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Tapestry’s Other Side

We have a tapestry in our office that is a beautiful silk weaving from the People’s Republic of China. The scene shows children laughing and playing. When this piece of art was brought out of China, it was in a suitcase that disappeared in transit for over a month. When the suitcase was found, everything of obvious value had disappeared. But this tapestry was folded wrong side out, and its complicated thread-thrashing back side was all that was viewable. It was not taken.

Cervantes once said that “translation is the other side of a tapestry.” We see well-written documents, Web sites and computer programs — and then we see their new localized versions and the general public has no idea of the hard work (and sometimes mad scramble) to accomplish the translation.

We’ve put this supplement together to address some basic concepts and questions in translation. Because you are reading this, you probably realize that if you need something professionally translated, you need to look further than to someone who studied a second language in grammar school.

But what is the market like right now? What issues are translation agencies facing? How do you choose a company to translate your work? What can you do to make the job run smoother? What sorts of tools might translators be using? David Shadbolt addresses these questions in his article.

Of course, it is best to originate material knowing that you are going to need to have it translated. Jonathan T. Hine, Jr., gives us some good guidelines for writing for an intended international audience. Once you’ve jumped into this procedure, it is sometimes overwhelming to see different word count figures for the same project. Tim Watson describes how words are often counted for translation, a critical topic for determining the cost of a translation job.

Laraine Tunick delves deeper into the topic of translation with technology, discussing various cost versus accuracy alternatives. Once you have selected a translation vendor, Kim Vitray outlines the best way for you to ensure a good project by preparing your work and procedures for the translation process.

Additional help may be found in the resources listings on page 22. And, for fun, we show how the phrase Know thyself might be translated around the world.

Yes, the other side of the tapestry is quite busy and sometimes not very attractive. But if you have the right weavers, equipment and materials, the tapestry can be beautiful.— Donna Parrish, Publisher

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Translation Processes and Tools

David Shadbolt

Any translator of Homer should, as the great Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold wrote in 1861, “be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author: that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought; that he be noble.” Whatever the subject field, be it literary, IT, pharmaceutical or manufacturing, the first three qualities remain key for professional translators, whatever their gender. In addition, they require skill sets not needed in Arnold’s day.

Client demand has meant that the language services sector has had to develop innovative production processes and software tools to lower translation costs, work faster and provide consistently high quality. As a result, agencies or corporate translation departments need translators with computer and language tool proficiency, as well as with a comprehensive knowledge of a specific subject area. Finding the required translator, especially in esoteric subjects, is not an easy task. Chris Fischer-Gissot, project manager at Eurotexte in Paris, asserts, “I find that it takes a lot of research to find good translators in highly specialized areas, and we investigate them thoroughly before entering into a working agreement. It’s one of our main ISO 9001 procedures.”

General manager Shelly Orr Priebe at Ralph McElroy Translation Company confirms that tracking down qualified translators with technical expertise offers a challenge, particularly if the ‘locale’ has not traditionally supported a particular industry or technology with education and support.

A handful of language schools, such as the Monterey Institute of International Studies in the United States, attempts to meet the growing demand for translators by training graduates in language tools and specific subjects. However, it seems that a lot more work is required in this area. Andrew Kirby, commercial development officer at England’s Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI), says, “I am not aware specifically of any educational bodies who provide much training in language tools. In fact, the ITI is looking into the possibility of providing services in this area due to the current perceived shortage. Translation degree and postgraduate courses in the United Kingdom are, however, increasing, including training in a wider range of areas as part of their studies in addition to pure linguistic skills. This is aimed at providing the student with a more rounded experience of life as a translator before the end of the course. Furthermore, translators will normally research their subject area(s) in order to familiarize themselves with all necessary terminology. This is where detailed knowledge, both in the language and subject matter, becomes evident.”

Ongoing support and education are offered through professional organizations such as the American Translators Association and ITI. Kirby confides, “At present the ITI has approximately 2,600 members, including 80 corporate members (predominantly translation companies and agencies). The growth in the European Union, together with increasing international trade by UK companies, generates demand for foreign language services. I would surmise from this that a wide variety of opportunities exist for translators and interpreters in the United Kingdom and beyond, covering many different industries and commercial fields.”

Recruitment and Quality Control

Highly skilled personnel, not bricks and mortar, form the foundation of any successful company. In the language sector, translators, whether in-house or freelancers, underpin any agency. John Watkins, vice-president, operations for Lingo Systems, outlines his company’s process for translator recruitment. “They are such an important part of our work, so we have a full-time linguist recruiter whose job it is to search high and low for translators with the appropriate qualifications. A translator must have five years’ experience before working for us, and then once he or she comes on board, we have a three-step process that validates the translator’s qualifications and abilities. Establishing the credentials of translators and starting them out small are essential for quality control. A translator first begins as a proofreader, moving up to copy editor and then on to translation.”

The translation process has quality control built into the workflow. Watkins explains, “We recommend and use a three-step linguistic process: a unique translator, a unique copy editor and a unique proofreader. These three people have very different functions. The translator is the lead. He or she knows the content and the terminology, sets the glossary definitions and so on. The translator is responsible for converting the source text into the target text. The copy editor works independently from the translator and reviews both the target translation and the original source to make sure that the translator accurately caught the spirit and the style as well as translation accuracy. That work is usually done in tandem, but independently. The translator and copy editor usually work in a language software tool such as Workbench so that they establish agreed-upon terminology as well as maintain translation consistency. The work comes back to us for rebuilding into a draft deliverable, whether it is a deliverable of a document or a software graphical user interface. The proofreader looks at that draft deliverable for stylistic issues, spelling or grammatical mistakes that the other two may have overlooked. The proofreader is mostly saying, ‘I’m a native speaker. Do I feel as though I’m sitting in say, France, reading a document that was created in France, or do I feel as though I am reading the translation of an American document?’ Their comments go back to the translator, who either accepts or rejects them and makes revisions where necessary, updating in Workbench or another language software tool.”
Choosing a Vendor

If you are a buyer of language services, you will need to identify which vendor has the appropriate expertise. As in any service sector, the range of services offered by vendors varies. Some are full-service agencies offering translation of documents, Web sites and software as well as full localization, which is the process of adapting software, document or other content to various markets or localities. Translation only involves the process of converting the source text into the target language. Some agencies may only specialize in documentation or the Web. “Others may confine their activities to only one specific industry and a few languages,” says Dan Johnson, director of sales and marketing at Lingo. “Full service to me means that the agency is able to take the source language product and perform all the services it takes to deliver a fully localized product as a deliverable and to do it in multiple languages, which makes Lingo a full-service agency. Localization normally requires a variety of steps, including translating user interface content, modifying formats of numbers and dates, replacing culturally specific graphics or design, or whatever.”

