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Technology for Translators

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of language and communication, modern technology has emerged as a powerful ally for translators and professional linguists, revolutionising the way they work and enhancing the efficiency of their tasks. The advantages afforded by cutting-edge technology are multifaceted, ranging from improved translation accuracy to increased productivity and streamlined collaboration.

In this guide on Technology for Translators, which follows our online event on technology for today's translators, we have asked seven professional translators what technological tools they use in their daily lives to assist them with their work. We hope that you find their contributions of interest and helpful.

In my day-to-day work as not only a French/ English translator but as a language teacher, there are some technological tools that I find incredibly useful and that I could not do without.

For example, CAT tools, glossaries, Machine Translation (I use Deepl) and Linguee.com all form important parts of my translation workflow, depending on the nature of the project.

By the end of this guide, you will hopefully agree that the integration of modern technology into the field of translation empowers linguists with tools that enhance precision, accelerate processes, and foster global collaboration. Embracing these advancements not only augments the capabilities of individual translators but also contributes to the overall evolution and elevation of language services in our interconnected world.

Karine Chevalier-Watts MCIL CL
Coordinator of CIOL Translating Division Steering Group

Danielle Coleman **MCIL CL**

When I first started working as a freelance translator in 1997, I had no broadband, no mobile phone, no dictation software and certainly no computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools! Back then, I remember sending a particularly long translation from Italian to English on the subject of holocaust denial down the phone line in a file transfer method that made a strange burbling sound as it travelled through the airwaves. Since that time, the technology available to me as a translator has changed out of all recognition.

Now, 25 years later, I use a CAT tool on a daily basis. In my case, it is usually SDL Trados Studio, although for some agencies I work using their proprietary CAT tool, in the cloud. I was initially unconvinced of the merits and time-saving properties of these tools, and so it took me some time to become a 'convert' and to go so far as to buy my own copy. The decisive moment was when an agency that I do a lot of work for told me many of their end clients were now requiring CAT tool use, so that if I didn't have my own I would miss out on most of the assignments available.

In terms of technology, I can divide my work now into three categories.

In the first category, I receive a pre-created SDL translation package containing the file to be translated and the translation memories (TMs) from previous related jobs, and from reference documents, already attached. Sometimes there are 100% match segments which I just need to check through to ensure the previous translation was correct. Sometimes these segments are locked and I don't get paid for them at all, and in theory don't look at them. In practice, though, I can't help it, and if I spot an error I will unlock it and correct it. That's the perfectionist in me!

Now that I have a separate monitor, I find it reasonably easy to work with SDL Trados or other tools from an ergonomic point of view. I have enough space now to display the source text on the left-hand side of the screen, the translation on the right, and the various other tabs (term base, translation results, concordance, etc.) on the side or at the top. Before that, the screen felt very crowded, but now I can have the CAT tool displayed on one screen and other windows on my main screen. However, reference documents, multiple internet windows for research and my email all fight for space on my main

screen. To give you an idea, I just stopped to check how many tabs I have open while writing this – 37!

One of the main advantages of using the same CAT tool when I translate is that I can build up my own TMs in the process. I currently have TMs for all five of my language combinations, and I can use these in concordance searches. The added bonus is that I know my own translation corpus is reliable. Another benefit is that, if you set up your translation environment so that you are saving each segment to your own TM as you go, then if some disaster occurs and you lose the document, you can open the original again and as if by magic all your previous translations will pop up as 100% matches.

Another category of project is where I either create my own packages or simply use the CAT tool to translate a file as a single document. The latter can be useful when translating a pdf document, for example, as the tool can reproduce all the formatting automatically, using tags, leaving me to focus on the actual translation work. Creating a package is more time-consuming and complicated and I have only recently started doing this, but it's good to learn how to do it and to understand the nuts and bolts behind the user interface.

Finally, the third category is those documents where using a CAT tool is undesirable or impossible. This is the case, for example, when translating certificates or other documents supplied as a photo, or a scan in a language using a non-Roman script that doesn't get converted well by the tool. There may be other cases where I simply prefer to come at the translation with no suggestions or preconceptions about the translation, and therefore opt to translate the 'old-fashioned' way.

To sum up, I have moved with the times and gone from being a CAT tool refusenik to a habitual user. I still have reservations about the reduction in creativity and job satisfaction and the loss of copyright in one's own translations. In addition, the forced imposition of a 'grid' tariff system by most agencies means that any gain in productivity through speed using existing translations or partial matches with existing translations is cancelled out through reduced rates paid for those segments. On the other hand, we live in the real world, in which technology in all its many forms is here to stay, so the best option is to gracefully accept it and make use of the benefits it offers.

