

Automated translation quality control

Nathalie De Sutter discusses how new technologies can mitigate the threats faced by Language Service Providers (LSPs).

All maturing industries try to avoid their products being seen as commodities that can easily be bought from any supplier; localisation and translation service providers are no exception. In most cases, translation does not pertain to the core business of the customer, who therefore considers it to be a 'non-critical' purchase. This, combined with the decreasing complexity of the supply market, increasing competition and more professional purchasing behaviour, results in the perception of localisation as a commodity. Customers demand greater flexibility, with higher volumes to be processed and shorter deadlines. One indicator is the practice of auctioning assignments of translation projects.

Differentiate or innovate

Many companies seek refuge by positioning themselves as 'high-quality providers' and strive toward a conscious commitment to quality as a differentiator. However, as we operate in a perceived commodity market, we should be aware that companies are not necessarily willing to pay extra for this and that the trinity — high quality, on time and at a minimum price — is often seen as a minimum requirement. Offering a better-than-acceptable level of quality without missing any deadlines at lower cost requires considerable process innovation.

Kaizen™ revisited

After falling out of fashion for over a decade, and thanks to the great performance of companies like Toyota, there is renewed managerial interest in Japanese management techniques and the Japanese philosophy of quality thinking. One of the principal concepts in the work of Masaaki Imai, founder of the Kaizen Institute, is that quality improvement and cost reduction are, in fact, compatible.

What more has Kaizen taught us? First of all, quality is the responsibility of everyone in the organisation and not exclusively of the quality department. Indeed, fighting non-

value-adding activities, or *Muda*, should be one of the key activities of all members of organisations striving for continuous improvement or *Kaizen*. A second insight relates to the fact that quality improvement, contrary to traditional belief, has a cost-reducing effect. 'Doing it right the first time' may require an initial investment, but the long-term impact generates many advantages outside the limited framework of quality. Spending money on quality seems inevitable; how much money, however, depends on *when* you intend to spend it.

Go to Gemba

The first implementation rule in Kaizen is 'Go to Gemba first!' *Gemba* means 'real place' but, in quality lingo, refers to 'the workplace'. So 'go to Gemba' means go to the shop floor, observe, measure and take immediate action — something the translation industry is very good at. We are flexible and will solve or fix any problem. However, Mr Imai takes this a step further: the immediate action is only a temporary countermeasure. It is more important to find the root cause of the problem and subsequently standardise so as to create the necessary procedures and tools to prevent a reoccurrence. This is exactly what our industry should do. In our hurry to consolidate and become a value creator, we have lost touch with the Gemba.

Doing it right the first time

Traditionally, in order to verify the quality of a translation, a revision by a second — usually senior — translator is carried out, a custom that is certainly expensive and time-consuming. Another possibility is to have the more experienced translator make the initial translation and a second person, who has yet to master the craft, proof the text to detect and eliminate inaccuracies and imperfections such as incorrectly formatted numbers, and punctuation errors and omissions. This approach not only makes the junior translator more familiar with certain technical subjects, it also strips the translated text from

those small defects that typically annoy the reader. It was precisely this last scenario that Ycomm was determined to automate. The notion that everything that is measurable is also traceable could be moulded into a software application that would eliminate most of the repetitive and predictable (formal) mistakes right after initial translation. This would not only improve the translation's quality, but also avoid corrective and often redundant actions afterwards, such as updating the translation memories or making corrections at the DTP stage. Furthermore, such a checker would be able to locate mistakes that are very difficult to spot 'manually', such as the inconsistent application of a 3000-word terminology list.

Automated translation quality control

QA Distiller™ enables us to locate omissions, inconsistencies, formatting problems and terminology mistakes in bilingual files (.txt, .rtf and .tmx), and also allows the rapid correction of these mistakes by taking us directly from the reported error to the problem in the text. An omission has occurred if a segment in the source text has no acceptable counterpart in the target text (Figure 1). It is possible that the translator skipped the source segment, or that the target segment is either empty or contains (partially) identical text as compared to the source language segment. It is indispensable for technical translations to be consistent: assuming that identical source segments should have identical targets, a consistency check can easily be automated by comparing the content of these segments.

