

Post-editing in practice

From light to full post-editing: What to expect of editing services

Minimalism in technical documentation

Writing manuals that encourage more intuitive, natural and instant product use

Say it clear

Using a controlled language to create better, more concise manuals



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From the editor

In 1946, English novelist George Orwell laid out six writing rules in an essay called "Politics and the English Language". His purpose was to criticize the "ugly and inaccurate" written English particularly used in political propaganda "to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind".

Orwell argued that such unclear prose was a "contagion", which had spread even to those who had no intent to hide the truth, and that it concealed a writer's thoughts from himself and others.

Orwell made his point by translating Ecclesiastes 9:11:

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding,

nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

into what he called "modern English of the worst sort":

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

Interestingly, Orwell's writing rules aren't that far off from the modern rule sets of a controlled language. Just like the acclaimed author once admonished writers to choose concreteness and clarity over vagueness and political conformity, today's technical writers are encouraged to cut the flesh of lengthy manuals to reveal clear messages and precise instructions.

This issue of our magazine is all about clear language.

In our focus theme Uwe Muegge takes a close look at established controlled languages and introduces some powerful controlled language tools, that are available for free (page 10).

To assist German writers faced with the challenge of creating documents in English, tekomp has developed a new guideline titled "English for German-speaking authors". Melanie Siegel, who helped to compose the new publication, sums up the gist of it (page 14).

Furthermore, we take a close look at the concept of minimalism in

technical writing. Leah Guren explains how we can write manuals that encourage more intuitive, natural and instant product use (page 24). Ray Gallon applies the concepts of cognitive science to technical communication and reveals some common misconceptions about minimalism (page 21).

While Don DePalma examines in his article the different types (and rates) of post-editing services available on the market (page 17), Latifah Elisa Kusri takes us on a journey to Indonesia, an emerging market that offers unique opportunities for the localization industry as well as international companies (page 29).

Tony Self draws an intriguing parallel between today's technical writers and Australia's 19th century railway engineers (page 31).

Finally, we wish all of our readers a successful and inspiring tcworld conference 2013!

Corinna Melville



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Say it clear

Controlled languages restrict writers to tight grammar rules and a limited vocabulary. In doing so, they not only help companies create better and more coherent manuals, but also save valuable time and money.

page 10



Post-editing in practice

Post-editing services and their costs vary largely depending on the needs of the translation buyer. From light to full post-editing, here is what is available on the market.

page 17

Minimalism in technical documentation

Less is more - writing manuals that encourage more intuitive, natural and instant product use.

page 24

6 news

focus

- 10 **Say it clear**
- 11 **Implementing a controlled language is now cheaper and easier than ever!**
Powerful and free controlled language rules available online
- 14 **Developing guidelines: English for German-speaking authors**
tekem introduces its newest publication

strategy

- 17 **Post-editing in practice**
- 21 **Minimalism and cognitive science**
Applying cognitive science to technical communication

solutions

- 24 **Minimalism in technical documentation**
- 27 **Clear and concise technical writing**
Finding the right balance between clarity and brevity

business culture

- 29 **Indonesia - an emerging market**

community

- 31 **Of standard gauge and technical communication**
- 32 **Nairobi and beyond - Translating for humanity**
Translators without Borders assists humanitarian projects around the world
- 34 **tcworld calendar**

- 3 editorial
- 3 imprint

TRANSLATIONS.COM LAUNCHES EXTENSION FOR MAGENTO

Language service and technology provider Translations.com has launched a new technology for users of Magento, eBay's e-commerce solution. With the addition of the GlobalLink Project Director extension, Magento customers gain a seamless, one-stop shop for launching multiple-language websites. The GlobalLink Extension on Magento Connect allows users to initiate, automate, control, track, and complete all facets of the translation process from within Magento's user interface. For e-commerce companies, the result is a cost-effective platform for managing and delivering multilingual content to customers and prospects around the globe.

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The battle to serve your digital self has begun

A survey conducted by the global research and advisory firm Forrester shows that individuals all over the world are using personal cloud technologies to store their personal and work stuff – files, contacts, photos, music, and videos – in online services. In the US, 77 percent of adult Internet users utilize one or more of these services, while in Europe 61 percent do so. As a result, there's now a new Internet gold rush to help people build their "digital self" – to help customers access, manage, and benefit from digital information using any smartphone, tablet, PC, or web browser. According to the report, today's personal cloud tools for managing the digital self will evolve into a full ecosystem of services for the digital self in three phases: 1) satisfying simple needs, such as file sync; 2) services for the digital self, such as financial management; and 3) curated ecosystems, offering holistic sets of federated services. In a blog post, Forrester's Frank Gillett explains, "Once your digital self is stored in online services, it becomes possible for providers to serve you

with not only automated storage but advice. These providers do things like automatically uploading your digital photos, synchronizing your contacts everywhere, and automatically assembling your expense report from photos, scans, or emails of receipts. Or even advising you on the right financial strategy or workout times based on your spending logs and work calendar." According to the report, the battle will play out over the next six years, and lines will be drawn based on which vendors step up to the plate. "Individuals will come to be defined as much by where they store their digital selves as what their nationality is. The big American Internet companies, major telcos, retailers, financial companies, and even some governments will compete to be the digital butler for the Web of services that make up your digital self," says Gillett. "Who you choose will define you and your choices will remake the power dynamics of the online world."

www.forrester.com



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SDL Trados Studio 2014

SDL, a provider of global customer experience management, has announced that SDL Trados Studio 2014 will be released this autumn. This release focuses on enhancements to the user experience, integrations and speed to improve the translation process and enhance capabilities for users.

Translators and translation providers continue to be squeezed for high quality translations, in less time and at lower costs. Market research firm Common Sense Advisory reports that the average per-word rate for translation for the 30 most commonly used languages on the Web fell 34.71 percent in the two years from 2010 to 2012. To remain competitive in this changing market, translators must leverage powerful tools and resources to improve project turnaround times and support their customers in delivering a global customer experience.

To support translators in an evolving business environment, SDL Trados Studio 2014 delivers the following capabilities:

- A new approach to alignment to improve re-use of translation where translation memories had not been created
- Enhanced user experience through an updated user interface to provide quick access to tools and options, making it easier to find features, enhancing user productivity
- Performance updates, particularly around opening, saving, preparing and analyzing files
- Tight integration with translation management solutions, making it a central component of enterprise translation deployments, also enhancing user productivity

www.sdl.com

GALA LAUNCHES LT ADVISOR

The Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) has launched its new platform for language technology specifications, ratings, and reviews. LT Advisor is a free, interactive directory of tools and technologies related to translation and localization. The platform offers a growing list of software and user reviews.

"Technology buyers can now search for products using their own criteria and compare features side by side. And developers of language tools can monitor their reputations and engage with customer communities directly," said Hans Fenstermacher, CEO of GALA.

According to Nielsen's latest Global Trust in Advertising report (2012), online reviews are the second most trusted source of brand information and messaging, behind personal recommendations. The reviews and comparisons in LT Advisor are focused on helping buyers choose tools that are right for them. LT Advisor is community-driven, and GALA invites all industry stakeholders to add content at www.gala-global.org/LTAdvisor.

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Interpretation and translation jobs on the rise in the U.S.

A recent USA Today report cites translation and interpretation jobs as among the fastest growing occupations. Hiring trends between 2002 and 2012 on Granted.com, a job search site based in Pasadena, California, reflected the growing demand for employees with multilingual skills.

The country's increasing ethnic diversity has created demand for workers with multilingual skills. The USA Today report listed interpretation and translation-related employment as the fourth fastest growing industry in the country.

From 2002 to 2012, employment grew 171 percent, with 31,720 jobs added in this time span. This trend is the result of both demographic shifts and overseas business expansion. The Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. continues to grow, particularly in border states like California, Texas, and Arizona. This has created a need on the most basic state and municipal level for interpretation services at schools and government offices. On the business side, large-scale international companies who deal with partners and clients in countries worldwide need to communicate in multiple languages to facilitate business transactions. Both

trends combined have created a surge in demand for both interpreters and translators. While the industry is rapidly expanding, compensation continues to be wide-ranging, depending on the individual's experience and skills set. According to the USA Today data, the top ten percent of translators made an average of \$91,800 a year, while the bottom tenth made less than \$23,570. Strong education or certification credentials can help give entry-level interpreters a leg up over the competition. The difficulty is that many clients cannot differentiate between qualifications of interpreters and will often simply hire the cheapest contractor, regardless of how credentialed or qualified that person may be.

Current hiring trends on job site Granted.com reflected the demand for workers with strong language skills. At the time that this release was written, more than 10,000 translation openings and nearly 26,000 interpretation openings were listed. California had the greatest demand for translation work, followed by New York, Texas, and Florida. Many of the positions were for project coordination, as companies seek workers with the language abilities to manage multilingual teams.



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Say it clear

Using a controlled language can not only save your company time and money, it also helps you create manuals for better readability and comprehension.



Implementing a controlled language is now cheaper and easier than ever!

The controlled language (CL) model is not new: Caterpillar Fundamental English was rolled-out in 1972, and many other enterprise- and a few industry-level controlled languages followed since then. What is new is the fact that now complete commercial rule sets and powerful CL tools are available for free, making controlled language authoring attractive for even the smallest organizations.

By Uwe Muegge

Why use a controlled language?

Improving the readability of technical texts

The first controlled language, C.K. Ogden's Basic English, consisted of 850 words and was published in 1930 with the goal of reducing the time needed to learn English. Modern controlled languages typically have two components:

- Grammar rules that are more restrictive than the rules of the general language;
- A vocabulary that contains only a fraction of the words of the general language.

These types of restrictions help authors avoid writing long, convoluted sentences and using uncommon words, all of which are arch enemies of easy readability and comprehension.

Supporting the translation process

When the European Aerospace Manufacturers Association (AECMA) introduced Simplified Technical English, the primary goal was not to simplify translation, but to completely eliminate it. How? By providing authors of aircraft maintenance manuals, which AECMA members were primarily concerned about, with a form of English that was specifically designed for an audience of non-native speakers of English. In many markets the documentation for a wide variety of products and services is subject to

strict translation requirements. Using a controlled language for the creation of technical documentation typically supports the translation process in a number of ways:

- The use of a restricted vocabulary typically reduces the number of terminology-related queries from translators, which speeds up the translation process.
- The use of a restrictive rule set typically improves the uniformity of source texts across documents, which helps leverage existing translations, thereby reducing translation cost.
- The use of a restrictive style guide typically reduces the number of words in source texts, which reduces translation cost and speeds up the translation process.

