

Taking Inventory With Saint Jerome: How Well Equipped Are Our Computers?

By Jost Zetsche

Last year, I wrote an article in the *Chronicle* speculating on why so many of us translators shy away from becoming more skilled with our computers. Since then, I believe I may have found one answer.

As I was browsing through websites recently, I noticed that the image used most often on translators' home pages is of Saint Jerome, the patron saint of translators and the foremost translator of the Bible into common Latin. Now, don't misunderstand me—I have nothing against Saint Jerome; in fact, most of my academic life was spent researching the translation of the Bible. But I believe these images of Jerome, quill in hand, bent over a roll of parchment, communicate something else: a romanticized idea of translation that has very little in common with our work as modern translators in a highly computerized world. I may be guilty of overextending this interpretation, but I believe that many of us would prefer to identify with figures like Saint Jerome than with a computer geek hunched over a keyboard. The truth is, however, that we need both sides of the coin.

We do well to devote ourselves to Saint Jerome's craft of translation, but we must also be able to work successfully with the tools of our day, our computers. And to work successfully with these computers, we must fulfill two requirements: 1) our computers must be equipped with the tools that are necessary for our translation tasks; and 2) we need to acquire the expertise to use these tools. In this article, I would like to provide you with a short checklist that will be helpful in assembling or complementing your equipment.

Which Operating System?

The choice of an operating system is one of the most contentious issues

you'll encounter, but it's of crucial importance. People who use Linux and Macintosh will fiercely defend the benefits of their systems, especially when it comes to security and stability. And they're right. I don't have much experience with Linux computers, but I do love my Macintosh. I can't remember the last time it crashed, and I don't even have virus protection on it (imagine that, Windows users!).

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However, I still think Windows is a better choice for translators because there simply aren't enough translation-specific tools for the other platforms. For example, only one of the more common computer-assisted translation tools (Wordfast) is designed to work on a Mac. All the others either don't run well or don't run at all on Mac.

Which Version of Windows?

There have been essentially two families of Windows: one for the home user (Windows 95, 98, and Me) and one that was originally designed for the business user (Windows NT, 2000, XP Professional), which now serves the home market with Windows XP Home. The Windows 95 series finally died a slow death because of its lack of stability. Windows 2000 and XP are infinitely more stable and—

even more important for translators—Unicode-enabled. This means they're able to process all major (and most minor) languages.

Which Word Processing and Other Office Software?

The state of affairs is much the same here as it is for Windows. There are numerous office suites available for Windows, some of which I think are better than Microsoft Office.

The free OpenOffice.org suite is simply fabulous, as is its commercial sibling Sun StarOffice. These weigh much less heavily on your system than their Windows counterpart, and the Word equivalent Write has features that make life a lot easier (such as a direct PDF conversion and a very advanced AutoComplete function).

Anyone who's worked with WordPerfect, Corel's word processing program, raves about many of its features, including the noteworthy “Reveal Codes” function or the ability to start typing anywhere on a page.

However, because we're service providers working on files that are furnished by our clients, we have no choice but to work in the environment provided, or in one that is compatible. All of the office suites claim compatibility with Microsoft Office, but none of them converts perfectly. To prove (or disprove) this point, I downloaded a copy of the new WordPerfect 12 yesterday, opened a fairly complex Microsoft Word file, and saved it back to Word format. The result: the file size had increased from 2 to 116 MB, the headers on most pages were gone, the pagination was completely different, and the fonts of the footnotes were altered. In a conservative estimate, I would have had to spend several hours “fixing” the file. I also know my clients well enough to know

that they wouldn't be thrilled at having to reformat files on their end.

Which Microsoft Office?

There are really two parts to this question. The first: Which edition of Microsoft Office should you use (Home, Professional, etc.)? Unless you're working with a lot of databases (with Microsoft Access), there's no reason for you to need anything but the basic package, which typically includes Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and Outlook. If only Word is relevant for you, you may be just as well off with the much less expensive version of Microsoft Works—just make sure that the package really does contain Word.

The second part of this question is which version of Microsoft Office you should use. The short answer: if you work in Asian, Eastern European, or other non-Western languages, you'll want to use Office 2000 or higher because it supports Unicode. Naturally there are differences between Office 2000, XP, and 2003, but I still haven't found the magic option that would justify the fairly steep upgrade price. Besides, all the versions are compatible with each other.

Are the Right Versions of Windows and Word Enough?

Well...no.

Here's the lowdown on what we've covered so far. There are many tasks that you'll be able to do quite well with this equipment, but there's much more that can be accomplished with the help of some other more specialized tools. Windows and Word would like to make you think they can cover everything, but there's almost nothing that can't be done just a little bit better.

The great thing is that most of the tools—called utilities—that you can

use for these specific tasks are free. Even if there's some cost involved, most of them are shareware, which means that you can download them in order to test them extensively.

