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TERMINOLOGY IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

The article describes terminology practice in the in-house language services department of a Zurich-based holding company: the SIS Group provides clearing and settlement as well as securities safekeeping and management services for Swiss and foreign banks. The group operates internationally; business documentation is issued in German, English and French. The members of the language services department are multi-task professionals assuming the role of "translator-terminologists".

In view of the ever increasing complexity of corporate terminology, the team of translator-terminologists recognised the need to create and maintain its own terminology resources to facilitate internal and external information and communication, while improving corporate knowledge sharing and transfer, initially within the team, later throughout the entire organisation.

In 2000, the team of translator-terminologists introduced computer-assisted translation (CAT) technology comprising a translation memory (TM) tool and a terminology management system (TMS) and started creating a multilingual terminology database (TDB).

2 TRANSLATOR-TERMINOLOGIST's CONTRIBUTION TO SHARING AND TRANSFERRING CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE

Translation-targeted terminology practice creates a vast reservoir of concept-specific corporate knowledge by meticulous selection and classification of information in the texts to be translated or other corporate publications. This procedure collects service, process and product-specific knowledge and processes it in three languages; the database can be accessed by simple query.

As systematic collectors of multilingual, context-specific data, the translator-terminologists assume the role of knowledge owners.

This implies that they deal with "corporate-explicit knowledge" i.e. knowledge relevant to the organisation that has already been documented in various forms and can therefore be transferred using electronic tools.

The focus of this "knowledge ownership" is not on the information contained in the terminological data selected as this information was already extant in other internal or external sources. The accent is rather on how the data was retrieved and/or re-elaborated, i.e. according to specific principles, before being assembled in a "corporate knowledge data base". The translator-terminologists contribute to corporate knowledge sharing and transfer throughout the organisation by making this data base available to all members of staff,.

Since the creation and sharing/transferring of knowledge would be meaningless if it were not used effectively, it is of fundamental importance to ensure that the intended users of the data base use it and use it systematically. Knowledge utilisation, another element in the chain of knowledge management processes, implies the de facto application of accumulated corporate knowledge for task processing or completion and/or business processes.

It may be argued that ensuring the regular use of corporate-explicit knowledge at organisation level exceeds the bounds of translation and terminology, especially in this case where the team adopts the role of internal service providers without being business process decision-makers.

However, meticulous terminology practice in conjunction with a pro-active and cooperative approach in interaction with other specialists within the organisation can significantly help to establish sound practice in leveraging corporate knowledge. This is discussed in detail below.

As all knowledge management processes are closely interrelated, a change to any one of them may effect others; translator-terminologists can be taken as knowledge managers or – and as Peter Drucker put it –, individuals who "make knowledge productive" (Frappaolo 2002:24) for their specific contribution to knowledge sharing and transfer.

3 TERMINOLOGY PRACTICE IN A LEARNING ORGANISATION: A PHASED APPROACH

As previously stated, from the outset the translator-terminologist team considered terminology practice an ongoing task to be carried out systematically within their "learning" team.

The targets were clear: continuous enlargement of the multilingual TDB leading to terminology consistency and therefore higher translation quality. In a broader sense, this new ongoing assignment in the translator-terminologists' portfolio was geared to promoting knowledge sharing and transfer not only at team level, but throughout the organisation.

