July, 2014

An overall view of translation in localization - An interview with Uwe Muegge

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An Overall View of the Translation in Localization1:

Interview with Uwe Muegge

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摘　要：乌维·穆格（Uwe Muegge）现任蒙特雷国际研究院翻译和本地化管理课程项目（TLM）主任，美国材料与试验协会（ASTM）下属国际技术委员会 F43 语言服务与产品小组成员，国际标准化组织（ISO）下属技术委员会 37 术语与其他语言及内容资源小组成员。他从事翻译技术教学十多年，发表相关论文 50 余篇，是翻译技术领域的资深专家。在这次访谈中，我们就与本地化翻译相关的一系列问题进行了深入的探讨：从项目实施时注意的要点，到翻译术语库的使用与引荐，再到翻译质量的保证，机器翻译的发展趋势以及自由译者的生存与发展，乌维·穆格都做了详细阐述。

PAN: Hi, Uwe. Thanks for accepting my interview. I am very honored to discuss with you about questions concerning translation in localization. My first question is: According to Standard Guide For Quality Assurance in Translation (F2575-06), there are three phases to complete a project localization, i.e. Specification phase, Production phase and Post-project phase. Could you give us a short account of what they are supposed to deal with and help us to point out what we are supposed to pay extra attention to?

MUEGGE: That is a very good question. Unfortunately, most buyers or service providers don't ask this question. I think this Standard is very helpful because it can serve as a roadmap for managing almost any translation project. The ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) Standard emphasizes that the success of a translation project not only depends on the quality of the translation, but also on the effort to prepare for the project and the post-production work. So Specification, basically a phase when the translation service provider and the buyer of the translation service have a conversation about what the buyer's needs and expectations are. Both parties come to a better understanding about what the project really involves, namely the availability of any glossaries, translation memories, or any other reference work. If a translation buyer makes these resources available to the translation service provider, it helps ensure the highest translation quality. All too often, translation buyers only provide source files, without giving the translator any background information such as who is the audience, whether the translation is only for information or it is intended for publication? While the Production phase is typically well-understood, Post-project activities may require a little bit of explanation. Once the translation has been delivered to the translation buyer, it is typically a good idea to have a post-mortem meeting between the clients, translation buyer and service provider, to discuss what did or did not go well and capture the results of this conversation for future reference. For instance, if the client discovered errors in the work the service provider delivered, it might be a good idea to include an additional review step in the next translation project. If the client had to correct terminology errors after delivery, maybe the client should provide the translator with a glossary the next time. These are the types of things the two parties discuss during the Post-project phase. Also, during the Post-project phase the service provider typically updates the glossary and translation memory with any feedback received from the client. The Post-project phase is an opportunity to receive the translation buyer's feedback, which helps the service provider to improve the process for the benefit of improving the quality and efficiency of future projects.

PAN: Do you have anything to remind us in these phases what we should pay extra attention to?

MUEGGE: Typically most translators or agencies focus exclusively on the Production phase, but I think more attention should be paid to the Specification and Post-production phase because the work that goes towards preparing a translation project typically pays off in higher efficiency if the service provider really understands what the buyer needs and what resources the buyer has available, such as previous translations and term-bases.

PAN: Yeah. These are good points to remind us. However, to the translators, it's palpable that Production phase is in the highest flight. To do that, you have made us convinced in one of your publications that terminology management should be placed at the top. Could you tell us why and how?

MUEGGE: Again, that is an excellent question.

Based on my experience, the overwhelming majority of translation-quality issues raised by the buyer are related to terminology. So if the clients file the complaints, most often they would complain about incorrect terminology. In other words: The terms that a translator used are not the terms that the client prefers, but the client did not tell the service provider about the fact they have preferred terminology. More often than not, preferred terminology exists only in the head of the reviewer and has never been captured in a proper glossary. So one way of avoiding these terminology complaints is to have the reviewers or someone else on the client's side, create a glossary of preferred terminology, and make terminology available for translator before translation. This conversation typically takes place in the Specification phase. Proper terminology management reduces translation turnaround time, by eliminating the back-and-forth between translator and reviewer if there is a disagreement on what the proper translation for a term is. To give you an example "Hard-disc", "hard-drive", "disc-drive" are all correct terms, but if the client used "hard-disc" consistently in all their product literatures and the translator uses a different term, that other term is an error and the client would consider the translation to be defective.