Rosa Insua-Salgueiro **MCIL CL**

Oh, technology… friend or foe? In the era of AI and ChatGPT, I believe we are better off making technology our friend. Furthermore, as professional translators and interpreters, we have to embrace technology and leverage its possibilities to help us in our daily work.

When it comes to client work, I use a mix of traditional working methods: Word files and CAT tools. I don't necessarily need to use my own CAT tool as many of the agencies that I work with have their own proprietary cloud-based CAT tool.

I currently use Trados Studio, but it is quite pricy. I think you have to consider how much you use your CAT tool; if you are just starting your career and would like to dip your toes into the CAT tool world, I have found that Smartcat will offer a first taste of the most basic functions of translation software with very little training effort and without the hefty price tag of some CAT tools.

There are many other CAT tools in the market, such as Wordfast and MemoQ, but again, they are not cheap, so I believe you should consider which one would best meet your working needs.

Now let's talk about what I really like about CAT tools: you can create your own TMs (translation memories). It really saves you time and keeps all your translations consistent.

I have found them really useful when working with direct clients. I currently work with a personal injury law firm that helps the Spanish community in London and they need pretty much the same type of documents to be translated over and over again for different Spanish-speaking clients.

To give you an example: I recently had to translate a Schedule of Loss for a claim that's going to be presented in court. It was not a long document – 1.5K words but only 200 of those were new. The rest were either 100% matches or context matches.

All in all, that meant that I translated the file more quickly, which helped reduce the time spent on the project and therefore increased my hourly rate.

Elisabeth Hippe-Heisler

Minimalism in performing repetitive tasks and efficiency in my work are hugely important to me. The following IT tools have simplified my life as a translator by enhancing my efficiency as well as the accuracy of my translations.

AutoHotkey is a fantastic tool for writing scripts for Windows applications to automate repetitive desktop tasks. It's a free, powerful tool, which is beginner-friendly, so previous coding experience is not required. A typical use of AutoHotkey is the creation of hotstrings that expand abbreviations into full text, which could turn out to be the scripts you'll find most useful in your day-to-day computing tasks. Other useful AutoHotkey scripts include scripts for performing Google or dictionary searches from any window, repurposing keys or gaining instant access to files or folders on your computer. Find out how to get started with AutoHotkey **here**.

ChatGPT can act as your virtual assistant, carrying out certain administrative tasks on your behalf. For instance, you can instruct it to draft (possibly awkward) emails for you or fix errors in OCR-converted text. Or you can seek quick answers to general IT-related queries from it, for example regarding problems encountered in your CAT tool.

The ChatGPT output isn't always good or acceptable, but when it is, often all you need to do is customise it. ChatGPT also excels at extracting data or terminology from sources you've chosen for use in your work, saving you from having to manually compile glossaries yourself. Find out how to get started with ChatGPT **here**.

Focused internet searches are crucial to the specialised work of translators and linguists, which is why I frequently use **Google search operators.** They are strings of parameters which are added to a search query to help narrow down the results returned by Google in order to extract more specific information from online content. You can, for example, limit a search to just examining all the text on a particular website by using the site: operator. Another popular operator is the wildcard: it is designated by an asterisk (*) and stands for a keyword that is not yet known at the time a search query is entered. Google search operators that are particularly useful to translators and linguists are listed **here** and **here**.

I highly recommend the tools described above as they will help increase your efficiency, leaving you with more time and headspace to focus on the more intricate aspects of your work as a linguist or translator.

Ina Hohmann   MCIL DipTrans

When asked how I use modern technology as a translator, the question took me aback – all the time, of course, but nothing I use is so extraordinary that others are not already aware of it.

I held out against a CAT tool for a long time and only came round after eight years of freelancing and doing quite well without one.

At the time, many agencies began to require at least one translation tool to even consider putting a linguist on their books. The options for me came down to Trados and MemoQ. The latter had by far the smaller market share and was a comparatively new player (read: eager to prove itself, great customer service), but supposedly more 'translator-friendly' and easier on the CPU and RAM.

Speaking purely from a translating perspective, working in a grid makes for a different approach than overtyping text in its native format. The advantages are obvious, especially once the translation memories are beginning to build up: immediate access to existing translations, no need to search for previously translated identical or near-identical text sections.