QA Distiller™ also checks for a number of language-dependent formatting irregularities. It will, for example, verify whether a translation contains any characters that do not pertain to the valid Unicode range of the language in question. It checks whether punctuation is correct, whether numbers are identical in the source and target (and are correctly

formatted), and that no suspicious multiple spaces and tabs occur in the text. Last but not least, it contains a terminology checker that verifies whether each term in the source text has been translated in accordance with one or more loaded dictionaries.

It is true that these errors only indicate the more 'formal' translation mistakes. Other possible problems such as style, fluency, register and grammar are ignored, making this quality checker suitable only for texts that are repetitive or deal with highly specialised subjects, a point that is equally applicable to the use of translation memories in general. In addition, proofreading may still be necessary.

Formal mistakes, however, are usually indicative of other severe quality issues in a translation and their detection allows us to evaluate our suppliers more objectively. Vendor evaluation and selection is, after all, one of the most critical activities in a business model that depends to a large extent on outsourcing. Discussions about style preferences or the choice between equally correct terms have often led to never-ending discussions, whereas formal mistakes such as inconsistent translations (Figure 2), untranslated text and incorrectly formatted numbers (for example 0.12 instead of 0,12 in French) are objectively incorrect in technical manuals. Total quality assurance obviously requires an integrated approach, but every step toward a better translation is progress.

