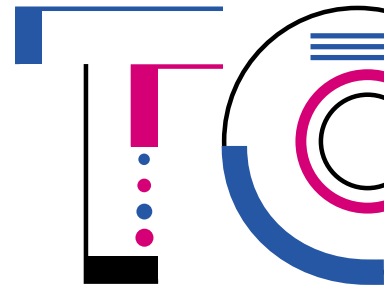


2·97

APRIL 1997



FORUM

**TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATORS'
FORUM**

Forum 95 continues...

Topics:

Controlled Language **cont.**

Translation Issues **new**

Readability/Usability **new**

Professional Events

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The International Council for
Technical Communication

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1) Each Topic has a two-letter
abbreviation, for example
• CL for Controlled Language
• TR for Translation Issues
• RU for Readability/Usability

The contributions for each topic
are numbered consecutively.
And although not numbered
specifically, we consider the first
three contributions to the Topic CL

contained in TC-Forum 1/97 as
CL 1, CL 2, and CL 3.

This explains why this issue starts
with CL 4, meaning that it is the
fourth contribution to the Topic CL.

When commenting to any of the
contributions, please refer to these
"codes" for ease of understanding.

A Note on Controlled Language (CL 4)



by Thomas L. Warren

In the original report by Brigitte Beuttenmüller, we read something of the history of Controlled Language. In this note, I want to expand on that history just a little and speculate about why, in the US, such an approach to technical documentation has not had as favorable reception as it has in Europe.

The idea of Controlled Language has been around for some time, probably beginning with BASIC English (British, American, Scientific, International, Commercial) developed in the 1920s in England by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards. That basic vocabulary used six affixes and compounding to extend the 850 words to several thousand. In addition, Ogden and Richards wanted a limitation on the kinds of sentences you could use. (See Tom McArthur's article on Basic English in his *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, 1992, for a discussion.)

When will we
be able to
write
technical
documents in
a language
that simplifies
communication
across
cultures?

In America, companies such as the Caterpillar Tractor Company and John Deere developed vocabularies for their documents that relied on a restricted number of words. One company, NCR, developed a dictionary (*NCR Fundamental English Dictionary*, 1978). This Dictionary uses a base of 1350 words plus the names of things and technical terms to provide a reference for its technical writers. All NCR manuals were to conform to this *Dictionary* in all ways when writing about technologies in which NCR is active. The *Dictionary* consists of 300 verbs, 1175 root words, 1350 usage words with 50 units of measurement, 2200 word forms, and 650 abbreviations. The *Dictionary* included these words as well as other words that commonly appeared in technical documents, providing suggested substitutes. For example, instead of *ability*, the *Dictionary* suggested using *capability* or *can*.

As you can tell from the date of the *NCR Dictionary*, controlled languages have not succeeded well in American technical documents. The question is why has it not had the success that it

has enjoyed in Europe? One reason is that in the U.S., you essentially have one language, so we are not faced with problems in translating. Another, more important reason, I think, is that when you use a controlled language, you take away from the technical author two important tools for communicating meaning: (1) connotation and (2) syntactical variety.

Connotation

Language conveys meaning by the words that it uses. These words have both an agreed upon (or at least partially so) meaning found in various dictionaries and a series of associative meanings, not found in dictionaries. Both meanings are important in communicating information that the reader needs, and in spite of the protests that technical communication should reduce connotative meanings to absolute zero, you can't escape them. What Controlled Language does is to attempt to do just that: strip from language the connotative meanings that enrich it. I think a lively debate could develop over the role of connotative meaning in technical documentation, especially documentation where absolute tolerance to ambiguity is zero (aircraft maintenance manuals, for example). So, I invite responses and encourage them to be sent to *TC-Forum* for the next issue.

Syntax

Language also depends on the arrangement of the words to convey the second of the two meanings found in communication. Thus, *John hit Bill* is a much different sentence in English than is *Bill hit John*. In other languages, the inflection appended for various cases reduces this potential ambiguity. BASIC, as envisioned by Ogden and Richards, restricted the possible sentence patterns available to the author, recognizing that a more complex sentence structure added to confusion when the reader was not familiar with the language. In technical communication, authors frequently take into account another factor: How familiar is the reader with the content of the

Another View of the Controlled Language Issue (CL 5)

by Ron Blicq and Lisa Moretto

When we teach engineers and technologists to write more effectively, we tell them (among other things) to

- keep their paragraphs and sentences short,
- write in the active voice,
- choose a simple word rather than a complex word (e.g. to write "pay" rather than "remuneration" or "salary"), where a choice exists,
- use subparagraphs to introduce a series of points,
- precede each subparagraph with a bullet, when the sequence is not important, or a number if the sequence is important,
- keep the verbs within each subparagraph in parallel form, and
- design their information to create a visually appealing document.

Aren't these many of the ideas promoted by the proponents of controlled language? Are they perhaps letting the theory and terminology of controlled language make the ideas seem more difficult and complex than they need be? The engineers and technologists we teach are not technical writers, yet they successfully adopt many of the controlled language ideas without even hearing the term "controlled language".