While smaller agencies may only specialize in one or two industries, medium to large agencies cover a wider range. For example, SDL International has its main clients in the IT and manufacturing sectors and several substantial clients in pharmaceutical, finance, automotive and electronics. Lingo Systems mainly targets the high tech, medical, handheld devices, heavy equipment and enterprise resource planning sectors. Ralph McElroy has established itself in technical and scientific documentation for research, legal and medical clients. “For many years,” Orr Pribe says, “we have had a division that focuses on legal translations to support patent prosecution and litigation, as well as a medical division for clients conducting international drug and device trials and seeking regulatory approvals. Although we value our historic core businesses, noting that areas like patent litigation are recession proof, we are particularly encouraged by the number of companies choosing to translate their Web sites due to a growing awareness that respect for other cultures is integral to the conduct of ‘good business’.”

Identifying the services you need simplifies your search for a vendor and the time required in obtaining and evaluating bids. However, Watkins says, “The biggest obstacle that companies face is trying to figure out the services offered by vendors because there is no consistency, in my opinion, in how we offer our services, which can lead to confusion. Vendor A may have a lower price than vendor B, but A’s price might only include two linguistic steps, whereas the higher price of B’s may include four linguistic steps and a higher quality translation product. For an uninformed client this may not appear obvious. Clients have to weigh the cost against the result — whether the cost of quality is worth it to them or not. We suggest that if companies want their products to work well in other countries they should go for quality.”

Vendors should provide metrics in key performance areas, so clients should provide them with a list of questions. The fourth edition of The Guide to Translation and Localization, published by Lingo Systems in cooperation with the American Translators Association, recommends a few questions, such as asking what is the vendor’s area of specialization, historical accuracy of cost estimates and on-time deliveries. You might also ask the vendor if the source text will be translated by native speakers of the target languages. Exercise caution if not, just as you should if the quote is too low compared to the competition — an indication that your job will not receive the attention it deserves. It is also advisable to ask for samples of documents and Web sites translated and then run those samples by a language-sensitive native speaker. Having selected a vendor, you may also want to show page proofs of its first translation job to an independent qualified translator for validation of the work, especially with respect to typographical conventions.

Helping the Vendor

For clients who wish to reduce translation costs, ITI and other organizations have some suggestions. First, consider whether the entire text needs translating, particularly in situations when a graphic could convey the message more clearly or where documents written for the national market contain padding in the form of marketing and corporate self-promotion that benefits overseas sales but little else. To avoid errors creeping into the final version, refrain from giving the translator a draft-in-progress. Make sure the vendor is clear on the purpose of the document and for whom it is written because it will dictate style, word choice, phrasing and sentence length — and, in particular, will avoid mistakes such as translating into Spanish for Spain when the market is Mexico. Finally, lead time has a bearing on quality, so provide as much as possible.

Common Errors

Many managers seem unable to resist the temptation to have translations undertaken internally by an individual who speaks the language, not realizing that readers will
quickly recognize the translation as “foreign,” especially if grammatical errors abound. For example, someone born in Germany but living in the United States may remain unaware that German grammar rules have changed within the last few years. Another management error is passing on the responsibility to an in-country distributor or subsidiary office.

“In-country people often change the message,” Watkins says, “doing things like stipulating different paper sizes when the product doesn’t actually support that paper size, or changing the licensing agreement without really communicating what those changes are back to the home office. Sometimes valid reasons exist for making changes, but it’s important for the home office to know those reasons and have the opportunity to buy into it. Without independent people reviewing content, managers may have an unpleasant surprise when they discover what they are supposedly marketing in another country. We’ve seen it happen.”

Good communication and translation consistency are critical to a successful international launch. For the sake of consistency, create and maintain terminology lists and glossaries and make sure that everyone translating for a project uses them, even your in-house translators. One of Lingo’s medical clients is Roche Diagnostics for whom it has translated a graphical user interface, on-line help, manuals, a “getting started” guide and configuration packaging. Julie Maynard, a project management consultant at Roche, says, “We had a product developed in Mannheim, Germany, and the packaging, manual and other materials developed by our Indianapolis, Indiana, plant. Our German development team organized the localization of the user interface, which of course included translation, and our US plant handled the packaging and so on. The assumption was made that our affiliates approved of the translations, meaning representatives from all of our countries representing the languages in which we were launching had an opportunity to look at the user interface, but they had not. We had to scramble to launch on time. We learned that wherever you are developing your user interface, you should also leverage communication between in-house and vendor relationships so that you have the translation of the user interface and packaging handled by the same people.”

Many company executives make the mistake of developing products with only the domestic market in mind, a parochial vision as they discover to their cost when the time comes to enter the international market. Watkins explains, “Validating and determining the needs for another country and then reengineering a product are a lot more expensive than doing that work at the development stage. That internationalization step is something that we try hard to impress on companies. For example, page layout, even writing slang and using undefined terminology, either in the glossary or the content, will make a big difference in localization costs. Internationalization efforts up front can save substantial costs in subsequent language versions.”

