

## TERMINOLOGY MANAGEMENT DURING TRANSLATION PROJECTS: PROFESSIONAL TESTIMONY

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### Abstract

This article briefly presents an overview of the author's experience regarding the way terminology is managed during translation projects, mainly in the technical and IT sectors. The purpose of the article is not to provide a cookbook on terminology management but rather to analyse some behaviours and reactions regarding this subject and to give some hints on key points linked to terminology in translation.

**Keywords:** *terminology, translation, revision, terminologist, translator, reviewer, translation company, terminologists, translators, reviewers, translation companies, terminology database, terminology databases, source term, target term, terms, terminology management, translation project, translation projects, glossary, glossaries, Style Guide, Translation Style Guide, Style Guides, Translation Style Guides, Multiterm, SDL Multiterm, Computer-Aided tool, Computer-Aided tools, CAT, CAT tool, CAT tools, translation memory, translation memories, translator forums.*

### 1. Introduction

Terminology is a key element in translation projects. Using the right term consistently is certainly beneficial for the quality of the translation. Nevertheless, in the course of real projects, terminology work is sometimes left aside, mainly due to time and money constraints.

In this article, we are trying to give a brief overview of our experience in terminology management during projects managed by private translation companies. We will start with a presentation of the main actors in those translation projects and the way they usually act and react, according to our experience, to terminology. An overview of the way glossaries are dealt with will follow. We will then develop some explanations on the additional material we handle in relation to terminology and end up with a short presentation of the two tools we currently use to manage terminology.

The goal of this article is not to describe the right way of managing terminology but rather to give a picture of how projects contributors handle terminology. Therefore, the role of a full-time “terminologist” will not be taken into consideration since, in our experience, it's quite unusual to have a dedicated person working 100% on this task in our field of activities.

## 2. Actors

In our market sectors<sup>1</sup>, most of the translation projects are ordered by clients who send them to translation agencies. These translation agencies work with a lot of freelance resources, mainly for the linguistic tasks like translation and revision. The number of employees working internally is in general quite reduced and the internal translators focus usually on revision and in some cases, on terminology.

### 2.1 Translators

When glossaries are provided at the beginning of a project, translators should of course use them. In some cases, this might be problematic. Indeed, translators frequently work on various projects for different clients. Sometimes, even for basic terms, the translation might differ from one client to another. If they are used to certain target terms, despite the reception of specific glossaries, translators might from time to time “automatically” use those typical translations and not take the time to check every single term in the provided glossaries. Translators should have the reflex to systematically check all the terminology in the various provided glossaries but obviously this might sometimes take time.

Another issue with existing glossaries is also that terminology might evolve in the course of a translation project. Indeed, it might be needed to add new terms to the existing glossary or to change existing ones due to a new light on the context. This requires proactivity and interest from the translators. They are the ones who should flag-up these needs and who should make the new term suggestions. Their reaction will of course vary from one person to the next and unfortunately, it is sometimes possible that people will not take the time to notify those requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation market is divided in several sectors. We mainly work in the Technical and IT sectors for which the volume to be translated is quite important. The projects are generally multilingual and involve a lot of people, with various technical competencies and language-skills.

When no glossary is provided for a project, one might wonder how translators will react. Will they simply translate the text, using existing glossaries they can find on their own? Will they try to create a glossary themselves? If several translators are involved in the translation, will they be able to share their glossaries and will they actually want to? If they are not paid for the task, will they really take the time to create proper glossaries? Clients and translation agencies should be aware of the problems that might arise when several people are involved in a project for which no “official” glossary is provided. The time and budget allocated for supplying good glossaries (or even for indicating the common references to use) will undoubtedly be beneficial for the whole course of the project.

## 2.2 Reviewers

When checking translations, reviewers will also verify terminology. Benefiting from existing and approved glossaries means an easier and more accurate revision job than if the reviewers have to decide upon the glossaries to use or even have to create them.

If the reviewers do not receive official glossaries from the client, some validation problems might occur. One reviewer might accept a particular term while another will reject it according to specific criteria. This could happen for terms associated to several acceptable translations but also for neologisms. In sectors like Information Technology, new English terms appear quite often. Before official glossaries or dictionaries integrate new approved translations, some might have to deal with them in translated texts. And their decision will certainly vary. For instance, when the IT term “spam” appeared in English, some decided to keep it as such in French IT documents but others preferred to translate it - still several translations were suggested, like for instance, “courrier non sollicité”, “courrier indésirable”, “pourriel”...

## 2.3 Translation companies

Translation companies usually manage in parallel a lot of projects for many customers. Quite often, deadlines are very tight and budgets quite restricted. Under those circumstances, if the end client does not provide glossaries or order their creation, translation companies will seldom finance their development. They might do it though for very big projects or very complicated subjects but in most cases, they will measure the profitability of creating them. Indeed, if glossaries can be created quickly, drastically reduce the problems on the entire project and represent very low costs within the global budget, those companies

might then decide it is worth developing them. Providing the linguistic resources with valid glossaries is therefore usually rather a decision based on a case by case than a common practice.