Here are some of my favorite tools:

- **HTML editors:** NEVER use Word to work in HTML files. Instead, use one of the many free or inexpensive tools like *Sausage's HotDog* (www.sausage.com/products), *Arachnophilia* (www.arachnoid.com), or *Macromedia* (formerly Allaire) *HomeSite* (www.macromedia.com/software/homesite).
- **Text editors:** If you want to sort, search, compare, or otherwise manipulate text files, you will want to work with text editors such as *TextPad* (www.textpad.com), *Multi-Edit* (www.multiedit.com), or *UltraEdit* (www.ultraedit.com). For non-Western languages, try *EmEditor* (www.emeditor.com).
- **Search tools:** When it's important to search through a large number of files at once (such as different glossaries), you might want to look at the beloved *Search and Replace* (www.funduc.com/search_replace.htm).
- **Conversion utilities:** *Convert* (www.joshmadison.com/software) places every possible (and impossible) conversion at your fingertips.
- **Copy and paste programs:** Tired of overwriting your clipboard content? *ClipMate* (www.thornsoft.com) may be just what you're looking for. It stores copied content indefinitely, ready for you to access at any time.

By now you've probably realized that I could go on for a long time. The great thing is this—if you have a task

that you would love your computer to do just a little more efficiently, chances are that someone else has already had the same wish—and has actually developed an application that will do just that. A single search in Google will frequently direct you to that tool in a matter of seconds.

Does My Utility Library Make My Computer Inventory Complete?

Some translators are content with what we've put together so far, but in my opinion, there's still something missing. I tend to divide my translation career into two phases: pre-CAT tool discovery and post-CAT tool discovery. The term CAT tool refers to computer-assisted translation tools, and in particular to translation memory tools (SDLX, Déjà Vu, TRADOS, Wordfast, and Star Transit, to name a few).

When I first began looking at these tools, I was skeptical. I didn't want to change the workflow I'd become comfortable with. I thought my own memory was good enough to retain what I'd translated before, and I feared that my translation creativity would suffer with a CAT tool hanging around my neck.

Today, with a translation memory database of almost a million and a terminology database of about 100,000 records, I can't help but smile at my early fears. No matter how good my own memory is, it still isn't that good! And creativity? Given the choices that I have in these large data repositories, I have no doubt that my translations are just as creative as they were before—or even more so.

Which Translation Memory Tool Should I Select?

To decide which tool fits your needs, make a list of criteria that seem important to you. Some of these might include the following: ➔

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- The file formats that your tool will need to support;
- The variety or uniformity of its user interface;
- Your preference for working in single files or several files at once; and
- The supportiveness of the tool's user group and distributor.

Most of these tools offer an evaluation version, and some even provide

a completely free version that you can use for specific files that have been prepared by your clients—a great way of getting to know a variety of tools! And if you find out that the tool you've chosen is not the right one, it's usually quite easy to transfer the databases between different tools.

It's certainly important to uphold the love of language and meaning that Saint Jerome personifies. But as

we cultivate those qualities, remember also that it's acceptable and even advisable to replace the quill with a keyboard and the parchment with a well-equipped computer.

If you're interested in these and many more computer-related details, please subscribe to my free newsletter at www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit.

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Job Shadowing: Promoting the Profession from the Comfort of Your Own Home Continued from page 19

about the future. Taking a would-be language professional on a virtual tour of your field, even for just a few hours, will give you a new perspective on your work. "I spent a whole morning looking at the forest instead of the trees," said one job shadowing host. "I found myself asking new questions and looking for ways to

work smarter and better."

Finally, as Racette notes, "It's energizing to see newcomers who are excited about the field." Many shadows are fascinating and entertaining people, and in selective programs like MetroLink they tend to be self-starters and go-getters. Connecting with a bright kid who's enthusiastic about a

career in languages can be enormously rewarding. "I really appreciated your advice and candidness..." wrote one MetroLink student to her ATA host, "I can honestly say that you have given me hope for the future!"

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Frankfurt Book Fair in size and prestige. The OMT is in touch with the literary mavens of the Fédération internationale des traducteurs, and hopes to secure their assistance in celebrating literary translation at the FIL this year.

This impressive program is being accomplished by a dedicated band of translators and interpreters acting

entirely on their own initiative, with no financial support from any outside body. I was stunned to learn that the entire membership of the OMT across Mexico is 125 people. I was also impressed to learn that each member of the OMT is obliged, as a condition of membership, to provide community interpreting or sight translation to indigent Mexican residents on at least

one occasion per year. The commitment to social service is yet another aspect of the admirable work being accomplished by our colleagues in Mexico. I salute them, and I hope that ATA members will find ways to become more informed about their work and support their activities.

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