

Translation  
Practices  
Explained

*Editing and Revising*

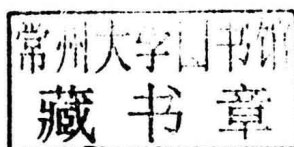
↪ [ ~~REVISING~~ AND  
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TRANSLATORS

3rd Edition

Brian Mossop

# Revising and Editing for Translators

Brian Mossop



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## Translation Practices Explained

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*Translation Practices Explained* is a series of coursebooks designed to help self-learners and teachers of translation. Each volume focuses on a specific aspect of professional translation practice, in many cases corresponding to actual courses available in translator-training institutions. Special volumes are devoted to well consolidated professional areas, such as legal translation or European Union texts; to areas where labour-market demands are currently undergoing considerable growth, such as screen translation in its different forms; and to specific aspects of professional practices on which little teaching and learning material is available, the case of editing and revising, or electronic tools. The authors are practising translators or translator trainers in the fields concerned. Although specialists, they explain their professional insights in a manner accessible to the wider learning public.

These books start from the recognition that professional translation practices require something more than elaborate abstraction or fixed methodologies. They are located close to work on authentic texts, and encourage learners to proceed inductively, solving problems as they arise from examples and case studies.

Each volume includes activities and exercises designed to help self-learners consolidate their knowledge; teachers may also find these useful for direct application in class, or alternatively as the basis for the design and preparation of their own material. Updated reading lists and website addresses will also help individual learners gain further insight into the realities of professional practice.

*Sharon O'Brien*  
*Kelly Washbourne*  
Series Editors

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## Introduction for Users

This book aims to provide guidance and learning materials for two groups of users: first, professional translators or translation students who wish to improve their ability to revise their own translations ('self-revision') or learn to revise translations prepared by others ('other-revision'); second, translation students who are learning to edit original writing by others. *In this book, revising means reading a translation in order to spot problematic passages, and making any needed corrections or improvements. Editing is this same task applied to texts which are not translations.*

Revising and editing are first and foremost exercises in very careful reading. You can't correct errors until you have found them, and it is very easy to simply not notice problems, or to notice minor problems (a paragraph was not indented) and miss major ones (the word 'not' is missing and the sentence means the opposite of what it is supposed to mean).

Self-revision, other-revision and editing have much in common. They all involve checking linguistic correctness as well as the suitability of a text's style to its future readers and to the use they will make of it. Much of what you do when revising is identical to what you do when editing. Whether you are editing original writing or revising a translation, you may decide to amend an awkward wording, for example. In either case, you have to make sure that you do not change the author's meaning while eliminating the awkwardness. That said, there are of course differences. Revisers will often come across unidiomatic wordings as a result of interference from the source language – a problem which editors will encounter only if the writer is not a native speaker of the language of the text. Revisers must also find and correct mistranslations and omissions – parts of the source text that were overlooked when the translation was drafted.

'Reviser' and 'editor' are not really parallel terms. Both words can be used simply to refer to someone who happens to be checking and amending a text, or someone whose function it is to do so, but 'editor' is more commonly used to name a profession. In many countries, there are editors' associations which are quite separate from writers' associations, but there are no revisers' associations separate from translators' associations. 'Reviser' is not the name of a profession; the activity or function of revising has developed historically as part of the profession of translator, though some translators may spend much or even all of their time revising. The relationship between writer and editor is therefore different from the relationship between translator and reviser, which might perhaps be better described as a relationship between the drafting translator and the revising translator.

In addition, in some countries, translators and editors live in completely separate professional worlds, with little contact between translators' and editors' organizations. In other countries, they have close professional relationships, and translators' and editors' organizations may have overlapping memberships: it may be unusual for someone to be a translator and not also an editor.

As will be seen in Chapter 2, a professional editor may engage in a huge range of tasks, from finding authors to discussing typographical details with printers. An editor may decide to recommend or insist on changes which would fall outside the purview of a translation reviser: delete whole sections, or rewrite them with new content. The treatment of editing in this book, however, is restricted to a fairly narrow range of activities: copyediting, stylistic editing and certain aspects of structural and content editing. The selection of editing topics, and the amount of attention accorded them, is governed by a simple principle: to the extent that an editing skill is also needed by revisers (and self-revisers) of translations, to that extent it is included. This is why the book is entitled *Revising and Editing for Translators*, and it is a feature that distinguishes this book from other treatments of editing.