Human resources dedicated to the translation or creation of glossaries can also be an issue sometimes. In this area, terminologists might help, but again, not all translation companies can rely on a professional terminologist. In many cases, some translators will be chosen randomly to create or to translate the glossary and a reviewer will “possibly” revise it. If these people are not familiar with the subject or even with the client environment, they might take wrong decisions. Whenever possible, it is recommended to have specialists in the field working on the translation/ internal revision and experts on the client side to validate the final glossaries.

#### 2.4 End clients

There could be some cases where the quality of the translation is not the top priority – for instance if the purpose of the translation is only to get a rough idea of the document contents, to quickly communicate in various languages, etc. Terminology would therefore be a minor concern.

On the contrary, for many clients, quality is crucial. They want to receive a high-level translation and in general, require the right terminology, even sometimes “their own internal terminology”, to be used.

Some clients will consider that the translation agencies and/or the translators working on their project are the “translation experts”. Hence, they should be the ones using the right terminology, searching for the right references, etc. On one side, this is true, but on the other, a client cannot expect the translators to know – or sometimes “to guess” – all local terms to be used for a specific sector and even for a specific company. Let's take for instance the business titles of people in companies. English titles could be translated differently according to the companies. If the client does not communicate the right local information to the translator, there is a risk for the translator not to use the exact internal company terms.

In order to reach the requested quality level, it is therefore important that end clients either provide glossaries or order their creation – in other words, that they spend the time and budget needed for this task. Moreover, it is essential that experts on the client side help understanding the meaning of specific terms, provide the needed context for the terms to be translated and validate the translated glossaries.

For international companies, for example, contribution to correct glossaries might just consist in providing technical material published in the

native language of various branches — documents that already exist, and simply need to be passed on.

### **3. Use and creation of glossaries**

#### **3.1. Existing material**

Existing dictionaries, general or specific glossaries, shared databases, Internet sites, etc. can obviously be useful for the translation teams. However, one should always wonder if the selected material is reliable and contains enough context to make sure the translation will fit the subject as well as the client requirements. Moreover, some terms might not be found in the existing resources, whether because as mentioned earlier they are brand new terms on the market or because they are internal terminology to the requestor. In some cases, it will therefore be necessary to create glossaries or at least to do maintenance tasks on existing materials.

#### **3.2. References from the clients**

Clients will sometimes provide the translation teams with their own glossaries. These might have been developed by experts on the client side or could be the result of an order to external translators or specialists. In the latter case, it is quite important to know if the client has approved the glossaries. Indeed, glossary translation by a professional team does not guarantee the perfect match to the client needs.

Knowing when the entries were translated might also be interesting. As a matter of fact, terminology evolves and with time, some terms might need to be updated or added to an existing glossary. Terminology management is not only about creating new glossaries but also about updating existing material.

#### **3.3. New glossaries created by Translation teams**

When creating a brand new glossary for a specific client order or as a personal decision, translators should make sure to use the right reference material. Glossary creation should not be limited to simply listing source terms and trying to guess what could be the best translation in the target language. On the contrary, it is essential to know the context for each term, to fully understand the meaning without any ambiguity and to search for the exact corresponding translation.

In some cases, the client will already provide the list of English terms (with or without context) to the translators. In others, the request will simply be “to create a glossary”. In both cases, the material that can be used will be, among others, various kinds of dictionaries; explanatory glossaries for finding definition of the source and/or target terms; bilingual material such as translated texts about the specific subject; documents that can help understanding and translating some terms; and so on. Remaining cautious about the validity of the reference material is of course essential as part of it might be outdated or not valid at all.

As always, the best option will be to make sure the client will revise and approve the final glossary.

## **4. Complements**

### **4.1 Translation Style Guides**

Translation Style Guides can be provided by clients or developed by translation companies or translators. They are a very good complement to glossaries, adding relevant information linked or not to terminology, and helping to guarantee a better consistency between translated texts.

In general, they list grammatical rules that usually cause problems to translators. For instance, in French, translators might sometimes hesitate when faced with the plural of compound words. In order to make their work easier, some typical examples, very frequent in the client's texts, might be listed in the French Style Guide.

Style Guides also list various clients' preferences. For instance, a French client will rather have the dates presented in groups of 2 figures only (14-02-09) while others will require the year to be fully written (14-02-2009) or even the month to be written in letters (14 février 2009).

They also provide lists of standard terms that might, for some, already be present in glossaries but on which they want to put the focus due to their very repetitive aspect. For instance, in some documents, English words like “Warning”, “Caution”, “Note” frequently appear to emphasize the kind of information given. Providing standard translations for those words in a French Style Guide might help making sure they will always be translated consistently throughout all texts when used for this purpose. Indeed, as a translation of the English word “Note”, both French terms “remarque” and “note” might be accepted in the flow of a text, but the Style Guide might instruct to always use the French word “Note” when used for emphasizing or as sub-title.

