



The other week I launched into a relatively large translation project dealing with a subject matter with which I am extremely familiar. I had already worked for every major competitor of this client—literally—so I had very good reference material, including glossaries and translation memories. I even had a full-blown terminology database from one of the client’s early competitors. In fact, I had even worked for one of the early market leaders in the field that had been purchased by my current client. So, it did not seem to matter that this particular client was not going to provide me with translation memories or glossaries.

You will not be surprised to hear that I quickly accepted this project, even though I was booked solid, because I felt pretty sure that I could just breeze through the work.

Well, things turned out a little differently. Unfortunately, I had inconveniently forgotten that my previous clients in that field had all equipped themselves with unique terminology, some in the target language only, others in both source and target languages. After all, this was still a subject area with a cutting-edge feel in which companies wanted to give themselves a unique and distinguished identity.

I realized quickly that the situation was no different with this client. Yes, there was some translated material out there which I checked after starting on the project, and, yes, the terminology was different from any and all of the previous projects, ironically including the company that had been bought by my client. With the sinking feeling that I was going to miss all of my daughter’s basketball games in the next couple of weeks, I decided to spend some time reading through the material I found online and jotting

Sample Decision Matrix

Does the project have an existing translation memory/glossary/termbase?

Yes: Hurray! Stop here!
No: Go to the next question.

Does the client have some high-quality translated material accessible online?

Yes: Can I use URL-based searches?
 → **Yes:** Great, if it is for a small- to medium-sized project. Stop here!
 → **No:** Can I use language-specific searches with a search engine?
 → → **Yes:** Great, if it is for a small project. Stop here!
 → → **No:** Should I download and align?
 → → → **Definitely**, if your overall productivity increases (depending on your alignment speed and project size). Stop here!
 → → → **Definitely not**, if your overall productivity decreases. (Hint: never go with the hunch that you might still use the aligned material for possible upcoming projects, since that typically does not pan out.)

No: Are there competitors with high-quality translated material?
 → **No:** You will have to start terminology research from scratch and charge accordingly. Start researching!
 → **Yes:** How similar is the terminology?
 → → **Similar:** Start with “Yes: Can I use URL-based searches?” above.
 → → **Not similar:** You will have to start terminology research from scratch and charge accordingly. Start researching!

down any specialized terminology. After about an hour spent covering two large sheets of paper in my scribbly handwriting, something in the back of my mind began taunting me: “You are the author of a transla-

tion technology newsletter and ATA’s *GeekSpeak* column and you are doing *what?*” So, I started to look at more automated solutions.

I knew I could try to download the websites I had found and align them to

use as a translation memory, but I also knew that this would take several hours and make me miss Lara's basketball game that night, so I looked at the website addresses, the URLs. Many URLs are written in a fashion that can be used by translators to switch back and forth between the different languages easily (see my June 2009 column, "Interpreting URLs": internationalwriters.com/toolkit/09_June_URLs.pdf). Unfortunately, these URLs were not. I did see that all of the English content was located behind www.<client>.com/en-us and the relevant German content was behind www.<client>.com/de-de, so I decided to make Google searches (this would have worked with Bing as well) with this string: `site:http://www.<client>.com/de-de Rettungsroutine`.¹

At least this verified whether a certain term was used on the German part of the site or not. Not a great way of going about it, but, believe it or not, I stuck with it for a couple of days even though that voice kept nagging me: "Sure, it's sort of clever, but shouldn't *clever* also mean *effective*?"

So, at the beginning of the third day I did exactly what I should have done from the start. I downloaded the complete website (with a "web spider" tool

called Teleport) and aligned it (with a tool called AlignFactory), although it ended up being about 800 HTML files in each language. To speed things up a little and make them a little less error prone, I ended up aligning the files on a paragraph rather than sentence basis, and I did not do much error checking—after all, I primarily wanted to use this as a terminology resource.

I spent about three hours on the download and the alignment, but from this point forward everything went very smoothly. My per-word output probably doubled since I no longer had to undertake tedious web searches. All I needed to do was use the concordance feature in my translation environment tool. Since this was a project that kept me busy for another week, the initial three-hour investment paid out many times over, and I was confident that I was returning a high-quality product to the client.

As I reflected back on this long odyssey of always trying to find the

quick-way-out solution, I realized that it would be helpful to develop a decision matrix to help us determine how we can approach projects like this. It would be structured something like what appears in the box on page 28.

No doubt my little "honing strategy" could be greatly improved, and it is certainly not a one-size-fits-all kind of solution for everyone. But if anything, I hope to communicate that it is to our advantage to make informed decisions on how we tackle translation projects *before* we start them or even bid on them. Every project is different, and a one-size-fits-all approach is bound to be inadequate.

Note

1. *Rettungsroutine* (rescue routine) was *not* what I actually searched for; I am using it as a sample because it was the odd choice for the German word of the year for 2012.

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The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost is the co-author of Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World, a perfect source for replenishing your arsenal of information on how human translation and machine translation each play important parts in the broader world of translation.

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