One of the most promising applications of controlled language is using Do-it-yourself statistical machine translation service (DIY SMT) for translating controlled language content. Once a statistical machine translation system has been customized with a controlled language corpus, this type of MT system should provide superior translation quality. The main benefit of the new DIY machine translation services is that these

new services make customization very easy and inexpensive. Once an organization has approx. 10,000 sentences of translated controlled language content, the transition to using statistical machine translation is an easy one with a DIY SMT service.

Supporting the writing process

'Speaking with one voice' is a common challenge many organizations have that work with teams of technical writers. 'Speaking with one voice' refers to the ability of every member in a team of writers to use the same style and vocabulary in the texts a writer creates. Providing technical writers with a shared set of writing rules and a shared vocabulary helps teams of writers create texts that are more uniform and require less editing. In fact, with a comprehensive set of writing rules in place, it is possible to automate certain aspects of the editing process using a controlled language checker.

Controlled language checkers, also known as style checkers, evaluate the compliance of texts with the grammar rules and the vocabulary rules of a controlled language. Below is a list of commercial controlled language checkers:

Content Optimization Software

Your Content,
Only Better

Acrolinx features:

- › Spell and grammar checking
- › Style and terminology checking
- › Multilingual terminology management
- › Reusable text modules
- › User-friendly operation

Benefits for your organization:

- › Reduced translation costs
- › Accurate and consistent content
- › Search Engine Optimization
- › Automated reporting



contact@acrolinx.com

- Acrolinx by Acrolinx (www.acrolinx.com)
- CLAT by IAI Saarbrücken (owl.li/nvU2f)
- HyperSTE by Tedopres (www.simplifiedenglish.net)
- MAXit by Smart Communications (www.smartny.com/maxit.htm)
- SEC by Talisen Technologies (owl.li/nvVjO)

Most of the products listed above are very mature, server-based enterprise solutions that were designed to support the large, geographically distributed teams of technical writers.

Are there any no-cost/
low-cost controlled
language rule sets and
tools?

Traditionally, controlled language environments were primarily used in large and very large organizations. However, one of the most exciting developments in the controlled language field is the recent release of several free CL resources. With powerful rule sets and a user-configurable vocabulary checker available at no cost, controlled language authoring (in English) is now an option for businesses of any size.

ASD-STE 100

In January of 2013, the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD), made Issue 6, which is the latest version of ASD-STE100, available to the public for free. ASD is the successor to AECMA, and ASD-STE100 is the updated version of Simplified Technical English. The PDF document that ASD distributes is 368 pages long and contains the complete set of writing rules as well as the entire dictionary of approved words. To receive a free copy of ASD-STE100, submit a request on the following web site: www.asd-ste100.org/request.html

Term Checker

The STE Term Checker is a special version of LanguageTool, an Open Source grammar, style and vocabulary checker, that has been optimized for ASD-STE100. The free version of the STE Term Checker implements the entire

(approved and non-approved) vocabulary of ASD-STE100 Issue 3, plus a number of vocabulary-related rules. This tool identifies not-approved words in a text, part-of-speech challenges and several other issues related to ASD-STE100 vocabulary.

The developers of the STE Term Checker (and of LanguageTool) provide information on how to customize this application with user-specific words. If properly configured, the STE Term Checker recognizes not only user-specific vocabulary but also inflected word forms. More information on the STE Term Checker and a download link are available on the following web site:

www.simplified-english.co.uk/index.html

Controlled Language Optimized for Uniform Translation (CLOUT)

CLOUT is a set of ten writing rules that this author found to have a high impact on the translation quality of several low-cost machine translation systems across several language pairs. CLOUT is a minimalist controlled language that is effective at improving the comprehensibility and translatability of technical documents. The CLOUT rules are intentionally simple so that even writers who have little or no prior writing training can quickly learn and use these rules. Here are a few examples of CLOUT rules:

- Write sentences that are shorter than 25 words.
- Write sentences that express only one idea.
- Write the same sentence if you want to express the same content.

In addition to the ten writing rules, CLOUT also includes 'Do' and 'Do not' examples for each rule. Here is an example of a CLOUT rule in its entirety:

Controlled language rule 5:

Write sentences that have a simple grammatical structure.

Write:

Show that you can organize your thoughts by using a simple sentence structure in your texts.

Do not write:

You, in your texts, to show that you can organize your thoughts, should use a simple sentence structure.

CLOUT is available as a one-page PDF document from this website: owl.li/nJscx



Figure 1: Source text in the top window, STE Term Checker results in the bottom window

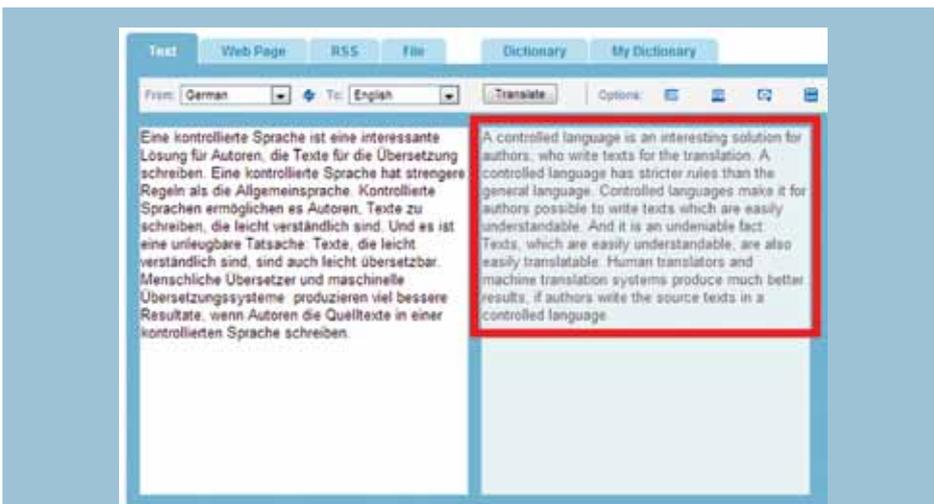


Figure 2: Example of a highly comprehensible machine translation from a German controlled language source text into English generated by a free (rules-based) machine translation service (SYSTRANet). No human post-editing was applied.

Summary

For many years, large organizations have been using controlled language authoring as a strategy for improving the readability and translatability of technical documents. Now that several powerful controlled language resources, including the ASD-STE100 rule set, are available for free, getting started with controlled language writing no longer requires a major investment.

While getting started with controlled language writing is now easier and cheaper than ever, it should be noted that changing the way technical authors write is still a major undertaking. However, the many benefits controlled language writing offers should convince many more managers of technical writers to give controlled language writing at least a try.

Further reading and resources

- MUEGGE, U. Controlled Language Optimized for Uniform Translation (CLOUT). 2002. Available from World Wide Web: <http://owl.li/orRQ3>
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ISSN 0953-3699.

Uwe Muegge

has more than 15 years of experience in the translation and localization industry, having worked in leadership functions on both



the vendor and buyer side. Uwe has been with CSOFT International, a provider of language services based in Beijing, since 2008, and he currently serves as Senior Translation Tools Strategist for North America.

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Developing guidelines: English for German-speaking authors

To assist German writers who are faced with the challenge of creating documents in English, tekomp has developed a guideline titled "English for German-speaking authors". Here is a sneak preview.

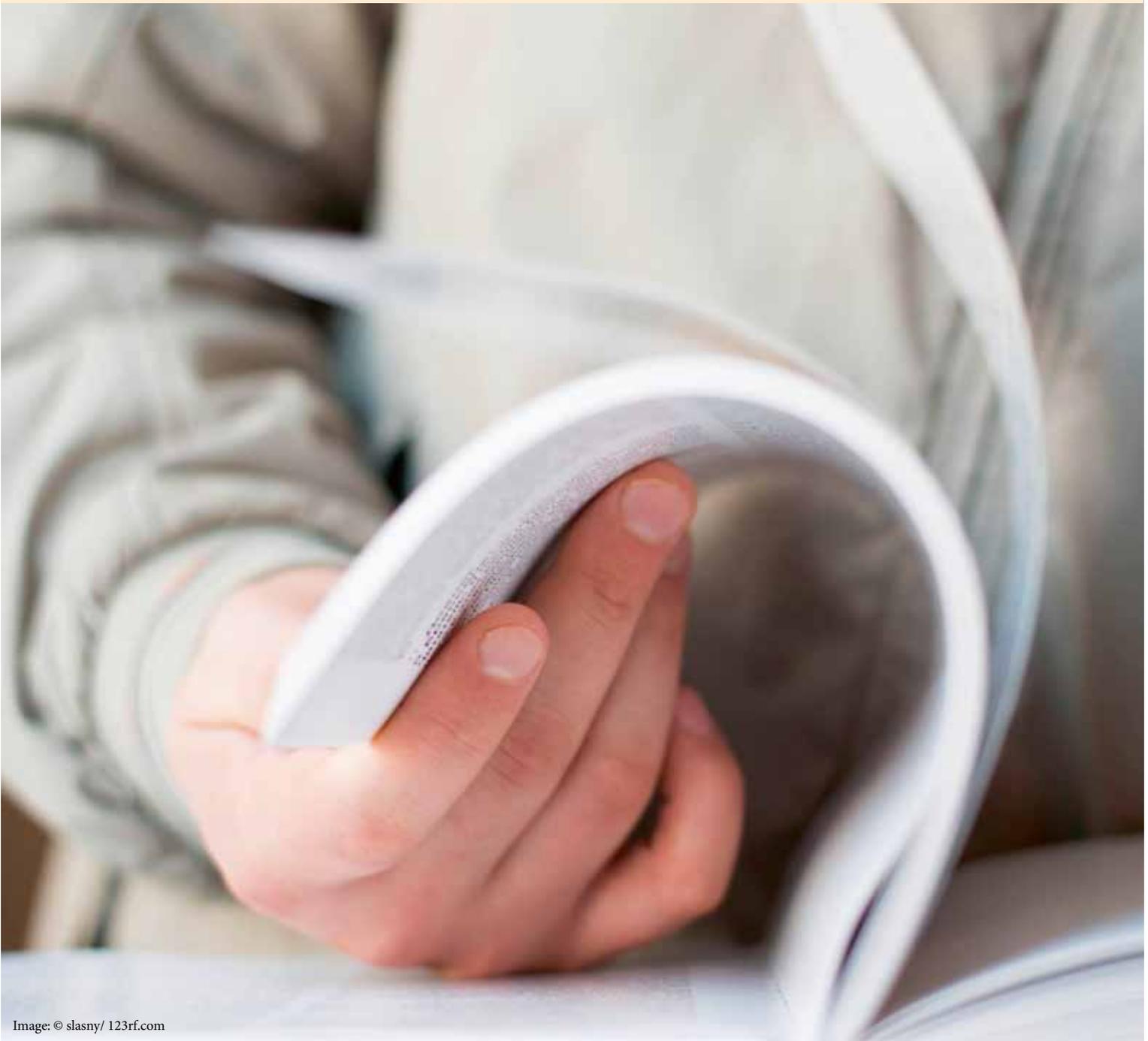


Image: © slasny/ 123rf.com

By Melanie Siegel, Elke Erdmann, Kristina Johnson Coenen, Lisa Link, James Longbotham, Markus Nickl, Ursula Reuther, Andrea Schöffner