Translation Tools

The development of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools such as machine translation (real-time translation), bilingual editing systems terminology management, and translation memory (TM) has led to significant reductions in project costs in the past five years. Hedley Rees-Evans, SDL marketing director, explains, “The main benefit of tools is leveraging translated text from TM and reducing project management time and engineering support. For example, we have an average output of more than three million words per week. If we can reuse 40% of this in leveraging TM, it saves us (and our clients) a lot of money. The larger savings, however, is in the form of project time scales. Tools and workflow can save at least as much in reductions of real-time use of project managers and engineers. The client benefits from the reduction in time-to-market — which is probably more relevant.”

Fischer-Gissot says, “There is absolutely no doubt that CAT tools are becoming increasingly important to our industry, but they are not the answer to all translation projects. If we receive a source text in hard copy, a PowerPoint file, a PDF document or some other format, we have to analyze the document to find out whether or not it is worth using a CAT tool and then set the tool up for the translation project. When evaluating the ROI on CAT tools, we need to bring the time to do all of that into the equation, as well as the initial tool learning curve. However, for large projects, CAT tools provide a good ROI, helping to translate a term the same way or to even pre-translate, using TM, large volumes of text such as the financial part of an annual report.”

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Orr Priebe agrees: “The use of memory tools, where applicable, enables us to price competitively, while offering higher quality and consistency to our clients. Our investment was recouped much more quickly than I would have imagined possible due to its efficient integration into our operational flow.”

Multilingual Workflow

While CAT tools have improved consistency, reduced word count and therefore costs, clients continually push the industry to do it faster, better and cheaper. Watkins believes, “The language services industry made a good ROI with CAT the first couple of years, but now what do we do? I think we look at the way we manage the workflow process. We see increasing conversions to content management systems (CMS) and to XML-based systems because of how they facilitate the translation and localization processes. There is a big investment up front for adopting the technologies just like there was with translation tools, but the rewards are there.”

Multilingual workflow systems contain technology to manage localization processes from start to finish. SDL is one of the early adopters with its SDLWorkflow version 4, an application for global management systems (GMS) — a system for multilingual content management — TM and workflow support. Rees-Evans points out the advantages of a GMS: “A GMS will integrate with content authoring processes and software, manage ‘multi-vendor project allocation’ and control, support rules-based workflow within the jobs allocated, utilize TM and real-time translation software and deliver secure, translated content to the target language site automatically on approval.”

P.H. Brink International is another vendor with workflow management technology to improve translation performance. Operating in the language services industry since 1977, the company has about 130 employees, two-thirds of them translators specializing in the agricultural, construction, medical and automotive industries. Jeff Brink, president and COO, says, “We’ve used our Web-based job initiation and tracking system iTrac for the past two years which, in addition to providing a client interface for obtaining quotes, job initiation, and real-time project status, is a phenomenal tool for managing projects and tracking costs and productivity.”

Using its iTrac as the backbone, the company has also developed OTTO, an automated translation management system.

“Essentially, it works in conjunction with a CMS,” explains Brink. “It constantly polls a designated site in an FTP server based on the file attribute and/or the file name, processes these chunks of information and routes them through our entire process utilizing components of iTrac. There are only two points of human intervention in the whole process. The translator, who receives an e-mail notification along with the files that OTTO has leveraged through TM, does the translation and clicks on the electronic sign-off. The proofreader — or proofreading team — who receives the files from the translator conducts a quality check and signs off when approved. From here on, OTTO takes over, automatically routing the file back to the client’s server — with the format integrity maintained — and adds the file to the weekly client invoice, which it generates. One of our heavy equipment clients expects this system will cut 40% off of its translation costs; a target it is close to achieving. The only caveat with OTTO is that a client has to have a CMS in place that can work with XML, SGML or HTML files and have the capability of handling language renditions to track corresponding translated text chunks.”

The Future

Early adopters of process management (or workflow) such as SDL have begun reaping the benefits. Rees-Evans contends, “For the future, there is no doubt that there is potential in the selective process application of real-time translation (MT) to TM technology. This will occur in the integration of dictionary and terminology developments where a system ‘learns’ from the human activity to improve either of these elements. SDL calls this ‘Knowledge-Based Translation Management.’ The real restriction in time and money is ensuring that human translators and project management — work and skill are maximized to accommodate the increasing volumes of work and to simultaneously maintain high-quality levels. Systemic support in these areas is a competitive imperative.

Watkins feels positive about the future of the industry: “From a business perspective, Lingo has seen its business begin to rebound from the financial insecurities of the last year, and we feel optimistic about the future for ourselves and the industry. We have watched with sadness the loss of some of our co-competitors, which have gone under, merged or been bought out. But we think the frenzy of consolidation that we’ve seen in recent years has slowed down, and this is a good thing for our industry because we can focus on providing quality work for our clients.”

Arnold’s fourth required quality for a literary translator is that he or she “be eminently noble.” One of the definitions of the word noble in Webster’s dictionary is “of an admirable high quality, type or class.” Translators and agencies expect ongoing efficiencies not only in the high quality of work, but also in speed, accuracy and cost, whatever the type of translation.
Preparing a Project for Translation

Kim Vitray

This article assumes that you have already completed the first step in successful translation purchasing — identifying a qualified translation vendor with whom you can develop a good working relationship and a body of experience. Better yet, you have more than one such translation vendor in a pool of possibilities, from which you can make the best choice for a particular project’s timeframe, size and content. Now, how can you help the selected translation vendor provide the best possible product that meets your needs for timeframe, quality and cost?

If you have control over the content of the document to be translated (that is, it’s something you or your company are writing), examine that content carefully for words and phrases that won’t translate well, such as slang or colloquial expressions. For example, on our Web site we refer to our general manager as our head honcho — after all, we are in Texas! — and our systems administrator as our number one computer guru. But when we localized our Web site into multiple languages, we reviewed the text and revised phrases such as these, realizing they would present difficulties in word choice for the translator and in meaning for the target audience. Be sure your text is as clear, concise and complete as possible, even if you have to hire a professional editor.

If at all possible, be sure the text is finalized and all “tweaking” is finished before you submit it for translation. Revisions to source documents after the translation process has begun require extra time to organize, coordinate and implement, and increase the potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication that cause errors. Time is money, and the time it takes to manage even a single revision of a source document being translated into multiple languages is substantial.

