



## MEMORANDUM

To: Ms. Catherine Pollard  
Ms. Cecilia Elizalde  
Ms. Corinne Momal-Vanian  
Ms. Michelle Keating

From: Languages Service Sectoral Assembly at UNOG

Geneva, 16 December 2016

Subject: Draft recommendation for the Steering Group on updating  
the definition of *reprise*

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1. After careful examination of the document entitled "Updating definition of reprise DRAFT 31102016", the Bureau of the Languages Service Sectoral Assembly (LSSA), the representative body of language staff working at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), would like to state the position of its constituents on this matter:
  2. The implementation of the recommendations contained in the aforementioned document would increase the proportion of text counted as *reprise* and, consequently, the effective productivity standard. However, this strategy disregards a fundamental fact: the current productivity standard is already very demanding in the light of the quality expected of UN translators. Meeting this standard while also producing high quality translations requires experience, careful thought, thorough research and, at times, long hours, regardless of a translator's seniority.
  3. Thus, any attempt to raise the effective productivity standard – directly or indirectly – will inevitably have a negative impact on the quality of translations. Indeed, basing the calculation on "snippets" in order to reduce the number of words credited would leave staff with no choice but to sacrifice quality for quantity. Yet, the General Assembly has repeatedly emphasized, most recently in resolution 70/9, the vital importance of quality translation for the functioning of UN entities and has requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the quality of translation into the six official languages, with particular emphasis on accuracy. In the LSSA Bureau's view, the recommendations disrespect the work of the Organization's translators and compromise the quality of their translations, thereby undermining important principles reaffirmed in the aforementioned resolution, in particular multilingualism and the equality of the official languages.

4. **The LSSA Bureau therefore urges the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) to refrain from taking any steps that would increase the amount of text counted as *reprise* and, consequently, the effective productivity standard.** While it agrees that it would be useful to implement a "harmonized, consistent and automatic approach in determining *reprise* text", the LSSA Bureau believes that the most efficient and appropriate way of achieving this would be to align the calculation with the practice known as the "Geneva rule", which defines *reprise* as "170 consecutive words of previously translated text".

5. **Specifically, the LSSA Bureau strongly encourages DGACM to keep the minimum requirement of 170 consecutive words from the same source for *reprise* purposes.** Any attempt to lower or remove that threshold would go against the most basic principle of translation, namely that translation depends entirely on context. A short segment translated one way in one document will often need to be translated differently in another document due to considerations such as internal consistency, field-specific terminology and context-based differences in meaning. When translators do quote an earlier document, they must make sure they are using the right source; very often, this implies that they cannot reuse the segment suggested by a CAT tool at all.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, the shorter the *reprise* segment, the higher the proportion of additional work that will be needed, regardless of the CAT tool used.

6. For similar reasons, **the LSSA Bureau does not agree with the rationale behind the introduction of "fuzzy matching" for the evaluation of *reprise* with the DCPMS tool.** The cherry-picked examples of minor editorial changes in the original do not represent the whole array of editorial changes that UN translators face every day. The recommendation fails to take into account the diversity of the official languages of the United Nations, in which sentence structures do not necessarily match from one language to the next and where the deletion of a phrase or the mere "invisible" change of a mandate-holder's gender might entail a much more thorough intervention by the translator than simply making a corresponding tweak in the target language.

7. Lastly, the recommendation to deduct figures contained in tables from the total word count ignores the fact that the translation of a table often requires as much time as running text with the same word count. For example, a three-word title in a column or row often takes significantly more time to translate than three words in a regular sentence because of the lack of context. Not crediting translators for figures would penalize them for this extra but necessary effort.

8. The LSSA Bureau sincerely hopes that the views of the language staff will be duly taken into account when making a decision on the recommendations put forward in the aforementioned document.

The Languages Service Sectoral Assembly at UNOG

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of quotes from treaties and resolutions, for example, it must be borne in mind that the quoted excerpt is very often a small part (e.g. 30%) of the original sentence. As a result, even if the correct source has been added to the bitext database of a CAT tool such as eLUNa, the quoted excerpt will not show up in the search results.