Standard of language consulting

towards universally accepted principles and best practices

March 2024

This document has been compiled within the framework of the project 'Tell Me How to Say It Right!' (TELMER), a collaboration between the Institute of the Estonian Language and the Czech Language Institute. The aim of the project was to investigate language consultancies in various countries, to develop a training programme to enhance the professionalism of language consultants, and to establish guidelines for best practices in language consultancy, creating a universally applicable standard for language consultations.

This standard is based on the results of a survey conducted among numerous European language consultancy institutions, as well as the agreement among experienced language consultants from the two institutes, reflecting fundamental principles of language consulting.

We believe that formulating these principles within the standard will raise awareness about the importance of language consulting and contribute to the provision of reliable, trustworthy, and high-quality language consulting services, ensuring client satisfaction.

The TELMER project was funded by the ERASMUS+ programme and was carried out from April 2023 to March 2024.

By the term language consulting, we mean giving requested advice on linguistic matters such as spelling, declension, meaning, origins of a word, usage of the language etc.

This document lists what we consider good practice in providing language consultations. We present it as invitations or recommendations rather than requirements or command(ment)s.

We are aware that language consulting practice has various forms – e-mails, online interfaces, telephone calls (to mention some major ones). Still, we aim to offer principles that apply to language consulting in general, although some of them may be especially relevant to one of the forms compared with the others.

INSTITUTE OF THE ESTONIAN LANGUAGE

Czech Language Institute
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I. General principles

1. Language consulting is a public service.
2. The goal of language consulting is helping the inquirer by answering their question.
3. Language consulting is primarily provided by the institution, though represented by a person. Stating the name of that person may depend on cultural traditions.
4. Language consulting is
   - science-based.
   - up-to-date regarding current linguistic knowledge.
   - recommendatory in nature.

II. Institutional aspects

The duties of the institutions would be:
1. to build and keep developing a database of questions and answers.
   - They may use it for themselves – for future checking, for research, or for learning from both good and problematic cases. It may help to ensure that the same question is being answered consistently.
   - They shall make it available for the public as much as possible. The editing and anonymization may take extra effort, but at the same time, it can save their work (help to avoid answering the same questions repeatedly to different inquirers).
2. to set and keep developing a system of continuous learning, training and tutoring.
3. to help the staff to feel good and do their work well and happily.
4. to exchange ideas and collaborate with language consulting institutions from other countries.

III. Individual aspects – long-term perspective

1. Enhance your communication skills. Learn how to assess what the inquirer wants and what shall be the best communication strategy to achieve it.
2. Educate yourself constantly. Be open to feedback. Learn from constructive feedback, think how you can develop further.
3. Be well prepared. Get familiar with language resources, have them always at hand, be on time and have an alternative strategy ready if technical issues occur.
4. Learn how to manage stress in difficult situations. Remain calm, know and use conflict resolution strategies, ask your colleagues for help if needed.
5. Do not fall into routine. Cultivate your interest in the process of consulting and try to keep focused on every individual case.

IV. Individual aspects – short-term perspective

Focused on subject
1. Pay attention to identifying the core of the language problem. Ask the inquirer for context or additional information if needed.
2. Base your answer primarily on objective data.
3. Provide arguments for your answer. Justify, refer to sources.
4. Make clear how certain you are, how reliable your answer is. Provide counterarguments and limitations whenever there are some.
5. If your answer has to contain your own opinions, state it clearly.
6. If you make a mistake, try to correct it.
7. You may not be able to answer the question at the moment. Another expert opinion may be needed or the inquirer may ask a question that is not (only) language in nature. Do not be shy to admit that.
8. If the question cannot be answered at all, say why and try to navigate the inquirer to a more appropriate source.

Focused on manner
1. Be helpful, cooperative, and friendly.
2. Remain calm, polite and kind; use empathy to understand others, go an extra mile if necessary. Take your time and avoid judging or jumping to quick conclusions.
3. Speak clearly, be self-confident, explain yourself with clarity. Use simple language that the inquirer can understand, avoid exclusive terminology.
4. Be open-minded, curious and tolerant to other perspectives, ideas and sources.
5. Listen actively, ensure understanding of the question, ask for clarifications if needed.
6. Provide balanced and accurate arguments. If you are not sure about your answer, don't hesitate to admit it.
7. Ask your colleagues for additional advice if needed.
8. Be positive, find joy and fun in your work, and appreciate people genuinely interested in learning about languages.

This is the first version of the standard. The authors genuinely welcome any notes, remarks, additions, proposals etc.

If you want to comment on it or cooperate in any other way, you may contact us on riin.kikkas@eki.ee and klara.dvorakova@ujc.cas.cz.

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