You may be involved with translation projects over which you have no content control. In this circumstance, keep in mind that the translation will only be as good as the source, particularly with technical documents. If the source is complex and poorly written, the translation will reflect that reality. The translation vendor will, of course, attempt to make the translation as comprehensible and readable as possible, but producing a quality localized product will be more challenging. Also, translators must carefully balance providing a well-written translation against adhering to the integrity of the source document.

Identify and communicate to the translation vendor the target audience for the translation. Are there government requirements to be met? What is the reading and comprehension level of the anticipated user? In what country will it be used? The target audience most likely will not affect the quality, schedule or cost of the translation, but its “fitness for use” — a key concept in making one word choice over another — may be greatly affected. When you write professionally, you consider whom you’re writing to and for, and the practice of translation is no different.

Signs of a Well-prepared Project

One of my favorite moments during the workday is when a project manager oohs and aahs over an incoming project that a client has carefully and thoughtfully organized. When that happens, we know we can provide our very best product. Following are some things you can do to ensure your vendor’s delight, which means you will also be pleased with your translation.

Locate and provide electronic source files, if they exist. You should send only the electronic files you want to be translated, no more and no less. If you send additional electronic files as reference material, clearly indicate that’s what they are. Name the source files something that will have meaning for both you and the translation vendor. If you reference the source files in your correspondence, use their exact file names. This is also the ideal time to inform your vendor of any special file-naming conventions you or your technical personnel may have for target language files.

Be sure that any paper copy you send matches the corresponding electronic file — exactly. With multiple source files, post-it notes on the paper copies indicating their correlating file names are helpful, save time and ensure against mishap.

Provide reference material and/or a terminology list, if available. If a terminology list is not readily available, the time taken to develop even a brief one, especially a list of terms, acronyms and abbreviations specific to your organization, is well worth the investment.

Tend to the administrative details on your end in advance, such as obtaining a purchase order or arranging for a confidentiality agreement to be signed.

Send a complete “package” all at once — written instructions, paper copy, electronic copy, reference material, terminology list and contact information. Although your vendor may know who you are and what you want from the briefest of e-mail messages, complete information saves time in the long run and ensures efficient order processing.

The translation of graphics can be more complex and problematic than text. Ask your vendor about this and expect to speak with a project manager who will have very specific...
questions. Are electronic files available? What software was used to create them? In what format are they? Are they editable? Do you need electronic target files? Fonts also need special attention. If particular fonts are required for your document's layout, can you provide them, or is the translation vendor to purchase them or substitute similar ones? Are they for the Macintosh or the Windows operating system? If the target translation is to be in a double-byte character language such as Japanese or Chinese, or a bidirectional language such as Arabic or Hebrew, do you have the fonts and software to correctly display and print it? There are good and easy solutions to most graphics and font situations, and translation vendors will be knowledgeable about them. Just let them know the issues that exist in your project.

Questions to Resolve

Most importantly, clearly and explicitly communicate your expectations, requirements and instructions to the translation vendor in writing. If you are unsure of the answers to the following questions, they can help you decide what's best for your needs.

- What are the target languages?
- In what locale will each language be used?
- What is the deliverable? Paper copy? Electronic copy, and what format — Microsoft Word, Excel, or PowerPoint, PDF, Quark or something else?
- Do you need an estimate? This should be provided in writing from the translation vendor, and you should also confirm acceptance of the estimate in writing.
- To whom is the completed work to be delivered?
- What is the specific date or general time frame for completion of the translation? If it is a large project, do you want it delivered in parts as they are finished or complete at the end?
- Are there any special formatting requirements or other instructions?
- Whom should the vendor contact with questions, and how and when is that person best reached?

Myths About Translation

If you are new to the translation process, have the vendor explain it to you, ask a lot of questions, provide as much information as you can and allow adequate time for completion of the work. Keep in mind that a change in scope of the project, such as adding or replacing documents or languages, will affect the time frame and cost; and hastening the due date may also affect cost. Beware of the following “myths” about translation:

- Anyone can translate who has two years of a high school language, who has lived in another country for three years during early childhood or who can type in a foreign language.

Truth: Writing in another language, which is what translating really is, requires the same education and immersion as writing in the original language.

- Translators can translate both ways just as easily.

Truth: Translators normally translate only into, not out of, their native languages, and most translators only have one native language.

- A good translator doesn’t need any reference literature.

Truth: Reference literature is enormously beneficial in understanding meaning and making good word choices.

- A good translator gets it right the first time, without any editing or proofreading.

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Translators will soon be replaced by computers. Truth: Yes, as soon as functional artificial intelligence is developed and widely implemented.

A 100-page technical manual that took four months and three persons to write can be translated by one translator in two days. Truth: Let’s assume that a 100-page manual averages 250 words per page, for a total of 25,000 words to be translated. Let’s also assume that a full-time, experienced translator can translate 3,000 words per day. Simple math informs us that the project will take at least eight days for translation, not including editing, proofreading or formatting. And this formula can be adversely affected by a large number of factors, such as the quality, complexity and subject matter of the source document, the actual number of words, the “popularity” of the source and target languages, and the translator’s schedule and previous commitments. The point is that good translation work takes a reasonable amount of time.

Translating is just replacing each word in the source language with the same word in the target language. Truth: Alaskan Indians have numerous words for snow in their native languages; English has one (and in Texas, none!). Spanish is Spanish — all around the world. Truth: The Spanish in Mexico is different from the Spanish in Spain; the French in Canada is different from the French in France; and the Portuguese in Brazil is different from the Portuguese in Portugal.

“Quality” is a concern for many translation buyers. If you can’t read the target language, how do you evaluate the product? Ask the translation vendor what his or her quality process is. Translations should always be translated and edited by a native speaker of the target language. You may also want to arrange for an in-country review by someone in your company who lives and works in the target locale. This native speaker of the target language will add value with his or her knowledge of jargon and nuance particular to your industry, your company and your market position. Ask the translation vendor if he or she would be willing to coordinate this process for you, among reviewers you select, by refereeing feedback and implementing revisions.

