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An Effective and Inexpensive Translation Memory Tool

by Andrei Gerasimov, Ph.D.

There are numerous Translation Memory tools available on the international market. All of them implement three main functions:

1. segmentation of source text,
2. preservation of the original typesetting and layout,
3. translation memory proper.

Segmentation means that a translator does not need to strain his/her eyes and brains looking for the beginning of the next source sentence to be translated. The software offers you this next sentence automatically using a table (as Déjà Vu does) or a highlighted colored background (as Trados does). Thanks to this simple technology, you will never skip a sentence or even a paragraph—a rather common situation when translating hard copy or overwriting electronic documents.

Translation memory means that you never have to translate the same sentence, phrase or word twice. You do it only once, and when you come across the same sentence, phrase or word next time, a program suggests that you use your previous translation, which may be edited if the context demands it. This is of importance primarily, but not exclusively, for technical translators, because technical documents tend to have plenty of repetitions. For example, when working with one of my long-term clients, Volvo Cars International, about 60% of the sentences in the brochure on the Volvo S60 were sentences I had already translated working on the Volvo S/V70, S80, S/V40 brochures. In such cases, which are not at all rare, a Translation Memory saves me a lot of time and ensures perfect consistency of terminology, which is appreciated by the client.

Preservation of the original typesetting and layout means that you no longer need not think about preserving the original typesetting and layout.

In my opinion, when choosing a Translation Memory tool, a translator should first of all pay attention to the following factors: price, user-friendliness, and the amount of time necessary to learn how to use it.

Being a freelance Russian translator who depends greatly on the Internet as a source of work, dictionaries, reference materials and translation software, **I came across WORDFAST in January 2001, and this translation memory program immediately became my favorite tool.** Previously I had had extensive experience with Déjà Vu 2.3.78 and Trados Workbench 2.0. Now I use Wordfast 3.30 every day, and it boosts my productivity up to 20-30 percent even when there are no repetitions in the source text! I never skip a sentence, proofreading became much easier and faster, strain on my eyes and brain decreased dramatically.

Wordfast is actually a set of macros (a template) compatible with any version of Microsoft Word. It builds on the standard Microsoft Word window adding 13 special Wordfast buttons and implements all typical TM tool functions: segmentation, creating/using translation memories and glossaries, exact/fuzzy matches, pretranslation, context search (concordance), exporting/importing glossaries and translation memories. Alignment (that is creating TM from previously translated materials) is performed by an additional tool (template) - Walign. The following figure will give you an idea of segmentation and use of TM by Wordfast (the green field means that Wordfast found the exact match in its TM).

Fig. (screen shot of a file translated in Word with Wordfast)

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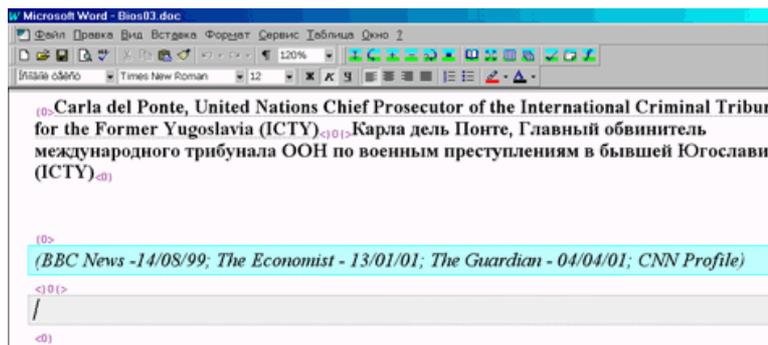
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It took me only a few seconds to download Wordfast from <http://champollion.net> (the web site of Wordfast developer Yves Champollion). This is a great advantage for many freelance translators with low-speed modem connection via a telephone line (compare 300 Kb of Wordfast with 7 Mb of Déjà Vu and 12 MB of Trados WB Freelance). It took me only a few seconds to install Wordfast—that is to copy the file wordfast.dot in the Template folder of the Microsoft Word. And it took me a couple of hours to become familiar with all Wordfast's functions. (Compare 18 pages of the Wordfast manual with fat manuals for Déjà Vu and Trados, each exceeding 200 pages). The last but not least advantage—Yves Champollion licenses his Wordfast for free to non-corporate users in 75 percent of the world including Russia, and for only USD 200.00 to users from EEC, NAFTA and the British Commonwealth. (Compare this price with USD 700.00 for Trados and 850.00 for Déjà Vu).

No translation memory tool I have tested was free of bugs—at least I came across bugs running them on my two PCs, both of which operate perfectly when I run many other applications and games. Déjà Vu fails to display correctly the context ("see in context" function) and performs segmentation with many errors which I have to correct manually. Trados makes mistakes when segmenting source text and hangs up your PC often, especially when working with Microsoft Office 2000. This is the case despite the fact that these products have been developed years ago and have been debugged for all these years. In February when testing Wordfast I noticed several bugs and reported them to the Wordfast developer. **By now all of them have disappeared!**

Of course, being much more complex and "heavy" (I refer to Kbs, sorry, Mbs of Trados and Déjà Vu), these competitors of Wordfast perform some functions beyond those of Wordfast. For example, they process files of "exotic" types (QuarkXpress, PageMaker and so on) without forcing a translator to previously convert them to the .doc format. DV and Trados offer you a lot of various windows and functions that may be useful to computer wizards but scare away the majority of translators. They are basically meant for translation managers and translators who are also very advanced PC users. Besides, all these sophisticated functions are very seldom used, if ever.

The bottom line is as follows: In my opinion, Wordfast is the most cost-efficient, user-friendly, and reliable segmentation/translation memory tool which may be very useful/helpful not only to translation professionals but also to people who translate only now and then—PR managers, journalists, authors, secretaries, reviewers, advisors, etc., i.e., individuals who do not have a large and steady translation workload—individuals whose main occupation demands only periodic translation. Such people will not invest in the overpriced TM tools and spend a lot of time studying them (and then periodically brush up their knowledge of the tool after a long interval of not using it). Besides Wordfast will find its market among those translators who are allergic to any sophisticated software whose developers seem to forget that their objective should be to facilitate the user's life, not to complicate it.

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