And of course, the one feature that, for me, would have made the entire investment of money, time, and effort worthwhile all by itself – the concordance function. Highlight one term, click concordance, discover all existing translations for that term in the translation memory. How did I ever work without it?

Any disadvantages? Any reservations I have relate more to translation quality. CAT tools are great to leverage existing translations and repetitions and ensure consistency, but I also discovered that errors creep in much more easily. Especially with online projects for agencies, it is also not helpful that the layout of the original document is sometimes not visible in the tool. Locked segments or 100% matches can also present problems. Theoretically, I should be able to ignore the former and simply accept the latter. In reality, it is not uncommon to discover that the pre-populated translation, while correct, does not work in context. That means sending messages to project managers or commenting on why a particular translation was changed rather than accepted.

So, the tool offers a great many advantages, but there are limitations to what can realistically be expected. And very, very careful proofreading is an absolute necessity! All of which, in my view, is worth the effort. I could not imagine working without a CAT tool ever again.

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Hélène Walters-Steinberg **MCIL CL DipTrans**

I have been interested in leveraging technology since I began working as a translator over ten years ago. I started out exploring different CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools – eventually sticking with MemoQ – and added voice dictation into the mix after injuring my wrist. Technology is now an integral part of my workflow.

To demonstrate how I use modern technology in all the stages of the translation process, I will take an example of a PDF file sent to me by an agency. My first step is to convert this file into an editable format. To do this, I use the Abbyy Fine Reader software, which allows me to manually remove any elements I do not need converted (such as signatures), and then export the file into Word.

Before importing the document into my CAT tool, I use the Transtools and Transtools+ Word plugins to tidy up the formatting. With these plugins, I can normalise font type, colour and size, remove text from inside text boxes, and replace special symbols with characters, among other things. On a practical level, this reduces the number of tags inside the document, making it easier to translate within the CAT environment.

If some passages are not to be translated (for instance if the client wants a bilingual table or only wants to update certain sections), I can also hide that text so that only the text for translation appears in the CAT tool.

Once I have finished formatting the source document, I import it in my CAT tool. I won't go into detail about how I use this tool as there is not enough space on this page for that! Suffice to say that MemoQ's translation memories and term bases allow me to leverage previous translations to improve my productivity and the overall consistency of my translations.

After running a quality check inside MemoQ, I export the translated document back into Word and proofread it myself. Then, I use technology to fine-tune the quality of the end product. I start by using Transtools and Transtools+ to bring back any text that was previously hidden and check that all the formatting matches the original. I make sure that the language and variant selected for the document match my client's requirements and run a spell check using the Antidote Word plugin, which is available for both French and English. I prefer this to the MS Word basic spell check, because it allows me to correct typographical errors (such as unbreakable spaces before punctuation in French) and highlights ambiguous sentences/word choices.

It can also produce a report on the style in terms of readability, repetitions or gender neutrality, among other options.

Now I have dealt with the grammar and spelling, I move onto consistency, using the PerfectIt Word plugin. This allows me to make sure that my text matches the house style selected (British UK spelling, Chicago Manual of Style, United Nations style, etc.) and that I have consistently used capitalisation and hyphenation throughout the text.

Finally, if I have been asked to use Plain English in my text or if I feel it is too wordy, I use the WordRake plugin to edit for clarity, brevity, and simplicity.

This may sound like a lot of steps to produce one translation, but most of these programs only take a few minutes to run. I find that they often catch tiny details that I may have missed and, ultimately, lead to a higher quality translation for my clients.
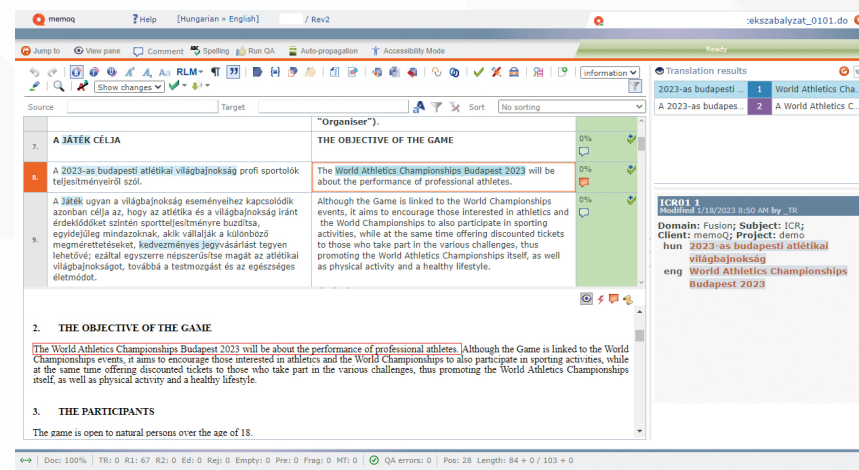
Nicholas Zeng