Quality Concerns

In summary, thorough up-front project organization and clear and complete communication with the translation vendor about the scope of work, including time frame and cost, are the contributions you, the client, can make toward ensuring a successful translation project. And having done your part, you can relax and be comfortable with your right to expect timely, high-quality and as-specified execution by the translation vendor. For more information, download Translation: Getting It Right — A Guide to Buying Translations, produced by the Institute of Translation & Interpreting and available in PDF format at www.iti.org.uk/documents/advice_for_businesses.html.
Language translation is an evolving industry. As with most forms of communication these days, the world demands faster and faster turnaround times. Gone are the days of simply “mailing” — through the post office, that is — a reply or request for information. Now, e-mail and Web connections make feedback instantaneous. For most of us, these actions are performed without a moment’s hesitation. We type, we click, and off it goes.

Language is seldom a barrier, or is it? Expanding global use of the Internet means companies can no longer assume their customers will come to them under their own umbrella of nationalism. On-line populations are growing at increasing rates in non-English speaking parts of the world. Customer retention and site “stickiness” have been shown to increase when visitors can access information in their native languages. And then there are the global corporations, which for too long have not been able to effectively share and disseminate corporate directives and database information to divisions overseas because there has been no policy on translating for those employees.

Historically speaking, language translation has always fallen to those who were fluent in at least two languages: the source language and the target language. Those outside of the industry commonly think of the market for translations as primarily translations of literature, textbooks, and medical and scientific journals. However, this is only a small, though significant, part of the industry. Increasingly, translators are working with companies seeking to localize their products or services, such as software developers, in an effort to market them overseas. Translators are crucial to the success of these product launches; not only do they bring their knowledge of the target language, but also their knowledge of the target country’s culture. For these reasons, along with the higher accuracy levels achieved with human translation, the Web site localization industry is also becoming more dependent on the services of translators.

According to the Allied Business Intelligence (ABI) report, “Language Translation, Localization, and Globalization: World Market Forecasts, Industry Drivers, and eSolutions,” the global market for translators is more than 400,000 professionals. Nearly two-thirds of these work in the profession part-time. With so many involved on just a part-time basis, it can be difficult for companies to maintain consistency among their translation projects. A translator who works on one project may not be available when the next need arises. Any knowledge of the company’s product or target audience gained by the first translator is lost when a different person takes up the next project.

Technology to the Rescue?

With the increasing demand for translation services comes the dilemma that faces many organizations looking to keep their products and services current. Translation is a time-consuming process. Translators can generally translate a few hundred words per hour, perhaps no more than 2,000 words per day for certain texts. Technology has not been able to keep up with the demands of accuracy and clarity. Machine translation (MT), although a 30-year-old technology, has many shortcomings. Considering that the meaning of a word often depends on the context in which it is used, it is difficult for computer programmers to devise a computer system that is capable of processing such associations. The human mind, however, if properly trained, can automatically make the necessary distinctions that are involved in the process of communication. But MT is fast; some systems are capable of translating up to 500 words per second.

MT tools, even when they are not 100% accurate, can grease the wheels of commerce by speeding up inter-business and intra-business communications. An MT program can often generate the gist of an e-mail or other message and allow a rapid reply with a reasonable degree of accuracy. This has become more acceptable in business, where the tolerance for low-quality text has risen. Some feel that users are more willing to concede some quality to achieve expediency in communication. A number of free on-line services have cropped up offering translation of text and Web pages using MT technology. The visitor types in the text or URL, and in a matter of seconds, the translated text appears. Completely accurate? No. Good enough? Perhaps. This is certainly handy when in surfing the Net you come across a page you have been looking for only to find that it is written in a language that you don’t understand.

The ability to at least get a sense of the information on that page can be priceless. A good example of this is AltaVista’s BabelFish. In 1997, AltaVista launched BabelFish (http://babelfish.altavista.com), the world’s first-ever on-line translation service, powered by SYS-TRAN. This had a great effect on the translation industry. Portions of text or Web site addresses could be entered and translated from English to French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese or Korean, or from any of these languages to English. In addition, the service allows translation to and from French and German, and from Russian to English. The whole process does not take more than a few minutes, and, although some words might return that have not been translated, the gist of the material is effectively conveyed. The most popular language pairs are English to Spanish and Japanese to English. In July 2002, AltaVista reported that BabelFish was handling approximately 75 million translations per month and had experienced a 25% growth in the past year.

MT systems have found great success in markets where only a gist-level translation is needed. The European Commission of the European Union staffs over 1,100 full-time translators in its Translation Service. They have been using an MT system, developed by SYS-TRAN, since 1976. This EC-SYSTRAN system has been developed for internal purposes and is distinct from the commercial version available. The system can produce 2,000 pages of raw translation per hour. Use of the MT system has increased sharply over the past few years, with some 546,000 pages being channeled through the system in 2000. The Translation Service has also customized the system by feeding it with material tailored to its own specific translation needs. Over time, MT systems can be “taught” to understand commonly used terms and word sequences.

Finding a Cost-effective Translation Solution

Laraine Tunick
Human translators must be used, however, when there is a finished product that reflects a corporate image, which is more than superficially informational or which involves legal considerations. While an error in the translation of an e-mail may be acceptable, an error in a legally binding contract is not.

**Translation Tools**

Translation tools include various computer technologies to assist in the process of translating material from one language to another. In the last few years, these tools have increased in popularity with professional translators. Advances in database technology and PC computing power have made it possible for these systems to store and retrieve large amounts of material that have been previously translated. Translation tools have benefits for translators only, as 20% to 50% or more of the document will still require manual translation.

Terminology managers act as a storage bank for source and target terminology that can be retrieved during the translation process. Terminology managers are particularly useful for translators working with industry-specific terminology. The functions of these management tools include a data repository, terminology extraction and insertion, and term lookup.