We are not alone in promoting these ideas to technical practitioners: many other teachers of technical writers do exactly the same, and so do the authors of textbooks on technical writing.

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sentence? If the reader is not familiar with the content, then adding additional difficulties by allowing complexity in the syntax further reduces the communication effectiveness of the document.

I think, then, that these two reasons account, in part, for the low acceptance of a controlled language in American technical documentation. (Of course, there is also the, at times, fierce individualism that Americans are so proud of and a reluctance to bow to authority. But that's another letter.)

One place where Controlled Languages have been useful has been in developing technical documents for translation. If there is a limited, agreed-upon vocabulary used in writing the original documents, then translating them can be somewhat easier. The problem with this approach is that some companies prepare documents in English for readers of English as a second language, and the problems inherent in adapting English to local culture creates difficulties when the vocabulary is a limited one. One vocabulary may not be culturally suitable for all cultures.

Still, the idea of a Controlled Language to minimize the problems of translating technical documents offers the possibility that the day is approaching when we will be able to write technical documents in a language that simplifies communication across cultures and in different languages. What do you think? Is the future of Controlled Language *just* to enable a higher efficiency of machine translation? Should each language have its own version of Controlled Language and if so, who should develop it and maintain it?



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Simple Sentence plus Active Voice → Improved

by *Coralyn K. McGregor*

I have no experience in any of the controlled language applications. Therefore, I scanned the original text into my computer and merely reworked it in a way I thought would improve comprehension by a nonnative speaker of English. There were several places where I had questions or comments about the content or organization, where I had suggestions for additional details, or where I had rewritten the sentence and had some uncertainty about whether I had retained the intended meaning. These questions or comments are enclosed in brackets.

Any improvements they made to Brigitte's version were minimal.

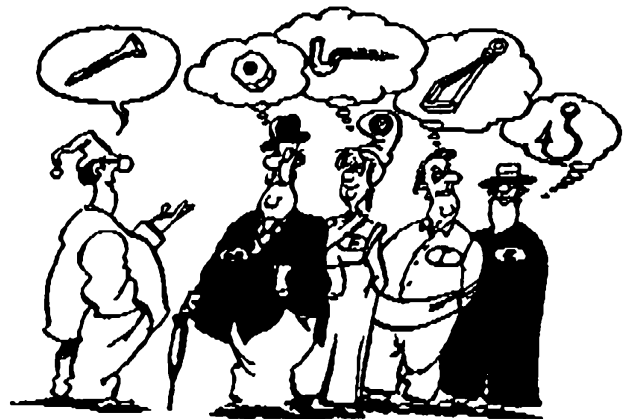
You asked us to answer a series of questions. Here is my response to those questions.

Breaking the text out into lists and using bold-face type for emphasis probably does improve speed of comprehension. However, I found the assortment of bullets, numbers, and arrows used by Gerhard Mark to be distracting.

Possibly, some of these techniques encourage "overkill." I noticed that both Gerhard Mark and Gordon Farrington, when "improving readability," resorted to format changes rather than to short, declarative sentences. I think any improvements they made to Brigitte's version were minimal. By extension, these changes would ease neither machine nor human translation. Nor would they improve comprehension by readers whose mother tongue is not English.

In sum, I believe that comprehension and the likelihood of accurate translations are both improved by the use of simple sentences, avoidance of jargon and slang, use of the active voice, and (important!) a very clear organizational structure that is communicated with words, not just with symbols. I also think that a machine translation would be adversely affected by some of the errors in language and punctuation.

Important: a clear organizational structure that is communicated with words.





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Comprehension (CL 6)

An Excerpt from "Workshop on Controlled Language Applications" as transformed by Coralyn K. McGregor

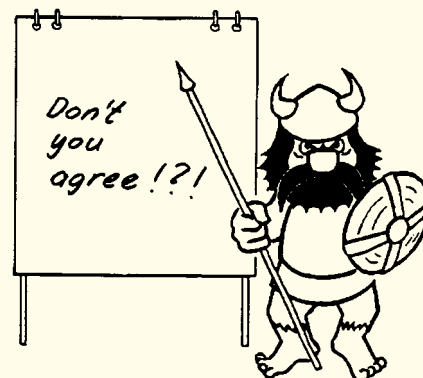
The first international workshop for controlled (structured) language applications took place in Leuven, Belgium, on 26 and 27 March 1996. The title of this workshop was "CLAW96-Controlled Language Applications." [The workshop was sponsored by the European Community for the purpose of Participants representing XX countries and speaking YY languages met to learn about and discuss the present status of controlled-language programs and to plan further studies. Simplified English and Structured German received primary emphases, although mmmm and nnnn were also discussed.]

