

# 3·98

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Interactive Discussion Medium



**FORUM**

**TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATORS'  
FORUM**

In this Issue:

Translation Issues

cont.

Education & Training

cont.

FORUM 2000

cont.

Professional Events

TC-Forum is supported  
by INTECOM



The International Council for  
Technical Communication

## Dear colleagues:



Have you realised that *TC-Forum* is a 'Virtual Organisation'?

- We don't have an office, not even an official address.
- We don't work at the same place - on the contrary, we work internationally as you can see in the impressum, linked by email using the Internet.
- Our authors are across nearly all continents and contribute their ideas, experience and questions from all parts of the world using email.
- Our "product" is distributed by 'snailmail' and also available on the WWW worldwide.
- The only 'national' contribution since the first issue of *TC-Forum* is the sponsoring by Daimler Benz AG, Stuttgart (Germany) - later joined by transline Deutschland Dr.-Ing Sturz-GmbH, Reutlingen (Germany).

### Sponsoring to continue free of charge delivery

Now – as we near the end of 1998 – the two-year start-up phase of *TC-Forum* can be seen as successfully finished. *TC-Forum* is well established, has reached a lot of readers and has received very positive international acceptance by the existing organisations for Technical Communication worldwide. *TC-Forum* also has found a good number of subscribers who, encouraged because the paper version of *TC-Forum* is distributed free of charge, are able

to participate in the public discussion without a financial burden. This is particularly true for 'isolated' free-lance technical communicators.

One of our main aims is to keep distributing *TC-Forum* free of charge beyond the year 1998. There are promising indications that we will receive further sponsoring to help cover the costs of producing and distributing it.

### Our Views for TC-Forum in 1999

We will continue to print and mail *TC-Forum* in its present size and quality, four issues per year (March, June, September, December), and free of charge.

We have added the WebSite [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org) as an addendum,

- to reach a wider spectrum of readers (and maybe new subscribers to the magazine),
- to find new contributors to the discussion forum, and
- to lobby for the profession of Technical Communicators in countries where it is not yet appreciated.

Other advantages of the Web-Site will be introduced step by step:

- As a preview of the contents of future issues, to initiate early comments.
- As an archive for articles published in earlier issues (to be found by author, topic, issue, etc).
- As mailing lists dealing with specific topics to open a faster discussion among the *TC-Forum* community.
- To provide faster information on international professional

events (with links to the organisers).

Our webmaster will be Alexander von Obert from Nürnberg, Germany. We welcome him as a new member of our editorial team and look forward to working with him.

### My Wishes for 1999

For 1999, I wish us the steady growth and further development of *TC-Forum*. In particular

- authors who contribute interesting, stimulating but short articles,
- sponsors who grant the necessary funds for continuing with *TC-Forum*,
- volunteers for assisting our virtual organisation, and
- continuation of the excellent co-operation among the National Contact Persons (NCPs) - and new NCPs from countries where there is no NCP yet.

Many thanks and best wishes for all who contribute to *TC-Forum* and read it.

Yours

  
Hans Springer

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## IMPRESSUM:

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*Editor:*

Hans Springer  
Bergstraße 56  
D 91443 Scheinfeld, Germany

+49 (0)9162 92 38 00 (voice)  
+49 (0)231 90 70 254 (fax)  
Springer.H@geod.geonet.de

*Publisher:*

Brigitte Beuttenmueller,  
Stuttgart, Germany

*Language & Style:*

Ron Blicq, Winnipeg, Canada,  
Lisa Moretto, Myrtle Beach SC,  
USA

*Graphics & Illustrations:*

Nils P. Smeby, Oslo, Norway  
Ulf L. Andersson, Skogas and  
Johan Näsström, Enskededalen,  
Sweden

*Production:*

Wolfgang Buchholz, Stuttgart,  
Germany

*Layout:*

Birgit Klink, Matthias Scheurle,  
ViV Werbeagentur, Stuttgart,  
Germany

*Address administration:*

Ami Wright, Cambridge, MA USA  
ami@ziplink.net

*Webmaster* [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org):  
Alexander von Obert, Nürnberg,  
Germany; avo@twh.nbg.de

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Forum 2000 is a unique opportunity to visit London at the beginning of the new millennium. The program committee gives you a lot of more reasons. Look at the special insert in the middle of this issue.

\* Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example

- TR for Translation Issues
- ET for Education & Training

The contributions (articles or comments) are numbered consecutively through the different issues of TC-Forum.

When commenting to any of the contributions, please refer to these "codes" for ease of understanding.

## Localization – Trendy Term or Legitimate Need? (TR 8)

*by Wolfgang Sturz*

Again and again we have seen how modern language use suddenly gives rise to new concepts or terms behind which, as closer observation shows, are simply the same old meanings. Whether it's the "administrative assistant" who used to be the "secretary", or the "human resources manager" who has replaced the "personnel manager" (or even ridiculous examples like "domestic engineer" for "housewife!"), such neologisms often generate little more than a smirk. Is there a similar situation when it comes to "localization"?

### Complex Translation in the Corporate Environment

One thing is certain: translation processes are becoming increasingly complex and are more and more integrated in a comprehensive workflow between other layers of preceding and following work steps.

- Translating is the process of converting a source text in one language into a target text in another language. The goal is to render the contents of the source text in the target language as truly as possible. But translations can only be really useful if they are considered as just one component of a comprehensive localization process.
- Localization is the adapting of a product (or a service) to a new linguistic and cultural region. Along with the translation process, localization includes adapting to country-specific or cultural conditions. To ensure that this localization is done economically, the product or the service should be "internationalized" right from the start.
- The internationalization of a product begins right at the time the product is conceived. Internationalization implies that products are broken down into a cultural and linguistic product core and cultural/linguistic product variables. The product core is implemented globally without any changes, whereas the variables will need to

be adapted from country to country or linguistic region to linguistic region.