Crossing linguistic borders

When Tina starts her work in the morning, she does the things that most technical writers do: She interviews product experts, produces product information, she reviews documents, she administrates the content management system, and she manages terminology. Quite unspectacular, you might think. The difference to many technical writers is that Tina does not perform this in her native language German but in English, which she learned as a foreign language. She has a solid fundamental knowledge of English – several years of school training – but no formal training as a translator. And: The amount of text that Tina has to create in English keeps increasing. How can Tina address the challenges and become a more proficient author?

tekomp guidelines for technical writers

In November 2011, tekomp presented its to date most successful guideline, "Regelbasiertes Schreiben – Deutsch für die Technische Redaktion". These guidelines contain rules for writing technical documents that are based on years of experience of authors, software companies and researchers. With this guideline tekomp addressed an important need of German technical writers, namely to have a basic set of rules for their daily work.

Immediately after the publication of this guideline many readers expressed their desire to tackle a further task: German writers often need to create English documents. Style guides for English technical documentation are available, such as John Kohl's "Global English Style Guide (1)". However, the target group of these style guides are native English speakers.

To help German technical writers faced with the challenge of writing English texts, a tekomp work group was formed to create a further set of guidelines: "English for German-Speaking Authors".

In this guideline, we are focusing on specific issues for non-native speakers of English, for example, particular errors or inappropriate phrasing made by Germans writing English. To make it easier for German authors, the help texts and references are in German. The rules, however, are illustrated with English examples. These real-world

examples are based on our extensive experience in writing and correcting English texts of German-speaking authors.

With this guideline we want to support technical writers in their efforts to create well-written English documents. Nevertheless, we recommend proofreading by a native speaker, wherever that is possible. We do not see our guideline as a substitute for a native speaker proofreading the texts, but rather as a supplement.

In this article, we will show how the new guideline relates to previous approaches, outline our workflow, describe the guideline, and point to further steps.

Related guidelines

As mentioned above, we based our work on the tekomp guideline for German technical writing (2). The basic ideas and structures of our guideline follow those of the German guideline. But it soon became clear that it is not possible to simply translate the German guideline, since both the English (technical) language and writing in a foreign language pose specific challenges.

Guidelines for English technical writing such as Kohl's (2008) are focusing on native English speakers. Analyses of texts created by non-native writers of English have shown that different mistakes are made by speakers of different native languages. The reason for this are the linguistic differences between the languages. For example, the Japanese language does not differentiate between the "l" and "r" sounds. The mix-up of these two letters was a common error found when analyzing English spelling mistakes made by native Japanese speakers, as Mitton and Okada (2007) state (3). A further example shows that non-native European writers of English have a high tendency to mix the US and UK variants, because both are equally present in English texts that can be accessed in Europe every day.

Similar to Kohl's and tekomp's German guideline, our guideline focuses on technical writing and is composed in such a way that it can be implemented in authoring tools.

Workflow

Our work started by forming a carefully chosen team. All members of the group were native speakers of either German or English, and they all spoke

both German and English. Thus we ensured that native English language abilities were available as well as experience with non-native English writing. In addition, group members with practical experience in technical writing saw to the practical relevance of the guidelines while members with a background in authoring support software tools contributed valuable information about the implementation potential of the rules, and members from industry and universities added practical and scientific aspects.

Before starting to set up rules, we conducted a survey on non-native English writing. The results showed that guidelines for non-native English writing are urgently needed. About half of the participants in the survey responded that they write English documents on a daily basis, a quarter of them at least once a month. Most participants had English language classes only at school. In most cases, English texts written by native German speakers were not proofread – neither by native English colleagues nor by authoring support tools. Instead of guidelines native German speakers generally used dictionaries when writing technical documents in English.

The next phase of our work was to collect rules. We set up an XML sheet for rule collection in order to guarantee consistency of the structure and information. We collected 126 rules for non-native English writing. Using XSLT, we compiled our guideline document from these rule files.

The tekomp guideline *English for German-Speaking Authors* is currently being reviewed and will be available soon. More information regarding the date of publication, price and how to order will be announced in our tcworld newsletter.

Description of the guideline

The guideline contains rules that support German-speaking authors when writing English technical documents. As in the German guideline, the linguistic levels are text, sentences, and words. Some rules are based on the German rules and thus contain a reference to the German guideline. However, the guideline includes a special focus on English texts written by German-speaking authors. Therefore, the instructions take into account particular problems of the target group, and rules specifically focused on the target group are set up as well.

Rules concerning sentences include rules to avoid ambiguous constructions, incomplete constructions, complex structures, stylistic rules, rules for word order and sequence of sentence elements, punctuation rules as well as rules for the usage of tense forms. Some of these rules have a clear reference to the German guideline (e.g. rules to avoid ambiguous constructions) while other rules are specific to the English language (e.g. rules for the usage of tense forms).

Text rules apply to headings, index entries, cross-references, glossaries and advance organizer. Rules for capitalization in headings, index and glossary entries are specific for the English language. The scope of the text rules is defined by the type of information.

Word rules are rules for the formation of single words or phrases. These include rules regarding articles, prepositions, relative pronouns, spelling names, countability, the use of abbreviations as well as distinct English language issues that are difficult for native German speakers.

Most of the rules specifically designed for writing English-language documents are word rules.

All rules are illustrated with examples of incorrect phrasing and ways to rephrase them. These examples are intended to illustrate both the possible scope of the rule as well as how to avoid the error.

In addition, all rules indicate the potential for automatic support. The respective note shows if the language-checking software is able to include this rule automatically. The status information provides the following information:

- Available: Rule is available by default in the standard test tools.
- Possible: Rule is in principle suitable for machine verifiability, but not stored in standard test tools by default.
- Not suitable: Given the current state of technology, the rule cannot be tested automatically.

Next steps

The guideline "English for German-Speaking Authors" will be presented at the tekomp Annual Conference in November 2013 in Wiesbaden. This guideline provides fundamental support for German-speaking authors who create English technical documents and thus will be a very useful tool for the day-to-day work. In addition, authoring tool providers will have a basis to implement automatic support software.

Based on this work, it will be possible to write similar guidelines for authors of other native languages. For this it will be necessary to consider the specific differences between these native languages and English, just as we did with the guideline for German authors.

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Post-editing in practice

Post-editing is the process by which humans review, edit, and improve the quality and usefulness of machine translation output. From light to full post-editing, the service – and price – varies largely according to the needs of the translation buyer. Here is an insight into the process and the types of services available in the marketplace.

By Donald A. DePalma

Translation buyers can choose between two levels of post-edited machine translation (PEMT): light and full. These two types differ based on the human effort required to improve the usability

of machine-translated text (Figure 1). So what do they involve?

Light post-editing converts raw MT output into understandable and usable, but not linguistically

or stylistically perfect, text. An editor corrects obvious errors such as mistranslations and terminology mistakes, along with phrases or tags that shouldn't be translated. A reader can usually