PAN: So do you have any suggestions about how to apply terminology management in localization?

MUEGGE: Yes. This is something I have been doing for almost twenty years. I tried to convince the translation buyers that terminology management is not just an effort to benefit translation, but also benefit the publication of product literature on the domestic market. If a company maintains a comprehensive glossary, the writers of the source documents will use terms consistently. In large organizations, there is typically not one writer but there are entire teams of writers. To use my example again: In the absence of a glossary, one writer may say 'hard disk' and another 'disk drive', which could be confusing for the user of the product.

PAN: As we know, to satisfy the client's requirements and protect him/herself from the potential illegal risks or negligence in his/her work, cannot be easily done for a translator, esp. a novice of freelancer. Therefore, making a well-considered contract with his/her client, which helps a translator stay away from the unwanted responsibilities, appears of much importance. As for that, what can you offer to remind the novice to reach the end before they sign a contract?

MUEGGE: That is a question supposed to be raised at the Specification phase. It makes a lot of sense for client and translation service provider to have either a face-to-face meeting or a conference, talks over the web or telephone. We discuss the project and specifications. The ASTM Standard lists some criteria, and TTT.org publishes the 21 transition parameters that should be discussed as part of every translation contract. Many translation contracts just specify the source document, language pair, deadline and translation fee. In my opinion that is not sufficient. The translation buyer should give the translator much more guidance in terms of who the audience is, and what resources are available. If all those parameters are clearly specified, that would improve the translation quality and mitigate any risk that the translator has.

PAN: An eminent Chinese translator once said this when he found himself struggling to find the corresponding Chinese term: "To create a term takes a fortnight to sleep on." However, such a predicament could hardly happen any more. Just owing to the terminology database, the translator in localization achieves efficiency of work so dramatically. Can you introduce some terminology database, paid or free, to us, and how to apply them?

MUEGGE: It's interesting, yet the "terminology database" you mentioned I would like to refer to "terminology tools". We now have Cloud-based tools, that means in Cloud-based environment the translator does not have to store the software. Not only that, it also makes sharing information between translators working on same project much easier. Cloud-based translation memory tools have a built-in terminology component, for example, Wordfast and XTM. These tools are comprehensive, Cloud-based translation management systems that have terminology management components. So the translators working in these environments benefit a lot. Translation systems typically are inexpensive, and some are available for free. It makes it possible for lots of translators to work on the same project at the same time, avoiding any inconsistencies typically introduced when multiple translators work on the same document but they work in isolation. So in Cloud-based environment they all work together, they all can see each other's work, and benefit from the similar translations the colleagues are providing.

PAN: So those terminology tools are available for free online. Are they classified for different products?

MUEGGE: It is up to the person who maintains the term database. There is always a big discussion among the translators whether we should put all the terms in one large term database or we should maintain multiple term databases, classified term databases, one for mechanical engineering, one for software. Again it's up to the individual translator. I strongly recommend keeping separate terms in separate domains.

PAN: Could you name some of them?

MUEGGE: If you talk about products in term-bases, typically a bigger terminology management tool, Wordfast, which is a translation memory tool, also has a terminology management component. I strongly recommend using the term-bases that is integrated in a translation memory product. There is a very interesting product called Term Assist. Term Assist is a part of TermWiki, an online terminology management solution that can work with any translation memory product.

PAN: Good, thanks. Being different from the traditional translation or literary translation, where the translator alone struggles against the source text, a translator in localization tends to work with a team. So project management and cooperation loom large in such a complex, role-playing operation. What's your suggestion for the project manager to make the program more efficient and work more happily?