Translation memory (TM) is a database that stores previously translated sentences that can be retrieved in future translation projects in an attempt to prevent repetitive, time-consuming work. Pre-translated sentences in the text are retrieved via fuzzy matching, leaving only parts of the sentence that do not have matches to the translator. TM products are particularly effective when used on text that must be periodically updated or changed. TM is the core technology that many translation tools are based on.

Translators often develop TM data banks in-house. In fact, many of the translation tools that are currently on the market began as in-house creations on the part of translation bureaus. TM software is commonly used by translators, and a highly developed system can reduce the length of the translation process by 50%. Additionally, reductions in total translation costs of between 15% and 30% can be realized.

Translator workbenches are a category of translation tools based on TM technology. Besides TM, these tools typically contain functions such as word count, format filters and converters, measurements for project pricing and sizing, and alignment tools to develop memories from past translations. The use of workbench tools contributes to greater consistency within the text, particularly when more than one translator is involved.

A translator workbench compares segments of text from source documents with translated pairs of words, phrases or even paragraphs that are stored in the product’s TM. If an exact match is found, a suggestion is made to the translator, who then has the option of using or amending the translated text. When an exact match cannot be located, the tool uses fuzzy matching algorithms to come up with the TM’s next best match.

Translator workbenches are popular with translators worldwide, as they provide key benefits, including productivity improvements and increased consistency, and allow translators to reuse and recycle previously translated materials.

Costs to implement an MT system vary. At the most basic level $25,000 will support a word-for-word translation with minimal dictionary building. To fully take advantage of the MT process, an investment of $250,000 to $500,000 will build the databases to give a more accurate representation of the source text. Companies must, however, be prepared to continue to support the effort once the system is rolled out. The best scenario under which to
embark on an MT program is to achieve the goals of reducing costs, saving time and improving service. Cost savings may be found to provide local language content when the cost of human translation is prohibitive. Time is saved when the delay for human translation is not acceptable. Service is improved when human translators cannot meet the demands of content volume or rate of change.

When an MT system is employed with human translation components, the cost may rival that of a strictly human implementation. However, the time savings are usually sufficient enough to warrant the combination of these two approaches.

Within the next few years, there will be a shift in the translation industry toward completing translation projects completely on-line. As Internet penetration increases, so does the importance of translating material quickly and efficiently, especially since much of the information available on-line is transitory and must be updated frequently. An increase in demand for translation will be met with innovative on-line applications provided by translation and localization companies that sufficiently address the need for speed and accuracy.

Putting It to the Test

For most localization companies, MT tools have taken them about as far as they will go. Considering that translation is the largest time and cost component of localization jobs, many are looking at ways to provide real-time translation. New technology in this area must be focused on quicker, more agile systems. Example-based machine translation (EBMT) is an area in which systems learn from existing translations or other linguistic data. These should make them more cost-effective to use since they will not cost as much to customize and maintain. However, it all comes back down to money. As corporations come to recognize the importance of global presence, they will perhaps put their money where their mouths are. In this way, the technology may be pushed to a level where it needs to be.

According to the ABI report, worldwide human translation market revenues will account for $11.5 billion by the end of 2007, and MT will have $134 million of this growing marketplace. The economic slump has slowed growth in the sector, but once over the hump many organizations will be beating a path to international markets. Vendors in this market need to address issues of speed versus accuracy to keep the wheels rolling.

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Know Thyself

The Oracle at Delphi drew visitors from the ancient Greek world and beyond. Travelers seeking prophecies from Apollo would approach the temple at Mount Parnassus, where they beheld the famous advice, “Know thyself,” a simple, universal maxim chiseled into the wall of the pronaos or front porch.

In order to illustrate the variety of ways in which this seemingly simple sentence can be expressed around the world, we sought translations for this text.

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Word and character counting is a subject close to the heart of all freelance translators, as it’s the basis for job costing and getting paid. This article considers some of the issues involved in word counting.

Different word processors and translation tools very often produce different word count values for the same document, though typically not wildly different. The differences can be due to the use of different rules for counting as well as deficiencies in the applications used.

Many people rely on the document property statistics produced by Microsoft Word to determine the word and character counts. In many instances this is perfectly good. There are, however, a few things to be aware of that Word gets wrong, as I will explain.

When one is handling a large number of documents at a time, getting an overall word count for all documents can be time consuming, especially if this means opening several documents in Microsoft Word, noting the count values for each file and then totalling them all together. There are third-party tools to automate the process of counting words. These allow a number of files, which may be of different formats, to be selected, and the word/character counts are then summarized and totalled. When one is faced with many files, these tools are real time savers. For example, when one is working with Web pages, it’s quite common for a customer to supply dozens of separate files. The utilities typically support multiple file formats such as Word, HTML, PDF, PowerPoint, Excel, and so on. These dedicated word counting tools can also be more accurate as they don’t have the deficiencies that standard applications such as Microsoft Word have. The table “Word Counts From Three Applications” shows the word count from three different applications, including Microsoft Word, for a set of test documents.

Readers who wish to try the test documents on their own systems may download them from www.surefiresoftware.com/testdocs.htm.

Scanned and electronically faxed images are another matter. These will typically be in bitmap (.bmp), .jpg, .gif, .tif or some other graphical format. Acrobat PDF documents or Word documents may also contain scanned images. Text in a scanned image is not stored in the form of a character encoding, but is described like a picture and is made up of colored dots or pixels. In order for a computer program to count words, one must first convert the graphical image back into a character encoded format, such as Word, rich text file (RTF), text and so on. This can be done with the aid of an optical character recognition (OCR) application. Several OCR applications are commercially available.

Counting in Word

Let’s now consider Microsoft Word in more depth and look at the areas where caution is needed. Word basically counts words by assuming everything between spaces is a word. This includes symbols such as %, &, @, * and #. Translation tools are generally a bit smarter and will not include these symbols as words.

