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Training for technical translators: an interview with Uwe Muegge

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Training for Technical Translators: An Interview with Uwe Muegge

By Marta Cheresnovska (Velychko)



Uwe Muegge is the coordinator of the Masters in Translation and Localization Management Program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies Graduate School of Translation, Interpretation, and Language Education. He teaches courses in computer-assisted translation and publishes regularly on translation technology. He is a director at CSOFT in Beijing. As CSOFT's senior translation tools strategist for North America, he contributed to the development of TermWiki, a cloud-based terminology management system. He is a member of several standardization bodies, including ASTM International Technical Committee F43 on Language Services and Products and ISO Technical Committee 37 for Terminology and Other Language and Content Resources. He has more than 15 years of experience working on both the vendor and buyer side of the industry.

I believe strongly in teaching the fundamental skills any knowledge worker in the 21st century needs.

What aspects do you emphasize most in your work as an educator of future technical translators and localizers?

One of the first things students learn in my "Introduction to Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT)" course is how technical translation is different from translation in the literary tradition. The most important characteristic of a typical technical translation project (if there is such a thing) is that the text to be translated is linked to a product or service, whereas a text in a literary translation project typically stands alone. The fact that there is a strong con-

nection between the source text and a product or service has many implications. First, consistency within and across documents and versions is of the utmost importance throughout the entire process of any technical translation project. For instance, how do you make sure that multiple translators working on multiple text types within a large project (e.g., software strings, online help, tutorials, etc.) all use the same terms in the target language? How do you ensure stylistic consistency between translated documents in the current release and those in previous releases (think usability and corporate identity)?

The big question is how do freelance technical translators meet the requirements for consistency and accuracy while performing their jobs in the most efficient manner? Unlike in literary translation projects, buyers of technical translation services typically have made heavy investments in research, development, and marketing prior to the launch of a new product or service. That is why buyers of technical translation services lose revenue every day a translation is not available and the company is not able to sell to international markets. Helping students understand the business reasons that drive technical translation projects and how to meet these needs using state-of-the-art translation tools and processes is the primary goal of all the courses I teach.

In addition to developing skills in translation core technologies like terminology management, translation memory, and machine translation systems, I believe strongly in teaching the fundamental skills any knowledge worker in the 21st century needs. For instance, I offer a module called “Advanced Web Search,” where students learn to use search operators like *filetype:*, *definition:*, or *“phrase”* to perform more targeted Google searches.¹ Helping students sharpen their online research skills enables aspiring linguists to find information related to translation of any kind faster and more efficiently. In another module, I familiarize incoming translation and localization students with basic social networking skills and strategies. Students learn that LinkedIn is a people and solutions search engine that rewards those who understand basic search engine optimization principles. I also emphasize that a presence on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook helps students get hired in emerging roles like social media

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marketing, which more and more language services providers are starting to offer.

Are there any emerging technologies and practices that you currently use in the classroom?

I have been very excited about the potential of cloud-computing ever since this technology arrived on the horizon. For those unfamiliar with cloud computing, it means that the applications that process your data reside on a remote webserver, not on your local computer. Cloud-computing has many benefits. Applications are basically maintenance-free, do not cause compatibility problems on the local computer, and many run on all major operating systems. In addition, because cloud-based applications are typically offered as software as a service (SaaS) on a monthly subscription basis, using this type of technology does not require a major upfront investment in software licenses.

I started using cloud-based translation memory systems in the classroom in 2008, and last year I made the transition to delivering all course material and activities in my CAT courses using cloud-based systems. Students access all material online, including instructor-generated content (articles and slides), student-generated content (results of group discussions), testing (with instant feedback!), and translation exercises in a CAT tool. Best of all, students have access to this infor-

mation 24/7, from any place that has an Internet connection, using the computing device of their choice (desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone).

Currently, I am using four types of cloud-based applications in my courses:

Moodle

www.moodle.org

A cross-platform, topic-based, self-service learning management system where students access course content, collaborate with other students, submit assignments, participate in tests, and receive performance feedback/grades.

TermWiki

www.termwiki.com

A cross-platform terminology management system where students create terminology projects and termbase entries that include mandatory definitions and a hierarchical data category structure. Students also perform batch uploads from external resources.

Wordfast Anywhere

www.freetm.com

A cross-platform translation memory system where students set up simple termbases and translation memories, analyze new documents, translate using termbases and translation memories, perform simple quality assurance, and share translation memories and termbases.



