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Factsheet

Understanding
Translation Memory

For large scale and long-term translation and localization projects, translation memory is a term that is often brought up. What exactly is translation memory and how does it add value? This factsheet answers frequently asked questions about translation memory, allowing you to understand the translation process in greater detail.

What is translation memory?

Translation memory is a linguistic database that stores segments of previous translations. Such segments can vary from phrases to sentences to paragraphs. Both segments of the source text and its corresponding translation are stored in language pairs known as "translation units". These are reused in subsequent translations for time and cost efficiency.

How does translation memory work?

The translation memory program breaks the text to be translated into segments, looks for matches in its database of "translation units" and presents matching pairs to the translator for review. The translator can accept the suggestion, replace it with a fresh translation, or modify it to match the source.

Some translation memory systems search for 100% matches only while others employ fuzzy matching algorithms to retrieve the segments. In latter cases, the segments are presented to the translator with the differences flagged.

In cases where the translation is replaced or modified, the new translation is recorded in the database. This improves the database over time, so subsequent translations can be even more accurate.

When does translation memory come in handy?

Translation memory can be used in any project that requires the content to be localized from one language into another. They are most effective when translating documents with a high level of repetition, particularly in technical terms. They are also useful for translating incremental changes in a previously translated document, like the user manual of an updated product.

In addition, translation memory can complement content management systems (CMS). A CMS allows individual blocks of text, rather than entire documents, to be edited and published in a variety of formats. Translation memory speeds up this process.

In online projects, a translation memory system enables the easy extraction and reinsertion of text that requires translation. In an HTML file, time is saved from having to search among this coding for this text. There is also no impact on the coding in pages where the tags are hidden. Thus, these pages can be as easily managed as normal documents.

What are the benefits of using translation memory?

• Translation memory reduces the cost of large scale or long term projects because it allows translation to be reused whenever appropriate.

• The translation process is accelerated for the same reason.

• Consistency is maintained in translated documents, including common definitions, phrases and terminology. This is especially important in projects that involve several translators.

• Translation memory systems ensure that the whole document is translated because it does not allow for empty target segments.

Corporate Headquarters
10 Jalan Besar #16-01/02
Sim Lim Tower
Singapore 208787

Tel: +65 6577 4646
Fax: +65 6577 4647
Email: singapore@verztec.com

Verztec Consulting Pte Ltd (Verztec) is an international ISO 9001:2015 Certified Provider of Global Content Management and Localization services in over 100 foreign languages.

With a global team of native, in-country linguists with subject matter expertise in over 26 industries, Verztec offers premium quality language services at competitive prices.

Over the years, Verztec has earned a reputation for having stringent quality assurance processes in place to ensure top quality deliverables. Our emphasis on quality and providing excellent customer service have also resulted in the increase of our loyal customers.

Verztec is the partner of choice for leading international corporations around the world, enabling effective and engaging communications across all channels.

How does a translation memory differ from a terminology tool?
Translation memory manages sentences and sentence-like units. A terminology tool is used to guide the use of multilingual terms. These two are often used together.

How does translation memory software differ from machine translation?
Machine translation automatically translates a document without any human input. The quality of translation is usually poor because a machine cannot understand the subtleties or contexts of language. On average, the accuracy of such translations varies between 50%–70%. Moreover, machine translations can only support a limited number of languages.

In comparison, translation memory systems are reviewed by professional translators. It is a tool to help the translator to increase the efficiency, consistency and quality of the project. In most translation memory systems, the number of supported languages is unlimited.

Now that you have a clearer idea of translation memory and how it can improve the quality of translations, you might want to check if your localization service provider uses this supplementary tool for your large-scale or long-term projects.