A topical issue

This workshop left no doubt that controlled language is a topical issue, both in industry and at universities. It is a topical issue even though it has not yet been presented as a public issue, possibly because many aspects of controlled language are still in the developmental stage. Technical writers, however, should know now about trends in controlled language; they should know how these developments will influence their work. In fact, well structured, easy-to-understand texts with consistent terminology have proven to be effective, both for readers in the original language and for subsequent translation. Technical writers should be aware that, since January 1995, all product information prepared by members of the European Union (EU) must be written in the language of the intended user.

The translations must be technically correct and easy to understand. This is true for both human and machine translations, although they are prepared according to different principles. Therefore, the original text must be completely understandable. Many difficulties must still be overcome. For example:

- Machine translation does not yet work because either
 - (a) the original texts are not suitable, or
 - (b) the machines are not capable of preparing a good translation.
- Until technical writers consider certain things [give examples?] when they are writing for translation, their texts will not be fully suitable [for translation by either humans or machines] .



Bulleted Text: A Perceptual Perspective (CL 7)



by Lars Johnson

Although the exact effects of specific text designs in a given document can only be measured through usability tests or interviews involving members of the intended audience (that is, potential readers or translators), technical writers generally assume that the readability and comprehensibility of written text may be optimized through the use of visual design elements. This assumption is obviously reflected in the Didactic-Typographic Visualisation (DTV) method which was exemplified in Gerhard Mark's 'converted article' in the first issue of TC-Forum. For example, the method makes, among other things, extensive use of visuals such as bullets.

Interaction of language and visual design

How the interaction of language and visual design influences the way we perceive and comprehend written information may be explained, in part, by K.S. Campbell's theory of textual cohesion. The theory attempts to set up some general principles 'for describing the unifying effects of the full range of discourse elements: from visual to semantic' (Campbell, 1995:11). Drawing on principles and concepts from Gestalt psychology, Campbell shows how writers, through the use of language, typography and layout, may, in predictable ways, influence our perception of unity and structure in texts. Some important notions in Campbell's theoretical framework are those of *similarity, proximity, reinforcement, conflict, continuity and foregrounding*.

Campbell argues, convincingly I think, that the use of *similar* and *proximate* design elements, visual and/or linguistic, makes us perceive *continuity*, or unity, between certain parts of a document. And continuity, in turn, may serve to *foreground* semantic differences. That is to say, readers more easily discern differences in meaning if the differences are perceived against a uniform background consisting of similar and proximate objects.

The idea can be illustrated by a visual example (Campbell, 1995: 64). Try and locate the letter O in the two figures below:

a) SWERTMLSPR	b) XXXXXXXXXXXX
LPLCSMWQAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX
ALCXQQASMC	XXXXXXXXXXXX
ILAWYETOMB	XXXXXXXXOXX
PLAQMNCWEV	XXXXXXXXXXXX

Although the O is placed in the same column and in the same row in the two figures, it is much easier to locate in figure b) because of the surrounding homogeneous configuration of similar elements (= the X's). Well, how does this relate to bulleted text (in technical communication)? Take an example from Gerhard Mark's DTV text (TC-Forum 1/97, page 8) :

Well structured, easy-to understand texts with consistent terminology have proven to be more effective,

- both for the readers in the original language and
- for translation purposes

In this example, the use of *reinforced* similarity (realized by identical layout and the same underlying syntactic structure) and spatial proximity creates continuity between the two bulleted portions of the sentence and, consequently, a foregrounding of dissimilar semantics. The advantage of foregrounding semantic distinctions is, of course, that it is supposed to have a positive effect on reading and comprehension, and, ultimately, on the transfer of information.

Now take another example from Gerhard Mark's text (TC-Forum 1/97, page 9):

Moreover, rules for highlighting headings, on punctuation etc. are established: Subsequently, SDD can

- perform an additional grammar check for these simplified texts
- which should then be much easier to subject to machine translation.

Although bullets are also used here, we do not experience the same kind of continuity in this instance. The reason is that the bulleted text segments are not linguistically parallel, the second one being a relative clause modifying the nominal phrase 'these simplified texts' in the line above. Or, in Gestalt terminology, there is a conflict between the signals of cohesion and continuity indicated by the bullets and the spatial arrangement of the two text segments on the one hand, and their linguistic manifestations on the other.

So essentially, on the basis of the Gestalt principles of reinforcement and conflict, we may predict that, in terms of document usability, the use of bulleted text seems to be a wiser solution in the first example than in the second. But - to repeat my first point above - to empirically verify this prediction we need to consult real readers.

It would, however, be interesting to know to what extent my analysis of the two examples is supported by the intuitions and experience of TC- Forum readers (and writers!). Likewise, it would be interesting to have a look at some more authentic examples of 'bulleting' in technical documentation to find out, more precisely, what communicative functions this particular trick of the trade serves in technical writing.

To what extent is my analysis supported by you?

Reference

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Coherence, Continuity, and Cohesion.

Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1995.



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Survey Report: Simplified English in Italian

by *Orlando Chiarello*

Introduction

The present report provides the results of a Survey on the use of the AECMA Simplified English (SE) by the Italian Aerospace Industries (A.I.A). The Survey was conducted by the SE National Coordinator, on behalf of the Documentation Working Group (DWG), and in collaboration with A.I.A. - Italy.