A check with QA Distiller™ also

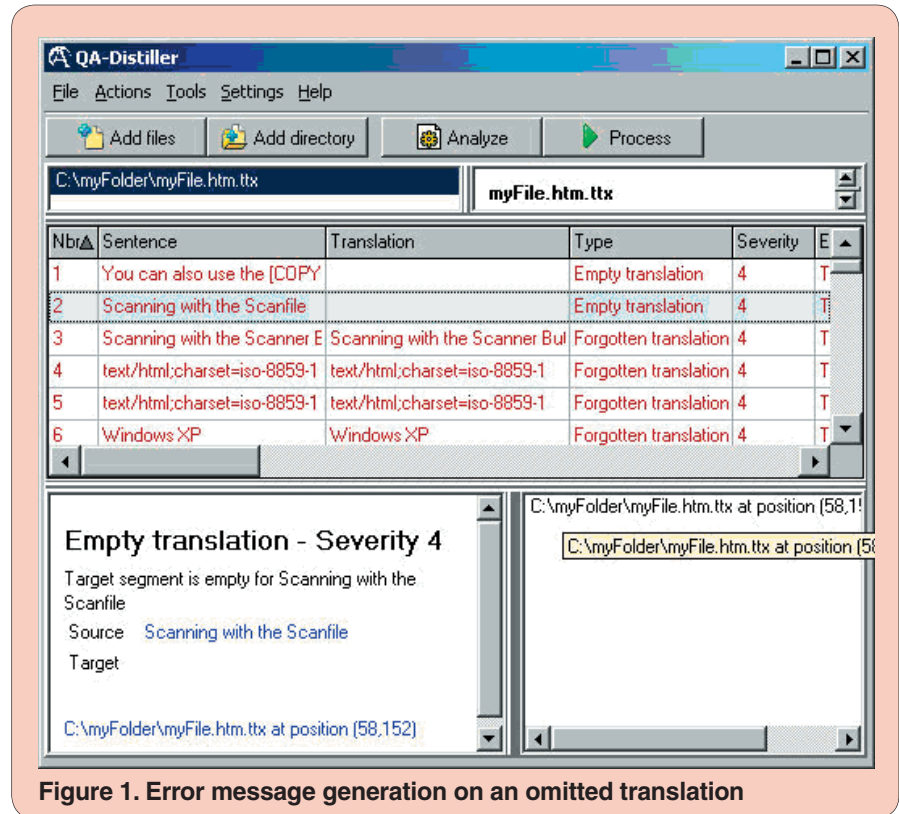


Figure 1. Error message generation on an omitted translation

works for the verification and clean-up of translation memories, thus preventing the dreaded 'garbage in, garbage out' effect that should always be taken into consideration when previous translations are recycled. Some errors will be generated only if there is a discrepancy between source and target text (Figure 3). QA Distiller is basically a comparison tool, based on the assumption that there is a certain level of correspondence between the *source* and *target* text. This implies that, if the source text itself contains errors or ambiguities, QA Distiller™ may not be able to identify related mistakes in

the target text. This takes us to another discussion on which I will comment very briefly: clients should not penalise translation suppliers for errors that are caused by faulty source documents.

Reducing proofreading efforts

Eliminating mistakes at an early stage saves time at the proofreading stage. However, there is a second way to reduce effort: proofreaders often revise texts that have already been validated, as the text was initially extracted from a translation memory or is the result of a pre-translation process. ColourTagger™ is a tool that colours translated text

