *texts* (3.14) to the layout and creates an approximately uniform line length throughout the text

3.2
exchange format
machine-readable format for representing information that is intended to facilitate exchange of the information between different applications

[SOURCE: ISO 25964-1:—,[1)] 3.24, modified — Note 1 to entry deleted.]

1) Under preparation. Stage at the time of publication: ISO/FDIS 25964-1:2026.

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3.3
match value
value of correspondence between a segment in the *source text* (3.12) and a segment found in a translation memory

Note 1 to entry: Match value is expressed as a percentage. Higher percentages indicate higher similarities between segments, while lower percentages indicate lower similarities between segments.

3.4
hard break
hard return
hard line break
paragraph break
line break (3.5) interpreted by *text editors* (3.15) as the end of a paragraph

Note 1 to entry: Hard breaks are represented by control characters and interrupt segmentation.

3.5
line break
point at which one line of *text* (3.14) ends and another begins

3.6
language checker
language checking tool
software or software feature that supports users in creating orthographically and grammatically correct, consistent, comprehensible and corporate language-compliant content

3.7
language identifier
language symbol
string of characters assigned to an individual language or a language group for the purpose of identifying it unequivocally

Note 1 to entry: In the ISO 639 language code, the string of characters consists of a string of letters.

EXAMPLE The individual language “Dutch” is assigned the two-letter language identifier “nl”, a three-letter identifier “nld” for use in the field of terminology and other language applications, and another three-letter identifier “dut” for use in the field of librarianship and documentation. The individual language “Polish” is assigned the two-letter language identifier “pl” and the three-letter identifier “pol”. The language group “Khoisan languages” is assigned the three-letter language identifier “khi”.

[SOURCE: ISO 639:2023, 3.7.10, modified — Note 2 to entry deleted.]

3.8
segment end
segment boundary
punctuation mark or other marker used to identify the end of a segment

3.9
segment pair
translation unit
TU
segment of source language content matched with its corresponding target language content

3.10
segmentation
process of splitting a *text* (3.14) into segments

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3.11
soft break
soft return
soft line break
line break (3.5) which retains paragraph formatting

Note 1 to entry: Soft breaks are represented by control characters and retain segmentation.

3.12
source text
text (3.14) to be translated into one or more target languages

3.13
target text
translated *text* (3.14) written in the intended target language

3.14
text
content in written form

[SOURCE: ISO 17100:2015, 2.3.4]

3.15
text editor
software that enables a user to create and revise *text* (3.14)

[SOURCE: ISO/IEC 2382:2015, 2126196, modified — Notes 1 and 2 to entry deleted.]

3.16
termbase
terminology database
terminological database
database comprising a terminological data collection

[SOURCE: ISO 26162-3:2023, 3.11, modified — “terminological database” added as an admitted term.]

3.17
TM system
translation memory system
CAT tool that uses a translation memory

3.18
translation-oriented writing
writing for translation
text (3.14) production resulting in content that lends itself to translation

3.19
translation project specifications
set of agreed upon and defined requirements for producing translation output

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

Note 2 to entry: For detailed information on developing project specifications, see ISO 11669:2024 Clauses 4 and 5 and Annexes B and C.

[SOURCE: ISO 5060:2024, 3.3.2. modified — Note 2 to entry added.]

3.20
XLIFF
XML Localization Interchange File Format
XML file format for the interchange of translation data or localization data, or both

Note 1 to entry: For more information on XLIFF, see ISO 21720.

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