When translation students graduate, they may find – depending on their language pair and the local translation market – that they cannot earn an adequate income from translation alone. They will be in a better position if they can accept related work such as technical writing or editing. Many people today seek work as translator/revisers and also as editors. A native English speaker resident in the Netherlands may translate from Dutch to English, revise Dutch-English translations, edit material written in English by Dutch speakers, and write original English material for Dutch companies.

Employers often want to hire ‘translator-editors’, reflecting the fact that in organizations such as corporations and ministries, translation production is integrated into the general process of producing print and electronic documents.

Here are descriptions of two translator-editor positions in Canada, the first in a government agency, the second at a science centre:

Translate, revise, standardize and re-write public and internal documents such as reports, announcements, decisions, ministerial orders, brochures, press releases, memos, etc. for employees and managers of the Agency. Coordinate requests for translation and revision for the Agency. Coordinate the preparation of briefing notes for the Minister and, when the responsible person is absent, of ministerial and executive correspondence.

Research, write, edit French copy related to scientific technological exhibits and programs for visiting or virtual public. Produce small publications, write for websites, copyedit, translate English material with extensive scientific content into clear, interesting, understandable French copy and meet deadlines.

The editing sections of this book should be of use to anyone who will be doing work of the sort just described. As for the revision sections, they will assist students in degree or diploma translation programs, practising translators who are assigned to revise others, and self-learners who wish to accept freelance revision work. The revision part of the book may also prove instructive to people who manage translation services but are not themselves professional translators.

Professionals who have a degree in translation may recall their teachers telling them how important it is to check their translations, that is, to self-revise. But if they look back at their textbooks, they will see that little or no substantive advice is given about just how to do this. They may never have learned any actual principles or procedures for self-revision. If they have been practising professionally for some time, they will have developed some procedure or other, but they may never have formulated it and looked at it critically. Is it achieving the desired purpose, and just what is that desired purpose?

The same applies to revising others, and to setting up or implementing quality control systems. It is important to think about the concepts involved (Just what *is* quality?) and about the procedures that will be used to achieve quality. New revisers tend to waste a great deal of time making unnecessary changes in texts. If they are to overcome this problem, and be able to decide what is necessary and what is not, they must clearly formulate in their minds the goals of revision.

In day-to-day work, of course, one proceeds to a great degree without conscious thought. As one revises or self-revises, one does not think: now I shall consider point five on my style checklist, and now I shall go on to point six. However, if you have reason to believe that your procedures are not catching errors, or if you think (or your supervisor thinks!) that you are taking too long to quality-control a text, then perhaps you need to bring your procedures to the mental surface – spell them out and then consider them in the light of certain principles. This book is intended to help you do so.

## Translating by revising

With the spread of Translation Memory, learning to revise translations by other people is becoming more important than it used to be. Many translators use memories that contain translations done by a large number of other translators. When material from these databases is imported into the translation on which a translator is currently working, he or she must decide to what degree the imported wording is useable in the current context. It may be necessary to make changes for a variety of reasons: the meaning of the imported material is somewhat different from the meaning of the current source text; the imported material is stylistically inconsistent with the translator's own wordings; there is a lack of cohesion between an imported sentence and the previous or following sentence; different imported sentences are not consistent with each other with respect to terminology and phraseology. When a great deal of material is imported from the memory's database, the task of translating becomes, to a great extent, an exercise in revising other people's wordings rather than an exercise in composing sentences in the target language. Translators who use Memory thus need to develop a reviser/editor mentality rather than the mentality of a text composer.

While the above tasks need to be performed even when importing material from a memory that contains nothing but the translator's own previous translations, the revision burden is greater when importing wordings written by others

since there is far less certainty about the reliability of the work done by the other translators. There may be pressure on translators to use the imported wordings in order to save time, even though corporate memories (containing translations by large numbers of translators) are notorious disseminators of mistranslations. In any situation where there is a growing volume of material that needs translating, but an insufficient number of translators, there will inevitably be a tendency to modify the concept of what counts as acceptable final quality in order to reflect what the translators are able to achieve with the assistance of the particular technologies they are using.

Aside from memories, translators working in many language pairs and genres now have access to useable machine translation output, and this too calls for people to revise wordings that are not their own.

### **What this book is not**

The book is not intended to form the self-editing component of a writing course. The users of the editing chapters are, after all, students in a professional language programme. Presumably they are already quite good at writing in their own language, and good writing of course requires good self-editing. In the revision part of the book, however, self-revision is included because many working translators are not efficient self-revisers, and also because very little has been written about the practical details of self-revision.

