



The role of open-source tools

Who is doing the best job?

Jost Zetzsche

Kein Zweifel besteht in der Gemeinschaft der Übersetzer darüber, wer der Marktführer für Übersetzungswerkzeuge ist. Können Open-Source-Tools eine echte Alternative zu den kommerziellen Produkten darstellen? Oder hängt der Erfolg einer Übersetzung nicht ohnehin von ganz anderen Faktoren ab: den gesammelten Daten, dem Wissen und den Geschäftsbeziehungen der Übersetzer?

When *Trados* was bought by *SDL* in 2005, there was a lot of speculation about the present and the future of translation tools. However, the discussion quickly died down and gave way to normalcy. A couple of tool vendors challenged the new *SDL Trados*, but only *Across* on the German market and *Idiom* on the global language service provider (LSP) market made any kind of significant inroads with their challenges. Overall, *SDL Trados* remained the dominant market leader. When *SDL* decided earlier this year to swallow *Idiom*, one of those challengers that had found a successful if unprofitable way to become "the" talked-about and desired tool among many medium and large LSPs, the frantic discussions arose again. Only this time they did not die away so soon. *SDL* had demonstrated that rather than competing on a feature or strategy level, it would simply kill the competition by swallowing the contender. Former *Trados* shareholder *Microsoft* must have been proud. *SDL* is still the dominant tool vendor on the market. However, especially the language service providers that were so enamored with *Idiom's* LSP Advantage Program have not reverted back to normalcy this time; instead, they are truly

looking for other solutions. As a result, many industry insiders see it as a foregone conclusion that *SDL's* market dominance is temporary and that *Trados/SDLX/Idiom* will eventually be replaced by _____.

And that is exactly where we are today. It's just that we don't know how to fill in the blank yet. Or do we?

Let's come back to that question in a bit. In preparation for this article, I posted this question on the discussion list for *OmegaT*, the most well-known open-source translation memory tool for freelance translators: *I am writing an article on open-source tools. I would like to investigate whether open-source tools have a real shot at becoming mainstream tools, possibly even to a degree where they could replace today's leading tool. I myself am not convinced of that. Should I be?*

The responses were fascinating. Some colleagues spent an extraordinary amount of time and effort to respond with very helpful answers, some of which I will incorporate into this article. But aside from that, two other things happened: an argument erupted about the state of another open-source tool – the issue was eventually resolved – and I was also contacted by someone else offline who had been banned from the list and who had nothing but criticism for his colleagues and the opinions they gave on the list. It would not be right to say that this was a typical occurrence – after all, arguments don't erupt only in open-source communities – but it was a good reminder that a successful attempt to produce an open-source translation memory tool can only succeed under a firm and capable project manager or project management team.



Aside from a skilled project manager, there are other dedicated professionals who are a must for a successful project:

- Subject matter experts representing the different constituencies of our industry (translators, editors, project managers, etc.)
- Professional programmers
- Support professionals
- Public relations personnel

No doubt this looks quite different in many past or existing open-source projects, where the subject matter expert is often the project manager and the programmer, the support is done on a voluntary peer-to-peer basis, and there is typically neither PR personnel nor funding for it. A project like *OmegaT* is successful because it is passionately supported by its development and user group, but I have a hard time believing that it will ever be one of the two or three most-used tools in its class. It probably has too much of a handmade feel to it, and it does not (directly) support some of the formats that we need to work in. (By the way, I would be pleasantly surprised to be proven wrong with this assumption.) Wildly successful open-source projects like *Linux*, *OpenOffice*, and the *Mozilla*



products are different because they have received significant funding. They were able to receive the funding because a) they are mainstream by nature and b) they are considered to be strategically important tools for challenging market dominance. We must recognize that translation tools will never be mainstream tools. If there ever were to be funding for such projects, it could only come from within the industry.

One such tool was released when *Lionbridge* (relatively unsuccessfully) open-sourced its *ForeignDesk* application back in 2001. However, we can expect to see similar moves in the near future again from *Lionbridge* with its *Freeway* application, as well as possibly from *Welocalize* with its newly acquired translation management system *Globalsight Ambassador*. Naturally, there will be motives behind these releases other than simply selflessly helping the competition – such as stemming *SDL's* dominance in the tool market or gearing up for projects like the TAUS Data Association's (TDA) data collection repository – but they will be interesting nevertheless. Another industry-funded attempt was described in Jutta Witzel's article in *MDÜ 2/2008* on the German industry association FOLT and its attempts to build an open-source translation memory tool ("*Im Open-Source-Land weht ein anderer Wind*"). While FOLT represents the most analytical and constructive (and best-funded) attempt to build an open-source translation memory system to date, it is a project that has not and will not produce anything overnight – quite different from its commercial competition. So, is there a future in an open-source translation memory system? Absolutely. Will it be an open-source tool whose name will be entered into the blanks for the tool designed to challenge the *Trados* dominance? I am quite sure that it won't – at least, not on its own.

I recently have begun a number of my talks by asking this rather rhetorical series of questions:

Which is more important:

- data or its container?
- knowledge or storing knowledge?
- human interactions or automating workflows?
- user or tool?

Just like you, of course, each audience knew the "right" answers. Still, these are worthwhile questions to ponder because they might help us to shift focus. I would argue that we have lost focus on the obviously more important side of the equations above – *data, knowledge, relationships*, and the *user* – and put too much emphasis on the tools that are intended to serve those components. And in a very similar way, we are in danger of losing focus when we discuss open-source tools.

But wait, you say, we've worked so hard to make everyone use tools, and now you're telling us that they're no good after all? Of course not. Tools are good, and we cannot and should not be without them. But they're only tools.