The translator-terminologists aimed to apply this phased approach to their interaction with the business specialists in the various departments, especially those involved in the production of multilingual documentation. Their objective was to promote a cooperative and
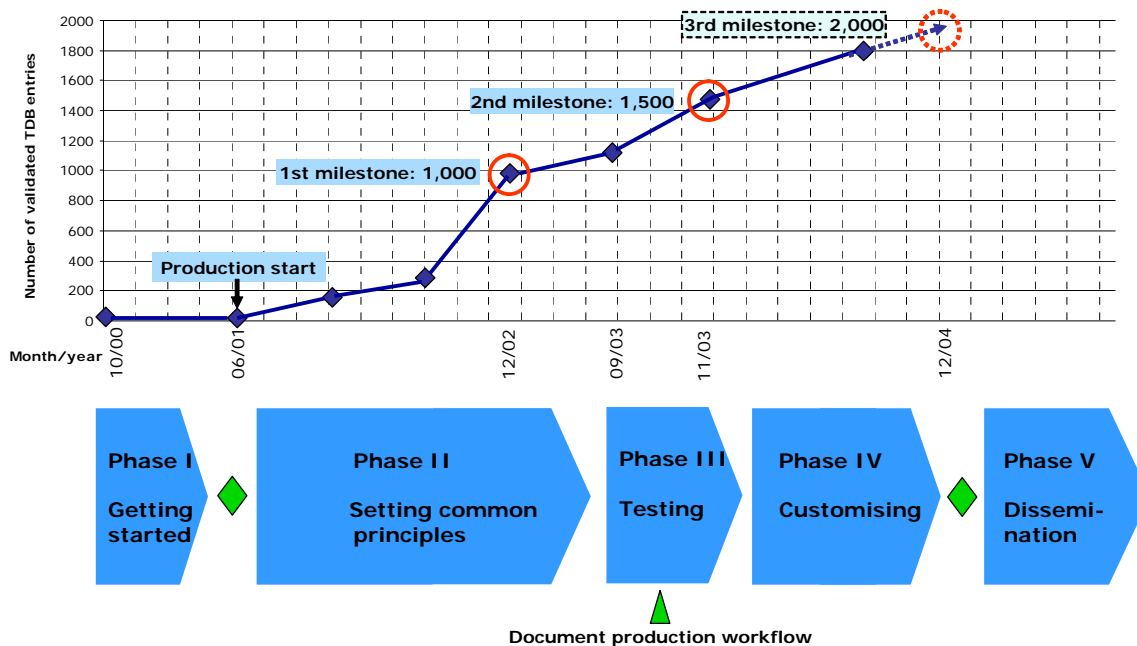
interactive working environment as part of a "learning organisation" in which all members would view future success as based on continuous learning and adaptive behaviour[1].

Consequently, the translator-terminologists wished to promote awareness of the added value terminology represents for the entire organisation; a means of achieving more efficiency in multilingual document production with a view to increasing their quality and, consequently, productivity.

Once the multilingual TDB is available to all members of staff, regular use by the latter will also contribute to establishing a consensus-based corporate language. This will also enhance the corporate image.

The translator-terminologists adopted a phased approach to achieve this objective. Clear targets were defined, specific measures taken and resources allocated for the various phases, the last of which – still in progress – is aimed at maximising knowledge utilisation within the framework of specific task completion.

The chart plots the timeframe for completion of the various phases; these are explained in detail in the following sections.

Phases in terminology practice: from the outset to the present

The actual timeframe for each of the phases described is of no great relevance in the present case as the translator-terminologists carry out terminology-related tasks on a best-effort basis; in other words, when they have the time and are not under pressure to deliver translations.

3.1 Phase I: Getting started

The translator-terminologists defined terminology targets for knowledge sharing and transfer purposes at team level before starting the actual terminology selection.

In this first phase, the main target was to define the most suitable TDB structure and to ensure that the first entries covered the most essential terms of the organisation's business areas, especially the official designations of products and/or services – though without specifying a threshold number of entries. Assuring this was not difficult, since the team primarily entered the terms from the texts to be translated and their equivalents in the other TDB languages.

The translator-terminologists also carried out a certain number of preliminary tasks to ensure optimum assignment procedure:

- Build-up of a document base (representative texts, magazines, specialist publications etc.)
- Consultation of specialists within the organisation to define the subjects to be covered
- Revision of the subjects
- Modelling of the terminology database including definition of a model for data input
- Processing/revision of an existing glossary of some 550 records
- Import of this glossary into the TDB
- Assignment of responsibilities and organisation of terminology practice

During this phase, lasting a good six months, particular attention was paid to setting general guidelines for future terminology practice; in other words, terminology selection, extraction, validation, updating, etc. These guidelines for professional terminology management were aimed at guaranteeing or, at least, largely contributing to overall consistency.