Text from text boxes, grouped shapes, auto-shapes, headers, footers and comments are not included in the Word-generated document statistics. Headers and footers usually contain little text, so the error introduced by
Word from ignoring this text is minor. The use of text boxes can be more significant. Some document authors use many text boxes, particularly to annotate drawings or to help produce complex text layouts. In these cases, ignoring this text can produce large errors, causing the word count to be far too low.

Microsoft Word counts numbers as words. For example, 4.7 would count as one word. Some other packages may exclude numbers from the word count. General opinion seems to be split on how to consider numbers. Some say that because numbers don't need to be translated, they should not be included. Others say that because numbers need to be transcribed and checked for errors, they should be included. The difference is typically not significant for documents that contain only a few numbers.

Word does not count the text contained in any embedded objects. These objects, sometimes also known as OLE objects, are inserted into a Word document through use of Word's Insert menu and the Object... item. For example, an Excel worksheet can be embedded within a Word document. Inserted OLE objects in Word documents are often diagrams with little or no text; but this is not always the case, and caution is needed. For example, an embedded Excel worksheet may contain significant amounts of text.

Using Microsoft Word to open HTML files and provide statistics needs some additional care. If the HTML file contains a form with predefined options for a drop-down type combo box, then Word will not count the predefined drop-down text options. When the HTML contains forms, this can lead to the word count being significantly lower than the truth. The Word statistics also do not include the HTML page title, button text, and text in meta tags such as meta tags for description and keywords. Scanned images — text that is part of a graphic, very often buttons — will also not be counted.

Counting in PowerPoint

In common with Word, PowerPoint does not count the text contained in OLE objects, which are commonly used in PowerPoint presentations. Microsoft Word tables can easily be inserted as embedded objects, using the PowerPoint Insert menu, Picture sub-menu. Excel worksheets are also commonly embedded into a slide. When embedded objects exist, they typically contain significant amounts of text, and this should be taken into account manually.

PowerPoint 97 and 2000 are not consistent with Word in the rules for counting.

For example, hyphenated words are counted as two words. PowerPoint XP corrects this difference. This means that two different users with different PowerPoint versions may disagree about the word count on the same document. PowerPoint, of course, doesn't provide character count statistics. A third-party tool must be used for this purpose.

Summary

Understanding the tools available and the shortcomings of different approaches to word and character counting is important. Minor word-count differences are probably not worth getting hung up on, and a pragmatic approach is sensible. A few words make little difference to the overall time for translation; it is far more important to consider carefully the type and difficulty of the material. This, of course, is an altogether more skilled task.
Writing for Translation

Jonathan T. Hine, Jr.

Content

Do you remember when you took a foreign language in school? Most language learning on earth has not changed much since then.

Grammar rules. Those who learn a second language in school often learn more about the grammar and structure of a language than natives do. Those who learn languages this way get lost when natives break the rules. For example, double negatives cause different changes in meaning in English, French and Italian. It is easy to cast sentences without double negatives in all three languages, so why inject confusion?

If your language has a respectful form of the second person singular, such as Lei, vous or Usted, switching to the familiar second person or leaving a sentence so that it could be interpreted either way can mislead the reader. Conversely, if your language lacks grammar related to social status (such as you in English), you may need to provide clues for the reader or the translator.

Writing for translation is another reason to avoid the passive voice in English or its related constructions in other languages, such as on in French or the subjunctive in Italian. Whenever possible, make sure each sentence shows who is doing what to whom. You need not always use the active voice, but never omit the subject of the action unintentionally.

Omissions. Another common problem for non-native readers is missing words. In school we often learn a foreign language with all the words in place and in a certain order. Of course, the natives never speak that way.

In English, we tend to drop articles. However, often the article helps a non-native reader distinguish the noun form of a word from a verb or an adjective.

Many languages do not need pronouns because their verbs are deeply conjugated, as in the Romance languages. In others (Slavic tongues, Turkish and so on), agreement of gender endings and agglutination make it easy to keep track of what is happening long after the antecedent noun or pronoun was last used. Sentences in these languages can run for several pages.

When writing for translation, try to keep the sentences short, even if your language allows for long ones. Arrange the nouns and pronouns so that the reader is reminded every so often who is doing what to whom.

If your language allows for optionally dropping words, do not drop them unless you are sure the reader cannot get lost. Your prose may feel less natural, but it will help the translator and the foreign readers.

Metaphors and other idiomatic issues. Idiomatic usage is a well-known problem area for non-native readers. It also adds to the translation effort. When using idioms and metaphors, you need to know that the reader shares your cultural context. The broader the reach of your documents, the more carefully you should handle metaphors.

Sport metaphors are common. Except for soccer, however, metaphors from most sports have meaning for relatively few readers on the planet. Professional translators can usually adapt your documents for the target culture, but what about the non-native readers reading the original documents?

Proverbs and mottoes based on the Judeo-Christian Bible, such as the “golden rule,” often have counterparts in other cultures but directly quoting a motto or proverb without attribution could mislead the reader. Most European and American languages contain references to Bible stories that at best may not be understood and at worst may offend. This is another reason to use translators who work into their native
languages. They will often have equivalent proverbs or metaphors handy. Also, when you attribute a Bible quotation, you alert the translator not to re-invent the translation. There are familiar versions in most target languages, and the translator should use one of them.

Alluding to the great literature of your country may be unfair to the reader who is not a scholar. In technical or commercial material you should not quote Cervante’s Don Quixote or Shakespeare’s King Lear without explaining why you are doing so. In this example, the italics and the author’s name should prevent your mistake Quixote or Lear for a real person.

Regionalisms can cause problems. Anguria is Northern Italian dialect for watermelon, but in Naples, it has been on the menu in restaurants catering to Northern tourists for so long that that some young waiters think that the Italian word, cocomero, is local dialect. Some regionalisms are recognizable nationally, like soda and pop in the US, but some, like anguria, are not. Regionalisms may add color to your writing, but they force the reader to pause and notice their use. I would check them in a general-purpose dictionary. If the word is there, you are probably safe.

Presentation

The basic rule is to simplify.