The decision to employ internationalization, which does entail higher initial costs at the time of product development, is predicated on a basic corporate decision with respect to globalization.

- Globalization is a corporate-political decision in which the company recognizes that it produces products for the world market (and, as a rule, in the world market). Behind the decision for globalization, however, must be more than simply the decision to sell worldwide. Only companies who are prepared for the long term to adapt their products to the linguistic and cultural expectations of their target markets will achieve and maintain long-term global success.

In the following sections we will use a top-down process to take a closer look at the four key concepts of globalization, internationalization, localization and translation.

### Globalization

Globalization thus represents a corporate-political decision and strategy. Globalization in this sense presumes more than merely the decision to export products. Globalization requires global consideration of one's own position in the world market – and especially a global consideration of the possible application of one's products in the specific markets.

Globalization includes far more aspects than just the product. Companies who want to globalize must first design their products for the world market. But beyond this, they also need to take all the other peripheral corporate activities such as marketing, sales, training, etc. into account. Only with such a comprehensive corporate decision to globalize can the individual steps needed to carry out this strategy be sensibly planned and finally implemented.

## Internationalization

Internationalization first has consequences for the product itself. In line with our introductory definitions, this means that certain variables have to be adapted to make the product readily useable in all global markets.

It should go without saying that internationalization refers also to product documentation, which is a component of the complex man-machine interface system. Technical devices or products (this applies as well to electronic data processing programs) are operated and used by people. It follows that communication is always through a man-machine interface, which in turn must in some parts be language- and culture-neutral.

In this context one often speaks of a product core, which in global terms always remains the same. Here we could be talking about an EDP program or something more tangible like an automobile with no country-specific accessories.

The most important step in internationalization is anticipatory planning. The unchanging characteristics of a product or software must be determined early, even during the development stage. Fixes are often difficult, sometimes impossible, and always expensive.

The localization variables can be divided into product-related and documentation-related:

- Product-related localization variables would include, for example, technical features such as the supply voltage for technical devices. But to this you could add such legally prescribed details as safety features, position and configuration of emergency stop switches, and so on. In data processing systems you would need to account for things like different keyboards used in various countries.
- In addition to the product-related localization variables and the user interfaces unique to a particular linguistic region, the documentation for technical products contains a multitude of localization variables. An example might be dif-

ferent character sets. Even more: when creating documentation, attention must be given to the layout. Translations often end up being longer than the source text, sometimes by as much as 30%. If no space is allowed for such expansions in the layout, the entire pagination will be off in the translation.

## Localization

Localization involves adapting correspondingly prepared products or services to national markets. Localization thus includes the final process steps which are needed to make a product suitable for a different market. In addition to the product features already described under internationalization, localization also requires that cultural aspects be considered.

When it comes to technical documentation, the question often arises to what extent should cultural aspects play a role in the translation. This discussion takes the form of two opposing theses:

1. Thesis: Technical documentation is culturally neutral, since it has only objective, technical content.
2. Counter-thesis: Even technical documentation cannot be culturally neutral, since the contents of a technical document always depends on the acquired knowledge and previous education of the reader. This is necessarily different from linguistic region to region.



## Localization – Trendy Term or Legitimate Need? (TR 8)

The truth – as is usually the case – lies somewhere in between. The more well-written a technical document is, the more objective will be the description of the technical content. It then follows that the rendering into other linguistic and cultural regions will be that much easier. But even today you can find frequent examples of technical documentation where the author has used plays on words, figurative examples and similes.

The following causal chain applies:

1. Technical documentation must be content-correct.
2. Content-correct technical documentation must be objective.
3. Objectively written documentation must be formulated concisely and precisely.
4. Concise and precise texts are nearly always shorter.
5. Concise and precise texts are nearly always more understandable.
6. Concise and precise texts nearly always lend themselves better to translation.
7. Concise and precise texts can be translated at lower cost.

Concisely and precisely formulated documentation therefore results in a direct reduction of the translation volume and the translation costs – not to mention an improvement in the quality of the translation.

### Translation

The actual act of translation as a component of the localization process remains the core of localization. Automatic machine translation – a field which has been researched since the 1950's – still does not offer the quality which could eliminate the human translator. On the other hand, human translators can no longer work without the help of computerized support. An optimal symbiosis has developed over the course of the years:

Most widespread is the use of computers for terminology management. Every company which is committed to globalization should develop and maintain a company-specific glossary where the company-internal terms are precisely defined and translated. But, unfortunately, many people forget that consistent foreign language terminology work depends on consistent terminology work in the original language. There is still much potential for growth in this area.

- Automatic machine translation, for which there are already programmes available costing just a couple of hundred dollars, still does not meet the demands which are placed on a technical translator. With few exceptions, most companies who have invested significant resources over the years to research in this area have since withdrawn their efforts.
- Using translation memories is a relatively new concept. Here, large databases are used to store complete sentences from the source text together with the complete translation in the target language. As soon as the source text appears again in a new document (such repetition is the rule in technical documentation, especially when it comes to frequently needed updates), the translation stored in the database is automatically offered to the translator. He or she can then decide right at the computer terminal whether to accept, reject, or slightly modify the text, based on the immediate context in which it appears and on the translator's familiarity with the field.

Even systems like this require integration into a comprehensive and well-structured documentation system. Only if attention is paid to word-for-word consistency and repetitions when the original document is created can such translation memories be used economically and effectively.

## Preparing the document for translation

Finally, a checklist can be used to summarize a few general tips which can be applied early in the process, to vastly simplify later localization of a product and translation of the product documentation:

- ✓ Avoid abbreviations in the original text.
- ✓ Avoid cartoons whenever possible, since they may take on a whole new meaning (or have no meaning) in another culture.
- ✓ Avoid distinguishing facial expressions on any person depicted in an illustration, since the expression may be interpreted variously in different cultures.
- ✓ Avoid the unconsidered use of colors. Signal colors can have completely different meanings in various cultural regions.
- ✓ Think ahead in terms of using various currency and technical units.
- ✓ Bear in mind that different page sizes/formats are used in different countries. Give some thought as to whether your documentation absolutely must be printed in a national paper format (such as DIN A4 in Germany), or whether it would be better printed in a different format.
- ✓ When using names for imaginary persons used in examples (e.g., "Now Mr. Smith can...") a similarly typical name should be used in the target language. It makes no sense to literally translate or leave names as they are.