Historical Background

A.I.A. - Italy has been active since the very beginning of the SE project. Other than participating to the AECMA Simplified English Working Group (SEWG) with a National Coordinator, a National SEWG was active for more than four years (1989-1993). Unfortunately, the period of uncertainty which has involved the Aerospace Industries in recent years regrettably has forced the group to withdraw from the project.

The impossibility of maintaining the Italian SEWG and, consequently, to have a member in the AECMA SEWG, in late 1994 led the A.I.A. - Italy DWG to create a "focal point" inside its group to guarantee a suitable liaison between the DWG and the AECMA SEWG. In September 1996, the "focal point" was turned into "National Coordinator" again, so bringing Italy back to its original active role.

Although the DWG represents the majority of the Aerospace Industries, there are several companies within A.I.A. which are not represented within the DWG and, consequently, they do not have any feedback information on the SE project. In this frame, the DWG, and the SE National Coordinator, promoted a Survey within A.I.A. with the purpose of representing the SE again on a wider basis and, as a result, have current information on knowledge, usage, training etc.

The Survey was conducted in the form of a brief Questionnaire attached to a Newsletter. The results of the Survey are shown in the following paragraphs.

Basic Statistics

The Questionnaire was sent to all A.I.A. associated companies (38 companies). Number of Respondents: 19

Question Breakdown

Question 1	Yes	No
Are you acquainted with the SE project?	17	2

Question 2	Yes	No
Do you currently use it in your company?	10	9

NOTE: Most of the affirmative answers read: "On civil projects"

Question 3	Yes	No
Will you use it in the near future?	17	2

NOTE: Most of the affirmative answers read: "If contractually required".

Question 4	None	Some
If used, what are the major difficulties encountered?	13	6

5 answers with the following REMARKS:

1. "Complex procedures, due to limited number of words and "ing" form not permitted".
2. "Descriptive modules".
3. "Translation from standard English".
4. "Lack of appropriate writing tools, i.e. software, syntax checkers etc."
5. "Lack of adequate words applicable to electronics".

Question 5	Yes	No
Are you aware that, in 1989, a SE presentation was made to the Italian MoD?	14	5

Question 6	Yes	No
Are you aware that some SE training courses were held in the past?	15	4

Aerospace Industries (CL 8)

Question 7	Yes	No
If yes, did your company attend?	11	8

Question 8	
How many people attended the courses?	2, on average

Without doubt, the interest is strong and growing. The actual lack of training facilities and the correct flow of information remain the main concern. In this sense, all possible efforts will be in the direction of a more consistent and active involvement of the aerospace industry in this project.

Remarks, questions and suggestions	Answers
1. "Since the SE is a requirement for EF2000/EJ200, NH90 and EH101, how did we manage until now for these programs?"	<i>The requirement for technical documentation necessary for EF2000/EJ200 and NH90 development phase is "standard" English. SE is mandatory for tech. pubs./data modules which are not required yet. Regarding EH101, if equipment tech. pubs. are to be supplied in accordance to ATA100, subsequent to rev 26, it is mandatory (unless differently specified in the contract).</i>
2. "Is it possible to extend SE to all technical documentation?"	<i>For the time being, the SE is meant to be used only in the aerospace, although many people outside the aerospace industry are interested in it. This is, however, an open point and there are discussions ongoing on this matter.</i>
3. "Lack of training courses and training materials. It would be advisable to receive information about training, with the relevant terms and conditions".	<i>The training facilities are within Europe and the SEWG (France, UK and Netherlands). Training together with the opportunity to organize dedicated Seminars in Italy are vital points and will be a future matter of discussion.</i>
4. "It would be advisable to organize Seminars on SE in Italy".	<i>The point of contact for SE Training is Mr. Howard Mason at AECMA. Brussels.</i>

Conclusions

On the basis of a wide and qualitative response, the Survey has been certainly successful. It will help greatly to focus on the actual use of SE in Italy, its constraints, its future evolution, and its development.

However, facing reality, although the start of the SE project goes back to 1983, SE still seems to be an entirely new "entity" with a strange sound to many technical authors and their managers.



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How to Save Money in Translation Cost (TR 1)

by Anne Lehrndorfer and
Rodolfo Beceiro Mangold

In an expert's opinion, up to the year 2000 there will be in Western Europe a demand for translations equal to 1,9 billion pages (Mayer, 1993). According to a survey carried out by the German Translators' Association (Bund Deutscher Uebersetzer, BDUE), English will still keep ahead. Referring exclusively to translations from German, 62% of all destination texts are in English, 20% in French, 7% in Spanish, and 4% in Italian and

Russian respectively. Most translations from German into English are scientific texts, speeches, advertising matter, and letters. Main translation types from English into German are operation manuals (instructions for users), i.e. technical texts. We have no official information in Spain on the types of translations from other languages into Spanish, and vice versa, and we doubt whether any is available. From Spanish into a foreign language, English also has the lead, followed by French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Arabic.