Lingotek

www.lingotek.com/collaborative_translation_platform

A cross-platform translation management system with an integrated machine translation component where students set up and manage simple translation workflows, post-edit machine-generated translations using termbases and (human-generated) translation memories, and collaborate with fellow students in real-time.

For those who are interested, there is a brief video available on how I am using cloud-based translation tools in the classroom.²

Do you have any tips for freelance translators who are interested in terminology management?

In my opinion, terminology management is one of the areas that many freelance linguists neglect in their professional practice. I tell my students that terms are the words that clients particularly care about. As a service provider, you want to make sure that you are using the client's preferred terms within and across projects, and you want to do that as efficiently as possible. But how?

First, and this may sound trivial, use a translation memory system for every project. It is amazing how many professional translators use a translation memory system only for repetitive text or if the client explicitly requires it. I know from experience that many industry professionals look at translation memory systems primarily as a productivity tool. However, translation memory software also offers many quality features that help translators with every translation project, be it repetitive or not. For a brief overview of the benefits of using translation memories, readers can consult an article I wrote on the subject.³

Using the terminology management component of a translation memory system to create a project-specific termbase is the most efficient way of ensuring terminological consistency within and across translation projects.

Second, create or update a project-specific termbase for every translation project using the terminology management component of a translation memory system. It is true that once translators process each and every translation project in a translation memory product, terminology from previous translations is accessible through the concordance or translation memory search function. However, there are two problems with relying solely on the translation memory database for terminology management:

1. Concordance searches are a manual and therefore slow process.
2. Concordances typically produce multiple search results, which necessitate time-consuming navigation of search results and decision-making.

The biggest problem with terminology management via concordance is that even after spending all of that time on identifying the best translated term, the linguist may still pick the "wrong" term, that is, the one to which the client might object! Therefore, using the terminology management component of a translation memory system to create a

project-specific termbase is the most efficient way of ensuring terminological consistency within and across translation projects.

Finally, I strongly recommend that translators have their multilingual termbases validated by the client early on in the translation project. With more than 10 years of freelance translation experience, I know that this is easier said than done. Having the client review a termbase before translation begins is the best way of ensuring that the target-language terms to be used in a translation meet the client's needs. Consider this scenario. The linguist has done his or her due diligence during terminology research to ensure that each target term in a glossary comes from a reliable source. However, the client has been using different target terms consistently in internal and external communications. What is the most likely outcome after the client reviews the translation after delivery? It is not very likely that the client will change the terminology in all existing product-related publications so that the website and catalogs are now consistent with the newly submitted translation. The most typical result of a terminological mismatch between what a translator delivers and what

the client expects is that the reviewer will mark all terms in a translation that deviate from established usage as translation errors.

For those interested in a more detailed discussion of terminology validation as part of a translation project, see my article “Ten Good Reasons Why You Should Validate Your Translated Terminology.”⁴

Can you recommend any best practices and tools for translation quality assurance?

Based on my experience working on the translation buyer side, many freelance translators have an uneasy relationship with translation quality assurance. In my opinion, there are a number of reasons for this:

1. In traditional translator training, translation quality is frequently defined purely in semantic terms (i.e., how well does a translation convey the meaning of the source text, serve the intended purpose, etc.).
2. Conversely, aspects of what I call “formal translation quality” have traditionally been neglected (i.e., consistency issues within and across documents, such as terminology, numbers, punctuation, tagging, etc.).
3. Most translation tools developers do not have a long history of providing comprehensive translation quality assurance features and functions.

My advice to (aspiring) translators on how to ensure high translation quality is:

Consistency within and across documents and versions is of the utmost importance across the entire spectrum of technical translation projects.

- Accept only projects for which you have the required competence (domain and text-type expertise).
- Process every translation project in a translation memory system. Many commercial translation memory products offer a range of quality assurance features, including a completeness check, consistency check (translation memory/terminology lookup), and easy formatting (tags/placeables).⁵
- Use the four-eye principle (i.e., have your translations edited) whenever possible.

While there is not exactly an abundance of free translation quality assurance tools, there are a few worth mentioning.

Across Personal Edition www.my-across.net/en/fdb-register.aspx

This is a powerful translation memory solution that is available for free to freelance translators. It offers a wide range of automatic translation quality assurance functions.

ApSIC Xbench www.apsic.com/en/downloads.aspx

This free download is primarily a concordance tool for searching translation memory and glossary databases, but it

also offers many translation quality assurance features.

Wordfast Classic and WordfastPro www.wordfast.com/index.html

Both Wordfast Classic and Wordfast Pro, which are free in demo mode (up to 1,000 translation units), offer very useful translation quality assurance modules.