3.2   Phase II: Establishing principles for terminology practice

The translator-terminologists set the following three guiding principles for terminology practice in compiling the TDB:

- **Quality comes before quantity, with special emphasis on systematic updating, meticulous validation and exclusive use of well-established sources of terminological data**[2]

   The quality of the terminological data is more important than the quantity: all subjects represented in the TDB shall be covered by the relevant entries; concepts and/or terms entered correspond to the currently used specialist-preferred terminology.

Each entry is proofread by two translator-terminologists besides the author. Particular attention is also given to selecting only reliable sources and confirming veracity of content by multiple source comparison where ever necessary.

- **Terminological data is both descriptive and prescriptive and is consensus-based**

    The TDB will become the official terminological reference with respect to corporate preference. In order to establish a given corporate terminology, certain terms are defined as preferred whereas others are considered as synonyms or even disregarded, for example, in view of internal usage, spelling conventions, etc.

    Last but not least, and since the TDB is intended to be a tailor-made corporate knowledge resource, the translator-terminologists confer with internal specialists when defining certain complex terms.

    TDB languages are handled on a par basis

    The TDB entries must contain all relevant mandatory concept-related and/or term-related data in the three languages used (German, English and French) to be complete and ready for the validation process. Only one model has been defined for data input as each of the translator-terminologists in the team has sufficient general know-how to enter data in the three languages, whereas he is involved in the validation process according to his specific language competencies.

To ensure consistency and provide an instrument for knowledge sharing and transfer at team level, the translator-terminologists resolved to compile a "white paper" on terminology practice. This regularly updated and/or extended paper is a compendium of the knowledge acquired progressively in terminology practice. It is illustrated with some 108 extracts from validated TDB entries and 9 complete TDB entries. The 125 page white paper highlights and defines the following aspects of TDB terminology practice:

- Use and scope of all data categories and data elements
- General procedures for entering terms
- Handling of the most frequent problems in multilingual terminology practice (e.g. overlapping or partial equivalence of term meaning in the different languages; terminology gaps; accepted non-synonymous designations of a term for more practical usage; blending of different language registers to signify specific terms etc.)
- Methods (e.g. procedure for entry validation, TDB management and planning, including statistical monitoring of terminology production)
- Complementary information (e.g. language and bibliographical codes, accepted format of internal and external publication titles and source details in the TDB entries)

This second phase came to an end when the first milestone in terminology practice was reached. At this juncture the TDB contained the first validated 1,000 multilingual entries.

3.3   Phase III: TDB user-acceptance test

Knowledge is meaningless if it is not used. It would be pointless to maintain a knowledge sharing and transfer instrument if the intended beneficiaries ignored it! The team had key staff test the TDB to raise awareness of the primary role played by a corporate-specific database in the exchange of knowledge in enhancing the quality of multilingual products.

It was important for the team to be sure their approach to terminology practice was convenient for other potential TDB users.

Therefore, as soon as the TDB contained 1,000 validated entries, it was time to assess TDB acceptance as a corporate database by letting key staff members test it.

The purpose of this test was to determine:

- test user appreciation of the quality of the terminological data: whether the data displayed was sufficient or too extensive; whether the data corresponded to the specialists' understanding of the relevant terms; whether corporate terminology was represented accurately (taken as a percentage of successful search results);
- user-friendliness of the current graphic user interface (data display design, need for user training, etc.);
- performance of the terminology management system (reliability and search response time).

Test users were asked to comment on any other requirement they felt should be considered in future TDB development.

The test ran for a month before feedback was collected and classified. The feedback confirmed that continuation of current terminology practice would undoubtedly contribute to improved knowledge sharing and transfer throughout the organisation. The translator-terminologists undertook to consider as much test user input as possible for the read-only TDB version that will be implemented on the Intranet.

Multilingual document production was taken as the main criteria for selecting test users. Consequently the team primarily addressed staff members involved in such tasks, as the prospective users of a corporate database.

After the test run, the test users unanimously voiced their interest in using the TDB as a tool to facilitate preparing and checking information for the production of multilingual documents. Current and validated information could be re-used for several purposes.

The test users also asked for an active feedback option (entry of terms not in the TDB, modification of term-related data, etc.). This cooperative response was in line with the vision of promoting corporate language practice in conjunction with the relevant specialists.