Style issues. How do you write dates? Most of the world uses day/month/year. Use letters for the month, as in 06-Dec-2002 or June 12, 2002, to make the date unequivocal. Numeric dates (06/12/02) can be read several different ways.

What about time? Most of the world uses the 24-hour clock. If you use AM and PM, then use them every time or include words like eight in the morning to be clear. Eight o’clock could be 08:00 or 20:00.

Did your composition teacher in school take off points for repeating a noun? Some people think it is a sign of high culture and education to show off a command of synonyms. Such fanciful writing baffles the foreign reader and is more expensive to translate. Except in personal letters and targeted copy such as advertising or sales brochures, good non-fiction uses the same word for a given meaning every time it occurs. This is especially important in technical writing and in financial statements.

In addition to standardizing terms, try using phrases consistently in documents whose purpose is to inform, not entertain. Compared to the balance at the end of the previous period could be rephrased many ways. However, the reader has to work harder when a different phrase is used for the same thing.

In technical manuals and safety instructions, the effect could even be harmful.

Be careful with parenthetical clauses or phrases of any kind. For example, this sentence holds up in many languages, but not in English:

The user, having recently attempted to recover the receptacle by twisting the cover in the wrong direction, which could cause the threads to be cut cross-wise, which would damage it beyond repair and thus invalidate the warranty, should be advised to inspect the threading, which the user may want to inspect to see if it is threaded to the right-hand or left-hand, before attempting to cover it.

The parenthesis clauses hide the main subject from its verb, and the word it is used for three different antecedents. In French or Italian, different pronouns match the gender of the nouns. English must be broken into shorter sentences in such a paragraph. However, nothing is lost in other languages by using shorter sentences and keeping nouns relatively close to their verbs and adjectives.

Word processors and file formats. Write for the lowest common denominator. Using common word processors such as Microsoft Word or WordPerfect allows the various groups handling your document to work easily. For example, translation tools, desktop publishing and localization software may all be involved in crafting the final document.

Localization issues. Documentation for everything from game programs to refrigerators comes out in HTML, multimedia and video as well as paper. Technical writers and software designers are increasingly aware of internationalization issues. You might want to be sure that your team has been trained to “think global” before they start your documentation. For example, consider string-length requirements for other languages you might need. And look at graphic design issues: left-to-right vs. right-to-left, top-to-bottom visualization, appropriate colors. At the very least, you should try to avoid building a program that cannot be modified easily for such things.

Writing for translation can help you communicate more effectively, whether you have the material translated or not. Also, the discipline of keeping your reader in mind as you write should improve all your writing.
Providers of Translation Tools & Services

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Advanced Language Translation       www.advancedlanguage.com
American Translators Association    www.atanet.org
Aquino Development, S.L.            www.webbudget.com
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International Effectiveness Center  www.ie-center.com
International Translation Resources Ltd. www.itr.co.uk
Iverson Language Associates, Inc.   www.iversonlang.com
LinguaLinx                          www.lingualinx.com
LinguaPoint GmbH                    www.linguapoint.de
Lionbridge Technologies             www.lionbridge.com
Logrus International Corporation    www.logrus.ru
LOMAC Group                         www.lomac.net
Loquant Localization Services       www.loquant.com
NORAKTRAD, S.L. - Grupo NORAK        www.norak.com
ORCO S.A.                           www.orco.gr
P.H. Brink International            www.phbrink.com
Prem Dan s.l.u.                     www.premdan.com
PROMT                               www.e-promt.com
ProTranslations                     www.protranslations.com
Syntes Language Group, Inc.         www.syntes.com
Terminotix Inc.                     www.terminotix.com
TRADOS                              www.trados.com/usa
Transco Ltd.                        www.transco.com.cn
viaLanguage Inc.                    www.vialanguage.com
WH & P                              www.whp.fr
World Accent                        www.worldaccent.net

Resources

Selected Associations
American Translators Association (ATA), www.atanet.org
Arab Translators Association, www.arabtranslators.net
Association of Centres specializing in Translation (ACT), www.act.es
Association of Translation Companies (ATC), www.atc.org.uk
Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT), www.ausit.org
Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council (CTIC), www.synapse.net/~ctic

European Union of Associations of Translation Companies, www.euatc.org
Institute of Translation & Interpreting (ITI), www.itl.org.uk
International Federation of Translators (FIT), www.fit-it.org
Israel Translators Association, www.ita.org.il
Japan Association of Translators (JAT), www.jat.org
Panhellenic Association of Professional Translators (PSEM), www.psem.gr
South African Translators' Institute (SATI), www.translators.org.za
Swiss Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Association, www.asti.ch
The Translators and Interpreters Guild (TTIG), www.ttig.org

Selected Graduate Schools
American University, Washington, DC, USA, www.american.edu
Beijing Foreign Studies University, www.bfsu.edu.cn
Binghamton University, New York, USA, www.binghamton.edu
Boğaziçi University, Turkey, www.boun.edu.tr
Center for Translation Studies, Hyderabad, India, www.anukriti.net
Ewha Womans University, Seoul, South Korea, www.ewha.ac.kr
Kent State University, Ohio, USA, www.kent.edu
Khazar University, Azerbaijan, www.khazar.org
McGill University, Montreal, Canada, www.mcgill.ca
Monterey Institute of International Studies, California, USA, www.miis.edu
New York University, New York, USA, www.scps.nyu.edu
The Australian National University, www.anu.edu.au
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This supplement introduces you to the magazine MultiLingual Computing & Technology. Published nine times a year, filled with news, technical developments and language information, it is widely recognized as a useful and informative publication for people who are interested in the role of language, technology and translation in our twenty-first-century world.

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How are translation tools changing the art and science of communicating ideas and information between speakers of different languages? Translators are vital to the development of international and localized software. Those who specialize in technical documents, such as manuals for computer hardware and software, industrial equipment and medical products, use sophisticated tools along with professional expertise to translate complex text clearly and precisely. Translators and people who use translation services track new developments through articles and news items in MultiLingual Computing & Technology.

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