My last question to you is about translation and localization standards. Which of these should freelance translators be familiar with?

I use a variety of standards in teaching my translation technology courses, and I tell my students that standards are basically best-practice documents. Standards initiatives typically reflect the combined wisdom of some of the most experienced practitioners in an industry. That is why these standards have something to offer to both novice translators and seasoned professionals. I am particularly fond of the following three translation standards:

ASTM F2575 Standard Guide for Quality Assurance in Translation www.astm.org/Standards/F2575.htm

This is the standard I use the most in my classroom, and the primary reason for that is the fact that ASTM F2575 has the largest scope. This translation quality standard not only covers the translation process, but also gives



recommendations for selecting translation services providers based on competencies, including competence in various types of translation technology. From the perspective of a freelance translator, the most valuable part of ASTM F2575 is probably Section 8, “Specifications Phase.” In this section, the standard lists the various areas where the translation buyer and translation vendor need to agree before translation begins. (*Note: Uwe has recently been appointed chair of ASTM F43.03, the body responsible for revising F2575.*)

SAE J2450 Translation Quality Metric

http://standards.sae.org/j2450_200508/

Even though this standard was originally developed specifically for use in the automotive industry, SAE J2450 is probably the most widely used translation quality standard today. As the “metric” in its name implies, J2450 is a standardized methodology for measuring the quality level of a translation. This metric was designed so that translation reviewers could rate translations in an objective and repeatable fashion. Freelance translators should be familiar with this standard because their clients are likely either already using this methodology or are thinking about it.

ISO 704:2009 Terminology Work – Principles and Methods

www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=38109

One of my pet peeves is that many of the freelance translators with whom I have professional contact either do not manage terminology efficiently or do not manage terminology at all. Anyone who has a basic understanding of linguistics and is looking for a concise guide to terminology management

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should familiarize themselves with ISO 704. This standard has answers to many questions related to terminology management (“What is a concept?” “How do I write a definition?” or “What is the difference between homonymy and synonymy?”).

In closing, a word of warning: while reading these standards can be rewarding in many ways, they are not exactly light fare!

If you want to read more, Uwe is a frequent contributor to CSOFT’s blog (<http://blog.csoftintl.com>). Uwe also makes his publications available for free download through SelectedWorks (http://works.bepress.com/uwe_muegge/doctype.html).

Notes

1. A search operator is an instruction that joins keywords to form a new, more complex query. It enables you to look for several words at once by telling the search engine how to link keywords. The most common search operators are the three Boolean operators (AND/+, OR, and NOT/-), which allow the inclusion or exclusion of documents from the search results. Below are definitions for the three search operators Uwe mentions. For more about search operators, visit

www.googleguide.com/advanced_operators.html.

Filetype: This search operation returns content from specific file types. File extensions such as doc, pdf, or txt designate the file type. For example, [web page evaluation checklist filetype:pdf] will return only Adobe Acrobat pdf files that include the terms “web,” “page,” “evaluation,” and “checklist.”

Define: If you start your query with define:term, Google shows definitions from pages on the web for the term that follows. This advanced search operator is useful for finding definitions of words, phrases, and acronyms.

Quoted Phrases: To search for a phrase, proper name, or a set of words in a specific order, put them in double quotes. A query with terms in quotes finds pages containing the exact quoted phrase. Use quotation marks to avoid finding similar terms or derived words.

2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AI0sKfoVIU
3. Muegge, Uwe. “Ten Good Reasons for Using Translation Memory,” *tcworld* (January 2010),

Related Resources

<http://bit.ly/Using-translation-memory-muegge>.

4. Muegge, Uwe. "Ten Good Reasons Why You Should Validate Your Translated Terminology," *tcworld* (June 2011), http://works.bepress.com/uwe_muegge/56/.

5. Placeables are formatting placeholders that can be inserted into the translation easily. Using placeables allows translators to work in a text-only environment (i.e., one that eliminates otherwise distracting formatting).

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Catalogue of Free/Open-Source Software for Translators

<http://bit.ly/Free-open-source>

Beninatto, Renato. "Localization Management: Lessons from the Experts" (downloadable PDF)

<http://bit.ly/Localization-management-Beninatto>

Freij, Nabil. "Enabling Globalization: A Guide to Using Localization to Penetrate International Markets"

<http://bit.ly/Globalization-Nabil-Freij>

Translation and l10n for dummies (Blog)

<http://transl10n.tumblr.com>

Personal blog of Marta Chereshnovska (Velychko)

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