MUEGGE: In terms of efficiency, I strongly recommend using Cloud-based tools because by using Cloud-based tools the project manager has direct access to the translation memory. So you can see exactly where the project is. You know, in the old paradigm, you worked with desktop software. The project manager never knows exactly where the project is until the day the translator delivers the translation. In a Cloud-based system everyone works on the same tool, so the translator logs on to the central translation memory server. That means the project manager has much more visibility. He can see if the individual translator falls behind, so he can take the correct action and bring on additional translators if necessary; even the translator doesn't tell the project manager there is a problem. So Cloud-based environment I think is much easier for the translation, for the project manager to manage the project, and also easier for translators to consistently maintain the style because they can see everybody else's translation at real time. Working in a desktop environment, one translator doesn't see what the other translators do, and how they translate the specific phrases. But in a Cloud-based environment everybody has complete visibility of everybody else's work. So that makes translating and maintaining a specific style across multiple translators much easier without an editor. In a traditional translation environment, or desktop environment, the editor needs to make sure all the translations made by multiple translators read as though it had only one translator. In a Cloud-based environment, due to the visibility of their work, it is easier for all the translators to keep a uniform style in their translation. That also definitely makes the project manager happier.

PAN: Translation in localization cannot do without Translation Memory (TM). However, the cost and lack of originality, even the errors, characteristic of TM, don't make everyone happy. What's your take on TM? Is it a blessing or a curse for the translator?

MUEGGE: I think it's a blessing if it is properly used. By proper use, I mean, for instance, before the translator starts the translation, the translator should create a glossary for the project if the client doesn't provide a glossary. In that way, the translation memory tool will help the translator translate the same term consistently in addition to helping them translate the same sentences or similar sentences consistently. So translation memory is both a productivity tool because it helps the translator avoid translating the similar things twice, and also the quality assurance tool by helping the translator translate the terminology consistently, maintain the stylistic consistency or other features like completeness of the text, because you know in word processor it is very easy to miss a sentence, but in translation memory it is almost impossible to miss a sentence because some translation memory won't let you move to the next segment if you have not translated the previous segment. In my opinion, there is no question that Translation Memory is a blessing.

PAN: Don't you think it is a little dull always to use what others have stored in the database?

MUEGGE: That is a good point. Sometimes, especially, when working for an agency, not all the translators are equally qualified. You have to deal with content with translation, you know, in the translation memory environment, not all the translations are as good as they could be. What is the dangerous working in the translation memory environment is to blindly accept everything as perfect translation. Sometimes a translator can even change imperfect translation because of 100 percent match. So this is the risk, but it can be avoided by giving the translator authority to change these that are not as good as they could be.

PAN: Does the translator have the authority to change that?

MUEGGE: Ideally, the translator should have the authority to flag translation for review. If the translator, the senior translator with a lot of experience, will be given the authority to change translation. In my opinion, every translator should have a due authority to flag the segment of translation for further review.

PAN: Good suggestion. As discussed above, localization translation is completed by a range of components; therefore, it seems to be more difficult to assure the quality of translation. What's your suggestion to keep the translation qualified? Are there any international documents to stipulate that?

MUEGGE: Yes. There are a number of documents. My favorite document is J-2450 Translation Quality Metrics Standard, which outlines seven error categories: terminology, meaning, punctuations, etc., it's very objective. Let's come back to terminology. It is an error when you use terms that deviate. So in the first place, the client should provide the terminology. With the Standard as the objective criteria, reviewers would take subjectivity out of their evaluations of translations because, for instance, whenever you ask two reviewers to review the same translations you will get three opinions and that is not helpful. So J-2450 makes the standard really help establishing the guideline of objective evaluation. So I strongly recommend using that Standard for evaluation.

PAN: Do you have any suggestions for the project manager to keep the translation qualified?

MUEGGE: You know there are many types of translation projects: brochures, engineering, software, etc. My suggestion is to emphasize the Specification phase. Instead of making the translator guess, the translation buyer and translation service provider should have a conversation: what is the translation about? who is the audience? where are resources they have? what are their expectations? what are the priorities – to get it done quickly or is quality the highest priority? Having this conversation before the translation and having the conversation after the translation project is delivered really makes a difference.

PAN: Could you tell us the difference between the freelancer and the in-house translator? I mean, what are advantages and disadvantages to either one? What tricks can you offer for the freelancer to facilitate his/her work, to reach out more extensively?