- ✓ Remember that certain symbols can be sacred in certain linguistic and cultural regions.
- ✓ Remember that national standards which prevail in your country may not be in force or even known in another country.
- ✓ Remember that different systems for date and time are used in other countries.
- ✓ Avoid whenever possible any reference to country-specific entities such as particular agencies, authorities or similar institutions for which there are no direct equivalents in the foreign country.



### Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Sturz

Owner and general manager of the translation companies Dr. Sturz Übersetzungen and transline International; interested in the legal and didactic demands on technical authoring, the adaptation of source texts for translation, and the efficiency of the processes involved in authoring and translation.

Badstr. 12  
D-72766 Reutlingen  
+49 71 21 94 63-0 (voice)  
+49 71 21 94 63-51 (Fax)  
service@transline.de  
www.sturz.com

## Controlled Siemens Documentary German and TopTrans

by Anne Lehrndorfer and  
Stefanie Schachtl

### Preface by the Editor

*The following paper is a machine-translated text from German into English. And at the same time it explains the technology applied. The German source-text was produced by Anne Lehrndorfer from an interview with Stefanie Schachtl. The final editing of the German text, the preparations for the machine-translation and the translation-process were performed at the Siemens-Nixdorf laboratories.*

*For the following text I have accepted only two paragraphs of the pre-processed text in German language and I have positioned them left of the English result of the translation-process. This result is the exact output of the machine-translation, without any additional editing. As I learnt while communicating with the authors, this quality of machine translation could only be reached by using a machine-controlled pre-processing of the German source-text, which is a component of this system and described in the paper. This process demands a certain amount of preparatory work which is - so to say - shifted away from the translation-process into the pre-translation-phase. The investment of time into this process has yet to be quantified. Nevertheless, the authors agreed that it is not at all negligible - as one will understand. The authors also announced that further investigation will be done throughout the winter, after which the results will be made available.*

*Here follows the English version as it was output from the machine translation - without any post-editing.* (Editor)

Till now, controlled German only existed as a scientific and pedagogical concept for technical documentation. The linguistic or computational linguistic aspects of language control were treated in dissertations and doctoral theses. Rules for syntax and choice of words were trained in industrial tutorials for translatable and intelligible writing. For winter 1998, Siemens researchers now announce the demo version of the TopTrans machine translation system. In the context of TopTrans, the machine-aided Controlled Siemens Documentary German (CSDG) is also presented. This project combines the experiences in controlled German from scientific and pedagogical work in the long term. The following summary shall give a *content* insight into the history of development and functioning of CSDG/TopTrans. Moreover, this summary shall procure a *formal* insight into the present stage of development of CSDG/TopTrans. For this purpose, a pre-edited source text in CSDG is put opposite its English translation. The translation was generated with a preliminary version of TopTrans automatically and has not been post-edited. For the demo version in winter, the Siemens researchers want to concentrate on the improvement of the stylistic quality of the target language (word order).

### Controlled language and machine translation

The concept of controlled language is a mental offspring of machine translation. Also CSDG arose out of the problems the traditional translation software faces today. However, the developers of CSDG/TopTrans emphasise that TopTrans is essentially different from machine translation systems of today's generation. TopTrans translates a text only if it understands it. But, it translates the text in such a way that you need not post-edit it any more. Therefore, the focus of CSDG doesn't lie on the generation of texts that are simple (e.g. *Caterpillar* Fundamental English) and intelligible for the reader in the first place. The most important aim of CSDG is the increase of effectiveness of the machine translation components. However, intelligibility for the reader results as a positive side effect.

(TR 9)

### Functioning of CSDG/TopTrans

#### The text prepared for the translation:

Die Software arbeitet in zwei konzeptuellen Modulen. Zunächst wird interaktiv der deutsche Quelltext auf Einhaltung analysierbarer, syntaktischer und lexikalischer Strukturen überprüft (KSDD). Das System mahnt jede Abweichung vom zugelassenen Vokabular und jede nicht syntaktisch vorhergesehene Struktur an. Mehrdeutige Strukturen werden ebenfalls kenntlich gemacht. ...

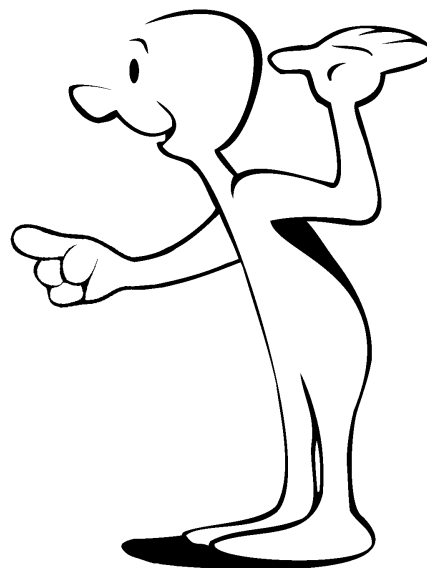
Die Verbesserung der Textstellen, die als Fehler erkannt wurden, erfordert Übung und linguistische Grundkenntnisse. Für die Auflösung der Textstellen, die als Mehrdeutigkeiten erkannt wurden, muss der Autor interaktiv Fragen beantworten. Diese Fragen generiert das System automatisch.

#### The result of the translation:

The software works in two conceptual modules. At first, the German source text is checked (CSDG) for adherence to analysable, syntactic and lexical structures interactively. The system indicates every deviation of the licensed vocabulary and every syntactically not anticipated structure. Ambiguous structures are also marked. ...