By the year
2000, a
demand for
translations
of about 1,9
billion pages
is expected.

Cost Factors

In Germany, there are around 4,000 offices that supply translation services; to these we must add larger companies with their own translation departments. Translation price is normally calculated according to the number of lines (50 keystrokes/line) and depends on the origin and destination languages). Average rates for translations from German into English stand between 2.10 and 2.90 DM per line. When exotic languages are involved (German-Arabic, German-Chinese or German-Japanese), translation costs range from between 4.50 and 6.80 DM per line (see Buchner et al., 1995:122). Price is particularly affected when translating into languages such as Japanese or Chinese, in which the characters are totally different to German and a wide sociocultural remoteness makes translating more difficult.

The translator's cognitive job when translating into these languages is much more complex. Translation takes longer, because at the words' level there is practically no 1:1 rate (as often is the case when similar languages are involved) between the terms or words used in the original language and those used in the destination language. Obviously, too, prices are subject to the law of supply and demand. For instance, opening-up the Chinese market is creating a new generation of translators, who will lower prices within the next few years.

Quality of the Original

A conclusive criterion in appraising a translation job is the quality of the original text. Various aspects have to be considered:

- As far as linguistic quality and the exactness of the destination text's contents are concerned, a clear, readily understood original text will more surely be translated correctly; at the same time, sources of errors in translation will be minimized.
- As for how long it will take to translate a text, a clear and readily understood original text will be translated more quickly.
- As far as the performance of mechanical support equipment is concerned (i.e. machine translation and machine-aided translation), with a high-quality original text the equipment may be used more efficiently. (For comparison, where human translation produces approximately 1 page/h, machine translation + human post editing produces approximately 3 pages/h (see Mayer 1993)).

Control of the Text Quality

In recent years, quality control of original text has been stressed more and more. To achieve an easily translatable text, authors are taught (although with very uneven results) how to write clearly and understandably. The path that leads most directly to easily understandable text (from a translation point of view), is a definite control of language as far as words, sentences and the

structure of the text are concerned (see TC-Forum 1/97), as - for instance - carried out in AECMA-Simplified English (see Lehrndorfer 1996). So that you may confirm the importance of an original text's linguistic quality (particularly controlled language) under all aspects mentioned above, see the text examples below:

non-controlled German text	controlled German text
<p>Magnesiumteile und besonders Innengewinde in diesen duerfen nicht mit cyanidisch verzinkten Teilen und insbesondere so behandelten Schraubgewinden kombiniert werden, da dieser Kontakt im Zusammenwirken mit Feuchtigkeit starke Korrosion an den Magnesiumteilen erzeugt.</p> <p>Ebenso kann bei der Kombination verzinkter Bauteile mit rostbestaendigen Staehlen unter Feuchtigkeitseinwirkung schaedigende Korrosion auftreten.</p>	<p>Nie Magnesium-Teile mit cyanidisch verzinkten Teilen kombinieren!</p> <p>Bei Feuchtigkeit korrodieren die Magnesium-Teile stark.</p> <p>Nie verzinkte Bauteile mit rostbestaendigen Staehlen kombinieren. Bei Feuchtigkeit korrodieren die Bauteile.</p>
non-controlled English text	controlled English text
<p>Magnesium parts and specially female threads inside same should not be combined with cyanide plated parts and specially screw threads so plated, since this contact - jointly with moisture - will cause strong corrosion to magnesium parts.</p> <p>In case you combine plated parts with rust-proof steels, harmful corrosion may also happen under moisture's action.</p>	<p>Never combine magnesium parts with cyanide plated parts!</p> <p>In case of moisture magnesium parts strongly corrode.</p> <p>Never combine plated parts with rustproof steels.</p> <p>In the presence of moisture plated parts badly corrode.</p>
Mean time to translate	Mean time to translate
<p>minutes needed to understand (more or less) the original German text, reading it three or four times: 8 minutes translation: 6 minutes mean time to translate: 14 minutes</p>	<p>minutes needed to understand the original German text: 1 minute translation: 2-3 minutes mean time to translate: 4 minutes</p>

How to Save Money in Translation Cost (cont.)

Another important point is that some authors use, for example, different words for the same application in the same text:

English	German	Spanish
hob	Kochfeld/Kochmulde	placa de cocción/encimera

In this example the Spanish word encimera for the English word hob is incorrect because it means worktop. Yet -and this is rather funny- people use it in technical documentation. Consequently, it can create errors in translation.

Human Aspects

Finally, we must not forget the translator's attitude toward the text, namely the text's quality. This psychological factor often is underestimated. Depending on the text's quality, sometimes the translator begins his work feeling angry ("Oh God, that's impossible to translate!") and that doesn't help him or her do the job well and on time. A miserable original text means the translator has to phone the client and ask for more information, and more precise information. Sometimes this requires calling from one country to another, or even creating a completely new text.

