

# **Pricing by Volume versus Pricing by Complexity**

Most translators and translation agencies invoice their services by text volume, implying that all words should be given equal weighting or that all sentences are equally complex. Whereas, in the interests of accounting simplification, this approach might make sense for long, homogenous texts, it is clearly quite inappropriate for other tasks. Obviously, volume is a key factor in measuring the recompense for a given translation, but other factors, too, must be considered. These include (in roughly descending order of frequency):

- the conceptual complexity of sentences
- the grammatical complexity of sentences  
(these two are not necessarily the same thing)
- recognising when one word is being used with different meanings
- recognising when more than word is used to mean the same thing
- recognising when an expression is being used incorrectly, or unusually, or flagging other probable errors, correcting these, and reporting these matters courteously under time pressure

- researching technical expressions (i.e. finding the correct term). This might involve recourse to expensive dictionaries (online or paper), to original literature (or reputable internet sites), or consulting experts or otherwise contacts in the client company
- validating that an easily found term really does have its presumed meaning (the internet and even dictionaries abound with unreliable candidates)
- spelling out in the target language what is meant by a culturally specific expression (to take some easy examples: an English speaker might wonder what ironing left-handed is; or what is meant by passive electoral rights or passive safety; otherwise, it may be desirable to spell out some legal or administrative or cultural background.)
- coping with ambiguities in the source text (these may be intended or unintended ambiguities, and one needs to spot the difference or else be able to reproduce the ambiguity, which is likely to be difficult, at least without becoming long-winded and so lending the matter more significance than it deserves)
- coping with poorly written source texts (these are not the exception). (Note that if the translator reproduces the poor quality, it is the translator who will be blamed, not the author)
- attending to deadlines (some unreasonable & unnecessary), and attending also to changes in deadline (in the most favourable case, suddenly a job is less urgent, but one has forgone other work in order to commit to delivering to the original deadline)

- processing awkward file formats or unravelling files overladen with metadata (from innumerable reworking, copying & pasting) while still complying with clients' formatting requirements

and so on.

While many of these complications, hurdles, challenges or aggravations will not occur in most texts, when they do, they need to be recognised modestly in the total stated on the invoice. Precision is impossible, but approximations (for instance, on the basis of extra time) are.

If there is insistence on invoicing by number of words (although then, please, to the next thousand and not by single digits) or, as is customary in Germany, by the (ill-defined) line, there is the possibility of weighting the volume accordingly. If it is expected that repeat passages (for example, when ready translations are provided in a database) should be billed at a discount, it is consistent to bill other segments at a mark-up by, for instance, by, for instance, counting these twice or in extreme cases by other multiples.

Except when the texts come from outside sources, it is the duty of the client to provide properly written texts. If, basically, these need revising prior to processing, such informal rewriting must be charged for. Indeed, something similar is common practice in every area of business, *mutatis mutandis*.