The correction of the text passages that were recognised as errors requires practice and linguistic basic knowledge. For the resolution of the text passages that were recognised as ambiguities, the author must answer questions interactively. The system generates these questions automatically.

So, only the structures the software engineers have defined as controlled German before they are translated. Only if the structures are unambiguous and correct in this sense, they are passed on as semantic representation (meta-language) to TopTrans. Then, TopTrans carries out the transfer into the semantic representation of the target language and the grammatical and lexical generation. Also means of the layout (e.g. fonts or labels of document formatting) are transferred into the target language. However, the TopTrans editor only supports HTML labels at present.



## Controlled Siemens Documentary German and TopTrans (TR 9)

### Advantages

#### The text prepared for the translation:

Die Vorteile dieses Systems entsprechen den bekannten Vorteilen von kontrollierten Sprachen. An die Stelle des Aufwands für die Nachbereitung von MÜ-Texten in den jeweiligen Zielsprachen tritt der Aufwand für das Pre-Editing in der Quellsprache. Wenn man in nur eine Zielsprache übersetzt, ermöglicht TopTrans eine Produktivitätssteigerung um den Faktor 2. Dieser Faktor erhöht sich um 1 für jede weitere Zielsprache.

TopTrans fungiert zudem als automatische Stil- und Rechtschreibprüfung und arbeitet somit autoren-spezifischen Stilabweichungen entgegen. Darüberhinaus prüft TopTrans lexikalische Konsistenz bezüglich der zugeschalteten Fachterminologien.

#### The result of the translation:

The advantages of this system conform to the well known advantages of controlled languages. The effort for pre-editing in the source language replaces the effort for post-editing of MT texts in the respective target languages. If you translate into only one target language, TopTrans permits an increase of productivity by the factor 2. This factor increases by 1 for every further target language.

TopTrans functions as automatic correction of style and orthography moreover and therefore works contrary to idiosyncratic stylistic deviations. On top of it, TopTrans checks lexical consistency with respect to the connected technical terminologies.

### Future

TopTrans transfers syntactic structures into a meta-language at first and only generates the target language from there. Therefore, the development of every new target language is confined to the respective language specific generation component. Thus, Chinese has been announced as further target language already for the end of the year 2000. In further steps, the languages of the EC shall be added.

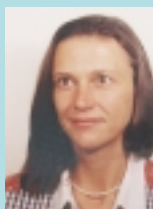
### Marketing

The different technical operational areas of CSDG/TopTrans require different terminologies and restrictions. Therefore, the software shall be adapted to the individual customer. Especially the training for CSDG shall be adjusted to the needs of the user. Because of a narrow contact with the customers, the software engineers of CSDG/TopTrans expect to achieve a further increase of the productivity and quality of software and languages.



**Anne Lehrndorfer,  
Dr. Phil, MA;**

Assistant Professor for Technical Writing and Controlled Language  
Gerlosstr. 2a  
D-81671 München  
+49 89 40 07 89 (voice)  
+49 89 40 07 09 (fax)  
lehrndorfer@t-online.de



**Stefanie Schachtl**

Zentrale Technik IK 5 (Mensch-Maschine Kooperation)  
Siemens AG  
Otto-Hahn-Ring 6  
+49 89 636 5 14 97 (voice)  
+49 89 636 4 98 02 (fax)  
stefanie.schachtl@mchp.siemens.de

## Two Years Later: The Triumphs, Trials and Tribulations of Life with a Translation Memory Tool (TR 10)

by Peter Kreitmeier

Looking at escalating costs and short deadlines for foreign-language documentation, we decided over two years ago that the time had come for a hands-on study of translation tools and their practical benefits. Machine-translation systems such as Systran and Logos were not an option; instead, we directed our attention toward Translation Memory tools. We tested everything the market had to offer before finally settling on Transit from Star. There were two main reasons for our choice:

- The comprehensive package of powerful filters: As a service provider we cater for all mainstream DTP systems and word processors (Winword, FrameMaker, Interleaf, and so on). Since our primary orientation is toward Interleaf and FrameMaker we could ignore manufacturers who did not have good working filters for these packages. At that time very few companies offered an effective Interleaf filter.
- The price: We had to convince thirty-odd freelance translators to move over to a TMS tool, so price was a frontline issue. Star won out over many rival companies by offering "light" licenses at an attractive price. These licenses, as the name suggests, are stripped of certain functions such as import/export filtering and segmentation. This is not necessarily a disadvantage for freelance translators if the service provider prepares the translation projects, as we do.

However, over the past two years, certain drawbacks have emerged:

- Transit's user interface could scarcely be termed intuitive: some features are throwbacks to the dark days of DOS. File management suffers accordingly (Transit has yet to achieve the 32-bit level on the evolutionary tree).
- The software is sophisticated but the user documentation is woefully inadequate. There is no Getting Started section and users progress rapidly downward through disappointment to discouragement to nail-biting frustra-

tion as the User Guide consistently fails to explain major concepts in the Transit environment.

- Project preparation is cumbersome. The value of thorough preparation is undeniable, however, because this phase (text segmentation, choice of reference documents) has a direct and powerful impact on output quality. Hidden text in online help documents, for example, often has to be tagged to ensure that it is not translated, but isolating these strings can be difficult. Care also has to be taken in defining rulesets for handling abbreviations. Many of these problems would not arise if writers take the time to consider how quirky formatting can hamper translation.
- Translators see only a few language-pair segments on the screen at a time. The information content of graphics and cross-references, for example, is left behind in the original document. This drawback is inherent to nearly all Translation Manager systems. Forced by the tool to adopt a sentence-by-sentence orientation, translators who are not content to work at one remove from the subject matter find themselves switching back and forth between the TM user interface and a paper or DTP original.
- The data has to be managed in two systems (Transit and the DTP programme). Once the files have been exported from Transit for proofing, subsequent changes can entail twice the work to ensure that the Transit reference library accurately reflects the final DTP product. The TMS tool is unable to cope with corrections of certain kinds. This is true especially of changes to tables and graphics. Errors tend to crop up again in the next version and refuse to go away as the document progresses through each successive release.