While doing my master's degree, the idea was that you can't be a translator without a CAT tool. Since then I have come to realise that although I do not need to use a CAT tool, they do facilitate the translation process. As such, I use Trados Studio as my preferred CAT tool. The reason I chose it is because it does seem to be the most used CAT tool by the agencies I work with.

For me, the main advantage of working with CAT tools lies in their ability to maintain consistency throughout a text through the use of its glossary and TM abilities. Due to its widespread use, there is a wealth of information on Trados Studio, and there are many YouTube instructional videos from Trados and other freelance translators.These videos have been extremely beneficial to me as I have found that Trados is not the most user-friendly CAT tool.

I have recently started to use the online tool LSP Expert, which can compile most of the data I was tracking in different Excel spreadsheets in one place. It contains functions to track your jobs, invoices, expenses, purchase orders and clients, and it can also generate various reports on the different services you offer your clients.

The main benefit to me of using this tool is that it has enabled me to gather all the data I need to run my translation business in one place. The job dashboard shows all ongoing jobs, breaking down for each job the client, the start and due dates, the price of the job and the word count. This has enabled me to have a good overview of all ongoing work and to be able to organise my workload. LSP expert also generates a tax summary, which uses the information from the invoices to show how much tax you will have to pay each quarter, which has allowed me to know how much of my income to set aside.

For me, maintenance of my computer system is also of high importance, as I want to minimise costly repairs and I do not want to replace my computer. So, every Friday, I like to run through my quick maintenance checklist to make sure that my computer is operating well. This involves backing up my computer to an external hard drive, running a virus scan, emptying my downloads, organising my files and emptying the bin.

Although it is not a comprehensive list of things that could be done, it does allow my system to run faster and it gives me the peace of mind of knowing that the system is backed up.

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Maria Pilar-Lahuerta

Most translators are no longer hunched over thick dictionaries these days, but work with their gaze fixed on the computer. New translation tools have speeded up and simplified this work, thanks to technology.

The digital revolution has triggered the creation of tools, software and resources that help ease the burden of translation and improve efficiency, consistency and quality. And while no tool can replace a qualified translator, it does help us to be more productive. Here are the tools we use most often in our daily work:

Translation memory software

There is an incredible variety of CAT tools available on the market. It's really difficult to find the perfect CAT tool, we don't know if it exists, but we can recommend two very complete ones: Trados Studio and MemoQ. Investing in a tool like this helps you to improve quality, check consistency and ensure correct use of terminology.

Language search engines

These translation tools are particularly useful to search for bilingual texts, words and expressions in different languages in order to check meanings and context-based translations. Linguee is one of the most popular search engines worldwide and is indispensable for us.

Style manuals and Spanish dictionaries

In addition to the Royal Spanish Academy's online dictionary, the best solution to resolve any questions related to Spanish is the website provided by Fundéu, the Fundación del Español Urgente, which, as well as all the Spanish Academy's knowledge, also introduces answers and solutions to more current problems. We find it especially useful because it's not only an electronic dictionary, but it also addresses aspects that are not found in dictionaries, e.g. the use of capital letters, punctuation, words that should be used instead of their terms in English, etc. It quickly resolves specific questions about the language.

Terminology databases

As translators we always need reliable sources to include in our translations and, although it is up to us to verify this information, terminology databases are a very useful resource. We use IATE, the EU terminology database for both EU translators and the general public. We also find Agrovoc useful, with entries related to agriculture and the environment, and the IMF, with terms from the International Monetary Bank.

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Supporting and developing
language professionals
worldwide

About CIOL

CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) is the leading professional body for people using foreign language skills at work, setting the standard for linguists worldwide. Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership, recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, publicly understood as a badge of quality and competence. We offer many benefits and services, such as mentoring and access to networks. Our awarding organisation, CIOL Qualifications, delivers fully regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, the Certificate in Translation and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, business and universities.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit **ciol.org.uk**

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