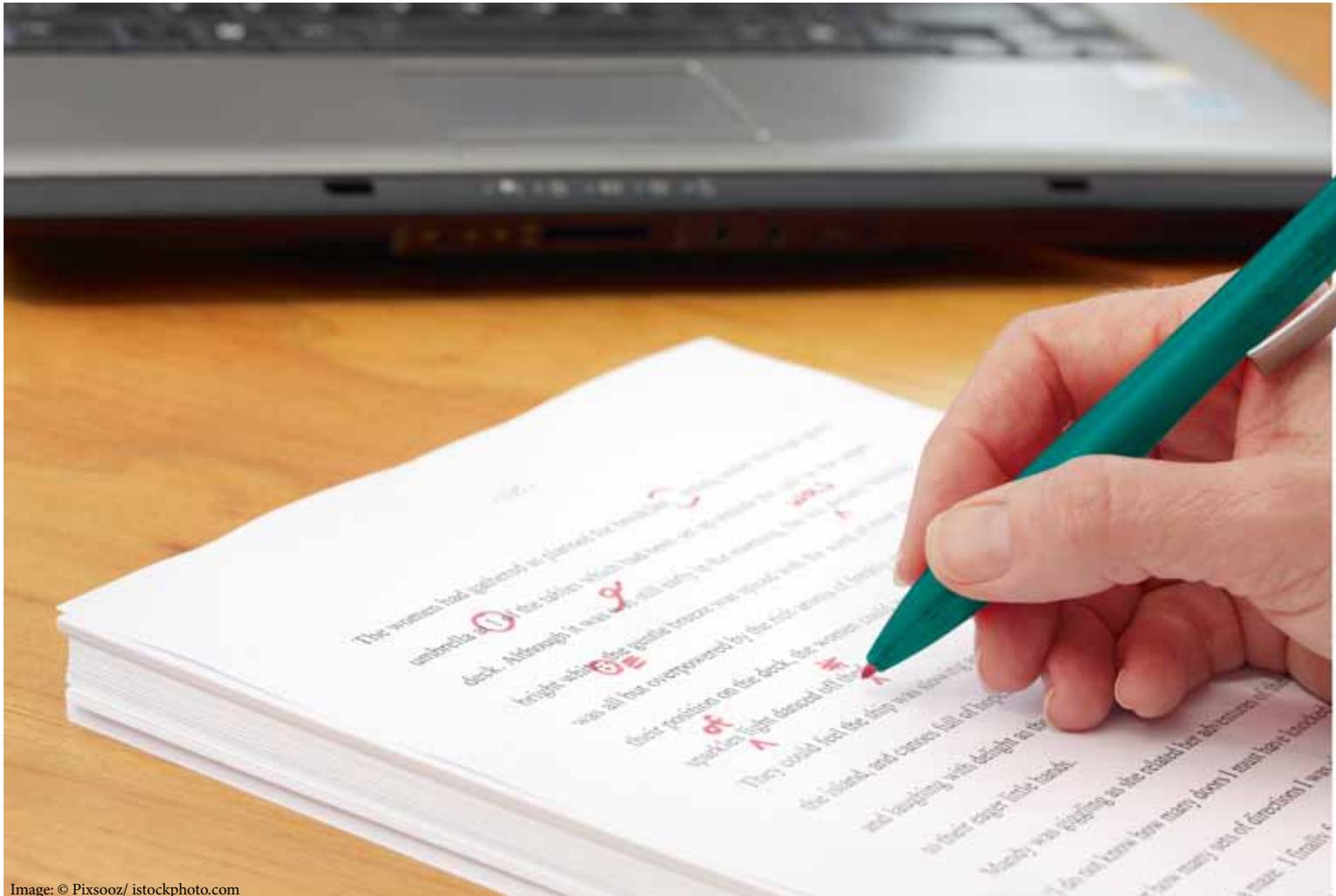


Image: © Pixsooz/ istockphoto.com

determine that the text was machine-translated and touched up by a human. Language Service Providers (LSPs) tell us that a translator doing light post-editing, also called “rapid post-editing,” can produce up to 20,000 words per day versus 2,700 without MT.

Full post-editing, on the other hand, is meant to produce human-quality output. The goal is to produce stylistically appropriate, linguistically correct output that is indistinguishable from what a good human translator can produce. This level of quality comes from the process that often involves the same number of QA checks as the

traditional translate-edit-proof (TEP) process. LSPs assume that linguists can do 5,000 to 8,000 words per day of such heavy post-editing.

Creating content for post-editing

For the record, Common Sense Advisory has long characterized “post-editing” as a misnomer because it ignores “pre-editing” – that is, fixing the content before it is machine-translated to remove typos, jargon, and clumsy output. While humans

are able to make such changes in a more comprehensive way, automated checkers from suppliers such as Acrolinx, SDL, and Tedopres can provide this function more efficiently. This prep work can extend to cleaning translation memories and terminology databases.

Where does the content that gets post-edited come from? The ideal, according to a recent Common Sense Advisory survey of translation buyers, is the output from commercial or open-source MT software that has been trained or customized for an organization’s terminology, style, or other linguistic requirements. These refinements are based on specialized rules, customized terminology, previous translation memories, or other linguistic assets.

However, the input to post-editing can also take the less ideal form of MT results from Google Translate or Microsoft Bing Translator, neither of which supports customization in their free variants. What’s the trade-off? Our surveys and interviews have found that more highly trained engines require less human intervention. Thus, post-editors will spend more time fixing the output of generic MT engines than cleaning up translations generated by trained software.

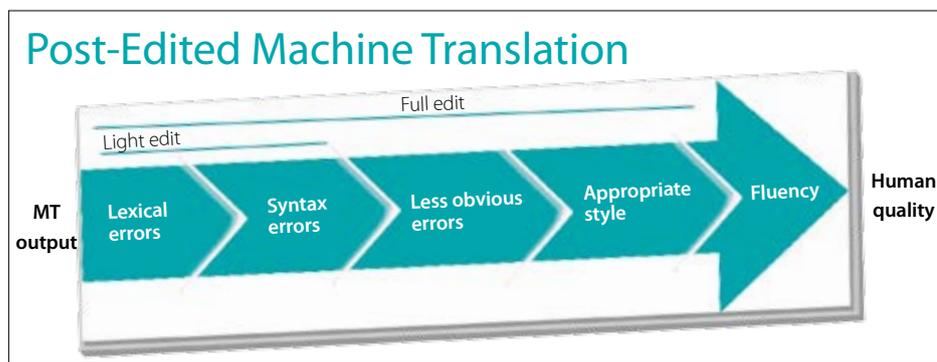


Figure 1: The journey from raw machine translation to human quality
Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

What quality to expect from service providers

With these two seemingly distinct types of post-editing on offer, you would expect that contracting with a translation vendor would be a simple act. It’s not. Because PEMENT is a relatively new phenomenon with no standardized specification, ordering just what you want will take a little comparison shopping. At Common Sense Advisory, we reviewed the characteristics of light and full PEMENT. We determined which type of PEMENT addresses which translation error categories and specific issues. We based our determination on commonly used translation quality metrics such as the LISA QA Model and SAE J2450 (see Table 1).

What a particular language service provider (LSP) includes in its PEMENT offering may differ, but the following table offers an idea of what you can expect. The checkmark symbol ✓ means that the listed issue is dealt with by a light or full PEMENT process; the no-go mark ✗ indicates that it’s not included in that type of edit; and the asterisk * specifies that it may be included if failing to fix it would affect the meaning.

Error Category	Specific Issues	Light PEMENT	Full PEMENT
Mistranslation		✓	✓
Accuracy	Omissions, additions	✓	✓
	Cross-references	*	✓
	Headers and footers	*	✓
Terminology	Glossary adherence	✓	✓
	Context	✓	✓
Language	Grammar	*	✓
	Semantics	*	✓
	Punctuation	✗	✓
	Spelling	✓	✓
Style	General style	✗	✓
	Register and tone	✗	✓
	Language variants and slang	✗	✓
Country	Country standards	*	✓
	Local suitability	*	✓
	Company standards	*	✓
Consistency		✓	✓

Table 1: Post-editing guidelines based on the LISA QA Model Source: Common Sense Advisory, Inc.

Buyers and suppliers alike can expect this “no standards in place” model to change. Multiple companies, associations, universities, and individuals have worked on or proposed guidelines or standardized approaches to post-editing, quality assessment, and best practices. None have yet gained any traction in the marketplace. Our advice is to agree with your translation suppliers on exactly what light and full post-editing includes before contracting for a job.

Calculating the cost

Once you decide what it is you want, you'll have to agree on what you should pay for it. Our research has found that the dominant pricing model for PEMT is word count multiplied by a percentage of the rate charged for a brand-new translation. Vendors charge between 40 to 85% of the full word rate for post-editing machine-translated European languages. That percentage reflects the range of rates for light and full PEMT across all sizes of suppliers (freelancers as well as

small, medium, and large LSPs). Rates for Asian, African, and American language pairs differ. Again, pricing isn't that straightforward. We have also found that freelancers and small LSPs tend to show a greater preference for hourly rates than do mid-sized and large LSPs. What we've seen in this evolving market is that many LSPs refrain from quoting by the hour. That is because they don't have enough data on the rate of productivity improvement or the required level of quality assurance for PEMT.

Some LSPs offer end-to-end managed services for PEMT. However, buyers can do some of the work themselves. For example, they can generate the output and send it to an LSP for post-editing. If that's the case, the buyer will incur additional charges to cover software licenses, installation, training, development, integration, maintenance, processing, and other operational expenses. Cloud-based, SaaS, and other remote MT solutions can lower or eliminate some of those costs. That approach will also incur fees for professional services. In this case, the MT supplier will charge

for training the software or building dictionaries by language pair. However, if you use commercial MT products such as Asia Online or SDL BeGlobal, you'll find do-it-yourself tools for training. Portals such as KantanMT, PangeaMT, or tauyou also let you do the training yourself.

Examples for light and full post-editing

Up to this point, this article has been theoretical. The big question is, for sure, what does MT look like in practice? To answer it, Common Sense Advisory asked four LSPs to provide examples of lightly and fully post-edited content. Three sent translations into English, while a fourth supplier sent an example of PEMT from English into Chinese. These are just some of the examples that we presented in our research on post-editing. Each of the examples includes the original content (“Source”), machine translation output from a trained engine (“MT Output”), and both lightly



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and fully edited versions of that output (“Light PE” and “Full PE,” respectively). They also include: 1) comments on what changes were made from the MT to the post-edited variants, or from the light to the full versions; and 2) a measure of the amount of change between these variants.

The examples illustrate “edit distance” or “string similarity” metrics for quantifying post-editing changes. They measure the number of modifications – insertions, deletions, substitutions, and other changes – that the editor must make to transform MT output into fluent text in the target

language without losing the meaning. Note that these metrics do not measure linguistic quality. The LSPs and their clients have separate mechanisms for that eternal challenge.

- The Portuguese > English example uses SymEval (Johann Roturier) to generate scores for all segments, an overall project score, and visible differences. This example also quantifies the change between the light and full variant.
- The German > English example uses the Jaro-Winkler model (Matthew A. Jaro and William E. Winkler) to gauge the similarity between two strings. In this example, the score is normalized so that 0% equates to no similarity and 100% is an exact match.
- Both Chinese examples use the Levenshtein distance metric (V.I. Levenshtein), with a 10-point score instead of percentages for the different distances.