Now for the good news:

- Updates are much easier to handle. There is no need to make line-by-line comparisons to pinpoint changes before a new document is generated. These checks are highly automated and error-free.

## Two Years Later: (TR 10)

- All the files in a project can be loaded into Global View, an excellent platform for quality-oriented functions (such as search and replace).
- Online terminology does away with wearisome searches through serried ranks of well-thumbed dictionaries. The automatic terminology check is ideal for monitoring consistency – assuming that someone of a lexicographical bent has compiled a dictionary.
- Post-editing is much less time-consuming, especially with Interleaf and FrameMaker documents. This, too, is subject to a proviso – the source documents have to be adequately formatted.
- Translation quality improves, because departures from one-to-one translation accuracy show up more readily in workflows.

To sum up:

Transit is a help in many ways; in others it is a hindrance. After weighing all the advantages and disadvantages, here at ITL we still believe we were right to adopt this software package.

Deadline, price and quality are the mainstays of every translation project: Transit improves all three. Translation Memory systems in general are a viable proposition and Transit in particular has a great deal to offer, although it has its constraints.



**Peter Kreitmeier**

Head of Translation Department  
itl GmbH, München  
Untere Muhlstrasse 13  
D-80999 München  
+49 89 89 26 23-38 (voice)  
+49 89 89 26 23-11 (fax)  
pkreitmeier@itl.de

## Fuzzy + Expensive = Useful?

by *Gabriele Bock*

Many people consider computer aided translation (CAT) to be the ultimate solution for all problems in the translation business. However, aspects call for attention and caution:

- The application surplus may be smaller than expected
- There are problems with fuzzy matching
- Handling of complex systems is tedious
- The costs for establishing and maintaining the system are high

### Often There is Little Surplus

Computers support the work of technical writers and translators by

- storing documents and information modules for updating and revising,
- comparing versions and highlighting the differences
- linking terminology databases and professional authoring systems, and
- providing online dictionaries for various translation tasks.

CAT systems integrate proven components into one application and add the fuzzy match technology.

### How Fuzzy Can the Match Be?

You won't have to translate the same sentence twice. What a relief! Provided the former version of the document was stored and some parts need to be updated, the computer shows the changed passages only and offers similar sentences from translation memory, i. e. one or more fuzzy matches.

The number of identical words is one indicator for fuzziness - hopefully not the only one. The translator takes care of the rest by choosing adequate words for the missing parts, preferably from the terminology database.

The quality of computer aided translation depends on the quality of the databases. The system can only offer suitable matches and translations, if

(TR 11)

- translation memory and terminology database are well filled, well managed, and well maintained, and
- the algorithm for the fuzzy match is adequate (i.e. it not only provides a word match, but also is context sensitive and allows for grammatical variation).

Fuzzy match suggestions are useful, as long as qualified translators will judge their suitability and acceptability, and as long as they can override the computer's suggestion when necessary. The danger is that some matches might be accepted out of laziness or because of time constraints. Another risk is that the translator may see only the paragraphs to be changed on the screen without being aware of the context, and so may choose wrong words.

### How Many Clicks for Changing One Word?

Like any writer, most experienced translators are able to type fluently. CAT systems are mouse directed: Passages, words, footnotes, tags, and other elements are inserted by mouse clicks. Yet if you need three clicks to change one word, then typing the word is faster! Many professionals find the extensive use of the mouse bothersome and inconvenient.

### Saving or Not?

In a German advertisement for a CAT System you get the impression that almost immediately after you bought the system, your company will save at least 30% of money and time in making translations. The empirical proof is not convincing, because the advertisement focuses on the last step in the line: the actual translation task. Costs for implementation, data collection, administration, and updating systems and databases are neglected. To implement and adapt a powerful system for computer aided translation is no bargain, if it is to be done properly. Furthermore, the burden of continuous updating and managing structured information, terminology databases, and multilin-

gual versions is not taken over by the computer, but the prerequisite for an efficient use of the CAT system by translators.

Even though translators create translation memories as part of their translation job, their documents must still be checked before they are stored in the database, if they are to achieve and preserve consistency of information, terminology, and style.

Undoubtedly, a lot of information in technical communication is repetitive, such as updating and revising documents, and reusing stored material for similar translation tasks, and so suitable for CAT. But engineers keep inventing new technologies - and new names for them - that need to be communicated to customers and clients. For these, little information will be stored in the database, so CAT can offer little help.

### Conclusions

CAT is a useful tool if applied by qualified and experienced translators to large quantities of repetitive information that need frequent updating and revising. Where consistency of information and terminology exist, the overall quality of multilingual documentation can be increased by an appropriately set up CAT system. But if cutting costs is your primary motivation to introduce CAT in your company, you may be disappointed. Do you recall how much money your company "saved" when DTP was introduced? CAT may cost more than you expect, but it offers the chance to increase content quality by giving translators (and authors) the best possible support. Translating is a genuine human occupation, it is neither a computer business nor mere process engineering.



**Dr. Gabriele Bock**  
 bcc communication consult  
 Rotter Str. 35  
 D-86911 Diessen am Ammersee  
 +49 88 07 9 43 52 (voice)  
 +49 8807 9 43 54 (fax)  
 bock.bcc@t-online.de

# Karlstad, Sweden – a Centre of Excellence in Technical Doc

*by Jeanne Lewis-Sturmhoefel*

How did Karlstad, a medium-sized town in central Sweden, come to be a "centre of excellence" in Technical Communication?

Well, a lot of it has to do with Ericsson. In the mid-80s the company began to concentrate on electronic design and technical information and asked the University of Karlstad to provide its whole staff with training in technical English.