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Does Quality Management Guarantee Quality? (RU 1)



by Gabriele Bock

The answer is no. Quality is a highly complex subject. Methods and controls being currently employed in quality management only provide information about specific aspects of quality, maybe not even the most important ones. In a series of articles in TC-Forum, I will discuss what quality management procedures actually contribute to quality, and where I see deficiencies. In this introductory part, I will share with you a few ideas about quality and its different meanings and, stimulated by the first issue of TC-Forum, about the impact of controlled language on quality. The next article will deal with another popular means, frequently (mis-)taken, for indicating and increasing the quality of technical documents: Certification.

The Scope of Quality

Quality is as hard to define as technical communicators' contribution to the return of investment, and it is probably even harder to measure. Quality definitions are as numerous as pebbles on the beach. In this article I will focus on those which are relevant to technical communication and which help to localize deficiencies of quality management. Smart, Seawright, and DeTienne gave an useful overview in their article in STC's Technical Communication.¹⁾

Smart et al claim that quality management is "the practical application of quality". This definition shows the limits of quality management: It reduces quality to its practical (and measurable) aspects. However, the subtitle of this article reveals that the authors take a holistic view on quality and, indeed, their different quality definitions do imply certain non-measurable subjective criteria.

The coordinates along which Smart et al group their quality definitions are internal versus external and subjective versus objective. They distinguish five groups of quality:

- Transcendent Quality
Individuals can perceive or recognize quality when it exists, even if they cannot define it.
- Customer-based Quality
Satisfaction of customer needs and expectations
- Value-based Quality
Customer satisfaction achieved through product excellence at a reasonable price
- Product-based Quality
Product characteristics or attributes, e. g. durability, serviceability, performance, usability.
- Design-based Quality
Conformance to design specifications, style guides, company standards etc.

Companies, and German companies in particular, clearly prefer internal objective quality definitions such as product-based or design-based rather than subjective external ones. They are easier to handle, and thought to be more reliable. Customers' needs and expectations could be neglected as long as most people unconditionally believed in technological progress.

However, times have changed, and technical products do not sell as easy as they used to. Therefore, modern management strategies call for customer-orientation. Controlled language is often considered the 'magic formula' for achieving several goals, e.g. to ease understanding and to facilitate translation. But the use of controlled language needs to be examined very carefully in regard to its contribution to quality from the customer's point of view.

Controlled language is often considered the 'magic formula'.

Does Quality Management Guarantee Quality? (cont.)

Controlled Language

The wide range of controlled language, although mentioned in the articles in TC-Forum 1/97, is not convincingly demonstrated. According to Nancy Hoft controlled language means:

- a limited, specialized vocabulary,
- a dictionary defining the meaning and usage of all words,
- simple writing rules and rigorous punctuation rules.²⁾

I doubt very much that customers want a controlled language

The first argument for developing controlled language usually is that machines cannot handle freedom of expression or diversified structures. Very true, but exactly here lies the advantage of human translators who cannot be put on the same level as machines. Translators are very aware of semantic subtleties, and specifically try to preserve expressivity and keep varied text structures. Of course, translation is easier when the author provides a clearly worded and structured manuscript. But translators can still ask questions until they understand the author's intention. Only if they understand the authors' intentions will their translations be adequate.

The second argument is that controlled language facilitates understanding for nonnative speakers. So, what about the guideline quoted in the same articles that product information must be written in the user's language? Will the future world be inhabited only by English native speakers? Will British and American citizens be dummed down to the level of backward children? Or will they get instructions in their everyday English, which is the intention of the guideline?

I doubt very much that customers want a controlled language in which terms are defined differently from everyday language and all sentences have the same, never changing structure. Maybe customers have been trained to expect it, but I refuse to believe that many people approve.

The examples quoted in the TC-Forum 1/97 articles show the limits of controlled language. The products of Caterpillar and McDonnell Douglas are sold to many countries in the world, but their proprietary sublanguages serve very specific communication purposes. Their technical audience must learn the company language to keep their jobs. The same is true for the aerospace industry.

But not everybody sells or maintains caterpillars and airplanes. A company selling consumer electronics, for instance, has to address a much more diversified audience which might not be willing to learn a restricted code. Charles K. Ogden is mentioned as the ancestor who created a general version of controlled language in 1930. What has been concealed, however, is that his British American Scientific International Commercial (BASIC) language failed. David Crystal, as quoted by Nancy Hoft, stated:

*"The System was strongly supported ... by Churchill and Roosevelt, but there were also many criticisms. The simplification of the vocabulary is achieved at the expense of a more complex grammar and a greater reliance on idiomatic construction. The replacement forms are often unwieldy, involving lengthy circumlocutions. And although BASIC proved easy to learn to read, it proved very difficult to write in the language in such a way that meaning was clearly preserved."*³⁾

Quality of Converted Versions in TC-Forum 1/97

The report by Brigitte Beuttenmüller is a fairly literal translation of the German original in *tekem nachrichten*. She reports in a narrative

style about the workshop she attended. Her article is both easy to understand and easy to read, at least for my German reading habits, which are accustomed to writing and reading coherent texts. Gordon Farrington's version is more concise but, for me, surprisingly close to the original. His text increased my appreciation of AECMA which obviously has not been confined to structural texts with technical content.