Source	Os Administradores de Empresa não podem solicitar ou ganhar pontos do Rewards para eles próprios em nome de um Account Manager ou Engenheiro de Vendas.		
MT Output	Company administrators can ask for or earn Rewards points for themselves on behalf of an Account Manager or sales engineer.		
Light PE	Company administrators cannot ask for or earn Rewards points for themselves on behalf of an Account Manager or sales engineer.	Mistranslation	Edit Distances: MT to Light: 6 MT to Full: 38 Light to Full: 39
Full PE	Company Administrators are neither eligible to claim nor redeem Rewards points for him/herself on behalf of the Account Manager or Sales Engineer.	Additional stylistic changes and harmonization of capitalization	

Source: Welocalize @ www.welocalize.com

Figure 2: Portuguese to English – Lightly and heavily post-edited MT (SymEval scoring)

Source: Welocalize @ www.welocalize.com

Source	Erste Abgabe Dokumentation betriebsrelevante Ersatzteile		
MT Output	first delivery documentation operation-relevant spare parts		
Light PE	First delivery documentation operation-relevant spare parts	Capitalization at the beginning of the sentence	Similarity: MT to Light: 97% Light to Full: 100%
Full PE	Initial submission of documentation for operations-relevant replacement parts	Stylistic improvements making the text better for the situation	

Source: LexWorks @ www.lexworks.com

Figure 3: German to English – Lightly and heavily post-edited MT (Jaro-Winkler scoring)

Source: LexWorks @ www.lexworks.com

Source	车主可自行选择具有维修资质的修理厂进行维修。也可以到保险公司合作救援点进行维修。保险公司与维修厂共同完成损失鉴定工作。受损车辆的定损维修以修复为准。		
MT Output	The vehicle owner can choose a qualified maintenance repair shop for maintenance, also can go to the insurance companies to rescue point for maintenance, insurance companies and repair plant together to complete loss of identification. Damaged vehicle to assess the damage repair to repair shall prevail.		
Light PE	The vehicle owner can choose a qualified repair shop for maintenance, or go to the insurance company's rescue point for maintenance; insurance companies and repair plant jointly complete damage estimate. Maintenance will treat repair as the priority when assessing the damage to the damaged vehicle.	Changes to reflect proper subject in final sentence, as well as to clarify meaning. Added semicolon to fix run-on sentence.	Edit Distances: MT to Light: 3 Light to Full: 7
Full PE	The vehicle owner can choose a qualified repair shop for maintenance, or can opt to go to the insurance company's rescue point instead. The insurance company and repair plant will jointly provide a damage estimate. When assessing the degree of damage attained by the vehicle, priority will be placed on repairing the damage.	Changes to reflect greater clarity in last sentence. Also some changes to improve overall readability.	

Figure 4: Chinese to English – Lightly and heavily post-edited MT (Levenshtein scoring)

Source: CSOFT @ www.csoftintl.com

Source	Accept the file name or enter a file name and save the script file in an appropriate location.		
MT Output	接受文件名称或输入一个文件名称并保存脚本文件中的相应的位置。		
Light PE	接受文件名称或输入一个文件名称并保存脚本文件至相应的位置。	Different translation of the advert	Edit Distances: Raw to Light: 2 Light to Full: 6
Full PE	接受文件名称或输入一个文件名称并将脚本文件保存到相应位置。	Adjustment of word sequence	

Figure 5: English to Chinese – Lightly and heavily post-edited MT (Levenshtein scoring)

Source: Pactera @ www.pactera.com

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Minimalism and cognitive science

The principles of minimalism, as developed by John Carroll in *The Nurnberg Funnel* and subsequent works, are based on solid principles of learning theory derived from cognitive science. Too often, we forget that our “users” are, in reality, learners.

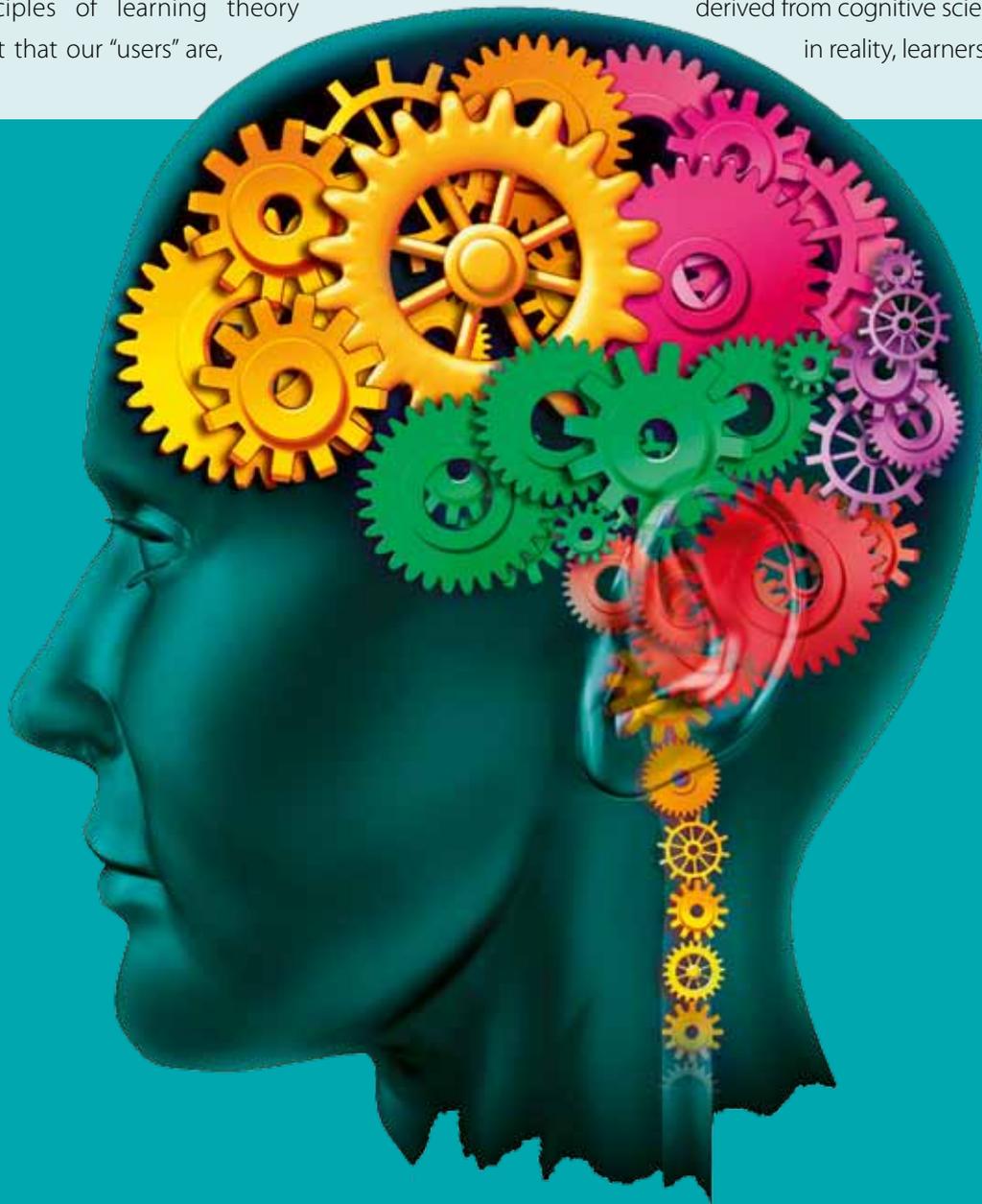


Image: © lightwise/ 123rf.com

By Ray Gallon

Minimalism has become a hot topic in technical communication. The term is so prevalent in our current vocabulary that it's worth taking a step back and asking ourselves if we know what it really means. The idea developed by John Carroll and his associates at IBM in 1990 was based on sound, cognitive theory as well as empirical observation of how users learned about software. Over time, people have come to interpret minimalism in their own ways. In 1998 Carroll and Hans van der Meij wrote an essay on *Ten Common Misconceptions About Minimalism*, among which, we find:

- Minimalism means brevity.
- Minimalism does not support people who learn by reading.
- Minimalism has no theoretical foundation.

I would add one of my own to Carroll's list:

- Minimalism means only procedures with no concepts.

So what is minimalism really about? According to Carroll "The minimalist idea, the way I think of it, is to minimize the extent to which the system and the information get in the way of what the user's really interested in... to try to bring function to the fore." And that means learning by doing – something that is often overlooked.

JoAnn Hackos [2012], updates her well-known four principles of minimalism as follows:

- Focus on an action-oriented approach.
- Ensure you understand the users' world.
- Recognize the importance of troubleshooting information.
- Ensure that users can find the information they need.

The first point, "action-oriented approach," again emphasizes learning by doing.

In short, we need to provide the user with action-oriented guidance that is sensitive to, and available in, her/his context. It must provide enough conceptual information (and, I would submit, just enough) so that the user can get out of trouble, should it occur. Not only that, this information needs to be readily findable when needed, and stay out of the way when not.

From our perspective today we might say that this approach is intuitively obvious, but that's not the case for everyone, and it certainly wasn't so clear in the years leading up to *The Nurnberg Funnel* in 1990.

Carroll and his team used a lot of empirical observation to arrive at their conclusions, but there is also a body of sound educational and cognitive theory that backs up their findings. One of the more interesting approaches is that of Roger C. Schank [1995], who attempted to analyze what exactly happens, from a cognitive point of view, when we learn by doing.

Schank started with the idea of "scripts." A script accounts for our capacity to understand more than what is literally expressed. For example, "when John orders sushi, we assume that he is in a Japanese restaurant; we know he might be seated at a sushi bar; we know that he is probably using chopsticks and not a fork; and, we can even assume that he is drinking Japanese beer. We assume these things because we know the sushi bar script. If we do not know this script, we cannot make such assumptions and thus might have difficulty understanding various sentences that refer to things we might be assumed to know" [Schank 1995].

This is important for our industry. For example, in the early days of graphical interfaces, we had to explain how to use a mouse. Today, we assume everyone understands the mouse script, and we simply say, for example, "Drag the file to the new directory." This also assumes that we

know the file and directory scripts. According to Schank, we remember scripts from personal experience, and when we have a new experience, we look for some sort of reminder that enables us to compare it with past experiences, and generalize from the conjunction of the two.

Scripts, however, were large, independent structures and the independence of these structures in memory would not account for the fact that we also learn transversally, across different scripts. Schank uses the example of paying: "one might pay for a restaurant meal, an airplane ticket, and a hospital visit in much the same way, that is, by going to a person seated behind a desk, presenting a credit card, signing and taking the receipt. Of course there are differences in paying in each situation, so one could argue that human memory would want to treat these as completely different entities, but this is unlikely" [Schank 1995]. Schank explains that it is unlikely because, for example, a mistake using a credit card in one situation can be generalized across all the payment situations, and a reasonable person could be expected to make that assumption.

This is precisely the kind of generalizing that we want and need in our minimalist scripts.