There was  
no school  
or university  
training in  
Technical  
Communi-  
cation.

I was given the job of organising and implementing this training programme, and in doing so I discovered the plight of engineers who were required to produce information about their high-tech products (in both Swedish and English), but who had absolutely no training for this kind of work. There was practically no school or university training in Technical Communication in Sweden (or, in fact, in Scandinavia or in Europe as a whole at that time) and I decided to do something about it.

The University of Karlstad seemed an ideal place to start such a course. It not only had engineering and science programmes, but also had all the subjects required for technical communication. So Göran Frödin, the (then) Managing Director of Ericsson Programatic (now Ericsson Infotech), and I vowed to make Karlstad a centre of Technical Communication - and we did!



## Teaching Engineers Communication Skills at the University of Karlstad

The course was developed in close collaboration with Bengt Nilsson, an experienced technical communicator who at the time was the head of Ericsson Programatic's Technical Communication Department, and started in January 1988. The focus was entirely on developing the skills needed to prepare good technical documentation. (See Brigitte Beuttenmüller's and Ron Blicq's articles in TC-Forum 2-98.) No engineering or technology of any kind is included in the course; it is offered as further education for qualified engineers and technicians who want to improve their communication skills and be able to produce better information, either because they use these skills in their present jobs or work as technical communicators.

As it is mainly people who are already qualified and working in industry who are aware of the need for these skills, we developed a part-time course which can be combined with work or other studies for one, two or three years (corresponding to one and a half year's full-time study) rather than a full-time degree programme. And, as it is the only course of this kind in Scandinavia, it is run as a distance course with meetings Thursday-Saturday four or five times a semester (about 9 times a year).

In addition to Technical Communication the syllabus also includes Swedish (Technical Writing), Technical English, Art and Graphic Design, Information Design, Communication Studies, Information Production and Commercial Law. There is also a considerable input by experienced practising technical communicators and other professional experts.

There is strong emphasis on practical training. Project assignments at the end of the first and second years require that students produce correct, appropriate and effective information for a specific purpose, in correct and appropriate language (Swedish or English), with appropriate use of graphics and layout, using appropriate media

## Documentation (ET 3)

and with an assessment of the production cost and other financial factors and constraints (such as product liability). In this way the students apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired on the course in a simulation of the real world of the technical communicator. This project work is supervised by an experienced practising technical communicator.

In the first year the emphasis is mainly on acquiring practical communication skills. In the second year the focus is more on the acquisition of knowledge - both within the academic subjects studied and in the professional field. And in the third year the syllabus includes current research and scientific method, and students are required to conduct a research project and write a dissertation on it.

Some of the students, in fact, are already working as technical communicators and many others get jobs as technical communicators during or immediately after the course. Companies like Ericsson Infotech and Ericsson Telecom are continually expanding, and an increasing number of other employers are becoming aware of the importance of high-quality technical information and of the existence of a course which trains people to produce it.

### Future Development

Karlstad will become a fully-fledged university on 1 January 1999 and there are plans not only to further develop the present part-time course but also to develop a full-time course which can be incorporated in a degree in engineering, science or data processing. By the year 2000 we hope to be able to offer a complete degree programme in Technical Communication.

We also hope to have greater resources for research and for expanding our contacts with other universities offering courses in Technical Communication, not only the Swedish universities at Eskilstuna and Malmö but also universities in other countries. We have had considerable contact with Coventry University and we are very interested in the type of co-operation and exchange of ideas that was discussed at Forum 95 and, hopefully, will be revived at Forum 2000.



**Jeanne Lewis-Sturmhoefel**

Technical Communication  
University of Karlstad  
651 88 Karlstad, Sweden  
+46 (0)54-83 83 81 (voice)  
+46 (0)54-83 84 32 (fax)  
jeanne.sturmhoefel@hks.se

## Announcing FORUM 2000

### Place and Date

June 13 – 14, 2000  
Commonwealth Centre  
London, England

### Proposed Topics

The FORUM committee is looking for a variety of interesting topics to be presented in a variety of formats. Here are some suggested topics:

### The Theme

#### Technical Communicators Leading the Way!

As we enter the new millennium Technical Communicators will make their mark in history. Documenting technology is our responsibility and, with the advancement of tools and equipment in all aspects of life, Technical Communicators will have to seize the opportunity to lead users into the future.

### Understanding Trends

- Changes in the communicator's role:
  - Why should we lead the way?
  - How will we lead the way?
  - What goals will we have?
- Changes in the definition of information
- Changes in information structures and architectures: for example, online indexes, random-access (hypertext) documents, context-sensitive online help files, mixed-media libraries
- Cross-cultural issues: localisation, wordless manuals, world-ready interfaces and documents
- Writing and reading online versus on paper
- Telecommuting (working at home)
- Distance learning
- Trends in project management
- Ethics for the new media: Internet, World-Wide Web, Interactive TV

### Planning Professional Development

- New and reconfigured skills
- Training needs
- Interdisciplinary/collaboration issues
- Job descriptions/responsibility sets
- Managing and developing your resume, CV, or Portfolio
- Usability issues – user/reader needs



## Mastering Tools and Technology

- Authoring tools, interface design, markup standards
- Information delivery and retrieval tools
- Translation tools
- Correspondence and administrative communication tools
- Internet issues: ownership and control, cost, security/privacy, logical and physical information structure
- Ultra-advanced technology: intuitive machines, voice input ...

## Presentation and Format of Forum 2000

Forum 2000 will have a variety of ways you can present information. When planning your presentation decide which format you are most comfortable with and which format is best for your information.

**Idea Markets:** This is the core of the Forum Concept. Ten to twelve "activators" are gathered in a large ballroom each standing beside two flip-charts. One chart has a topic title and a list of issues or questions the activator plans to explore. Participants roam around the room and engage in conversation and discussion with others who have joined a particular activator. Idea Markets typically last 45 to 60 minutes and activators often leave the session knowing more about their topic than when they came.