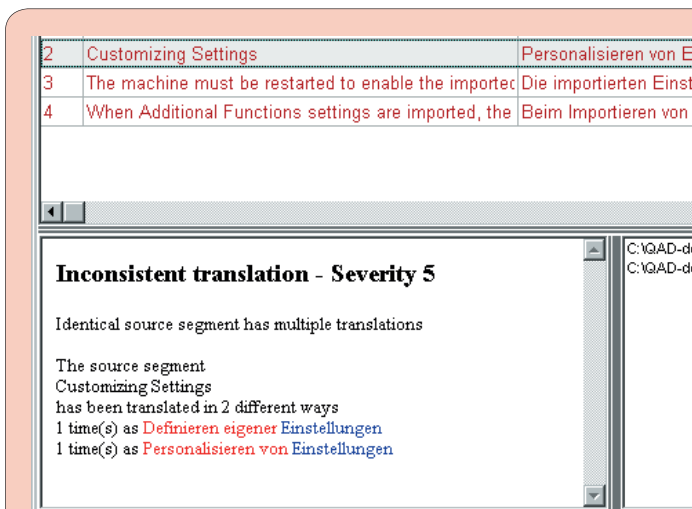


Figure 2. Inconsistent translation

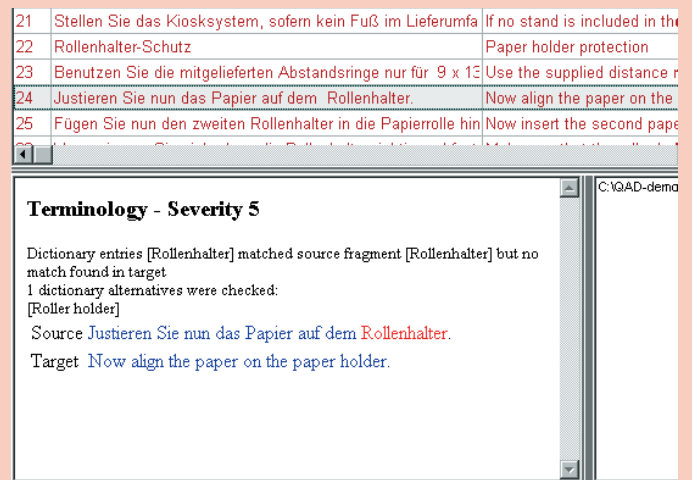


Figure 3. Terminology mistake

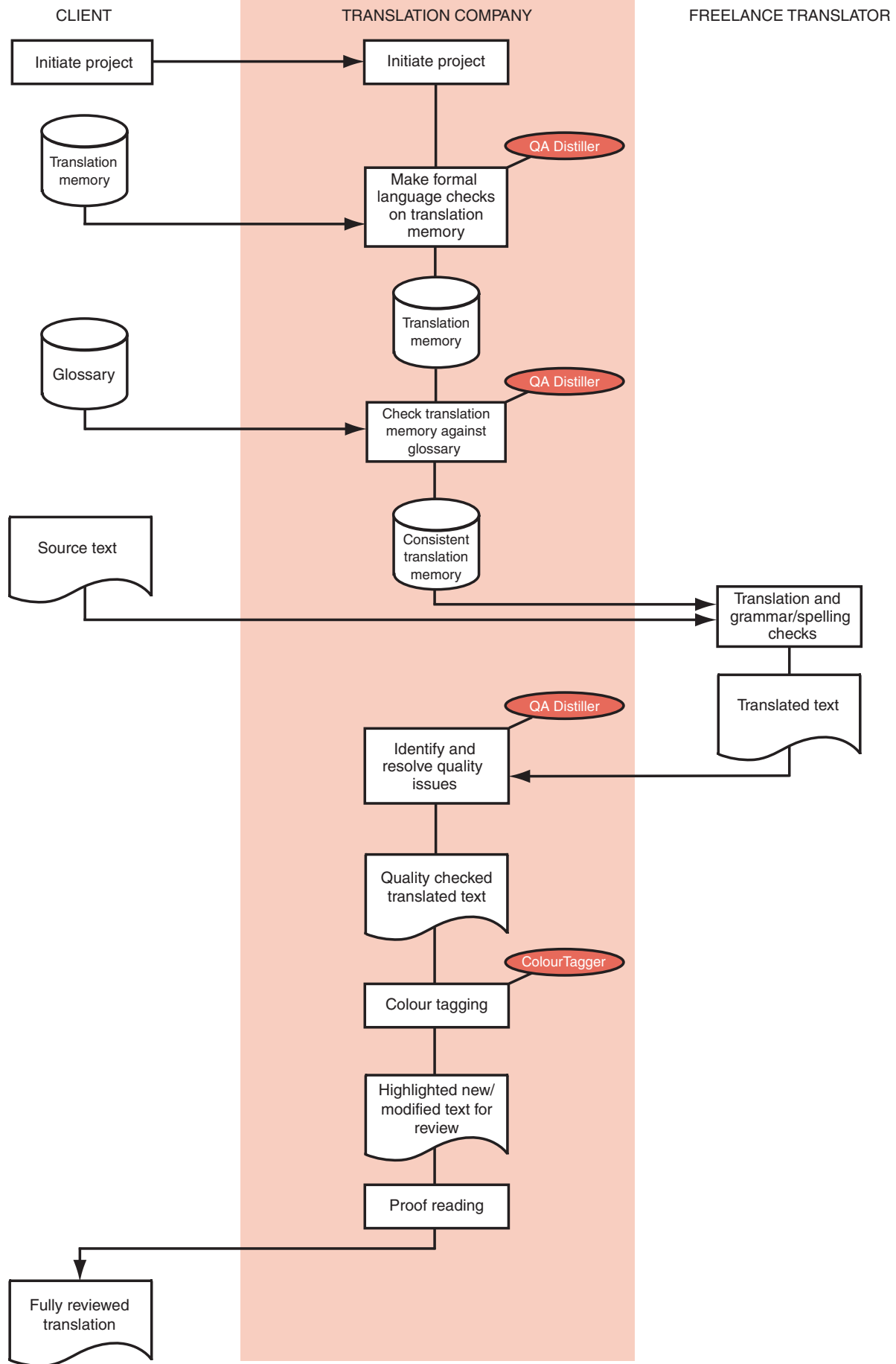


Figure 4. Implementing QA Distiller™ in the localisation process

based upon its recuperation level from Trados™ XTranslate or a Trados™ translation memory, and presents the results in a laid-out FrameMaker™ or HTML document that includes illustrations (Figure 5). If 75% of a manual has been generated from a validated translation memory, the proofreader may want to skip these parts and concentrate on the sections containing new text.

