

Tutorial: Up close and personal with a Translator - How Translators Really Work

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1 Intended Audience and Goals

This tutorial is intended for researchers and developers who are working on Computer Assisted Technology (CAT), and want to know more about how translators do their work, and what they need from such technology. It will teach them how to acquire such knowledge using a simple Human Computer Interaction Technique (HCI) called Contextual Inquiry.

Contextual Inquiry is a well-known, mature technique (Beyer and Holtzblatt, 1998), where researchers observe and interview potential end-users while they are involved in their normal day to day work. One advantage of this technique, compared to other requirement elicitation methods, is that it is generative. Instead of just asking end-users what they think they need (which often turns out to be different from what they actually do need), researchers aim for a deep understanding of important details of the end-user's world. This intimate knowledge can then be leveraged to design new and possibly disruptive technologies and processes, which are nevertheless well grounded in actual end-user needs and context, and have therefore a greater chance of being adopted. The presenters of this tutorial have been using this technique in the context of several Computer Assisted Translation technology projects, and have found it to be invaluable (Désilets et al, 2008).

The tutorial will be highly interactive and allows attendees to get hands on experience with the technique, by observing an actual translator doing her normal work. Attendees also get to ask probing questions, and collectively analyze what they saw

and heard during the interview, in terms of what it might mean for CAT development. For many developers and researchers in the audience, this may be their very first exposure to the work of actual end-users of their technology, and this in itself, has been shown to produce long-lasting and valuable changes in developers attitudes towards end users (Beyer and Holtzblatt, 1998).

2 Process and Activities

The tutorial will proceed as follows:

Introduction to Contextual Interview (30 mins)

- Why it's important to know your end users.
- Use Contextual Interview to that end.
- Do's and don'ts of Contextual Inquiry

Generating a Focus Structure (15 mins)

- Attendees collaboratively post questions or issues for which they hope to get answers through user observation.
- Each issue is written on a postIt note, and participants strive to cluster similar issues together on big sheets of blank poster

Observing the translator (60 mins)

- This is the bulk of the tutorial.
- A volunteer professional translator will do a typical translation task in front of the audience.
- The translator's screen will be displayed with a projector, so that attendees can see it.
- The translator will think aloud as she is doing her work.
- People in the audience will be allowed to interrupt with probing questions about what the translator is doing and why.

- Attendees will be encouraged to take notes about what they see, for use in later discussion.

BREAK (15 mins)

- This will give attendees a chance to start discussing what they saw informally.

Collaboratively analyzing the data (30 mins)

- Attendees write notes and observations on post-its, and put them on the poster, near the question or issue to which it seems to pertain.
- If new issues or questions arise from certain observations, they are added to the poster.

Closing discussion (30 mins)

- Attendees discuss what they learned from the tutorial
- Did they see anything today that will impact their work?
- Did they get a new idea that was directly inspired by what they saw?
- Did they see something that will slightly change the direction of one of their projects?
- Would they consider using Contextual Inquiry to acquire more information about users of their specific projects?

Total time: 3h

3 Presenters Biographies

Alain Désilets

Alain Désilets is a Research Officer at the Institute for Information Technology of the National Research Council of Canada (NRC), and an active member of the Language Technology Research Center, a joint initiative between the NRC, Université du Québec en Outaouais, and the Translation Bureau of Canada. For more than a decade, he has been doing research on applications of human language technologies (speech recognition, machine translation, bilingual text alignment and text mining), always with a strong emphasis on meeting genuine needs of end user.

He is also very active in the area of collaborative wiki tools, and was general chair for the international WikiSym 2007 conference held in Montreal, Canada last October. He is co-founder of LOPLT, a multidisciplinary group of researchers from NRC and Université du Québec en Outaouais that aims at better understanding the technological needs of professional translators by observing and interviewing them in action in their normal workplace.

His latest work has focused on computer-assisted translation technology, with an emphasis on tools to help translators collaborate and share knowledge within world-wide communities of practice.

Geneviève Patenaude

Geneviève Patenaude is a research assistant at the National Research Council of Canada. She received a Bachelor of Translation and Writing from University of Quebec in Outaouais (2006) and is now enrolled in a master's degree in Communication and Languages at Sherbrooke University. A university research assistant since November 2004, she has worked on different research projects related to language technologies, including a number of contextual inquiries with professional translators. Her research interests include Writing and Languages (French and English) in context. Her fields of interest also include cognitive processing of information and message understanding as well as Translation. Her current Masters work focuses on the technical terms in use in automotive mechanics in Québec. She is also a lecturer at Université du Québec en Outaouais, where she teaches writing and communication.

Andrée Sirois

André Sirois is a freelance translator with over 15 years of experience. After working in various Canadian government departments, she started her own private practice in 1994, which serves customers across Canada and even the United States. She is also president of the Réseau des Traducteurs en Éducation, an association of Canadian translators, revisers, terminologists and writers who work on their own as freelancers or for a variety of employers and share an interest in education in Canada.

References

Beyer H., Holtzblatt K. (1998) *Contextual Design: A Customer-Centered Approach to Systems Designs.*, Morgan Kauffman.

Désilets, A., Brunette, L., Melançon, C., Patenaude, G. (2008) *Reliable Innovation: A Tecchie's Travels in the Land of Translators.* Proceedings of the AMTA 2008. Waikiki, Hawaii, Oct 21-25, 2008.