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TechScribe STE Term Checker: Uwe Muegge reviews a free vocabulary checking tool for ASD-STE100

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The Simplified Technical English Maintenance Group (STEMG) recently made its Simplified Technical English (STE) specification ASD-STE100 available to the technical communication community free of charge. While STE was originally developed for the European aerospace industry, the ASD-STE100 specification has become the most widely-used controlled language on the planet. The STE Term Checker is a new tool that lets users of Simplified Technical English automatically check texts for compliance with the word lists and vocabulary rules of ASD-STE100.

What is the STE Term Checker?

The STE Term Checker is a customised version of LanguageTool, an Open Source grammar, style and vocabulary checker. It deserves mentioning that the LanguageTool not only offers a number of generic grammar and style rules for checking British and American English, but also more than 20 other languages. For technical communicators who author text in a language other than English and who have been looking for a simple, cost-effective proofing tool, LanguageTool might be the right solution.

The standard version of the LanguageTool provides a comprehensive dictionary and several grammar and style rules for Standard

English. In addition, the STE version of the LanguageTool implements the entire (approved and non-approved) vocabulary of Issue 3 of ASD-STE100, plus a number of vocabulary-related rules.

STE Term Checker features

The STE Term Checker is a vocabulary and grammar checker that helps technical communicators ensure that the texts they create are compliant with ASD-STE100 vocabulary rules.

- **Compatible via copy-and-paste.** The STE Term Checker is a stand-alone application that accesses documents either after they have been saved as a text file, or via the copy-and-paste function.
- **Multiple OS support.** Being Java-based, the STE Term Checker is compatible with all major operating systems, running on Windows, Mac OS and Linux computers.
- **Linguistic functionality.** Using the LanguageTool platform, the STE Term Checker not only recognises not-approved words but is also capable of identifying inflected word forms, part-of-speech challenges, and several other vocabulary-related issues.
- **User-customisable dictionary.** Tech-savvy users can add their own technical terms to the word list that the STE Term Checker validates.
- **Easy-to-use tool:** Offering only a small number of menu options and functions, the STE Term Checker is a tool that requires almost no training for use in its standard configuration.

Using the STE Term Checker

For the purpose of this review I used the STE Term Checker in a Windows 8 environment.

Operation

After launching the Java standalone application – the STE Term Checker is also available in a command-line version – the user has two options for initiating a vocabulary check:

1. Opening an existing text file.
2. Copying the text to be checked and pasting that text in the upper of the two windows in the STE Term Checker.

Once the source text is uploaded, the user selects the appropriate text language from a drop-down menu and then clicks the 'Check Text' button. Check results appear in the lower window almost instantly.

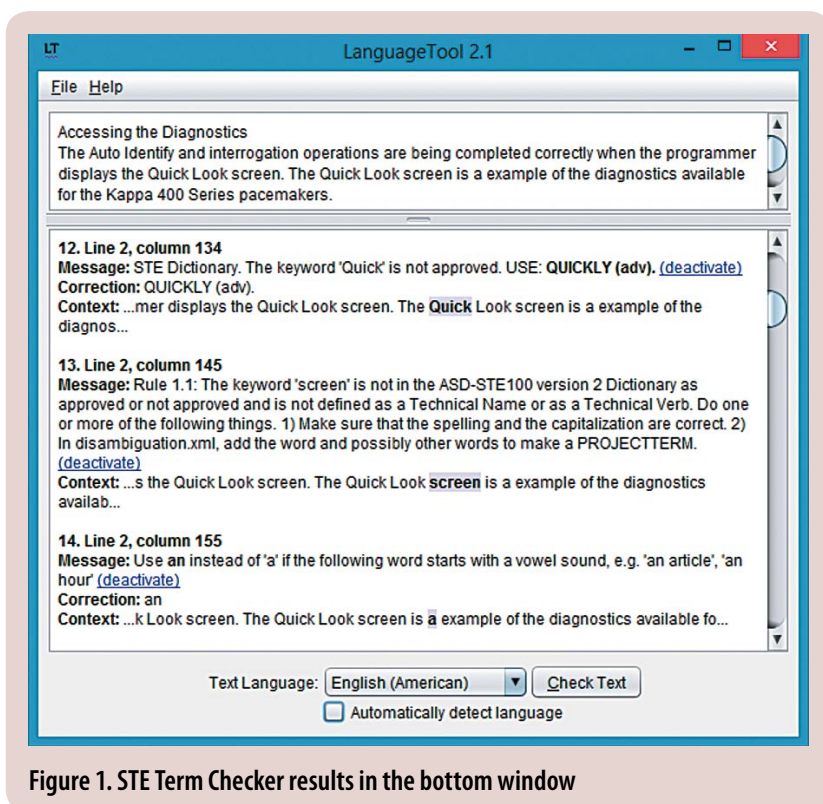


Figure 1. STE Term Checker results in the bottom window

Word recognition

In accordance with the ASD-STE100 specification, the STE Term Checker performs the following checks:

- **Approved words:** The Term Checker did an excellent job of identifying instances where an approved word had a not-approved part of speech, for example 'aid' was used as a verb but is only approved as a noun.
- **Not-approved words:** Any word that is not listed in the list of approved words (STE vocabulary) or the list of project names (typically user vocabulary) will be identified as not approved.