Schank later refined this idea. The larger memory structures such as "restaurant" were seen more as "memory organization packets (MOPs)." Independent scenes such as "paying" could be assembled in memory to create them. Thus, the restaurant MOP included scenes such as "paying" or "ordering" or "being seated." These don't change very much from MOP to MOP.

What is interesting in all this is, that learners (and John Carroll has said he prefers the term "learner" to that of "user" [Bleiel & Carroll 2013]) need to make cognitive discriminations: "when we learn about something that takes place in a restaurant, we need to know whether what we

learned is about restaurants per se (and thus we need to alter the restaurant MOP), or about some aspect of restaurants that has significance beyond restaurants such as "paying" (in which case we need to alter what we know about a scene), or something that just happened to occur in a restaurant and has nothing to do with the MOP or scene in which it occurred (so we must alter what we know about some more abstract MOP, such as embarrassment or romance, that might have been operating at the same time in the same place)" [Schank 1995].

Most user assistance is concerned with the acquisition of skills. Minimalist principles assert that we must immediately allow learners to start on meaningfully realistic tasks. These correspond to Schank's MOP's. In order to help learners be able to generalize from one MOP to another, we need to include just enough conceptual information – for example, why the learner might want to perform the task explained by the MOP – or when it is useful to perform it. By associating the conceptual part of the MOP with the action part, we help embed it in memory and improve the chance that it will be recalled, when comparing another new MOP to the one in memory. This is essential for learning how to troubleshoot, among other things.

According to Schank there are three types of scenes or "micro-scripts" that make up our MOP's:

Cognitive micro-script

"A cognitive micro-script refers to knowledge about use. This knowledge is usually consciously available. That is, a person in possession of that knowledge can talk about it. If the sentence "John knows how to use X" makes sense for a given X then X is a cognitive micro-script."

Example: I know how to use my media center to record, or to view videos, and I can tell you how to do it.

Physical micro-script "

A physical micro-script refers to knowledge about operations. This knowledge is not usually consciously available. That is, a person in possession of a physical micro-script may not be able to talk about it. If the sentence "John knows how to operate an X" makes sense for a given X then X is a physical micro-script."

Example: I can ride a bicycle. I can show you what I do, but I can't tell you how to do it. It's in muscle memory, not intellectual memory.

Perceptual micro-script

"A perceptual micro-script refers to knowledge about observations. This knowledge is not usually consciously available. A person in possession of a perceptual micro-script may not be able to talk about it. If the sentence "John knows how to recognize an X" makes sense for a given X then X is a perceptual micro-script."

Example: I look up at the sky, and tell you, "It's going to rain this afternoon." I can describe the signs I notice, but you would need my experience in my locale to be as accurate as I am.

Our job, then, as authors of good minimalist user assistance, is not simply to "cut excess verbiage." It is rather to ensure that we have found just the right balance of cognitive, physical, and perceptual micro-scripts in our content, and that we have strategically focused them in the place where they will be of most use to our learners.

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Minimalism in technical documentation

Minimalism is the idea that less is more; that fewer “bells and whistles” is better; that good design leads to intuitive, natural, and instant use. How can you adopt minimalism in your documentation?

Image: © Denis Iachimovschi/ 123rf.com

By Leah Guren

John Carroll, the leading proponent of minimalism in software design, introduced the idea of progressive information disclosure – the process of showing information based on what the user selected, rather than showing everything at once. Carroll insisted that a product should be so intuitive that people could instantly use it

without having to read a single page of the documentation.

What is minimalism?

Minimalism in documentation is the idea that:

- you don't need to document every single aspect of most products;
- users can play with the product and discover functions on their own;
- fewer words on a page (or screen) improves navigation (the ability to find content);
- writing in a simple, straight-forward language improves comprehension.

Minimalism is more than removing *fluff*. Fluff comes in many forms: unnecessary words (saying something in 20 words instead of 5), overly complex words, needless repetitions, pompous or unnecessarily formal writing, or vague writing (for example, a sentence that can be interpreted in multiple ways, perhaps because of the

inherent ambiguity of English, or a modifier that can't be quantified). You can cut out words and still have fluffy writing; and you can have fluff-free writing that isn't minimalist.

How did we get here?

Look at any technical product documentation from 30 years ago and you are likely to discover long, complex sentences and dense blocks of text with very little visual design. Inexperienced technical writers often took input from the SMEs (subject matter experts, such as engineers, programmers, or other developers) and turned it into "correct English." The writing resembled verbose, pompous research papers, rather than useful tools designed to help the user successfully use a product.

In the mid 1980s, a new breed of technical specialist began to emerge – the usability expert. These people looked at information from a completely different perspective. Instead of focusing on product features and technical details, they looked at how people actually used products. Jakob Nielsen, William Horton, Jared Spool, and other pioneers in this field significantly changed the way we analyze, write, and even structure information.

One of the most compelling studies was the now-famous example from Sun Microsystems back in 1994. Jakob Nielsen, at that time an engineer at Sun, was involved with the development of SunWeb, Sun's intranet. Nielsen conducted usability testing on the initial prototype of the intranet, then cut 40 percent of the text and retested. The results were astonishing. The overwhelming majority of users found the new version to be not just better, but more information-rich. The message was clear: too many words hide content, confuse

meaning, and significantly impair navigation.

As the usability movement grew, more and more data emerged confirming these findings. Excess words are deadly! They make it harder for people to use products safely and effectively. And, after all, helping people use products safely and effectively is the core charter of our profession!

At the same time, the business argument for minimalism emerged. Reducing a bloated documentation suite of 1000 pages by even 10 percent meant significant savings in localization, printing, and production costs. The improved documentation usability led to fewer calls to tech support, which meant additional corporate savings. In short, everyone won.

It was a revelation to many professional technical communicators and editors to realize that there was no legal, moral, or ethical obligation to explain every single bit of minutia about a product. As a profession, we now understand that there is a price to pay for every extra word on the page and every extra page in the manual. Documentation minimalism became the accepted trend. Major players, such as Microsoft, switched to minimalism in their documentation. Gone were the big manuals, replaced by hundreds of short, concise Help topics.

The good, the bad, and avoiding the ugly

The good: when minimalism works

Minimalism works brilliantly when you just need a quick reminder about how to do something, where something is, or what something is for. Want to reset the clock in your car's dashboard? You don't need to read long paragraphs explaining the multi-function button com-

binations; you just want to know what sequence to push.

Any kind of just-in-time documentation works best when it embraces minimalism. Slivering information into progressive disclosure (just what you need to know for this step, this page of the wizard, this part of the process, etc.) helps users focus on the immediate step without the distraction of low-level details or high-level process flow.

Minimalism is also the best approach for interface: if you want to label part of the graphical user interface (GUI) or the physical product interface with text, minimalism works well.

The bad: when minimalism fails

There are several scenarios when minimalism fails:

- If users consistently show poor compliance, it might be because they don't understand big conceptual issues, such as the internal mechanisms of the product. For them, adding theory of operation and other background content, which is not usually part of true minimalist documentation, becomes very helpful.
- The product is unlike anything else. Again, in this situation, users lack the correct mental model to understand the product, and therefore may make usage mistakes.
- A diverse audience but no option for multiple documents. In this scenario, you need to add extensive layering and sometimes even repeat information to support the needs of a mixed group of users.

Avoiding the ugly: finding a compromise

In many cases, you need to find the middle ground. While minimalism fails in some situations, the solution is not to veer back to fluffy, wordy, overly long documentation. The answer is to slowly add in words that provide context, clarify conditions,

provide motivation, and improve usability and user compliance. Consider signposting elements, such as headings. They often are greatly improved by the addition of a word or two. For example, the heading:

Guidelines

communicates a lot less than:

Guidelines for selecting printer settings

The price of those extra four words is insignificant when compared to the improved signposting and usability.

The editor's challenge

Recognize your nature

All of us are editors. Even if you are a writer, rather than a professional technical editor, you still need to be able to review your own work and to provide editing support for others in the team. Therefore, the best starting point is to recognize your own style: are you fluffy or overly minimalist?

Tips for the fluffy

Do you tend to overwrite? No fear! Get the ideas down. Let the writing flow. Don't hold back. Then, assuming that the structure is logical and correct, go back and start editing ruthlessly.

1. Run the text through a readability calculator. Various algorithms, including the Gunning Fox index, the Flesch Kincaide Grade Level index, the SMOG score, and the Coleman Liau index, all tell you how readable your text is. Most calculate the number of years of education a reader needs to comfortably understand the text. They look at sentence length, word length, use of passive voice, and more. A good all-in-one

online calculator (such as the one listed in the references below) gives you all scores. These metrics are necessary as a starting point. If you don't know where your text currently scores, how will you know if you have improved it?

2. Target long sentences: break them down, simplify them, shorten them.
3. Target long words: find simpler ways of expressing the same idea.
4. Look for unnecessary content: do you really need to tell users about the four different ways of accessing a feature?
5. Look for unnecessary repetition: if something isn't essential for a critical workflow, you don't need to repeat it. You can offload the information to one location and then cross-reference it.
6. Look for content that is there only because you are afraid to delete it, even though you have no idea what purpose it serves. Dump it or offload it to an appendix (see *Junk drawer*, below).

Tips for the terse

Do you tend to underwrite? Do you struggle figuring out what to write or understanding why you need to write something? If you are overly terse, you may not be seeing the missing logical connections. Things that seem obvious to you may be conceptual jumps from A to D; users need to be led through B and C.

1. Do usability testing. Have someone who matches a persona read what you wrote. Have the person explain it back to you. If they can't, then you are probably missing context.
2. Look for the *why*, not just the *what*. Telling users *what* something is doesn't help them decide whether or not to *use* it; telling users *how* to do something doesn't help persuade them *why* they should do it.

Perform triage

Remember that not all content is created equal. We, as technical communicators, have the responsibility

of analyzing and filtering information that we receive. Just because an SME said so doesn't make it true; and just because something is true doesn't make it necessary. Therefore, examine information critically and place it in the correct category:

• Essential

Essential information is content that is necessary for someone to use the product safely and effectively. This includes clear, straightforward procedures for the most commonly needed tasks in the user workflow, plus essential background information about the product and its interface.