The converted version of Gerhard Mark is not convincing. The Didactic Typographic Visualization (DTV) method is a tool to structure texts. Mark uses many arrows, hyphens, bullets, and highlights to structure the text. The result is a continuous interruption of the flow of reading. Sentences which were perfectly understandable in the beginning have to be re-built in the reader's mind to get the meaning. If read without considering the context, many "lists" do not make sense. The readability has decreased for reasons I already pointed out in my analysis of Günther W. Reichert's guide for technical writers.⁴⁾ If a writer highlights too many things the reader does not know what is really important. In Reichert's book DTV is exemplified in a text being rewritten from a list, which makes the text sound very silly. Here we have the opposite: A text was converted to a list which was not written for that purpose. I do not see how this version could possibly facilitate translation. Applying formal principles is only a very small contribution to controlled language, which first of all is a feature of content.

Conclusions

Customer-based quality is clearly opposed to simplified English, not necessarily to controlled language. Customers expect technical documents to be written in their normal words and grammar, not in a simplified and structured language they have to learn or that sounds dull to them. Like

societies, technical documents have to reflect development and change, evident not only in the products they describe but also in a lively and attractive language. This does not at all thwart the goal to produce

"Texts that have correct structures and are easy to read, with agreed and standard terminology."
(Farrington, TC-Forum 1/97, p. 10)

But, to accomplish this goal, we need not mutilate natural languages in which human beings normally communicate. The danger of controlled language, as presently projected, is that it will make us feel like Alice in Wonderland:

*"The Hatter's remark seemed to have no meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English."*⁵⁾

References:

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Defining Quality in Technical Communication: A Holistic approach. STC Technical Communication, vol. 42,3, 1995, pp. 474-481
- 2) Hoft, Nancy L.
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New York, 1995, pp. 212-213
- 3) Hoft, p. 213
- 4) Günther W. Reichert
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In: Bock, Gabriele (1993): *Ansätze zur Verbesserung von Techniddokumentation.* Frankfurt a. M., pp. 112-133
- 5) Lewis Carroll (1907):
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
Edition quoted: London 1986, p. 86



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National Contact Persons (NCPs)

TC-Forum intends to create a worldwide network for technical communicators with contact persons in as many countries as possible. These national contact persons (NCPs) are volunteers that help keep the communication process running.

The NCP should be a technical communicator who is well-known in his/her country and has many contacts to industries, universities and public authorities. He/she should

- help find interested readers/ participants (copies free for at least the next 12 months thanks to sponsoring)
- help find competent discussion partners in his/her country
- stimulate discussion subjects / contributions to TC-Forum

The regular period of office of an NCP is 1 year and may be prolonged on mutual agreement.

NCP's should agree to have their names and contact-information (preferably email-addresses) published in TC-Forum.

Any individual who meets the above criteria and is prepared to volunteer being an NCP may contact the Editor.

A maximum of two NCPs per country are accepted.

NCPs for the following countries have been nominated so far:

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Please feel free to contact either the Editor or your NCP for any questions concerning TC-Forum.

Letters to the Editor:

Cyrill Windust, Harrow, England, wrote:

Dear Hans,

I felt that trying to equate a machine with the human brain was oversimplifying the work of a translator.

The initial copy must be accurate, effective, and provide easy to use information for the envisaged readership. The translator then has to put himself into the role of an intended reader. Literal translations can result in very misleading statements. Only then the translator has a firm base to work from. For important, vital documentation, e.g. medical life support equipment, it is vital that the translation be re-translated to the author to ensure that its accuracy has been maintained. Maybe machine translation could help as first draft material for provisional translation.

A further point is that, as technical publications are acceptable in court as legal evidence, how would mechanical flaws, even a misplaced comma, stand up?

Although I am only conversant with English (being typically lazy in that respect) I can imagine that other languages have personal views on debatable points of grammar. ...

A brilliantly written document, handbook, manual etc. can do a good job with few, if any, commenting on its effectiveness. Yet let the writer commit one of the mythical sins of grammatical 'rules', 'know-all' readers will put pen to the paper in vicious fury. In English there are four ways of using or not using a split infinitive, there is 'open' or 'closed' punctuation,

Professional Events

phonetic or 'pepper-pot' punctuation, there are various other arguable points. I cannot imagine the English grammar is alone in this respect. It would be interesting to see how a mechanical system copes with such quirks.

To summarize, writers, be they technical or in other fields, are very individual specialists. Attempts at mechanization have a long way to go and, I suspect, will never catch up. So long live the technical communicator.

Carol Chubiz, Maple Grove MN, USA wrote

Dear Hans,

Yes, I do have some thoughts and experience about Controlled English. When I worked for IBM-Rochester (Minnesota), we had something of a controlled vocabulary when we wrote the AS/400 manuals. We got a list of about 5000 most-commonly-used words from the Living Word Vocabulary. We compared our documents against these 5000 words. If a word did not come from the list, we had to either change it or define it. Our editors were very strict about adherence to this. It was frustrating to do, but I think our manuals turned out very good. I think the translators from other countries also had an easier time.