MUEGGE: The answer to your question may probably vary by country. In the United States, and probably in most countries, the main difference between the freelancer and the in-house translator is that the freelance translators have to find new clients and they have no control over the workflow; and above all, they don't get benefits, so in addition to get paid for per word rate, but no benefits of insurance. The client doesn't pay for health insurance, retirement planning or pay for education. All of these things if you are employed as in-house translators your employer will contribute to insurance, retirement plan, etc., yet as freelancer you have to pay 100 percent of your insurance and another 100 percent of your pension plan. Other differences include, as everyone knows, apart from health insurance, another benefit that in-house employees get is the paid training while the freelance translators have to pay by themselves. Conferences, such kind of things. These

are drawbacks that many freelancers may complain about. But the big advantage is that if you don't want to work, then you don't work. There is a lot of flexibility. In-house employees have to work from nine to five on every office day. And their way of doing work must be in line with the procedures. For freelance translators, no one tells them how to do the work, when to do the work. They have a lot of flexibility, which is one of the most enjoyable parts of being a freelancer.

PAN: How about their reliability or reputation, which is set up by their work? Or the clients just place their trust in the big corporation which has a large number of in-house translators?

MUEGGE: That is a good point. When I worked as a freelancer, I was working for a few clients with very close relationship. There are different ways approaching translation: many large organizations work with large translation agencies and these translation agencies work with many freelancers. So one drawback to work with agencies is that you never know who you are going to work because there are so many freelancers. But if the company works directly with the freelancers, you know exactly who is doing the work and you can set up very close relationship with the freelance translator.

PAN: How to reach out their connections and find work for the freelancers?

MUEGGE: Internet will help them a lot. It's much easier than ten or fifteen years ago, because for so many marketplaces, if you register, you will find the clients. It is easier and cheaper to market yourself through services like Linkedin, making you visible to hundreds of thousands of potential clients. It is very easy to create professional profile on Linkedin for totally free, yet to global audience who may buy your services.

PAN: For freelance translators, how can they make the potential clients confident in their translation?

MUEGGE: The freelance translator's reputation is established through his/her work. He/She can publish the recommendation after the project. I do it all the time. I worked on a large scale, difficult project and after the project the client wrote a recommendation in Linkedin. I have over seventy recommendations on my website.

PAN: You have predicted that the next big thing in translation is Controlled Language and you have developed CLOUT(Controlled Language Optimized for Uniform Translation) that is applied to Machine Translation. It is a great job. Lastly, could you share with us some of your latest achievements? And what do you think the prospect as well as the challenges is in the ever-developing localization industry?

MUEGGE: You know what thing I find fascinating is the newly-evolved type of machine translation which

is Do-it-yourself machine translation, which is a type of statistic machine translation where it is very easy for the user to customize that system, basically the system is customized by the user's uploading translation memories on a regular basis, so the translation memory improves the quality the statistic translation machine provides. Statistic machine translation has been run for a long time. Many translators use Google Translator Toolkit. But the problem with Translator Toolkit is that it has no control over the quality this system provides. In the contrast, Do-it-yourself machine translation gives even the freelance translator the opportunity to update a powerful statistic machine translation system with all translations. So the machine learns to translate like a human translator that is something Google cannot do because you have no way to provide the input to update this system. So in my opinion, this is very exciting, very new development. I think the first commercial Do-it-yourself machine translation system was launched in 2010 and only last year a number of services were launched including Microsoft's Translator Hub which is a free service. So this technology even the freelance translators can use and this system is very affordable. It is true with the help of Cloud-based system the cost of using most sophisticated technology has come down to the level that is available for freelance translators, including the technologies like translation management system, machine translation system, etc. For example, even for the novices, you can afford $15 subscription to XTM, a very sophisticated machine translation management tool, which has built-in terminology management. So again for machine translation, that is really the promise for the Cloud, it really levels the playing field, putting an extremely powerful tool into the hands of freelance translators.

PAN: To make machine translation smart in the future, a set of Controlled Language should be vital. You have invented the CLOUT, is that a demanding job?

MUEGGE: The reason to develop the rules is to make it easy, just ten rules. And the benefit of using the CLOUT is to make machine translation rules-based machine translation, but it also makes translation easier for human translators because the texts created to use CLOUT are very easy to understand for any user. The Controlled Language is not only used for machine translation, but also simplifies and supports human translation.

PAN: Thanks a lot. I appreciate sharing your expert view with all of us.

MUEGGE: My pleasure.

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