GeekSpeak

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Where Are We Headed?

In my April 2014 column, I reported on two webinars conducted in January of that year during which the participants and I collected ideas for features in translation environment tools that were either missing or that we felt were underdeveloped. We presented those lists to the tool developers, who took this to heart by responding very comprehensively. Many promised changes or improvements in their tools, and we agreed to follow up with them after a year. Well, it took slightly longer than a year, but I did finally touch base with all those who had promised changes to see what kind of progress had been made. I compiled all of the progress reports in a recent version of the *Tool Box Journal*.[1]

But why stop there? As a next step, I thought it would be helpful not just to look at individual features, but to find out whether we as a community could come up with something bigger, perhaps the "The Next Big Thing" in translation technology. So, I opened a shared document and promoted it widely on social media (including ATA's LinkedIn group). The result? Although we may not have broken completely new ground, we were able to come up with some overarching themes that we then passed on to the tool developers. (The list included the developers of Across, Cafetran, Déjà Vu, Fluency, Lingo, MateCat, memoQ, Memsource, Metatexis, OmegaT, SmartCAT, Smartling, Star Transit, Swordfish, Text United, TM-Town, Trados Studio, Translation Workspace, Wordbee, Wordfast, and XTM.) Here is the letter.

Dear Tool Vendors:

I would really like to thank you again for your willingness this past year to respond to the translation community's suggestions on where we would like to see improvements in your technology.

The upcoming follow-up seminar has long been booked, so there is obviously great interest from our side to continue this discussion. We are grateful that you're taking the time to engage with us again.

Last year's topics dealt with very specific features concerning user-friendliness, translation memory and term base handling, and usage of external resources. For this year, I've tried to push this to the next step and ask the community to chime in with more groundbreaking ideas that look toward where translation technology should really be headed. I've had quite a few submissions, and though I'm not sure we really came up with anything completely new, here is my attempt to distill the discussions into some over-arching topics.

Translation Environment: I've been using the term translation environment tool for several years now, and quite a few others have adopted the term as well, but I'm only now starting to see why this was a particularly good choice because of its description of something very desirable. We want a tool (or platform) that provides a complete environment that:

1. Gives us the full range of authoring capacities that we can find in full-fledged word processing programs, as well as editing capacities that we find in tools like Adobe Acrobat (such as better and more easily visible commenting features).

2. Gives us access within the tool to all required external resources, whether they are browser-based or found in digital dictionaries.

Machine Translation: Many of us are looking for a deeper and different integration of machine translation into our translation environments. While some translators are interested in using machine translation through the traditional route of post-editing of machine translation (PEMT), overall there is more interest in having machine translation be just one of the resources in our translation environments. If machine translation is used to complement and enhance existing processes and if it is interactive,

Information and Contacts

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. Contact: jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.

many see a bright future in using machine translation because it would be more productive and find greater acceptance among practitioners. Suggestions included:

1. A direct integration of Moses into translation environments.

2. Simultaneously using various sub-segmented machine translations as AutoSuggestions.

3. Fixing translation memory matches with machine translation and fixing machine-translated suggestions with terms and translation memory.

4. Evaluation of translation memory subsegments by using machine translation.

5. Better reporting on the impact of productivity through machine translation.

OS Independence: You've heard this many times over the years—usually packaged as "We want a Mac/Linux version of the tool." Offering an interface that runs on all platforms (such as through the web browser) rather than looking at the support of specific operating systems might finally make this a reality.

New Business Models: There has been a lot of talk about disintermediation (i.e., the direct contracting of translation clients with the immediate translation provider) in the past few years. The only way this seems possible on a large scale is by using technology. While there already are technology solutions for this, they typically lack the volume of users to make them viable. Are you (with a potentially large number of existing technology users) willing and able to open your technology for this? Does the fact that some of you (SDL, Star, or Lionbridge) are also language services providers prevent you from offering such a possibility?

A number of other points were made that we might be able to discuss during the webinar, but the four points below are the ones to which I would ask you to respond:

1. Creating a more complete translation environment.

2. Integrating machine translation more organically and productively.

3. Achieving independence of operating systems.

4. Finding new and sustainable business models through translation technology.

How do you see your technology fitting into those? Do you have plans (that you can share) to head that way already? What can we do to encourage you to take those routes? And (maybe most importantly) did we overlook a fundamental change in translation technology that you're already anticipating or implementing? Please share that as well.

I can't tell you how pleased I am to report that we received thoughtful (and illuminating!) answers from Across, Cafetran, Déjà Vu, memoQ, Memsource, OmegaT, SmartCAT, Star Transit, Trados Studio, Wordbee, Wordfast, and XTM.

I used these answers extensively in the webinar,[2] but, more importantly, I compiled all of them into a 20+ page document that can be found online.[3] Since it would far exceed the space boundaries of this column to give you an adequate retelling of the responses, I encourage you to read through the document—that is, if you have any interest in where the technology you're using (or maybe should be using?) is headed.

And be sure to thank the tool vendor of your choice for this kind of meaningful and thoughtful interaction when you talk with them or meet them at the next ATA Annual Conference. (While you're at it, feel free to ask those who didn't respond why they didn't.) ■

Don't Miss Out!

Many of ATA's announcements, including division newsletters, webinar schedules, and conference updates, are sent to members by e-mail. To be sure that these messages don't end up in your spam folder, take a minute now to add ata-hq@atanet.org to your "safe senders" list.

Notes

1. See tinyurl.com/ProgressSince2014.

2. You can download the webinar at tinyurl.com/TransTechWebinar.

3. "Translation Technology: What's Still Missing and What Has Been Fixed?" tinyurl.com/Visions2015.