

He, L. & Lyu, Q. (2023). Chuan Yu (2022). Translation Project Management. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 40, 371-376. <https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2023.540>

This article is publish under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International* (CC BY):  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



© Linghan He, Qi Lyu, 2023

**Walker, Callum (2023). *Translation Project Management*. London /New York: Routledge, pp. 282, \$42.95. ISBN 9780367677732 (paperback), 9781003132813 (e-book).**

It has been argued that the “constellation” of “moving parts” that is the highly projectised language industry — a constellation that “tends to vary from one task to the next” — “makes the sound management of translation projects all the more important” (Angelone *et al.* 2020: 1). This practice has become increasingly significant, given the proliferating demand for translation services fuelled by the increasing prevalence of globalisation, technological advancement, and big data (Angelone *et al.* 2020: 2; Moorkens 2020: 324-325). In this context, the publication of *Translation Project Management*, authored by Callum Walker, is a particularly timely contribution to the field.

Adopting the terminology of the international standard for translation services ISO 17100:2015 (ISO 2015), Walker applies the generic frameworks *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK) and *PRjects IN Controlled Environments* (PRINCE2) to the translation industry. The author provides a coherent overview of current translation project management with a special focus on its workflow, principles and constraints. The book is organised into two parts: Part I presents a comprehensive account of the translation project lifecycle of pre-production, production, and post-production; Part II addresses some “principles, theories, and approaches” (11) which are useful for managing the critically interrelated constraints of translation projects, some aspects of which are explored through the lens of economics.

The opening chapter provides a sound introductory grounding for the monograph. Presenting a holistic view of the rapidly evolving language services industry, this chapter begins by appreciating the importance of translation project management and subsequently situates the subject within the applied branch of translation studies. The author acknowledges that project management has been undervalued as an object of academic inquiry (given the scarcity of devoted book-length scholarly works); this lacuna in academic studies justifies the author’s purpose. He then introduces the PMBOK and PRINCE2 frameworks, as well as the international standard of ISO 17100:2015, which this research also draws on. This chapter concludes by highlighting the specificities of an evolved model that considers various project constraints, which forms the foundation for Part II.

The ensuing three chapters shine a spotlight on the project lifecycle “from cradle to grave” (11). Chapter 2 is dedicated to pre-production, the first part of the lifecycle. It delineates the steps for assessing the feasibility of meeting the demands set forth in an enquiry requesting a particular translation service. The administrative, linguistic, and technical tasks

required to prepare the launch of a project are also outlined, with these potentially ensuring better project results. Chapter 3 moves to the stage of project production. Structured around a conception of the workflow as a waterfall model, this chapter guides readers through compulsory and optional project steps in great detail. The often-confused terms such as quality assurance and quality assessment are also clarified. Chapter 4 delves into post-production, where the lifecycle terminates. It considers the proper collection and handling of multidirectional feedback indispensable for “feeding-forward into future project execution” (82), since the so-called principle of ‘the aggregation of marginal gains’ has shown that seemingly minor improvements can lead to drastically different outcomes. Technical aspects, such as invoicing and “post-mortem meetings” (106-107), are also tackled as part of closing administration tasks.

Building upon the essential aspects of translation project management, Part II deals with project constraints from a more theoretical perspective. In chapter 5, the temporary nature of projects is emphasized, providing a firm ground for introducing the specificities of schedule management. By suggesting recommendations such as defining activities within a work breakdown structure, sequencing them in accordance with their internal dependency, estimating durations in heed of the “Goldilocks principle” (120) that is often invoked in project management, and developing and monitoring schedules with tools, this chapter exhibits how a sound timescale management can be ensured. It also offers a panoramic discussion of factors affecting project schedules, and emphasis is put on human factors, where the “law of diminishing returns” (124-126), among others, speaks volumes about the detrimental effects of adding excessive human resources to a project.

Chapter 6 investigates the cost element as an economic constraint. It starts by presenting the formula of cost calculation with a view to ensuring an adequate profit margin, and then moves past the basics by examining how market forces of supply and demand operate on pricing proposals by different stakeholders. Moreover, the economic concept known as “price elasticity” is used to explicate the significantly inelastic nature of the supply and demand variables which influence pricing. This explanation deepens the readers’ understanding of the industry-wide mechanisms at work in pricing and locates cost calculation for translation projects within a wider economic landscape.