Acknowledging the need to avert double tracking, the test users agreed the team should review, adjust and import relevant data from current glossaries created and maintained by the various departments, so the TDB would become the sole terminological reference for all staff members. The concept of the learning organisation would be materialised in the process. Growth of the corporate knowledge database would no longer be the exclusive responsibility of the translator-terminologists, but of all involved in the dissemination of corporate information. The translator-terminologists would provide the expertise, the specialists ensure veracity and effective use of data. The "lessons learned" would be an asset for better understanding and guidance of future processes.

Making the TDB available to all and implementing a suitable single-source document base such as a document management system (DMS[3]) would generate:

- better content quality at source
- validated, unambiguous and unequivocal language
- consistent and consensus-based terminology
- consistent use of approved information

Cooperation between the various "knowledge carriers" with optimised resource allocation would obviate the need to change and/or adjust the relevant document versions along the line resulting in shorter production processes short to medium-term. Circulating and promoting corporate knowledge throughout the group would contribute to higher productivity.

3.4 Phase IV: Customising the graphic user interface and on-demand bulk integration of terminological data

3.4.1 Customising the graphic user interface

Most of the test feedback concerned the TDB graphic user interface. Therefore, customising a truly user-friendly interface was important to ensure future users would feel at ease querying the TDB on the Intranet and would use it regularly.

Customising the graphic user interface to user needs implied providing:

- an easy search function comprising two fields with dropdown menus to define source and target language and one field for term entry. Any other restrictive search criteria (e.g. subject etc.) were not felt to be necessary; on the contrary, a fuzzy search feature was considered a must.

- a "compact" terminological data display in order to avoid unnecessary scrolling e.g. displaying only relevant data elements without the corresponding data categories whenever the latter were self-explanatory.

- two data display layouts. The default layout appears immediately after a successful search displaying only the basic entry data e.g. concept-related data categories with the relevant data elements, all designations in the three languages and the concept definition in the source language chosen. An optional layout displays all entry data. The latter would appear only in the extended search option.

- an automatic e-mail generation feature to send a message to the translator-terminologist team requesting or suggesting adjustments to data on a specific entry.

Another essential objective for the translator-terminologists was to ensure no user training would be necessary to query the TDB. Apart from a simplified search function as described above, the TDB read-only version had to comply with corporate identity guidelines and design. Some navigation links to useful TDB-related information were added to the Intranet page e.g.

- the number of terminology entries available (this figure must be updated as frequently as possible);

- a disclaimer;

- all navigation links to the pages containing useful information for the readers such as a description of the scope, content and languages of the terminological data base (including internal guidelines applied for each languages etc.); a description of the entry structure and entry fields; a list of the subjects available; TDB facts and figures (development, statistics, etc.) and, last but not least, a detailed description of the search feature (data displays, fuzzy search, etc.), definitions of terminology, terminology practice and the relationship between terminology and knowledge management.

A link to the translator-terminologists' mailbox is provided for terminology-related requests.

3.4.2 On-demand terminological data integration

In line with their cooperative approach and commitment to avoiding a proliferation of glossaries on the Intranet, the team prioritised integration of data from existing glossaries after due reviewing and adjusting.

This disclosed that they had already entered approximately 60% of glossary data in the TDB. It also confirmed the adequacy of their choices for defining the terms to be entered before starting effective terminology acquisition. The team undertook to importing the remaining eligible data before making the TDB available on the Intranet.

3.5   Phase IV: Organisation-wide dissemination

3.5.1 Timing

This challenging phase started in January 2005 when the team's third milestone of 2,000 validated entries had been reached.
Although the TDB is still in the initial stages and, in quantitative terms, does not stand comparison with similar products managed by large organisations, the number of entries contained, though modest, is a sound basis to make it an efficient search and working tool for all staff members.

The TDB should prove useful since preferential treatment was given to terminological data closely related to the organisation's business activities. Two other major reasons underpin the need to make the TDB available to a larger user group:

- Up-to-date terminological data
- Validity of spelling rules, especially in German

In an ever changing business environment such as finance, terms and/or data can become outdated relatively quickly (e.g. a company name changes as a result of a merger or reorganisation; a product name is replaced by another; a company is no longer active in a certain business field; new taxonomy in a programme or application; SWIFT compliant messages are renamed, etc.).

