Use and Value of Computer-Assisted Translation in the Central Translation Service of Coop Switzerland, Basle
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Abstract

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the translation department of Coop Switzerland has had to cope with rapid growth in the volume of orders. This has given rise to two groups of problems: growth of "corporate language", and the need to rationalise and control costs. Coop's solution to these quantitative and qualitative difficulties was to set up its own data base of Coop terminology and resort to the computer-supported processing of certain categories of text.

These adjustments in working methods led to a "cultural change" in the translation department. This phenomenon is the subject of this paper.

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Is the Director of the Translation Service of Coop Schweiz. Studied Germanic and Romanic languages at Salzburg University. MA in philosophy. For 9 years, German lecturer at the Universities of Reims and Mulhouse. Graduated in Germanistic Linguistics at the University of Besançon. Taught German as a Foreign Language and French for Finance at a private school in Germany. Became a translator at Coop Schweiz in 1981 and director in 1989.

Coop Schweiz

Coop Schweiz is the services branch of the Swiss Coop Group which is made up of 17 regional associations and 24 production, commercial and service companies. It is the second largest distributor in Switzerland, with a market share of 13,9%, a turnover of 11 billion, 1 000 shops of various sizes and about 46 000 employees.

The **Translation Service** of Coop Schweiz translates into the various languages of the Swiss cantons. Organised as a cost centre, it houses 8 French translators, 3 Italian translators and contracts several internal and external free-lance translators. It has a terminology service and uses translator's workbenches as a computer aided translation service.

It has a Multiterm-based termbank, uses various dictionaries and encyclopaedias on CD-ROM, as well as on-line termbanks. It has its own library and documentation service.

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(Outline of the Presentation)

Switzerland - a country of institutionalised translation

- Multilingual nature of public life guaranteed by the constitution

    hence

    - product information

    - advertising

    - communication

    - business documents

- In three national languages: German, French and Italian

The Coop Group in Switzerland

- Turnover of CHF 11 billion, approx. 1 100 sales outlets

- 1.3 million member households

- 17 regional cooperative societies

- 24 affiliates (manufacturing, trade and services)

- Coop Switzerland is the umbrella organisation of the Swiss coop societies

Translation at Coop Switzerland

- Central Translation Service: profile and goals

    - 10 translators and 1 terminologist

    - secretariat and management

- Specifics of Coop Switzerland

    - oriented to the Swiss market

    - active in trade, manufacturing and services

- Organisation as cost centre

    - economic significance

    - value of work provided

    - cost-to-performance ratio

Requirements of translation

- Speed (shortest possible time)

- Efficiency (methods commensurate with desired result)

- Consistency (terminological, textual etc)

- Readability (communicative quality of texts)

- Accuracy (e.g. requirements relating to product liability)

Work analysis 1993

Conducted by Coop Switzerland's Internal Controlling

Investigation

- Organisation of work
- Quality
- Quantity
- Speed
- Flexibility
- EDP compatibility
- In-house/outsourced ratio

Measures

- Organisation as cost centre
- Streamlining of procedures
- Orders to be processed via LAN
- Creation of terminologist's post
- Creation of Coop terminological database
- Introduction of computer-assisted translation at all workplaces

Development of work methods

- Typewriter, paper, pens, dictionaries (until 1983)
- Word processing, dictionaries (until 1993)
- Word processing, terminology database, computer-assisted translation, CD-ROM, on-line services (since 1993)

Change in work methods (resource management)

Efficient use of available resources and capacity, i.e. avoiding

- duplication of translation work
- wasteful use of time and resources

Change in work methods (providing customer satisfaction)

Inconsistencies in repetitive text (packaging, advertising etc), existence of different translations for the same text

- impairs understanding (intertextual references are lost in the translation process (example: product lines, NP)
- undermines the creation of a "textual" image of the organisation

Change in working methods (quality management)

Quality assurance

- accuracy and consistency of terminology

- intertextual consistency

- the means used must be appropriate to the text to be translated (quality at a reasonable price)

- text appropriate to its purpose (product liability)

New tools

- Multiterm 95 Professional Plus from Trados GmbH

- Translator's Workbench 1.07 from Trados GmbH

- CD-ROMs, on-line services

Efficiency in translation I

Method must be adapted to the type of text

Efficiency in translation II

Criteria for using computer-assisted translation:

- repetitive texts (significant amount of repetition within one and the same text)

     - manuals (IT, etc)

     - instructions (e.g. for different items in a line of electrical appliances)

- multi-version texts

     - administrative planning documents subject to periodic revision

     - manuals subject to periodic revision

     - collective agreements

     - statutes etc.

Efficiency in translation III

- standardised texts (recipes, packaging texts, manuals, instructions, management documents, plans, diagrams)

- texts with frequently recurring terms (do-it-yourself/building centres)

Reshaping of the translation process

I Preparation and follow-up

- Selecting the translation method according to the nature and type of text involved

- Preparing the document for computer-assisted translation (formats, abbreviations, standard text, analysis and/or Translate function)

- Post-translation editing of documents and updating databases

II Work method: The translator

Selecting the most effective work method according to the principle of "leaving all repetitive work to the machine"

- interactive (manual or semi-automatic)
- automatic adaptation during computer-assisted translation (especially with long texts)
- traditional

General principles

Working principle I: suitability of text

Only suitable texts are selected for computer-assisted translation

Working principle II: Approach orders from a long-term viewpoint

Losing time in order to gain time = cutting costs!

Working principle III: Consistency in translation memory

Ensuring the consistency of texts in the translation memory = creating a shared knowledge base for future translations. This means avoiding any incosistencies arising from translators' personal ambitions.

Results as per 30.6.96:

Costs/performance

- Achievement of departmental target: 75%
- More than a 30% improvement in output while personnel costs and billing rates remain unchanged
- Substantial increase in number of translation orders (especially in the IT field) because of efficient approach used

Translator response

- High level of acceptance of new CAT tools after initial scepticism
- Terminology database (15 000 entries) and translation memories (French: 107 000 entries and Italian: 50 000 entries) are treated as a shared activity that merits careful attention
- No inappropriate "creativity"

Quality of texts

- High level of consistency in CAT texts
- Translation memories as terminology resource

- Long texts easy to divide up among several translators

- Preparation of texts for external translators

Infrastructure requirements

- Strengthening of IDP support for translators

- Organisation of support for network and database

- Organisation of more intensive Windows, Word and network training

- Organisation of comprehensive servicing of tools, translation memories and terminology databases

Conclusions

- Reduction in relative translation costs

- Establishment of quality standards in the terminological and the intertextual domain

- Less duplication of effort

- Additional benefits for the translation service's customers

- Reduced loss of know-how on departure of staff