Get what you expect

Nevertheless, perception of the overall quality of a translation project is still relative, as it is defined by the client's expectations. Making these explicit and communicating them upstream will avoid unnecessary discussions and misunderstandings. Perhaps you have also encountered the situation in which translation memory and glossary, both provided by the customer, are inconsistent. A quick terminology check of the translation memory will give you immediate proof of this, and discussing this with your customer before the next translation project kicks off is definitely a good idea. Ask the customer to decide which reference material has priority and implement corrections if necessary.

A well-defined division of tasks and an open communication between you and your (freelance) supplier are equally vital. Figure 4 illustrates how tasks may be allocated. The translator runs a spelling and grammar check on the translation before delivering it, while the translation company commits itself to verifying the quality

of a translation memory before forcing the freelancers to give discounts on recuperated segments that may still require complete revision and editing.

Kaizen in translation

These approaches are closely related to the insights provided by Japanese quality thinking described at the start of this article:

everyone involved in a translation project monitors the quality at every stage of the process. Problems and mistakes are detected early, so they can be fixed before they infiltrate the translation memory, preventing dreaded scenarios such as the realisation that a terminology list has been ignored when the final layout is almost complete. The client has the assurance that its translation partner takes quality seriously and spends less time proofreading because the 'stupid' mistakes have already been detected automatically and eliminated. The DTP department will have fewer corrections to implement and none will require corrections to the translation memory. In the end, the translation company has gained control over the outsourced translations, even if the project manager does not master the languages involved. It is evident that all parties benefit from this strategy, but above all, the

customer receives a decent translation without paying more. **C**

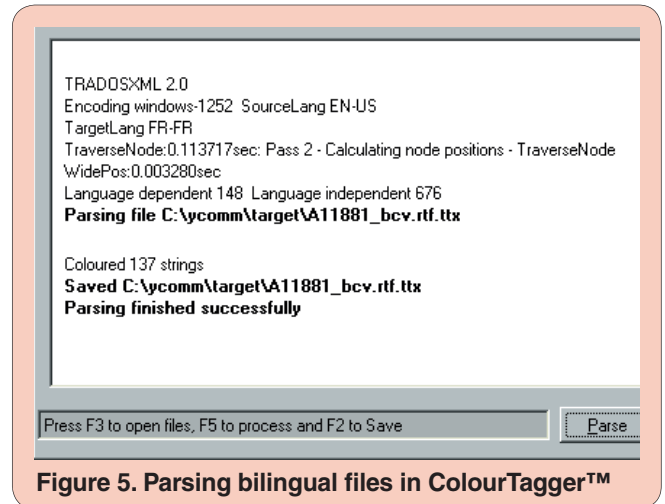
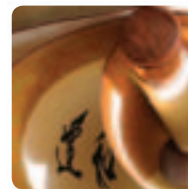
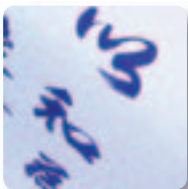


Figure 5. Parsing bilingual files in ColourTagger™

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Ycomm Europe - Interface Providers

Ycomm Europe is the centre of excellence for multilingual content management within the Yamagata Printing Group. Ycomm offers a variety of team-based services for handling documentation projects from A to Z, and ensures dedicated project management, knowledgeable and experienced staff, and the necessary flexibility in methods and tools. Ycomm firmly believes in the customer-driven approach: years of experience gained in serving the documentation divisions of our Japanese clients and striving for ever-higher levels of quality have resulted in our automating the "human processes" wherever possible. Our motivation to satisfy customers has accelerated the development of a variety of tools that have proven to smoothen the workflow and have been assimilated into an integrated Total Quality approach.

Our services include:

Multilingual Content Management

Desktop Publishing & Printing

Compilation & Language Engineering

Translation and Localisation

Translation Quality Assurance Services

Terminology Management



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