**Brainstorm Sessions:** If an Idea Market topic becomes very active and participants want to explore it in more depth, the activator can sign up for a room to brainstorm ideas or solutions relating to the Idea Market topic. This is not a pre-arranged session; it happens as a result of an Idea Market.

**Sort-and-Build Sessions:** These are similar to the Brainstorm sessions except the group will leave with a deliverable, such as a set of guidelines,

standards or policies relating to the Idea Market topic.

**Information Sessions:** This is a new format for Forum conferences. Presenters will deliver the information in a lecture or theatre style room with various visual aids. Each presenter will be one of three in a room and be allotted a total of 30 minutes to present and answer questions. This format is common at North American conferences. Presenters may want to present an Idea Market on the same topic as an Information Session.

**Debate Sessions:** This is a new format for presenting information at a Forum conference. You will be asked to submit a paper describing your opinion on one of the topics listed below. The Forum Program Committee will organise presenters in teams of two; each with an opposing viewpoint. During the 45 minute session, participants will hear each side of the argument and be able to ask the presenters questions about their opinions and the topic.

### Debate Topics

1. Outsourcing projects versus in-house writing staff: How do we manage budgets, quality, and project schedules?
2. Qualification or Certification recognition for Technical Communicators: Do we need it?
3. Education versus Experience: Which has more value?
4. Practical versus Theoretical education curriculum: What do Technical Communication students need?
5. Do educational programs need to be accredited?

**For more information about Forum 2000 contact:**

### Peter Greenfield

The Institute of Scientific and  
Technical Communicators (ISTC)  
Blackhorse Road  
Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 1YY  
England  
istc@istc.org.uk

## Letters to the Editor:

### To Serif or Not?

I'm currently in the final year of my MA in Technical Authorship and have come across a small anomaly which I hope TC-Forum readers may be able to help with. I am looking to improve the readability of our documents by examining layout, font type, font size and so on. All the research I have read so far has indicated that serif fonts are better for online and sans serif fonts are better for the printed word. However, when I did a small in-house survey I found that the favourite printed font was Arial. In fact 4 of the top five were sans-serif!

I know much of the research has been done in the US and I wondered - is there a "geographical" preference for sans-serif fonts in Europe? I know my results are from a small sample, still the results are intriguing.

Damien Braniff  
 Damien\_Braniff@PAC.CO.UK

### Letter from Klaus Daube:

The article by Ulrich Thiele (There goes the productivity..., TC-Forum 2-98, TO 7) points out a major issue of service provided in the documentation area.

There is a big difference in the computing environment between service providers and departments in companies supported by some IT staff: the customer dictates!

In the current harsh economic climate a service provider cannot escape even ill-behaved projects (or his income decreases further). The burden he must carry to a large extent has its roots in "The blind leading the enlightened" (TC-Forum 2-98,

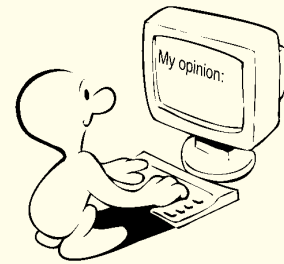
TO 8), as people with no appropriate knowledge at the customer side set the conditions in a documentation project:

- the tools to be used (and even their version!) are prescribed by the customer
- multiple versions of one tool do not behave well on the PC (try, for example, to run a German and an English version of the same SW concurrently)
- the data provided by the customer very often are accompanied by incomplete or faulty information about these data
- the work flow forced by the customer does not fit the task (e.g. TIFFs must be imported into Corel Draw to generate a WMF, although FrameMaker could handle the TIFF directly).

This all adds to a huge amount of time fiddling with PC concerns which have nothing to do with the real task. This waste of time is nourished by many SW companies (the bigger, the more) with their hyped marketing effort ("everything" is sooo easy with their product), which is taken for granted by the "blind" (but they have the budget).

How to educate the customer (better: their management)?

Klaus Daube  
 Docu + Design Daube;  
 Schäracher 11; CH-8053 Zürich  
 Technical documentation & consultancy; On-line and paper  
 +41-1-4228625 (voice/fax)  
 daube@dial.eunet.ch  
 HTTP://www.daube.ch/



### A Memo From Gina Hertel:

Dear Hans:

I need to convince a client that he needs a User manual to go with an application that my company developed for him. My whole argument, basically, is that if people don't know how to use what you have developed, it's worthless. Does anyone have any canned language to this effect? Does anyone have any statistics on the topic?

Gina Hertel, Manager, Technical Communications  
 Alpha Technologies, Inc.  
 ghertel@alpha88.com

The first (we believe humorous) reply Gina received:

### Gina:

You don't need a manual! You just need a small card that says:

"If you have any problems using our application, please call our technical support line at 1-800-XXX-XXX."

Try it! Hand your client a business card that has their company logo on it with that message. Tell your client that companies routinely budget technical support calls at \$150 per call (as a rule of thumb), whereas a single copy of a manual costs about \$10. See how they react!

Would anyone else like to contribute to this dialogue?

