



GeekSpeak

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## Spinning the Crystal Ball

**Former** long-time ATA Board member Tony Roder was kind enough to send me a few manuscripts of talks on translation memory (TM) technology that he gave in the late 1990s at ATA conferences. Here is one quote that I found remarkable:

In acknowledging that this is an irreversible phenomenon, we come to the realization that TM work is so different from conventional translation, that it is creating a distinct form of language transposition which opens the gates to an uncharted territory, in which the demand for TM specialists can only grow, and in which the choice of becoming a TM specialist becomes a viable alternative. In my crystal ball, I see a migration, a diaspora of translators moving into that specialty, weighed down by computers with gigabytes of memory, and by all the software they can carry; but with no dictionaries to speak of.

Hats off to Tony: few predictions for the future have been more on the mark!

As I write, we have not yet launched into 2008, so it seems fair for me to gaze into my own crystal ball in an attempt to identify trends in TEnTs (translation environment tools) that we will see in the coming months and years, and that naturally will have an impact on translators. (We will have to wait and see whether these predictions will be as good as Tony's.)

Admittedly, I did not conjure these ideas out of thin air. For the 100th edition of my newsletter ([www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit](http://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit)), I sent a note to most tool vendors asking them for their opinion on the future of translation tools. I then published those opinions in the newsletter, and they served as a good springboard for my own opinions. Not included in my pre-

dictions are your answers to the recent tool survey, which have not yet been compiled as I write.

**Subsegment search and automatic utilization** will become much more important, and if you think about it, it is a no-brainer. Of course, there are more matches on the subsegment level than on the sentence level, and if these can be intelligently filtered and automatically reused as some tools have already started to do, there is a potentially steep productivity gain on the horizon—one, by the way, that cannot yet be quantified and discounted in clients' pricing schemes. I predict that terminology work and subsegment processing will slowly merge. (I can just imagine how this will make true terminologists cringe).

**Merging of TM and machine translation** is also a no-brainer. It already happens on the enterprise level, but I think that we will see this more and more on the agency and freelancer level in the next three to five years. Yes, I know, it is sort of a bitter pill to swallow, but let's face it: the stuff that is worthwhile to process with machine translation is not worth wasting our time on. (This is because users have low expectations of the quality of the output and because, so far, the only successful implementations have been in strongly controlled environments.)

**Software as a Service (SaaS)** has just reached our industry, but it arrived with great force. SaaS is the concept of not having to install the software on your local computer, but instead using it through a Web browser, with most, if not all, of your language data being hosted by a server. In the realm of project management for the language industry this has already become the *de facto* standard, and it also represents the future for TEnTs, with a few of them

already pointing the way. When I first heard about server-based computing it sounded way too futuristic, and I resented the idea because it seemed to promise me less control. However, I have come to the conclusion that freedom (from software updates, computer problems, and backup worries) is not a bad thing either.

**Sharing of language resources** will no doubt become more relevant. It remains to be seen whether it will come through SaaS-like tools, project-specific client-server constellations, an industry consortium like TAUS, a commercial model like TM Marketplace, or some open-source model. Chances are that it will be a mixture of all of the above and something else that we have not even seen yet.

**Automated workflow processes** will become more prevalent, especially for larger projects, and this hopefully will also include the TM-based authoring of the source text (which I still believe is one of the most underutilized opportunities of our industry).

**Open-source projects** will become more relevant. Existing projects to watch include the conceptual design of a Translation Memory Open Source System (TMOSS), OmegaT and Sun's Open Language Tools, and now even open source versions of established TEnTs (such as OpenWordfast). Also, look to XLIFF (XML Localization Interchange File Format) to become a much more common translation standard format, and help with some of the file format issues we are dealing with right now, and, in turn, substantially assist the open-source communities.

And, yes, for those of you who are still wondering about when and how

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## The Onionskin

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### Winging it in Milan

**A little knowledge** can be a dangerous thing.

Consider what happens when a translation comes under the microscope for tweaking or an ultimate green light. If the “reviser” is not genuinely fluent in the target language, his or her input can do more harm than good.

For example, a European businessman recently gave a thumbs-down to “Putting clients first” as a heading in the English version of a brochure testifying to his company’s focus on service. “Golf terms should not be used in formal business documents,” he opined to colleagues, who fortunately set him straight.

More commonly, nonnative buyers or revisers let errors slip through for lack of language awareness. An advertisement promoting Milan’s Malpensa airport to readers of the *Financial Times* on November 30 and again on December 7 hit this wall. The aim was to convince foreign businesspeople of the airport’s efficiency, punctuality, and general appeal. A clever visual shows banknotes folded into paper planes clustered on the tarmac around a modern terminal.

Alas, the accompanying 100-word text fails to fly due to odd phrasing and grammar, starting with, “A growth without comparison” in boldface. Growth, in English, takes no article; “a growth” is more often than not a medical condition requiring surgery.

At our request, a French sales executive who describes his own English as “fluent” looked through the offending text from Malpensa and agreed it was flawed, but not until he had reached the end, where “catchment area” caught his attention. “That’s a strange word; it’s wrong, isn’t it?” he commented. Well, no, actually. In fact, “catchment” was one of the rare correct bits.

To get that far, our man had waded, oblivious, through “Malpensa, the only airport wanted by the EU for the Trans European Network”; through “9,3% increase of passengers”; through “The shopping mall with the greatest Fashion Designers of the Made in Italy sector”; and more. Not a single one of these glitches had caught his eye in the English text—just as the U.S. and British businesses regularly cited in this column fail to notice errors in their German, Italian, French, and Japanese texts.

Back in Milan, an airport representative confirmed to the Onionskin that the English text had been supplied by an external specialist in communications, Luca Ciserani. At their request, we prepared an earnest and detailed critique, which they kindly passed on. But it fell on deaf ears, Mr. Ciserani insisted to Malpensa that the English text had been crafted by a bona fide translator—yessir, a native speaker of American English—working in Italy

The Onionskin is a client education column launched by the *ITI Bulletin* (a publication of the U.K.’s Institute of Translation and Interpreting) in 1996. Comments and leads for future columns are very welcome; please include full contact details. Contact: chrisdurban@noos.fr.

for some six years. Was this Onionskin person not engaging in a crass commercial bid to steal a client?

Mr. Ciserani did not respond to our requests for an interview, but we stand by our analysis: the text speaks for itself as proof that somebody was bluffing somebody along the supply chain.

While Malpensa has declined to pursue the issue, the advert highlights the challenge facing well-meaning clients who simply cannot judge the quality of work delivered. “Trust me, I’m a professional” is only as good as the quality of the work on the page, and when time is short and the buyer inexperienced (or simply too trusting), accidents happen. For Malpensa, this was an expensive one: the *Financial Times* rate sheet indicates the airport spent €160,000 on its advertising space, only to run a poorly translated text that flies in the face of the sophisticated international image it wished to convey.

Once again from the top: the higher the stakes, the more important it is to use a professional, and to solicit regular feedback from independent, literate, native-speaking sources. To ensure future texts get off the ground in Milan, we are sending both Malpensa and their external specialist a copy of the Italian version of *Translation, getting it right*.

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to make the plunge for a TEnT, it will indeed become (or should I say “it already is”) so commonplace that it will be a struggle to do without (unless you strictly translate nonfunctional texts).

Well, there they are—my bold crystal ball predictions for the heady translation future. I will leave it up to Tony to check back 10 years from now to test their validity.

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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 also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators ([www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit](http://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit)).