



State of the industry

The translation industry in 2016
Trends and tips for translators

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Industry trends in 2016

The year 2015 has almost come to an end. This year the industry did not see any disruptive initiatives or events. Nevertheless, much happened: new CAT tools and solutions were introduced, new companies were founded, and trends that were on the rise last year grew even bigger. In this second State of the Industry I highlight the most remarkable trends and developments from this year – trends and developments that will make even more impact in the year to come.

Increasing price pressure

By far the most contested item in the translation industry is the price. End clients often demand a sharp price from agencies, which in the end boils down to a cut in rates for freelance translators. A second factor that influences increasing price pressures is the development of new systems and solutions, which often are developed to cut costs and win the competition on price but in the end contribute to a vicious circle of even higher demands for even lower rates. A third contributing factor is the increase in (new) translators who begin their working life by offering low rates or who fall prey to companies that promise lots of work but in return demand low rates. In some cases they even offer opportunities for 'starters in the translation industry' or for people 'who want to extend their portfolio' or 'who want to gain experience', thereby attracting low cost professionals and pushing more expensive professionals out of the market.

The steady rise of new tools and the introduction of lower prices – whatever their reasons – will make a vicious circle that will not be broken in the years to come.

Freeing up of freelance translators' work

The idea of self-billing, that was introduced not so many years ago and only took centre stage last year, is now growing larger. More and more companies are introducing payment cycles based on their own records. Translators no longer need to send their invoices as companies will pay the amounts owed – based on POs – in due time after the project is finished. In some cases, translators need to generate and/or print their invoice afterwards but there are even companies that send own generated invoices automatically by email as proof of payment and as a document for the translator's records.

Despite the adaptation of this principle, the vast majority of companies require translators themselves to invoice. A major benefit of self-billing by companies is that the details are always correct (some companies even send the invoice to be paid in advance in order to give the translators a chance to check). Furthermore, translators do not need to spend time on checking details and creating and sending invoices.

A big caveat is that the method does not allow much flexibility in terms of POs and invoicing. The details of the company are always leading and translators are made dependable on their clients in some sense.

Growing amount of work

The growth in the amount of work available is highly subjective and differs among language pairs. Nevertheless, translators across all countries and in almost all language pairs report stability at least in the amount of work – and even growth. An important reason for this growth is the improving economic climate and the ongoing rise of new technological developments. Despite the importance of English and Chinese in the current market, companies still strive to offer people product guidance in their own language. The emergence of new markets and many people's improving financial situation influences companies in their decision to offer products and support in native languages. Given the economic recovery and the trends in improved welfare and emerging technologies, the future seems bright for translators in terms of work.

Machine translations

For many trend watchers, companies, and forward-looking translators, “machine translation” and “translation engine” are buzzwords. However, the real breakthrough of machine translations is still not registering. Although new end clients and translation companies alike are investing time and money in translation engines and new translation systems in order to cut their prices, the amounts are not yet staggering. Furthermore, in many cases that developed last year the quality was not convincing. Until now only the companies that have been working with machine translation for many years have satisfactory results – although they still need linguistic professionals in order to have qualitatively adequate texts.

In some cases, the companies seem to rely on machine translations along for some texts. This results in crooked, illegible or otherwise poor texts. At the same time the “garbage in-garbage out” principle comes into play. Judging from the quality of new translation engine results Microsoft recently seems to have had translators that did a poor job. If companies are relying only on first line professionals for PME – and that is a quite logical approach if they use translation engines in order to lower their costs – and, at the same time, these professionals are not the best in the industry, then a loss in quality is unavoidable. A good PME approach only works well when the quality of the engine is good and the quality of editors is even better.

Where translation engines traditionally were instruments for translation agencies and end clients alike to generate material that was post-edited by freelance translators, a new product was introduced that aimed to offer translators everything they needed to create a translation engine on their own – Slate Desktop – which started as a crowdfunding project. The introduction of a one of a kind solution should not give rise to any speculations about trends, but it should be clear that Slate Desktop offers a disruptive view of how translation engines are used and how machine translations can also be generated by freelance translators. When this initiative will be successful, similar product introductions will soon follow.