## National Contact Persons (NCPs) Professional Events

**Australia:** Julie Fisher  
+61 3365 2592 (fax)  
strype@onaustralia.com.au

**Belgium:** Patrick Goyvaerts  
+32 3 240 3759 (fax)  
goyvaerp@btmaa.bel.alcatel.be

**Canada:** Ron Blicq  
+1 204 488 7294 (fax)  
rgi\_ron@compuserve.com

**Denmark:** Thomas O'Connor  
+45 4226 9322 (fax)  
toc@foss-electric.dk

**England:** Gerry D. Gentle  
+44 1462 483 480 (fax)  
ns68@dial.pipex.com

**France:** Jean-Paul Bardez  
+33 1487 56566 (fax)  
100423.1635.compuserve.com

**Germany:** Brigitte Beuttenmueller  
+49 711 657 40 13 (fax)  
Beuttenmueller.B@t-online.de

**India:** Guru Kamath  
guruk@giasbm01@vsnl.net.in

**Israel:** Julian Zelenko  
+972 9 771 8189 (fax)  
techstyle@netvision.net.il

**Netherlands:** Rob Punselie  
+31 4027 57710 (fax)  
punselie@msbe.nl

**Norway:** Tove Østberg  
+47 2202 6050 (fax)  
tove.ostberg@comtext.no

**Spain:** J. Antonio Bardera Pinuela  
+34 45 185 099 (fax)

Dr. Rodolfo Beceiro Mangold  
+34 1 638 5313 (voice/fax)

**South Africa:** Jan Roodbol  
+27 1283 1553 (fax)

**Sweden:** Johan Naestroem  
+46 08 648 00 37 (voice/fax)  
johan.nasstrom@odata.se

**USA:** Jeffrey L. Hibbard  
+1 9149 452 018 (fax)  
hibbard@watson.ibm.com

Thomas L. Warren  
+1 4057 446 326 (fax)  
twarren@vm1.ucc.okstate.edu

Please feel free to contact either the Editor or your NCP for any questions concerning TC-Forum.

TC-Forum provides information about upcoming events for technical communicators. These include conferences, seminars, calls for papers and other information of professional interest. TC-Forum accepts information about non-profit events only. Send information to the Editor (address see Impressum page 3).

### 30 November - 2 December 1998 IST 98 Vienna Conference and Exhibition

#### Living and Working in the Information Society

Information society technologies increasingly pervade all industrial and social activities. At the same time, the technologies underpinning the development of the information society are in rapid evolution, with advances in information processing and communications opening up exciting new possibilities in the way we live, work and enjoy ourselves.

- The components of the conference and exhibition are:
- Living and Working
- Exhibitions
- Investment Conference
- Investment Forum
- Information society technologies (IST) Programme
- Workshops and Seminars
- TV Broadcast
- Webcast
- Teleconference Global 360
- Idealist and Idealist-East: National Contact Points

For detailed up-to date Information see the homepage at: [www.cordis.lu.ist98](http://www.cordis.lu.ist98)

6-7 May 1999, Innsbruck, Austria  
**tekem Conference**

#### Producing in Europe

For further information contact: [www.tekem.de](http://www.tekem.de)

16-19 May 1999

#### STC's 46th Annual Conference

will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio.

For details, please contact:

[stc@stc-va.org](mailto:stc@stc-va.org)

<http://www.stc-va.org>

24-28 August 1999,  
Innsbruck (Austria)

#### TKE '99, Multimedia and Content for a New Millennium 5th International Congress on Terminology and Knowledge Engineering

organized by

Association for Terminology and Knowledge Transfer (GTW)  
International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm)  
International Network for Terminology (TermNet)

#### Objectives of the Congress

On behalf of the Association for Terminology and Knowledge Transfer - Gesellschaft für Terminologie und Wissenstransfer (GTW) we are pleased to announce the 5th International Congress on Terminology and Knowledge Engineering TKE '99. In continuation of the first four TKE Congresses in Trier (1987 and 1990), Cologne (1993) and Vienna (1996), TKE'99 will address world-wide interests in the interdisciplinary methods of Terminology Science, Information Science and Computer Science. It should furthermore help to achieve the "universal availability of information and

## Professional Events

knowledge" via computerized methods, multimedia content-oriented net applications and other tools, open new horizons for more efficient applications based upon this integration of methodologies and elicit the interest and participation of experts working in the fields that are gradually drawing nearer from the point of theory and methodology such as Terminology research, Knowledge engineering, Language engineering, Computational philosophy, Classification theory, Information & Documentation computer-assisted instruction/learning, Computerized terminography, Specialized translation, Technical writing.

We welcome submissions of papers describing substantial, original and unpublished research contributions. TKE '99 will be divided into 8 sections concentrating on the following areas of research:

- Knowledge Theory and Terminology
- Knowledge Data Management
- Multimedia and Content
- Language Engineering and Terminology
- Documentation and Terminology
- World Wide Web and Terminology
- Multilingualism and Terminology
- Specialist Communication and Terminology

Further information available at<sup>1)</sup>.

**30th August - 3rd September 1999**  
The 12th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes LSP '99

### Perspectives for the new millennium

We are pleased to announce the 12th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes "LSP '99", organised by the European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen. The working languages of the Symposium are English, French, German and Italian; this refers to the oral presentations as well as to the planned publication following the Symposium.

We welcome the submission of abstracts describing substantial, original and unpublished research contributions in these fields.

- LSP Theory
- Linguistic aspects of LSP
- Cognitive aspects of LSP
- Language technology
- Computational linguistics and LSP
- Knowledge representation
- LSP-lexicography and terminography
- LSP-communication from a diachronic-synchronic perspective
- LSP-translation and interpretation
- LSP-communication in lesser-used languages
- LSP-pedagogy
- LSP within the EU
- LSP and law

Workshops may be arranged.

Further Information<sup>2)</sup>:

June 2000 in the UK:

### Forum 2000

**Technical Communication**

**Leading the way.**

See page 16 – 17

## Thank you to the Sponsors of TC-FORUM

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1) Gesellschaft für Terminologie und Wissenstransfer (GTW)  
Universität Innsbruck  
Fischnallerstr. 4  
A-6020 Innsbruck (Austria)  
Fax +43 512 507 2966  
<http://gtw-org.uibk.ac.at>

2) Accademia Europea Bolzano  
\* Via Weggenstein 12/a I-39100 Bolzano, Italia  
Europäische Akademie Bozen  
\* Weggensteinstraße 12/a I-39100 Bozen Italy  
Tel: +39 471 306 111  
Fax: +39 471 306 199  
LSP99@eurac.edu  
<http://www.eurac.edu/LSP99>