This is not a workbook. Many chapters end with descriptions of exercises, and a few include exercises on short sentences or sentence fragments. However there are no complete texts, for that would have made the book much longer (and more expensive!), and my text selection might not have been found suitable by many if not most course instructors.

The book presumes a basic knowledge of grammar. It does not explain what a subordinate clause is, or give instruction on how to identify the subject of a sentence. When editing and revising the work of others, it is often necessary to explain why a change has been made, and that calls for some knowledge of grammatical structure and terminology. All translation students would be well advised to take an introductory course in linguistics, for this will give them concepts and terms with which to think about and talk about language.

The book is not a guide to writing do's and don'ts. It offers no advice on the correct use of semicolons, on how to avoid sexist language, or on whether a sentence can begin with 'and'. These, and a thousand and one similar issues, are the subject of innumerable writers' handbooks that can be found on the reference shelves of most bookstores. Naturally the exercises in this book call for a knowledge of these substantive matters, but the body of each chapter focuses on principles and procedures.

The book is not a review of the problems of translation. In the course of revising, one is faced with the need not merely to identify errors but also to correct them. To do so, one obviously needs to have the full range of text-interpreting, researching, composing and computer skills that are required of a translator.

These matters are discussed only to the extent that they apply in a special way to the revising process as opposed to the translation drafting process.

The book does not cover the creation of a visual form for the text: desktop publishing and the layout of text and graphics are not discussed. Certain matters of visual presentation are mentioned briefly, such as consistency in typography and in the form and placement of headings and subheadings, but the production of the physical print or on-line document containing the translation is beyond the scope of this book. There is also no coverage of the processes of marking up a manuscript (nowadays usually a Word file) for the printer and checking the printer's output (nowadays often a .pdf file).

The book does not provide a thorough treatment of machine translation post-editing, in part because I have only a small amount of personal experience with it, and in part because most translators I have encountered at recent revision workshops still do not use it. That said, much of what will be found here does apply to post-editing.

The book is not concerned with the editing and revision of literary texts. Literary texts can conveniently be defined as fictional or non-fictional writing in which named individuals engage in self-expression on their own behalf. Part of the value of such texts often lies in the particular linguistic forms selected. A non-literary text by contrast is typically anonymous, or else written by a named individual on behalf of an institution, and the linguistic form is of no value in itself; indeed, in current English, the ideal with such texts is for the linguistic form to be transparent – unnoticed by the reader. The checking and amending of literary translations takes place within a commercial publishing environment that differs from the translation departments and agencies within which non-literary texts are revised. The exception is marketing documents, which have affinities with literary translation in the great importance of the specific linguistic forms selected. A successful translation of such a document (one which helps sell the product) may also need to deviate from the norms of accuracy and completeness that usually govern non-literary translation. Revision of this type of translation work will not be considered here except for a brief mention of adaptation (large-scale adding to and subtracting from the source text).

Finally, the revising and editing work needed for software and webpage localization is not considered since these kinds of translation involve both adaptation and text/graphic/video coordination.

## **Principles and procedures**

### ***Principles versus rules***

This book approaches both editing and revising as exercises not in rule-following but in the intelligent application of principles. Neither editing nor revising is straightforward. There are indeed clear-cut cases of right/wrong, but there are many more cases where it is up to you to decide, and for this you will need principles.



Principles are simply guides to action. An example would be the principle of minimizing changes: If in doubt about whether to make a change in the text, don't. You might also think of principles as things you do 'in principle', that is, things you do by default, unless the situation suggests doing something else. 'Follow the paragraphing of the source text' might be a principle in this sense for many language pairs. It is not a 'rule'; when you are revising, you may find that there is a good reason to change the paragraphing.

### ***Formulating procedures***

Aside from principles, the main thing you need in order to be a successful editor or reviser is procedures. It is all very well to have a list of error types, but if your procedure does not succeed in finding the errors, the list is not much use. As already mentioned, you cannot correct a problem until you have spotted it! *Editing and revising are both, first and foremost, exercises in very careful reading.*

Eventually, procedures will become second-nature, but the point of studying revision and editing is to formulate them. This book aims to help its readers to answer, or at least think about, questions such as the following: In what *order* should I carry out editing and revising tasks? (What should I do first? Second?) And given that one can go on perfecting a text endlessly, when should I *stop*?