They have served us well. They've helped us to collect huge amounts of data that are now just waiting to be used outside our own four walls (i.e., hard drives). They've allowed us to store and manage linguistic knowledge and even our relationships far better than we could have done ourselves. However, though the tool vendors would like us to believe that it is the tool that performs these wonders, it is actually our data, our knowledge, and our relationships that do the job – the tools just help them along a little. Now, if it really is the data in its various forms that is at the center of our efforts in the translation industry, the equivalent to open-source tools is open standards. Who cares if it is *Trados, Déjà Vu, OmegaT*, or the upcoming FOLT tool set that we, our project managers, our clients, or our freelance contractors use? If we could finally use tools that truly support these standards – I am talking about data exchange standards like *TMX, TBX, SRX, GMX*, and probably most importantly *XLIFF* – and that allow us to exchange translation kits which could be opened by every other tool, then the more tools that are out there the merrier! After all, we each have different work habits and are looking for different criteria in our tools, and these differing needs and preferences can only be met by different tools.

We also have differing time schedules and passions. I predict that the open-source movement will continue to grow in its search for better tools, with those among us who feel most passionate (and have



Übersetzen ist eine Frage der Integration

■ Ist Ihr Übersetzungsprozess einsam? Fehlt der passende Partner?

■ Wir integrieren. Wie das geht? Fragen Sie uns! www.transline.de

■ **transline** Deutschland
Dr.-Ing. Sturz GmbH
Am Heilbrunnen 47
72766 Reutlingen

Telefon 0 71 21 - 94 63-0
Telefax 0 71 21 - 94 63-150
Freecall 0 800 - 94 63-800

service@transline.de
www.transline.de



Dr. Jost Zetzsche

Dr. Jost Zetzsche arbeitet als Übersetzer vom Englischen ins Deutsche sowie als Lokalisierungs- und Übersetzungsberater und ist der Autor zahlreicher Publikationen über technische Aspekte des Übersetzens. Er schloss seine Promotion über die Geschichte der chinesischen Bibelübersetzung 1996 ab und arbeitet seit 1997 in der Lokalisierungs- und Übersetzungsbranche. 1999 gründete er die International Writers' Group (www.internationalwriters.com) in Oregon, 2003 publizierte er das e-book „A Translator's Tool Box: A Computer Primer for Translators“ und seit 2005 veröffentlicht er einen zweiwöchentlichen Newsletter für Übersetzung und Computer. Im letzten Jahr lancierte er TranslatorsTraining.com, eine Website, die detaillierte Vergleiche zwischen den verfügbaren Übersetzungstools bietet.

JZetzsche@internationalwriters.com

some time to spare) building tools just the way we want them. There are a number of existing projects going on right now. I mentioned *OmegaT*, but there is also *Sun's Open Language Tools*, or *TinyTM* (an open-source server-based TM product inspired by FOLT); there are various tools that are primarily geared toward open-source software formats; and there are a number of projects for which development has come to a halt (such as *Tran-solution*, *ForeignDesk*, and *OpenWord-fast*). Some of these and probably some new ones will be up there with the tools filling in those blanks left by *SDL Trados*. But alongside them will be commercial tools.

The reason for my confidence is that – not surprisingly – commercial tools that have come out in the last few years, such as *MemoQ*, *Lingotek*, *Heartsome*, and *Swordfish*, have been very strong (much stronger than the old guard of tools) about supporting standards. Their vendors understand that it's pointless to re-

place *Trados* in its market position with just one tool, thus using *Trados'* closed format strategy. Instead, the market is looking for tools that seamlessly work together because they support the same data formats.

Nachruf

Friedrich Krollmann

Am 18. August 2008 ist Friedrich Krollmann gestorben. Der BDÜ trauert um ein engagiertes Mitglied.

Von 1986–1989 war Friedrich Krollmann Vizepräsident des BDÜ, von 1990 bis 1994 Präsident des Verbands. Als Leiter der Abteilung Sprachmittlerwesen des Bundes-sprachenamtes war er beruflich voll ausgelastet, folgte jedoch der Bitte des ehemaligen BDÜ-Ehrenvorsitzenden Hans Schwarz, sich für die Leitung des Verbands zur Verfügung zu stellen.

Zwei wichtige Ereignisse kennzeichnen seine Amtszeit: Die erfolgreiche internationale Konferenz, die der BDÜ im April 1993 in Bonn veranstaltete, und die Gewinnung neuer Mitgliedsverbände in den neuen Bundesländern. Wertvolle Dienste leistete er in seiner Funktion als Mitherausgeber der Zeitschrift *Lebende Sprachen* und als Verfasser der Blätter zur Berufskunde für den Beruf der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer. Für seine besonderen Verdienste um Volk und Staat wurde ihm das Bundesverdienstkreuz verliehen; der BDÜ verlieh ihm seine höchste Auszeichnung, die Goldene Ehrennadel.
Der Bundesvorstand

MG Denzer

Unabhängiger Versicherungsmakler

Telefon +49 (0) 7052-92 47-18

Sicherheit
übersetzt man so
mg-denzer.de



Die besten Lösungen.

Die günstigsten Tarife.

Die erste Adresse für den
beruflichen und privaten

Versicherungsschutz
qualifizierter Übersetzer
und Dolmetscher.

MG Denzer GmbH

Unabhängiger Versicherungsmakler

Otto-Haug-Straße 18-20
75378 Bad Liebenzell

E-Mail: guenter.denzer@mg-denzer.de
Web: www.mg-denzer.de

Telefon: 0 70 52-92 47-0
Telefax: 0 70 52-92 47-60