Chapter 7 looks at scope, a constraint established on the basis of clients’ needs and expectations. In simpler contexts, as the author suggests, scope can be managed by producing buyers’ guides and properly defined translation briefs that refrain from generating “unrealistic expectations on the client side” (150). For more complex circumstances, when competing priorities cannot be properly managed, the chapter offers the MoSCow method and the Kano model as toolkits. “Scope creep”, i.e., “the

uncontrolled expansion to product or project scope without adjustments to time, cost, and resources” (Project Management Institute 2017: 168), is defined as the hopeless pursuit of perfection in translation projects.

In chapter 8, the focus shifts towards quality. Asserting that “quality is best appraised in relative terms” (171), this chapter proposes a tailored application of DMAIC (define, measure, analyse, improve, control), a Six Sigma-based methodology, to maintain appropriate standards of quality. Important aspects to take into account when delineating the five-step methodology are vendor-focused error scoring methods, i.e., macro linguistic quality assessment (LQA) scores and micro LQA scores like the LISA error typology, for measurement. In addition to descriptive statistics, the ‘Pareto principle’, a metric of analysis, is also drawn on in this chapter to determine “the ‘vital few’ that account for 80% of the errors” and “the ‘trivial many’ that account for only 20% of the errors” (185), thus disclosing the main deficiencies that should be addressed first. With a critical look at the relationship between cost and quality, the final section of this chapter evaluates the difficulties in reaching an ideal balance between cost and quality (CoQ).

Chapter 9 explores benefits in the context of project constraints. It brings the concept of ‘business case’ into the process of measuring and pursuing benefits, in which a justification is required in relation to the desirability, viability, and achievability of a decision to undertake a project. Moving beyond the general practice of assessing benefits in financial terms, this chapter approaches benefits from lesser-acknowledged angles, such as non-profit work, client satisfaction, and the usability and functionality of translation with regard to end-users. It provides a holistic picture of the ‘benefit chain’ that interconnects different stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle, and concludes by advocating that efforts are devoted to act “in the best interests of the project as a whole” (210).

Chapter 10 covers the last point of the two overlaid constraint triangles that have been discussed: risk. Breaking down the factors involved in the risk-management process, this chapter provides cross-disciplinary insights into these steps. For instance, it claims that larger LSPs can use probability/impact matrices to quantify risks based on registered data, which allows high probability and high impact risks to be prioritised for an appropriate response. Notably, the notion that “risk need not be something negative” (214) recurs in this section, responding to a common misconception that can result in overlooking positive risk (i.e., opportunity).

Chapter 11 completes the monograph by figuratively echoing the notion “post-mortem” (237) as the last stage of the translation project lifecycle. It locates translation project management within the wider industry landscape and summarizes the triadic relation among client, project manager, and vendor from the perspective of the principal-professional relationship (i.e.,

in economic terms). Underpinned by the threads from previous subsections, the author ultimately offers recommendations for future research on translation project management.

This monograph draws on the author's teaching and translation practice as well as theoretical scholarship. The bridging of academic world and translation industry makes it versatile, with a level of complexity perfectly exemplifying the "just right" Goldilocks principle (120) referred to by the author. Thus, it can be used as a textbook by students and teachers, as a practice reference manual by translators new to the LSPs, and as a theoretical guide with novel insight that may be of help to practitioners and scholars. Another remarkable feature lies in its reader-centeredness and reader-friendliness, which find full expression in its problem-driven and task-based design as well as its coherent account of the entire translation project management lifecycle. What makes this strength even more prominent is that all intricacies of project management, even the sheer enormity of details such as invoicing content (96-97), are well-attended to by the author. In addition, it highlights the role of CAT tools and modern MT engines in managing translation projects. This feature is exemplified in its foregrounding of the role that the weighted source word count plays in quotation (29), of the importance of managing resources such as translation memories (TMs) and term bases (TBs) (105), and of the application of machine translation post-editing (MTPE) to offer a faster pathway to production in the ISO waterfall workflow (60-67), which is in line with the increased demand for MTPE services (Guerberof Arenas and Moorkens 2019). Finally, in the context of a language-industry landscape dramatically altered by globalisation, it adopts a global, interconnected and inclusive perspective. Rather than being limited to intra-European translation projects, it gives due regard to transcontinental cases, and includes language pairs such as English to Arabic (23) and Swedish to Swahili (133-135). This global insight is also evident in its discussion of the timescale constraint, in relation to which public holidays, religious festivals, and time zones (122-124) are taken into consideration, and of the influence exerted by the macroeconomic variable of exchange rates on cost (136-137).