TC-Forum provides information about upcoming events for technical communicators. These include conferences, seminars, calls for papers and other information of professional interest. TC-Forum accepts information about non-profit events only. Send information to the Editor (address see the Impressum on page 3).

May 11-14, 1997, Toronto, Ontario, Canada:

44th STC Annual Conference

STC conferences are the world's largest gatherings of technical communicators. Among the highlights are educational sessions, workshops, vendor exhibits, and displays of the winning entries of the Society's international technical communication competitions. Further information available from the STC-office (see below ¹).

4 - 7 June 1997 in Winnipeg, Canada:

TCI 97 - New Educational Institute for Technical Communicators

Two Forum 95 activators have formed an annual Technical Communication Institute (TCI). The first Institute, known as TCI 96, was held in June 1996. The TCIs are held in Winnipeg, Canada, and are organized by Lisa Moretto and Ron Blicq, who were the IEEE/PCS representatives on the Forum 95 organizing committee. The purpose of each Institute is to bring four days of intensive instruction on topics of special interest to technical communicators in Western Canada and the north-central USA.

The course leaders are well-known specialists in technical communication, and they present advanced rather than basic courses.

TCI 97's course leaders will present courses on

- Planning and Designing Multimedia
- Designing and Developing Online Documentation
- Usability Testing
- Project Management
- Developing a Web Site
- Human Factors for Technical Communicators
- Preparing World-Ready Information

For more information, contact Lisa Moretto at 75557.3326@compuserve.com or Ron Blicq at 71604.1535@compuserve.com.

11-13 June 1997, Wart, Germany:

T.I.E.M 97 Technical Information in Electronic Media

tekomp offers a technical conference for practitioners and managers in Technical Documentation. The venue will be a modern Conference Centre at Wart (near Nagold in the Black Forest, in Southwest Germany).

There will be workshops, tutorials, speeches and panel discussions. Languages will be German and English – but there will be no synchronous interpretation. The Call for Papers has been published on the Internet ([HTTP://WWW.tekom.de](http://www.tekom.de)) – further details will be published there as well and will be available from the tekomp-office (see below ²).

Professional Events

11 - 15 August 1997, Vienna

Methods of Terminology Management

The seminar will be organized by the International Institute for Terminology Research (IITF) in cooperation with the International Network for Terminology (TermNet). Trainers: Prof. Sue Ellen Wright (USA) and Dr. Gerhard Budin (Austria).

Registration form and information are available from TermNet ³⁾

September 1997:

ISTC Annual Conference, UK

Next year's ISTC conference is being brought forward to middle/late September 1997. Those wishing to participate as a presenter, sponsor or delegate should contact the ISTC administrative secretary (see below ⁴⁾).

10-11 October 1997:

Abbaye de Royaumont, France

COMTECH '97 International Congress organized by the Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques (CRT)

COMTECH '97 is a communications congress based on the concept of live forum: very few speeches, but with an idea-market, activators instead of speakers, Preseedings (with the papers in advance) and a Postharvest (which will document the outcome of the congress). COMTECH '97 will reorient from present reflections onto the discussions towards user-satisfaction - the aim of technical communication. French and English are the official languages.

The Call for Papers has just been issued. Detailed information and

Registration Form are available from CRT (see below ⁵⁾)

22 - 24 October 1997 Provo, Utah, USA and 23 - 25 September 1998 in Quebec, Canada:

IEEE/PCS IPCC 97 / IPCC 98 Technical Communication Conferences

The Professional Communication Society (PCS) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Inc (IEEE) holds an annual conference each autumn, in different locations across the USA and Canada. Two teams of volunteers are currently planning the 1997 and 1998 conferences.

IPCC 97 will be held at the Snowbird Ski Resort in Provo, Utah, in the western USA (Unfortunately, it will be too early for skiing!). For information, contact IPCC 97 conference chair Karl Smart at karl-smart@byugate.bye.com IPCC 98 will be held in picturesque Quebec City on the banks of the St Lawrence River in Canada, from 23 to 25 September 1998. For information, contact IPCC 98 conference chair Ron Blicq at 71604.1535@compuserve.com.

15 - 16 January 1998

Terminology in Advanced Microcomputer Applications TAMA '98

Organized by the International Network for Terminology (TermNet), Supported by the International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm)

Latest developments in selected terminology-related (i.e. tools for terminology management, translation, text management and analysis, concordance and localization) will be presented and discussed. Individ-

ual demonstrations and mini-workshops offer a unique chance to get fully acquainted with innovative products, as well as services and publications.

Further information is available from TermNet. ³⁾

Autumn 2000 in the UK:

Forum 2000

The INTECOM General Assembly decided during its Annual Meeting (September 1996) to have Forum 2000 in England. Gerry Gentle from ISTC (UK) will look for partners to join the Forum 2000 working group.

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