Another type of essential information is anything that must be there because of regulatory, compliance, legal, or certification issues. Many compliance rules don't help improve the usability of documentation, yet if you violate them, you risk having the entire product rejected. For business reasons, anything mandated by regulatory, compliance, legal, or certification bodies must be followed, whether or not it actually helps users.

• Value-added

Value-added information is content that, while not essential, adds something useful. It can be the layering that provides context, improves user compliance, helps establish a correct mental model, helps novice users, adds skills for advanced users, and does anything to improve the readability and navigation of a document.

• Junk drawer

Junk drawer information is anything that has no real value. Often, this is legacy information from previous versions, things that the SMEs think are interesting, details about unused features, background information that doesn't translate into necessary knowledge, and more. When dealing with this kind of information, it is usually safe to offload it from the main workflow.

For example, turn it into reference content, such as an appendix. If you are truly brave, delete it. In most cases, users never notice the loss of unnecessary information!

Permanence and the learning curve

One common problem is writing for the first-time user who knows nothing about the product. Yes, you need to include information appropriate for this type of user in your documentation, but be very careful about any information that has permanence. For example, text that appears as part of the product interface may be quite helpful the first time the user tries to figure out what to do, but can be very annoying after the second or third usage. Think about text labels on interface elements, text on appliance front panels, and the level of detail in task and descriptive topics.

Don't forget to test!

Any major change in documentation requires testing. You need to know that your edits are making the documentation better. The only way to do this is to have some benchmark against which you can compare the new version. Therefore, before attempting any complete rewrite of content, start by performing documentation usability testing on the existing version.

To do so, start by learning the basics of usability testing, including defining your personas, identifying specific tasks for testing scenarios, setting up your test environment, and finding testers. Make sure that you know how to run the actual tests and what to do with the results.

After rewriting the first draft, repeat the testing with new testers. Compare the results. Look for:

- tasks that had a higher completion rate or a faster performance time
- reduced time searching for information
- any decrease in problems or questions from the tester

Conclusion

No matter how much legacy documentation you have, it is never too late to start reducing fluff and moving towards minimalism without, of course, going too far into unhelpful terseness. Start small with one task, one chapter, or one Help topic. Measure your results and then extrapolate to show value, both in savings and improved usability. This value is the way you persuade management to allow these changes across the board.

References and resources

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- John Millar Carroll, *Minimalism Beyond the Nürnberg Funnel*, MIT Press, 2003
- Online Utilities (all-in-one document readability calculator) www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp

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Clear and concise technical writing

Technical writing requires a balance between brevity and clarity. A few simple tricks can help to enhance the meaning of a short text without lengthening it significantly.

By Susan Grimmette

Particularly on computer screens, space is limited and content often created with the KISS principle in mind: keep it short and simple. Clarity might take a backseat to allow for shorter texts.

In this article I give examples of abbreviations, mainly from computing, to suggest some simple improvements. Some of the examples may confuse readers, particularly when taken out of context. My aim is to alert you to possible inconsistencies, so that you can look out for possible ambiguities in your own writing. Recognizing that there is a problem is the first step towards seeking a solution.

Take the reader's viewpoint

In my view, the most important thing about good technical writing is to address the viewpoint of your readers. Do not assume that your readers share the point of view of the person who gave you the information (usually a product developer, such as an engineer or a computer programmer). If something is unclear, you are in the privileged position of being able to ask the developer questions; your readers are not.

Pay attention to the terms you use. Snappy abbreviations are useful in saving time and ink for groups of specialists working closely together in a particular field, but what about readers from outside that field or that country? Will they be able to understand these abbreviations?

The importance of context

Context is what gives our writing meaning. Some terms have different meanings in the field of science than they have in other fields or in different areas of science. Some terms have more than one meaning in the same field of science, or indeed in life in general. Modern developments, particularly in consumer electronics, have multiplied possible meanings.

The helpful little article

An article (grammatical term) such as "the" or "a" is usually from one to three letters. It takes up very little space, but including it can make all the difference when it comes to clear meaning.





WHEN TO USE "A" OR "AN" BEFORE A VOWEL

The indefinite article you use depends on sound (pronunciation) not spelling:

- A "Yoo"-sound follows "a", for example: a user, a unified field, a unit or a utility
- Vowel sound (a, e, i, o or u) follows "an", for example: an alphabetic character, an editor, an SQL (ess cue el) statement, an integer, an object or an unpacked decimal representation

Example 1: the abbreviation plc

On the Internet you will find many terms that use the abbreviation "plc". Three of them are:
product life cycle
power line communication
programmable logic controller

Any of the three could be described in a technical document, so how can readers tell which of these terms (or many others) is intended?

I can expect you to read an essay (like the one I am writing) "sequentially" starting at the beginning and continuing to read until you reach the end. In that case, I can introduce an abbreviation (or other new term) by defining it the first time I use it. You can tell it is the first time, because I refer to it with an indefinite article "a or an" (or nothing if the term is plural or collective), for example:

```
"I will now discuss a programmable logic controller (plc)",
or
"I will now discuss power line communication (plc)".
```

Note that I should define only one of these terms as plc. If I give two definitions, my readers cannot tell them apart. Having defined an abbreviation with one meaning, I should then take care not to use it with a different meaning.

Every other time I mention the abbreviation, I use a definite article, which implies that I have already mentioned it, for example:

"The plc..."

The procedure above works fine in short introductory manuals that are read from beginning to end, but what about "random access" reference manuals, where readers just "dip in" to the section that interests them? They are

not going to read an introductory definition. In this case the preferred approach is to define your abbreviations in a glossary of terms near the end of the manual (before the index). If there are lots of new terms, you may even consider a separate glossary of abbreviations. Your readers can tell from the table of contents that there is a glossary at the end and they can consult it if they come across an abbreviation whose meaning is unclear to them.

Singular or plural?

Singular conveys more information about the cardinality of relationships than plural does.

In the examples below, taken mainly from computing,

- X indicates what I found in technical documentation;
- ? indicates questions that readers may ask;
- √ indicates my suggestions for improvement.

In computing (error) messages and context-sensitive help, space may be very restricted. But this doesn't mean that you need to compromise accuracy. Think clearly about what exactly you want to say.

Example 2:

- X All parts have different numbers.
- √ Each part has a different number.

Example 3:

- X Files contain fields.
- √ A file contains a field; a file contains fields; a file contains at least one field.

Example 4

- X Line commands influence the editor lines.
- ? How many line commands influence each editor line? How many editor lines does each line command influence? What is an editor line?
- √ A line command influences the line of text on which it is issued.

Counterexample: your readers

You might have noticed an inconsistency in my logic. If I prefer singular, why am I referring to readers in the plural? Unfortunately, in English a reader may, grammatically speaking, be either masculine (he) or feminine (she). In order to not discriminate against any gender, you can slavishly repeat "a reader" or use the cumbersome construction "he or she". I hope that more than one reader will read

your documentation – and also this essay. Thus, I have chosen to refer to readers in the plural, which can be followed by "they".

To summarize, using singular forms should be the preferred choice – unless you have a reason to use plural.

Be specific: give examples

In the previous section, I kept explanations to a minimum and let examples speak for themselves. This is often an effective way to convey a lot of meaning in a few words.

Conclusion

For me, one of the advantages of technical writing is that there are no hard and fast rules. Guidelines need to be considered in each individual case and a balance found. Paramount is what is clear to readers. I have shown how appropriate articles can be used to impart meaning without taking up much space and can thus be applied in situations where brevity is crucial, for example on computer screens.

contact

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Indonesia – an emerging market

With a population of 240 million and a growing young and curious middle-class, Indonesia represents a huge market for international companies and the localization industry.



Image: © tykhyi/ 123rf.com

By **Latifah Elisa Kusrini**

Indonesia is an archipelago with around 17,000 islands, a country with different ethnics and cultures. It shares land borders with Malaysia, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea. In the past, the Dutch colonized Indonesia for over 340 years followed by the Japanese from 1942, until it became independent in 1945. Bahasa Indonesia is the lingua franca of the Indonesian archipelago. Indonesian is unifying a nation which has more than 300 native languages spoken by a vast array of ethnic groups. The Indonesian and Malaysian languages have the same root, namely Malay, and both languages are mutually understood by most native-speakers. Nevertheless the languages differ in spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. After the economic collapse of 1998, the economy of Indonesia has been recovering since 2004. In recent years its growth has accelerated to over 6 percent with a GDP (gross domestic product) per capita of US\$3,500. This is a huge rise compared to the GDP of 1997 of US\$1,066. In Asia, Indonesia is positioned as the fifth largest economy and the fourth most populated nation. It shows the sixth largest economic growth among developing countries and was the fifth fastest growing G20 country in 2010. Unquestionable, Indonesia is one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

With 240 million people, Indonesia offers a large domestic market. Over 53 percent of the population live in urban areas and have adopted a modern Western lifestyle. Shopping in one of the many modern shopping malls has become a favorite activity for many Indonesians living in the cities. In particular for those in Jakarta, which is home to almost ten million people.

A growing and affluent middle class supports a healthy GDP growth, with approximately 56.7 percent of the GDP accounting for private consumption in 2010. In recent years the size of this new middle class has grown steadily, constituting an increasing potential market for products such as cars, electronics devices, and many other consumptive goods. The enthusiasm of the rising Indonesian middle class to shop for the newest gadget is almost unparalleled. Twice a year, the computer and technology exhibition in Jakarta, which showcases computers, cell phones, and mobile gadgets, attracts over 216,000 customers with total transactions approximating US\$67.5 million in five days. The Indonesia International

Motor Show, a popular automotive exhibition held once a year, was visited by 320,000 customers in 2012 with total transactions of roughly US\$450 million in just nine days. And, in addition to these trade fairs, there are other large exhibitions that take place around Jakarta.

As an emerging country, Indonesia is a socio-economically diverse nation. You find luxurious malls where the upper middle class shops for high-end luxurious goods, while outside you can still see street stalls that are flocked with locals. Indonesians love technological advancement and innovations, and will do whatever it takes to buy the latest trendy gadget. Blackberry is a popular product in Indonesia and many people yearn to have this device. Some people might go as far as eating smaller or cheaper meals or go without any mobile phone credit, just to have a shiny new Blackberry. In 2011, Blackberry released their Blackberry Bellagio and chose Indonesia as the first nation in the world to sell it. The company ran a promotion, which promised a 50 percent discount for the first 1000 people to pay with a credit card. As a result thousands of people queued before the event even started. The fighting and pushing that started among the customers caused 90 people to faint and three people to suffer from bone fractures.

