Terminology at Work at Ericsson Language Services

REPORT BY
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Terms are the alpha and omega of Gary Jaekel's work in the Ericsson Language Service. They do not simply underwrite consistent localization of the mobile phone manufacturer's products, they also make marketable terminology products.

Ericsson's markets have changed radically in recent years, from focusing on public telecoms authorities to private operators, and from large-scale employers to small firms seeking competitive edge and high profits. Increasingly this means that Ericsson's products are primarily software in nature. Today's telecom operators only buy the functions they want and expect to generate profit from them immediately after they are installed. This means that operations and maintenance instructions have to be efficient and effective since they are part of an investment.

Hence the vital importance of the quality of information delivered to customers; in other words, information means language and terminology. At the same time, quality of communication between Ericsson and its customers lies in being business-like, providing customers with the solution they want when they want it. We believe that common, clear terminology plays a major part in creating and maintaining this quality of communication.

Under Customer Communication, I would also include the quality of information flowing corporately inside Ericsson, since whether written or oral, it determines how effectively the company responds to market needs. Confusion at home sows confusions abroad. And confusion is not the same thing as change.

At Language Services, we offer products and services in language training, terminology, and translation. Correct and consistent terminology is central to our operations; it forms the backbone to both translation and language-training operations. We have to maintain a clear profile in our contacts with customers within Ericsson, and a uniform approach to terminology is part of that profile. We also market terminology products and services, and the success of this determines how much we can re-invest in those products and services and maintain our term work.

Methods Before Tools

In LS, the vital step was to agree on a method for working with terminology before finding tools to fit the method. And not vice versa. As is often the case with documentation and translation, people have the unrealistic expectation that once a need has been assessed, it can be met by buying a tool that will magically solve the problem. Usually what happens is that the introduction of a new tool creates further needs.

When we started, we had no formal training in terminology but we felt our way forward using our native competence and experience. What we lacked in theory, we made up for in hard-nosed practicality. Terminology is a slow business and does not create immediate cost benefits.

We do not have a full-time terminologist in the Service. Every translator devotes an average of four hours a week per translator for terminology work. Translators are free to add new Swedish language terms in our competent languages on a day-to-day basis. Once a month all these terms are reviewed by our corporate terminology group, which tries to determine which entries receive status as terms, and then gives them domain, sub-domain, definition and equivalent in English plus two other languages. Another source of potential new terms is the log list of failed searches during the previous month.

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Our in-house terminology database—Termelsa—currently holds 21,000 terms covering 13 domains and operates under the Trados Multiterm system. When we chose Multiterm we already

had a database called Term in a mainframe environment, but it was not much used due to the structural restrictions on the database. The portability capability of Multiterm was therefore essential.

We have kept administrative information about the term record to a minimum and made it accessible separately so that the user's screen is as uncluttered as possible.

Marketing In-House Term Resources

Eriterm is a marketable spin-off of the Termelsa terminology databank. In its original 1986 book form, it came out in five volumes, one per Ericsson language pair (Swedish to English. Spanish. French, and German) with a total of 13,000 terms per book. We upgraded Eriterm and marketed it as a 15,000-term Eriterm 96 product, with a limited-edition CD-ROM produced in partnership with the Swiss firm Ascom, which sells Ericsson products to the Swiss telecoms authority. The purpose of this restricted operation was exclusively to provide read-only term consultation a multi-site basis; the system was not used for adding or exporting terms.

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Today, we are on the point of shipping our new Eriterm 97 CD-ROM for the open market and we are also planning to make the database available on the Web via Ericsson's intranet, again for restricted lookup. Efforts will also have to be made to make Eriterm an approved standard inside Ericsson. This will provide us with the financial stability and stimulus to keep the product continually up-to-date.

Interfacing with MT

Since 1995 we have been using a Logos Intelligent Machine Translation system to localize English documentation into French. Although quality has been judged as acceptable for this language pair in the context of Ericsson's translation requirements, Ericsson's rather heavy-weight documentation-authoring system makes it hard as yet to optimize workflow using the Logos system. One problem here is terminology. Despite our

work on terminology, there is as yet no way to automatically use the terminology that has been put into our MT system. We hope that LE projects like OTELO (a European Commission project to provide integrated, network access to tools and lexical resources) will help in this effort. At the same time, this project would be able to work in the other direction, allowing us to massively update our MT database from Termelsa in due course.

We are constantly struggling with the pace of change in the telecoms industry, with its almost daily harvest of new terms, acronyms, and abbreviations. These often come into existence in a totally unsystematic manner, with the result that you get a whole collection of identical acronyms with totally different meanings. Our other main preoccupation is to balance the cost of terminology development and maintenance against economic returns. Our terminology operations are currently profitable, but at the price of not keeping them as up-to-date as we would like.

Gary Jaekel is manager of Ericsson Language Services. This article is based on a paper given recently at the Conference on Terminology held at Mons, Belgium.