Own translation tools

Last year saw the introduction and development of new CAT tools by translation agencies and companies, mainly software and app developers. The big agencies have already run their own tools for years, but now medium-sized agencies are introducing their own, often cloud-based, tools as well.

App and software developers are creating their own translation tools for several reasons: they often do not have sound knowledge of the possibilities that CAT tools offer for translations, they have the knowledge and experience to develop systems that suit their needs, and the creation of an internal translation platform prevents them from sharing a multitude of files – and “secrets” – with many translators.

It should be noted that many of these translation tools are not CAT tools. In many cases the “tools” provide an environment where strings can be translated directly, but they have no intelligence for calculating repe-

repetitions and matches, and helping translators to improve or speed up their translation results.

A major benefit of internally developed and hosted systems is that they provide a secure environment that can be amended and extended easily, while also being easily connected to the app, website, and software development environments – thereby avoiding costly time and energy.

Real-time translations

Closely related to the own translation tools are the real-time translation tools. These tools are in essence own translation tools, but have an extra benefit (and caveat): translations that are put in the translation environment are fed to the front-end directly. This approach does not work for app and software developers as they have to re-compile and re-submit all their new releases. However, website developers and developers of cloud tools are using this more and more – sometimes only because of a geeky mind-set, but sometimes because it offers possibilities for improving their systems directly while generating new clients on the fly.

The cloud

It should be no surprise that the cloud is gaining a greater foothold. Cloud services like DropBox, Box and Google Drive are used even more by freelance translators and translation agencies, despite the non-disclosure agreements signed and the confidentiality constraints of some documents. It is interesting, and at the same time strange to see that companies that place the highest constraints on sharing file use public sharing services to spread confidential files. The use of cloud tools is in many cases primarily a cost consideration, but their public acceptance also plays a role: cloud services are no longer alien, which make them useful despite their privacy policies, frequent hacks and other dangers.

Nothing will prevent companies and translators from using cloud services even more in the future, but it may not take very long until the first public confidentiality scandal occurs.

New CAT tools

When it comes to CAT tools there are Trados Studio, MemoQ, Wordfast, Déjà Vu, Memsource, Catalyst and Across – to name a few. Each tool has its own benefits and caveats and its own community, although the most used tools are growing more and more close. Despite the existence of many tools, there are still new CAT programs developed that appeal to specific communities. This year, CafeTran Espresso, among others, saw a rise in popularity among translators who are looking for light-weight software tools that work intuitively and that offer specific features that traditional CAT tools do not provide for. New CAT tools often focus on specific demands, such as the demand for adapting PDF files or the demand for using professional translation engines. They also offer support for a variety of file types – even native file types from other CAT tools – that are not supported by other files, thereby creating the demand itself.

More automation

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Conclusion

There is much going on in the industry. New technologies that were developed years ago are now being implemented on a greater scale, while at the same time new developments and solutions are being introduced that will help agencies and freelance translators alike. These new developments can be disruptive and helpful at the same time, and form both a solution to the increasing price pressure while simultaneously adding to the load. The new developments support agencies, translators and end clients but they will benefit from them only when they adopt them – while at the same time securing the confidentiality of their processes and documents. This era requires a new mind-set and new processes to succeed. Only in this way will translators and agencies secure their business for the times to come.

About Pieter Beens



Pieter Beens is a native Dutch translator, offering translation and copywriting service from English into Dutch. Pieter works for major brands in the world, sharing his knowledge and expertise and dedication to quality both with clients and colleagues.

Visit his blog and CV at www.vertaalt.nu/blog.

Clients

Pieter loves being broad instead of specializing into one subject. He nevertheless only offers his services in industries in which he can prove his experience.

Rabobank

Volkswagen

Microsoft



Rabobank



ut his work?



Microsoft

"First of all I am "very" happy with the quality of the text the translator delivered, it was a pretty "free-style" (even playful if you wish..) translation yet with everything in it, translated in a very understandable and fluent way, without sticking too close to the (literal) source text. I really had trouble finding issues and making corrections, not even 1 spelling mistake, also grammar was absolutely perfect! Usually I would never give a perfect score but this only leaves me one possible score: 10! The translator had a very good understanding (and feeling) of the topic he was dealing with.

Reviewer



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