

The Many Flavors of Translation Memory

In addition Fraunhofer's, two other variants of the "translation memory" concept have recently surfaced: one in Germany, the other in Canada. There appear to be more to come.

"Translation memory," a vague and overused term, may be a recent concoction, but the concept is not. Over the years, various parties have investigated the possibilities of automating document comparison to recycle previously translated material, most notably alpn with its Translation Support Software, without significant impact.

At CEBIT '92, Stuttgart translation company and software developers Trados announced its variation on this theme. It will be part of the company's "Translator's Workbench 2" package slated for release later this spring. The package will include the MultiTerm 2 terminology database (now with a Microsoft Windows' interface), a translation editor, and a text analysis tool for automating terminology extraction. Trados also announced three glossaries in MultiTerm format containing acronyms, computer automation terms, and ec terminology in eight languages, derived from the vast eurodicautom databank.

Trados's Jochen Hummel claims that the Translation Memory module will be particularly useful for large documentation translation jobs where version updates form a significant part of the load. In contrast to the system developed by Fraunhofer, which uses statistical methods, Trados' system uses a fuzzy match algorithm for seeking out "similar" strings and sentences in a document database and retrieving them for reuse.

The Official Languages and Translation sector of the Canadian Department of the Secretary of State in Ottawa — a major employer of translators (1,200) and producer of translations (c. 295 million words per year) — has introduced a new network version of its Translator Work Station with a system for storing and accessing previously translated documents, another variant of the translation memory concept. The system offers translators such facilities as wordprocessing, a French conjugation engine, a terminology management, document comparison, integrated e-mail, and peripherals-sharing. Naturally, workstation users have access to the CD-ROM version of Termium, the Secretary of State's famous English-French terminology databank.

IBM's European Language Services (Denmark) is also developing a translation memory variant, while translation-hungry companies such as Canon Europa are studying the feasibility of such an approach. Trados' Hummel comments, "competition sharpens your approach to product quality."