### ***Principles and language pairs***

Do the same principles apply to editing in all languages, and to revision in all language pairs? Many do, but editing work in particular will differ from language to language because the linguistic culture of a society will dictate certain emphases; problems of a certain type will be deemed important that may seem quite unimportant in another language community. For example, if one society is moving out from under the influence of a formerly dominating other society, reduction of the linguistic influence of that other society may be seen as an important aspect of editorial work. Also, one linguistic culture may currently be in a phase where a 'plain style' is the ideal in non-literary texts, whereas another culture may currently prefer a more ornate style. This will obviously affect the work of editors; for example, the concept of readability, discussed in Chapter 4, may differ if an ornate style is preferred.

A further important point is that two editors may be working in different linguistic cultures even though both of them use the same name for their language. In other words, the factors affecting editing work may differ depending on whether you are in Dublin or Sydney, in Paris or Montréal, in Lisbon or São Paulo. Obviously if you are editing texts for publication in another country, you will need to make appropriate adjustments. For example, Canadians submitting material to US or British publications may have to edit out Canadian spellings and substitute US or British spellings. To outsiders, the Canadian system looks like a combination of British and American spellings—'honour', not 'honor'; but 'organize', not 'organise'. To Canadians, it is simply the way we learned to spell

our language as children. It is also of symbolic importance – one small way in which we English-speaking Canadians distinguish ourselves from the Americans. Defending the local identity of texts is often an important part of the work of editors and revisers.

The editing sections of this book are very heavily oriented toward the linguistic cultures of the countries where the great majority of the population are native speakers of English. For the most part, it is assumed that the texts are written by native speakers and are being edited for reading by native speakers. Much of what is said will be applicable to other cases (texts written in English by non-native speakers or for a multilingual, international audience; texts written in the French-influenced Euro-English of the institutions of the European Union), but the special problems of these cases will be discussed only briefly. Those who will be editing material written in languages other than English may find that some of what is said about English here is relevant to them because English writing habits are increasingly having an effect on how people write in other languages.

The revision sections of the book are probably more universally valid than the editing sections. Again, though, emphases will vary. If translated texts are widely used in a society, an important function of revisers may be to eliminate any traces of foreign influence. In a society where translated texts do not play such a great role, source-language influence on the wording of the translation may be more tolerable.

The revision sections of the book will be applicable when the target language is the self-reviser's second language, or when the source language is the source-text author's second language, or when revising translations of translations. However, little attention will be paid to the special additional problems of these cases, such as the difficulty of assessing idiomaticity when the self-reviser is not a native target-language speaker. For those who are advanced learners or near-native speakers of English, self-revising English is much easier than it used to be because you can check wordings of which you are uncertain in Google (see Chapter 8) or in concordancers and because there are now good Advanced Learner's dictionaries, often on-line or on CD-ROM, which provide vital information that is not given (because it is assumed to be already known) in dictionaries aimed at native speakers.

## Outline

The book begins with a consideration of why editing and revising are needed in the first place, and of what quality is (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 concerns the work done by people employed as editors. This is followed by four chapters (3-6) devoted to the various kinds of textual amending work: copyediting, stylistic editing, structural editing and content editing. Chapter 7 is concerned with the question of how much consistency an editor or reviser should seek to achieve, and Chapter 8 with computer aids for editors and revisers. Chapter 9 looks at the work of people who function as revisers. It is followed by three chapters that look at the following questions: What are the features of a draft translation that may require



revision (Chapter 10)? To what degree should I revise a translation (Chapter 11)? What procedures should I use to revise (Chapter 12)? Finally, Chapter 13 looks at self-revision, and Chapter 14 at the problems of revising others. The book closes with a list of readings on revision, an index, and six appendixes: a review of the principles of revision, a brief look at systems for assessing the quality of translations, a method for marking exercises, a sample revision, a glossary of editing and revision terms, and an overview of empirical studies of revision.

## **New in this Edition**

For this third edition, aside from checking, improving and updating the entire second edition, and adding more cross-references between chapters, I have placed more emphasis on the reading (as opposed to the writing) aspect of revision and editing. In addition, there is a considerably modified Introduction for Instructors, a greatly expanded section on the vital concept of quality in Chapter 1, a new section on editing non-native English in Chapter 2, additional discussion of quality assurance and a few other topics in Chapter 9, new material on revision policies in Chapter 11, a new presentation of the self-revision process in Chapter 13, a separate section on Translation Memory in Chapter 14, new material on translation assessment in Appendix 2, and a much expanded list of readings.