Obviously the kind of information that can be found in Translation Style Guides will vary from one client to another and will depend on the writer. Some contain only a few pages while others count hundreds of pages. Apart from the sections described above, information can be found about formatting of specific words, punctuation, instructions on reference glossaries to use, sections containing standard texts already translated (like the copyright paragraph of a company or the translation of some logos), style to adopt for specific areas (marketing texts versus legal texts for instance), ways to translate titles within the company, product names, etc.

All this information is a precious complement to glossaries, providing not only pure terminology information but also “non-terminology” information that can be very important on the linguistic side.

#### 4.2 Computer-Aided Tools (CAT)

A lot of CAT tools exist on the market. In our case, we mainly use Translation Memory tools<sup>2</sup>. Beside the leveraging aspect, TM tools are very useful to guarantee consistency within a translated text or between several translation projects, and even among several people. Their various formats allow the translators to exchange the TM database contents and make sure they use the same terminology. Most of those tools provide a functionality to search for specific terms and display the results with context information. This kind of material should of course not replace glossaries, but certainly represents a very good complement.

#### 4.3 Forums on the Internet

With the development of modern telecom and Internet, communication between translators is easier than ever. A lot of public forums allow them to exchange information and ideas, among other things about translation of some new terms.

For our part, we have also setup a private forum used by our teams. They use it to exchange ideas on certain projects and to access some reference

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<sup>2</sup> Translation Memories (TM) are a type of Computer-Aided tools. The principle is to save the translated segments (parts of text) within a database which will store each source segment together with its corresponding translation. Whenever the same source segment appears in the same document or in another text, the tool proposes the stored translation. If the source text is not exactly the same but is still quite similar, the stored translation is also proposed but some indications show which source parts are different and should consequently be adapted within the translation.

material. Forums are a very good way to centralize project information, to easily distribute instructions and to share feedback. When a reviewer decides to change the translation of a term, posting this information on the forum will benefit the entire team and not only the translator receiving feedback on his own translation.

## 5. Tools

Various software can be used to manage terminology. In our case, we mainly use two well-known software: Microsoft Excel and SDL Multiterm. Our choice is based on the fact that these two programs are usually well known by the translators and quite easy to use.

### 5.1 Microsoft Excel

A lot of translators work with the Microsoft Office Suite, in which MS Excel is included. The first advantage is therefore that they do not need to buy any specific tool for working with our MS Excel glossaries. This program is moreover very easy to use, especially for consulting glossaries. It is also quite flexible since you can quickly add or change information, insert new columns with data for all entries at once, and even define a password to lock any unwanted edition.

Nevertheless, one can also argue that this program is not a professional terminology tool. Moreover, managing multilingual glossaries can be quite hard, especially when entering a very high amount of information. In such cases, it might therefore be better to use a tool specifically conceived for terminology management.

### 5.2 SDL Multiterm

The various features of SDL Multiterm have been built with terminology management in mind. Creating a glossary with this tool might be a little bit longer than using a simple MS Excel spreadsheet but the data organisation is much better. For translators, it is very easy to handle, and extra features like the possibility of linking glossaries to a translation memory is a Plus. Indeed, during translation, the program recognizes that some terms appearing in the source text can be found in the glossary and automatically suggests the corresponding target terms to the translator.

On the other hand, beside the fact that not all translators buy this product, it is sometimes less obvious to quickly update the database content and

distribute it among all translators, making sure they will update their own SDL Multiterm database. Working most of the time under heavy time pressure, some translators will indeed prefer to receive a MS Excel glossary, directly usable, rather than parts of a SDL Multiterm database on which they still need to act, even for very brief operations.

Since a conversion utility exists allowing us to convert the MS Excel glossaries into SDL Multiterm databases, we have chosen to offer both formats to our translators. This way, they work according to their preferences, while making sure they respect the most up-to-date terminology provided.

## 6. Conclusion

Terminology management remains challenging. Constant efforts are required to make sure everyone will use the provided glossaries. When such material needs to be created, the right processes have to be followed to guarantee the quality of the terms. Finally, getting the client to validate the target entries is also extremely important.

Major risks are also associated with the update of terminology. Any change has to be communicated to all project contributors in order to be applied in a consistent way, and might require the update of previously translated texts.

Understanding the implications of terminology and its key role in the translation process also implies accepting that time and money should be spent for its optimal implementation.

It is crucial that all parties involved in a translation project are aware of a few simple, basic facts: a glossary is, by definition, a long-term tool. It is, at the end of the day, an investment, the rewards of which will be reaped not only during the current project it is created for, but also during any future translation projects a company will have to deal with...