

Terminology Workflows: Moving Toward Improved Consistency



In corporate and product communication, consistent use of terminology is vital, as it ensures comprehensible language and a uniform corporate identity. Especially for internationally positioned enterprises that operate in multiple languages, terminology management is necessary to minimize translation costs. This white paper describes how enterprises can establish the necessary preconditions in this area.

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Necessity and Requirements

"Wrench" or "Spanner"? "Tennis shoes" or "sneakers"? Terminology must be used consistently, as diversity in source texts increases the probability of misunderstandings on the customer side and results in inconsistent translations. If a standard term is determined, it only needs to be translated once.

A terminology system in which a company's entire specialized vocabulary is defined and maintained ensures consistent use of concepts. Other details such as additional information on the use of a term can also be stored in this database. Regardless of whether the text that is being composed is to be used in user manuals, training documents, or display texts, all parties who edit the text thus know which term is correct or preferred in a particular context. If a writer or translator uses a term that is not approved, the system will alert him and suggest an alternative.

For this, the terminology system should meet a number of requirements:

- » All **information** on a term can be **combined** and stored in a terminology entry.
- » The system should be configurable **at concept and term level**. The persons involved and departments that participate in key processes (e.g. translation) should be able to access and use the data intuitively.
- » **Quality assurance mechanisms** should be available both **for source texts and for target texts**.
- » The **assignment of user rights** enables the mapping of functions and duties of certain groups of persons. For example, terminologists and individual employees from the

departments may be permitted to evaluate and approve terms, while other users may only be granted suggestion or read rights. In this case, the approval status or missing information can be highlighted visually.

Possible other user rights of many terminology systems

- » Users are permitted to write **comments**.
- » Users can suggest the **merging of redundant entries**.
- » Users can **add information** (e.g. images) to the entries.
- » Users can suggest **usage information**.
- » Users can **suggest terms**, e.g. via an online form.

Normative or Descriptive Terminology?

Enterprises take different approaches to the establishment and maintenance of consistent terminology. In the normative approach, terminologists elaborate rules for the use of terms. The descriptive approach, on the other hand, depends on the participation of the users. In the first case, the objective is to capture and evaluate all possible designations of an item or process as comprehensively as possible. The collection of information takes place with the help of resources such as subject-related books and reference works as well as the expertise of professionals in the particular area. The goal is to reach a clear decision on preferred terms and terms to be avoided. The approval of terms is very time-consuming, as the information of various resources needs to be compared. While this process is under way, important terms are usually not available for use. By contrast, the descriptive approach is more flexible. Here, the terminology database is flexible,

allowing translators, writers, and other users to enter suggestions and comments. Term candidates can also be extracted from existing texts. In this way, large terminology repositories can be developed in a shorter time. The downside of this approach is that without a normative instance for the quality assurance, irrelevant or redundant entries can proliferate freely. Even if all users are involved, it would therefore be advisable to designate one or several terminology owners who design the processes and play a moderating role.

Populating the Database

Once the terminology database has been implemented, it needs to be populated. Many companies used to collect the source and target-language entries in Excel, a rather inefficient method. A number of steps are necessary before importing these legacy data: Especially large data repositories should be reviewed in order to check if the entries are correct and unwanted synonyms are marked as misnomers. Any errors should be corrected. Moreover, it should be determined which will be the leading system for the use of terminology. Finally, the database structure should be established in order to define which information is to be stored for an entry. Apart from the initial population, new terms must be added continually, as terminology work is an ongoing process. The extraction and determination of terms from source texts can be performed via a linguistic or statistical approach. The linguistic approach examines the source texts and stores new terminology in the system for further processing. The statistical terminology extraction as part of the translation workflow transfers the entire text to the terminology system, which proposes the terms that occur frequently in the text. Accepted suggestions are then sent to the terminology translators, who translate them into the respective target languages.

Another way to populate the terminology database is to extract terminology from a translation memory that contains

terminology already used in the past. These can be extracted from the translation memory along with the existing translations and stored in the terminology database, or the translation memory can be searched for any terms for which translations are not yet available in all target languages.

Besides these methods for populating the terminology system, terms are frequently suggested by translators or employees. It should be determined where these are to be stored and when they may be viewed by third parties. For example, this may be done directly in the terminology system or by way of suggestion forms. The easiest way to go about this is as follows: An authorized employee submits a terminology suggestion in the source language and informs the terminologist, who in turn checks whether this term is to be taken into consideration in the future. If the term is to be included in the terminology database, it is completed and published for use. A translator then translates the suggestion into the target language and makes the translation available.

The close collaboration between terminologists and the individual departments enables the combination of linguistic knowledge with the experience in using certain terms. This helps to describe a term as effectively as possible. In this expanded process, a specialist reviews the suggestions and proposes alternatives if necessary. In this context, several coordination loops may occur between the two parties.

Use of Terminology

The maintenance of terminology is one thing, its use is another. To enable authors to create consistent sources, they should have access to the terminology database during their writing work. This ensures that they will use authorized terms for which translations already exist. This eliminates the need for redundant translations. If possible, the terminology database should be embedded directly in the translation editor

during translation. Thus, quality checks are possible during the translation. For example, if a defined misnomer is used, the translator will immediately be alerted. Moreover, the use of terminology can also be used as a process stopper. As long as the previous translation contains incorrect terms, the processing can be paused until these have been corrected. Moreover, statistics and reports on the use of terminology or errors deliver information on the translation quality.

- » Write rights enable employees to generate their own entries or supplement existing ones. Moreover, a configurable module is provided by means of which all authorized users can submit suggestions to expand the terminology database.
- » Moreover, it supports the use of mobile devices for searching the terminology system. Across also enables the search in MS Windows applications in which text can be copied to the clipboard, e.g. e-mail and Word/PDF files.

Terminology Workflows with Across

In its translation management system, Across Systems also provides numerous tools that comprehensively support the terminology management:

- » A central terminology system for authors, translators, and departments supports the entire process including stages such as the definition of preferred terms, editing, translation, review, and quality assurance. It offers customizable entry structures and professional functions to extract and find terms.
- » It enables location-independent access to the terminology system via a Web browser.

Conclusion

Clear terminology is not only beneficial for the corporate communication in the source language, it also facilitates the creation of high-quality translations. The maintenance of foreign-language terminology increases the consistency in the translated texts. In this way, errors can be prevented from being passed down, and unnecessary costs can be avoided. The terminology population and utilization processes can be optimized with the help of smart utilities such as those offered by Across. An individual plan should be elaborated to accommodate the company's specific requirements.