Further, the introduction of the German language reform represents another stumbling block for translator-terminologists in defining preferred spelling to ensure term consistency; this is particularly striking in the Swiss-German business environment with its tendency to use English terms, sometimes hyphenated, sometimes uppercased while retaining the original spelling. Since authors have no common spelling guidelines, translator-terminologists are confrontedwith frequent inconsistencies; they can assist authors by providing a sensible and consistent approach to spelling that is reflected in the TDB entries.

The choice of an appropriate communication strategy to entice potential users to acknowledge the existence of the new tool is also crucial. The translator-terminologists have already written the relevant announcement – a concise message in the form of a pop-up-window – to appear on the Intranet homepage for a period of about two weeks. By telling potential users that their involvement in the process of defining corporate language is welcome and valued, they hope to appeal to the staff members' curiosity and encourage them to click on the TDB link and subsequently become active users of this reservoir of corporate terminology. It is hoped that this will eventually result in increased productivity leaving staff members with more time for value-added tasks.

3.5.2   Next steps

It goes without saying that the phased approach to terminology practice does not end here. The next step will be to assess to what extent the Terminology Data Base will effectively contribute to knowledge sharing and transfer for those who wish to draw on this corporate reservoir for personal purposes (internalisation) or to disseminate it to a larger recipient group (externalisation).

The first aspect will definitely be more difficult to assess since it implies appraising understanding and acknowledgement of corporate language practice in the minds of all staff members - including those with whom the translator-terminologists do not have any (regular) working relationship. The second aspect could be appraised by analysing increased efficiency in the processes supported by terminology collection within a given timeframe.

An Intranet statistics feature is planned to monitor the number and type of TDB queries. In addition user requests will be collected and classified A user survey will be made and the users will be kept informed.

The timing for initiating this assessment phase will depend on user reaction. A full year of practice will probably be necessary before any assessment can be viable.

4   TRANSLATOR-TERMINOLOGISTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE UTILISATION IN A LEARNING ORGANISATION

By using translation-related and terminological knowledge (on the human side) and the appropriate infrastructure (on the technical side), it is possible to share 'ready-to-use' knowledge with company staff. This permits continuous re-purposing of certain or all contents.

Terminology is an asset to knowledge sharing and transfer in the corporate environment presented. The multilingual document production process described, as well as other ongoing processes such as localisation of a proprietary software, effectively demand the use of a corporate knowledge resource like the TDB. Particularly in this respect, the translator-terminologist objective is to become knowledge facilitators by making specific knowledge available on demand.

The team aims to promote a more cooperative environment; a learning organisation where practice, culture and systems promote continuous sharing of experience and lessons learned (Frappaolo 2002).

According to Garvin (1993) a learning organisation has the skills to create, acquire and transfer knowledge and to change its behaviour according to the new knowledge and insights gained. By continuing to adopt a pro-active approach in their relationships with

other specialists throughout the organisation, the translator-terminologists aim at due recognition as central language regulators for communication processes and, more specifically, as qualified partners of the business specialists in language and terminology matters. The ultimate goal is to contribute, even if minimally, to the cultivation of an open attitude towards changes and new approaches in the minds of the other agents in the organisation.

It is essential that the translator-terminologists keep up-to-date with the latest trends in language processing to provide input on how existing or future gaps could be filled and on how the use of controlled language or machine translation tools could be integrated for complex processes demanding a higher degree of automation. By doing so they will promote active TDB utilisation.

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[1] http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/glossary/glossary.asp#l
[2] According to C. Frappaolo (2002:10-11), the main challenge when facing explicit knowledge is "to manage its volume, ensure its relevance and quality, and make it easily accessible – in a word, handling infoglut."
[3] A DMS is a software system based on an underlying database, in which unstructured objects (i.e. documents) are indexed and tracked. A DMS monitors security, logs access to files and maintains a history of file content (Frappaolo 2002).

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Note: This article is based on the 1 hour workshop held by the author at the 7th international TAMA Conference on Terminology in Advanced Management Applications – Multilingual Content Integration (November 29 to December 1, 2004, Cologne).
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