As expected, the STE Term Checker performed very well at the task of flagging words that did not comply with the vocabulary requirements of the ASD-STE100 specification. The STE Term Checker consistently identified individual words, and multi-word compounds that are not-approved in STE (for example 'close' as a verb is approved in STE but 'close down' is not).

Customisation


Many users of the STE Term Checker will face the challenge that it identifies some of the terms in their texts as not-approved words. These words are typically user-specific project terms that will need to be added to the list of user-specific technical names and verbs.

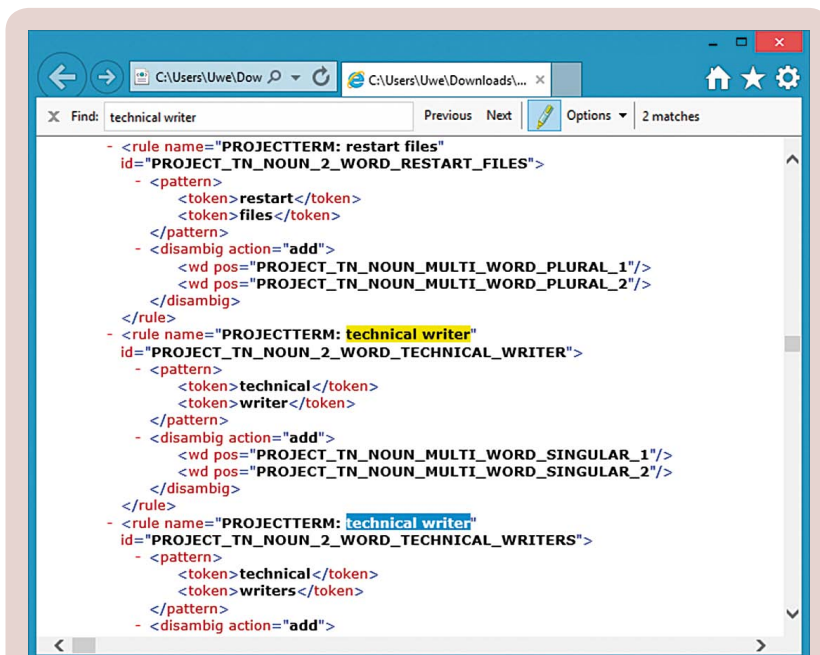
The good news is that the developers of the STE Term Checker (and the LanguageTool) provide information on how to customise this application with user-specific words. Best of all, if properly configured, the STE Term Checker will recognise user-specific vocabulary – including inflected word forms!

It should be noted, however, that customising the STE Term Checker requires a good understanding of formal grammars and some experience with editing XML files. For users of the STE Term Checker who have neither, TechScribe offers commercial customisation services.

Summary

The TechScribe STE Term Checker is an interesting solution for technical communicators who are just getting started with STE or a similar controlled language.

While the free version of the STE Term Checker only supports STE Issue 3, this tool makes a very good companion to the equally free issue of the ASD-STE100 specification. 



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- <rule name="PROJECTTERM: restart files"
  id="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_2_WORD_RESTART_FILES">
  - <pattern>
    <token>restart</token>
    <token>files</token>
  </pattern>
  - <disambig action="add">
    <wd pos="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_MULTI_WORD_PLURAL_1"/>
    <wd pos="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_MULTI_WORD_PLURAL_2"/>
  </disambig>
</rule>
- <rule name="PROJECTTERM: technical writer"
  id="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_2_WORD_TECHNICAL_WRITER">
  - <pattern>
    <token>technical</token>
    <token>writer</token>
  </pattern>
  - <disambig action="add">
    <wd pos="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_MULTI_WORD_SINGULAR_1"/>
    <wd pos="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_MULTI_WORD_SINGULAR_2"/>
  </disambig>
</rule>
- <rule name="PROJECTTERM: technical writers"
  id="PROJECT_TN_NOUN_2_WORD_TECHNICAL_WRITERS">
  - <pattern>
    <token>technical</token>
    <token>writers</token>
  </pattern>
  - <disambig action="add">

```

Figure 2. STE Term Checker project term list

Free and easy

Automatic style and vocabulary checking tools for technical communicators are typically expensive and require a considerable training effort. The STE Term Checker is a powerful yet easy-to-use checking tool that is ideal for small organisations and freelancers.

References and resources

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