



GeekSpeak

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Translation Memory Authoring

Whether you like it or hate it, technology plays an important role in our professional lives. In most cases, our work lives and technology have a sort of tag-team approach: the demands of the work life determine what needs to be improved in the technology sector, and, in turn, these improvements lead to higher demands, and so on. Every once in a while, however, the roles are reversed. In these rare cases, technology provides a quantum leap in the way we work and operate without us having demanded it. Examples of this include the FAX, the PC (and, yes, this includes all personal computers, including Macs!), the Internet, or translation memory (TM) technology.

Now again, still unnoticed by most of us, a new technology is entering our work lives. Strictly speaking, it is not even that new—it is a bit like the emperor in a new suit of clothes. However, the potential impact is enormous. I am talking about TM authoring, the really rather simple process by which existing TMs are used to create source texts.

Not exciting? Think of the implications. TM technology has become a ubiquitous technology that has been used for the last 10 or 15 years. The amounts of data that have been assembled are gargantuan. For instance, Microsoft just announced that it had entered the one hundred-millionth translation unit (= combination of source and target segments) into its TM. But despite this accumulated mass of existing data, the match rates we receive when using TM technology often disappoint. Why? Because most source text authors are just “too creative.” With this new TM authoring technology, however, it is possible to tailor the source text to existing entries in translation memories, resulting in (a) more consistent writing, that (b) is not stylistically inferior as is sometimes the complaint in “controlled” authoring, and (c) produces match rates in the translation phase that will be many times higher than those we get today.

So what does this mean for us? Incredible opportunities. Of all parties involved in the documentation/

translation processes, who best understands how to deal with TMs? Who has already experienced the pitfalls of introducing this technology, resulting in forced changes to ingrained work habits? That would be us, of course—members of the language industry. This is our chance to tear down the artificial divide between authoring and translation and expand our service portfolio into writing source documents, thanks to this sophisticated new approach to a technology that we have all (grudgingly) gotten used to.

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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 also publishing a free technical newsletter for translators (www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit).