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Interview with Uwe Muegge

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Uwe Muegge has been involved in terminology work in almost every possible role: A year after graduating with an MA in translation, he filed a patent application for a terminology extraction process he had invented, then built custom dictionaries for commercial clients, worked as corporate terminologist for a Fortune 500 company, provided terminology consulting services to Fortune 500 companies, taught Terminology Management on the post-graduate level, and was involved in the development of several terminology-related standards. Uwe Muegge currently serves as Vice President, Client Services, North America at L10n People, a global staffing company for the translation, localization and gaming industries.

1. **How important is the knowledge of terminology in the use of social media?**

As someone who has thousands of followers on social media, I have a confession to make: For many years, I was actually afraid to use any social media outside of LinkedIn because I thought that people using Twitter and Facebook would communicate in the same rudimentary and often cryptic language I saw in the text messages my (then teenage) daughters would send me. But once two of them entered college (in 2011), Facebook became the primary channel of communication between the mothership (i.e. my wife, me and my youngest daughter) and the college girls, and at that point, I had no choice but to make the dreaded step into the world of social networking. And it was then that I learned that it was okay to use standard spelling and grammar in Facebook updates.

The situation on Twitter, which I joined the same year, is similar: Even though
the 140-character limit imposes certain restrictions on the choice of words and style, I primarily use common, everyday words in the messages I post.

2. **Can hashtags and keywords be considered terminology?**

Hashtags are extremely important on Twitter: Using the right hashtags (I typically use more than one in each of the updates I post) can make the difference between reaching a few dozen or many thousand people. To give you an example: I primarily tweet about translation-related job opportunities, events and competitions. When I started using hashtags like #t9njobs, and #internship, #conference, #award and #prize in combination with #t9n, my success rate has grown dramatically on every level on Twitter: the number of followers (currently 4000+) as well as re-tweets and link clicks (I get about 60+ per day each) have dramatically increased. By the way: 99% of my tweets include both hashtags and a link. Do I consider hashtags terminology? Yes, in many ways hashtags are THE terminology of social media in general and Twitter in particular. To the outsider, ‘t9n’, ‘1nt’ and ‘l10n’, which stand for ‘translation’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘localization’, respectively, are just as incomprehensible as other domain-specific terms are to the uninitiated. But there is one characteristic of hashtags that make this type of terminology stand out, and that is how quickly they come and go. In fact, anyone can coin a new hashtag – and thousands of users on Twitter and Instagram do exactly that every day. Some new hashtags will go viral and be adopted by massive numbers of users, like #panamapapers, which appeared in more than 400000 tweets today (April 4) – and this hashtag didn’t even exist the day before yesterday. Other hashtags, like #dem-rootveggiestho, which was dreamed up by my daughter Jule, made it into exactly two posts on Instagram: her own.

3. **Do hashtags and keywords need localisation?**

That is an excellent question! And the answer depends of course on where you are located on the social media spectrum. If you are using social media to connect with friends and family, and some of your follows don’t have a good command of the language you are posting in, those followers can use an automated translation service to close the communication gap. Facebook has
made it particularly easy for users to translate updates from a language they don’t understand. All it takes is clicking the ‘See Translation’ button, and a foreign-language message is almost instantly displayed in the users preferred language. I use this feature all the time as I have friends and followers who publish in Chinese, Russian and other languages that I don’t speak. Do these machine translations always make sense? No, not always, but most of the time I do get the gist of what I believe was the author’s intended message. And that’s good enough for the personal use of social media. If, on the other hand, you are a commercial organization and use social media to engage with current and potential customers, it is imperative to localize not only your hashtags and keywords, but the entire message. In fact, many global organizations use country-specific local accounts that deliver targeted, country-specific content, instead of simply translating messages that the marketing department at the corporate headquarters created. And many businesses use the geo-targeting features of Twitter and Facebook to fine-tune their messaging (including using locale-specific keywords and hashtags).

4. **Do you think social media can be an effective dissemination platform for multilingual resources?**

Absolutely – and I know that from personal experience! I make my publications (mostly articles and presentations, but also a few interviews) available to the public through a SelectedWorks site ([https://works.bepress.com/uwe_muegge/](https://works.bepress.com/uwe_muegge/)), and this service provides detailed analytics for each item in this repository. So I know for a fact that when I tweet or post an update about a newly available article, the number of downloads for that article increases dramatically. That’s why I use all social media channels I have accounts on, i.e. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ to let my followers know that a new resource is available.

5. **Is social media content difficult to process automatically?**

Generally speaking, I would say that social media content is easier to process automatically, i.e. via machine translation, than other types of online content, e.g. academic or scientific publications.
The writing style of social media messages is typically informal and characterized by short sentences, a simple grammatical structure and low usage of specialized terminology— all of which works in favor of automatic translation.

6. **What is the state of machine translation for social media?**

Facebook and Twitter have made it extremely easy to access automatic translation of foreign-language content on their platforms: Facebook in particular has invested heavily in machine translation technology since 2011, and last year they have rolled out their own machine translation technology, replacing Microsoft Bing. Twitter still uses Bing, which is currently available in more than 50 languages, from Arabic to Klingon (I am not kidding!) to Yucatec Maya. All the user has to do to get a foreign-language message translated in real time is click the “See Translation” button in Facebook or the “View Translation” button in Twitter.

Needless to say that the quality of the translation may vary from language to language within the languages supported by a given machine translation system: Translations between similar languages are typically more accurate. Also, the quality of recently added languages may be lower than that of languages that Microsoft has been supporting for a long time.

For Facebook and Twitter users who need to translate to or from a language that is not supported by the built-in machine translation system, or for users of social media platforms that don’t offer a machine translation feature, there are other options available.

Google Translate currently supports more than 100 languages, and users of any social media platform can simply drag-and-drop or copy-and-paste content from the social media service to the Google Translate site. Or, alternatively, after installing the Google Translate Chrome Extension, users can simply highlight any text on a page, right-click and then choose “Google Translate” to get that content automatically translated.

7. **Does machine-translated social media content need post-editing?**

In the context of personal use, for all practical purposes, I don’t think that professional post-editing of automatically translated social media content makes
any sense. In the business world, it’s a different story. In sentiment analysis for instance, where marketers try to understand the attitude a demographic takes towards a product or service, it may make a lot of sense to have social media posts by people, who are opinion and thought leaders in a foreign market, not only machine translated but post-edited to get a nuanced picture of how they communicate their perception of a product or service. Likewise, in competitive intelligence, companies may want to take advantage of the fact that more and more companies encourage their employees to post on social media, and following those accounts may provide an unfiltered view of what is going on at a competitor, including any issues they are currently having or even hints at new products or services they may be working on that haven’t been publicly announced. In these types of scenarios, it makes a lot of sense to have those messages, that may include highly relevant content, post-edited by professionals after that content has been automatically translated. It’s money well-spent as an organization may make decisions with far-reaching effects based on the information gleaned from this type of social media content.

8. Although the nature of the social media content might seem arbitrary, can we consider a controlled language for some types of social media content? For example, there is a limited vocabulary in support forums.

That’s an excellent point! I am a strong believer in optimizing content for machine translation through controlling the input to MT. The good news is that some of the rule sets for helping authors write better content for machine translation are fairly simple. Take CLOUT, the Controlled Language Optimized for Uniform Translation (https://works.bepress.com/uwe_muegge/88/download/) that I developed a number of years ago for this specific purpose: These are ten simple rules that anyone with a basic understanding of language and grammar can master with very little practice. And once a user applies these rules to how they write the content they publish on social media, the quality of the machine translations created from that content will improve dramatically. At the same time, the providers of machine translation services are getting better and better at creating and providing domain-specific MT engines. So to
use your support forum example, it is possible today to train an MT engine on the vocabulary and style specific to, say a particular video game. In other words: Unlike in the controlled-language approach, where the user adapts their input to the capabilities of the machine, modern machine translation engines actually learn from their users and adapt to the input they create.

9. **Are you satisfied with the results your efforts produce related to job opportunities that you post on social media?**

You know, I started posting job opportunities on my Twitter (@UweMuegge) account in 2011 in response to some of my students telling me that there were neither in-house jobs nor (paid) internship positions for translators and interpreters. To prove the point that I have been making in class, namely that there are plenty of well-paid jobs and internships for linguists at first-rate companies not only in the United States, but also in Europe and Asia, I started tweeting about every job and internship opportunity I came across. In fact, I came across so many jobs that now I am limiting myself to posting only those opportunities that I consider particularly attractive.

What started as an extracurricular service to my students has now taken on a life of its own: The 46000+ tweets I have published have attracted a following of more than 4000 linguists and institutions from across the globe. And every single day, up to 10 more people are following my posts.

So yes, I am very satisfied with how this initiative evolved!

By the way: I should mention that I recently started tweeting information about translation competitions, awards and prizes as well as translation and interpretation conferences and events. And based on the feedback I receive, many of my followers appreciate the fact that I included these additional topics in my Twitter coverage, as not many others do the same consistently.

10. **What is your opinion of our new section Trainings&Job on our website termcoord.eu?**

I think this is a great initiative: This section offers essential information about job opportunities for linguists within the various institutions of the European Union! In my opinion, the EU offers some of the best internships for future translators, interpreters and terminologist, and your site not only explains the
respective application processes, but also has links to the required forms and information on any available scholarships. This is the one-stop-shop for anyone considering an internship/traineeship with any organization within the EU. I also like the section with links to major job sites that are relevant to those job seekers who wish to work as full-time linguists; and there are quite a few of those. It’s like I kept saying to my students: If you can’t find a job opportunity that’s right for you, you are probably not looking in the right places! And this new section on your website makes looking for a language job a lot easier.

By the way: Thank you very much for including me in the list of job-related Twitter accounts – I appreciate that very much!