This monograph is a valuable contribution to current scholarship. According to the industry research body Common Sense Advisory (CSA), the language services and technology market is estimated to be worth around \$52.01 billion (DePalma and Lommel 2022). This flourishing industry makes translation project management all the more salient, which is in a sharp contrast to a much less rosy picture of its relevance in the academic realm. Dunne and Dunne (2011) label project management in the discipline of translation studies as "terra incognita" when reviewing existing literature (1). Although this area has become less unknown thanks to the publication of some journal articles in the last decade, book-length studies are still scarce (e.g. Matis 2014; Beninatto and Johnson 2017; Angelone *et al.* 2020; Mitchell-Schuitevoerder 2020). This makes *Translation Project Management*

an important contribution. Additionally, by incorporating principles of economics and project management, this monograph offers an interdisciplinary perspective into translation studies.

Compared with other theme-related publications in recent years (e.g. Dunne and Dunne 2011; Mitchell-Schuitevoerder 2020), this book merits recommendation. Dunne and Dunne (2011) compile an array of chapters that investigate different facets of translation project management, such as risk management and global virtual teams. However, due to its nature as an edited volume, it is less focused than the reviewed monograph. Additionally, since it was published a decade ago, it may not fully capture the current state of a sector that is advancing by leaps and bounds. The work by Mitchell-Schuitevoerder (2020) includes core elements of project management and how translation workflow can be managed through technological tools. However, this book focuses on the learning of CAT tools. *Translation Project Management*, with its timeliness and relevance, thus represents an advance over existing literature.

Nevertheless, this engaging monograph still has some room for improvement. In Part II, six project constraints are mapped into separate chapters with focused and in-depth discussion. However, with the exception of cost and quality, the interrelations between some constraints seem to be left unweighed or receive comparatively less treatment. Furthermore, in the real-industry context, the six constraints, represented by the model of two overlaid triangles, typically work together to affect the project. In this regard, more attention could be given to the comprehensive picture in which the six constraints interact. Another limitation of this volume is related to the undertreatment of interpreting. Greater inclusiveness could be achieved by presenting a more detailed theoretical exploration and more examples of interpreting-related management practice. Furthermore, although it touches upon the considerably evolved forms of collaboration that have emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic (241), this monograph would be even more welcome and relevant if it had included more insights into the changes in the dominant project management model in the post-pandemic 'new normal'.

In sum, this book provides a coherent and interdisciplinary insight into translation project management. As a valuable contribution to this applied area of translation studies, it serves a diverse readership and identifies promising areas of future research in this field.

## **Acknowledgements**

This review is supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (grant number 21BYY066).

## References

- **Angelone, Erik, Ehrensberger-Dow, Maureen and Gary Massey** (2020). "Introduction." Erik Angelone, Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow and Gary Massey (eds) (2020). *The Bloomsbury Companion to Language Industry Studies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1-14.
- **Beninatto, Renato and Tucker Johnson** (2017). *The General Theory of Translation Company*. <https://www.nimdzi.com/about/our-publications/ebook/> (consulted 27.12.2022).
- **DePalma, Donald A. and Arle Lommel** (2022). *The Language Services Market*. <http://insights.csa-research.com/reportaction/305013412/Marketing> (consulted 23.12.2022).
- **Dunne, Keiran J. and Elena S. Dunne** (eds) (2011). *Translation and Localization Project Management: The Art of the Possible*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- **Guerberof Arenas, Ana and Joss Moorkens** (2019). "Machine translation and post-editing training as part of a master's programme." *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 31, 217-238.
- **International Organization for Standardization, ISO** (2015). *Translation Services – Requirements for Translation Services (ISO 17100: 2015)*. Geneva: International Organization for Standardization.
- **Matis, Nancy** (2014). *How to Manage Your Translation Projects*. <https://www.translation-project-management.com/en> (consulted 8.12.2022).
- **Mitchell-Schuitevoerder, Rosemary** (2020). *A Project-Based Approach to Translation Technology*. London/New York: Routledge.
- **Moorkens, Joss** (2020). "Translation in the neoliberal era." Esperança Bielsa and Dionysios Kapsaskis (eds) (2020). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Globalization*. London/New York: Routledge, 323-336.
- **Project Management Institute** (2017). *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pennsylvania: Project Management Institute, Inc.

**Linghan HE**

**Hubei University**

E-mail: linghan.he@hubu.edu.cn

**Qi LYU (Corresponding Author)**

**Hubei University**

E-mail: richlvq@hubu.edu.cn