Apart from the tremendous fiscal and political transformations that Indonesia went through during the last decade, it is also undergoing a major structural shift in terms of demographics. Over 50 percent of the population is under 29 years old and 60 percent under 39. Since young people are more open-minded and keen to try new products, a country with a high percentage of young people is more likely to invest in foreign products such as cars and electronic devices. Most of Indonesia's economy takes place around the large cities of Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, which are all located on the main island of Java. The rapid economic growth of Indonesia drives the consumption of both local and imported products. What is unique about the Indonesian market is that almost every level of quality has potential buyers. And, with the middle class steadily increasing, there is a good opportunity to gain market share and to sell products ranging from generic products to luxurious goods, from household appliances to high tech devices. The buying power of the rising Indonesian middle

class not only attracts the market entry of local innovations but also of foreign products. This provides a great opportunity for the localization industry because by law all products sold in Indonesia have to be accompanied by a user manual or product information in Indonesian. So, the more goods are imported to Indonesia, the more documentation needs to be localized.

In 2010 two people were caught selling iPads through an Indonesian online forum. The item in question was legal and not a black market product. However, as the iPad wasn't yet sold on the Indonesian market, it was not accompanied by a legal Indonesian user manual.

Indonesia has a growing market potential not only for foreign products but also for localization service providers. And, it's not too late to grab a bigger market share. There are a myriad of translation providers, both companies and freelancers, who offer Indonesian language services. When considering to enter the Indonesian localization market, one should take into account that this is a long-term effort and will only develop slowly. Therefore, it is crucial to find a reliable local partner. The ideal local partner should not only be able to deliver top-quality translations, but should also have dedicated expert human resources to provide advice about the local market, its laws and regulations.

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Of standard gauge and technical communication



By Tony Self

Image: © Mazuryk Mykola/ 123rf.com

It doesn't quite sound believable, but it's true: In 21st-century Australia, there isn't a standard national rail gauge. (Gauge is the gap between railway tracks.) In some states, narrow gauge is used, in others broad gauge, and ironically in just one state, standard gauge. This means that rail cars and locomotives can't travel between states.

This schmozzle started long before the independent colonies of the Australian continent became states in a federated nation in 1901. It was in 1847 that the first railway lines were built in the colony of South Australia. It started well: a decision by the British Government's Secretary of State for the Colonies ruled that all colonies should adopt standard gauge.

However, a private company building a railway line in New South Wales lobbied for the standard to be changed to broad gauge. Broad gauge thus became the new standard in 1854. A year later, the chief rail track engineer in New South Wales was replaced, and the new chief convinced the New

South Wales government to unilaterally change the NSW "standard" back to standard gauge. This pattern continued until there was no standard left.

By now, you might be wondering what this obscure historical anecdote is doing in a magazine on technical communication and information management. The reason is that this tale says a lot about the importance of standards, and how standard adoption by an industry can go horribly wrong with enormous, long-term financial consequences.

True, the decisions made by those early railway engineers seem strikingly stupid, but in context, having a standard made little difference. Australia is a big continent, and the mooted railway lines were short, and were contained well within their colony. There were no plans for railway lines to cross borders, so as long as all lines within a colony used the same gauge, there would be no problem.

There are many standards in technical communication, and their adop-

tion is haphazard and parochial, to put it kindly. ISO/IEC 82079 is an international standard for technical communication, covering all types of product, software and service related instructions for use. A LinkedIn group for technical communicators to discuss this standard and its adoption was started in September 2011. It has one member. ISO/IEC 26514, which provides requirements for the design and development of software user documentation, arouses very little discussion in online forums or at technical communication conferences, and has no LinkedIn group. This standard replaced ISO/IEC 18019, which was published in 2004.

The Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards, OASIS, approved the DITA standard in 2005, and although its adoption is growing, it is still nowhere near widespread in technical communication. Are technical communicators generally reluctant to adopt standards? It is undeniable that technical communicators love some standards, such as spelling and grammar, and argue strongly for the benefits of such language standards and conventions. But it seems to me that beyond language standards, we collectively show the same attitudes as the late 19th-century colonial railway engineers.

One of the benefits of a standard – be it a railway standard or a technical communication standard – is that it allows for interchange. For railway lines, interchange means being able to move from one part of a rail network to any other part. In 2013, modern Australia still does not have this interchange. Freight travelling between some points has to be unloaded from one set of rolling stock and reloaded onto another. Passengers travelling down the east coast from Cairns to Sydney have to change trains in Brisbane.

In 2013, technical communication doesn't have this interchange either. A component supplier provides sup-

porting documents to a customer in one format, whereupon they are manually converted to the customer's format. Information on a website has to be copied and pasted into a proposal document. An article submitted for publication in a technical communication magazine is written to one standard, and then re-cast into a different standard.

The consequences of the Australian railway gauge decisions are still being felt, and paid for, 130 years later. Interstate tracks are slowly being changed to standard gauge, often by duplicating tracks. The development of railways in Australia has been stifled; in such a big country, there is still no high-speed rail. Blame for the decisions of the late 1800s is often sheeted to "politics". Rivalries between companies and colonies and even individuals, power struggles, and deep-seated prejudices were the cause. "We have to be non-standard because our requirements are special." These same arguments are used by some technical communicators to avoid adoption of standards, and as an excuse to implement a custom solution. I think that as a profession we need to move beyond the politics of standards, and work together in a standard way.

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Nairobi and beyond – Translating for humanity

Accurate, up-to-date information in the right language can save lives. The not-for-profit organization Translators without Borders aims to transfer critical knowledge by translating information for humanitarian projects.

By Rebecca Petras

The call came in January: “Can you help us translate thousands of messages during the Kenyan elections to make sure civilians across the country are heard?” asked Heather Leson of Ushahidi, the successful non-profit organization focused on information collection during humanitarian events. “Sure!” was my immediate response. I knew our translators were still learning, and I knew they had just been taught MemoQ by our dedicated volunteer, Marek Pawelec. And I knew we had an excellent project head in Nairobi who had been carefully trained and mentored by our board member in charge of Kenya, Simon Andriesen. No doubt – this was an important project. Organized by a number of humanitarian groups and managed by Ushahidi, the election project – named Uchaguzi – was designed to increase transparency during the Kenyan elections. Five years earlier, in 2007 and 2008, major unrest after the elections had resulted in

more than 1,000 people losing their lives, and a general mistrust in the election process and its results. This time the goal was to make sure all voices were heard during the elections and to minimize the impact of intimidation that often occurred through social media networks. To do it right, language had to be considered: When engaging in community issues, Kenyans generally use either the lingua franca Swahili or their mother tongues, which add up to more than a dozen throughout the country.

Translators without Borders’ mission is, to use language to transfer critical knowledge. We knew this was a very important humanitarian situation – we would figure out how to help.

And we did. Our team of professional translators, who were without a professional path just six months before, played an important role in the success of Uchaguzi. They worked nonstop for eight days, translating information from ten languages – and they felt great about being part of this table effort.



This is a good example of what we do – in Kenya and around the world. Translators without Borders translates for humanity. We take critical content that is often available only in major 'world' languages, and we make it available in regional and local languages, giving people access to this knowledge in their own language. In most cases, we work with professional translators who volunteer their time. In fact, in May, our professional volunteers reached a major milestone, having translated ten million words for humanity in just the past two years. These are words that help Syrian refugees, doctors in Haiti, mothers in India and care workers in Indonesia.

This is vital work, and translation makes the difference. As Andrew Alspach of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said:

"Your professionalism and prompt turnaround for this piece of work is impressive and the impact it will have on our Arabic speaking audience, which includes those Syrians directly affected by this crisis, will be profound."

Back in Kenya, we are working to increase language capacity, as it is known in the translation jargon. The fact is, there are very few translators working into Swahili, and those who do are quickly snatched up by commercial enterprises that can pay top rates. We recognized this issue when we were asked to do some health translations into Swahili, and we could not find translators who would do the humanitarian work. We then began to hear many stories about the lack of knowledge in Swahili and the general lack of translators or a translation industry. This led us to establish our first translation training center in Nairobi where we have trained ten translators by now and plan to train more this year.

Our team's work on Uchaguzi was actually a bit of a change from the translators' daily work, which is primarily healthcare based. Our team is especially trained on healthcare issues and specializes in healthcare translations. We work on a number of small projects, including subtitling maternal and neonatal videos for mothers in Kenya. But two projects dominate our work: one for the Open University and the other for Wikipedia (financed by Indigo Trust).

The HEAT project

Our team is currently working on a project called Health Education And Training (HEAT), a volume of half a million words of training materials for community health workers. This material was orig-

inally written by the Open University (in the UK) for the government of Ethiopia, where it is already being used. The content is first reviewed and edited by our team of English editors, managed by Content Rules of California (a major supporter of our work). The editors take out any references that are specific to Ethiopia and make it more general. They also simplify the text. The end result is then translated by our team in Nairobi. All work is carefully checked and edited, both linguistically and medically. This project is partly subsidized by a grant from the Open University.

100 x 100 Wikipedia project

The other major project is our 100 x 100 Wikipedia project, which involves the translation of the 100+ most widely read Wikipedia articles on health issues into 100+ languages. The project is well under way – dozens of articles have been translated into a still growing number of languages. All Swahili work is done by our translators. This part of the 100 x 100 Wikipedia Project is funded by The Indigo Trust.

Meanwhile, we do work for a number of other non-profit organizations and social enterprises who recognize the importance of having their information in Swahili. For example, in addition to the Uchaguzi project, we translated the Ushahidi platform into Swahili, completing the work in record time.

We are proud of this work – yet there is so much more to do. Swahili is an important language, spo-

ken by 60-100 million people in East Africa, but no less than 2,000 other languages are also spoken in Africa. It is Translators without Borders' mission to create translation capacity by providing training to translators who live in areas with the triple disadvantages of poor public health, health information in the wrong language and an underdeveloped translation infrastructure. In Uganda, for example, four major languages are used, and with the help of trained translators, we could greatly assist the Village Health Teams who handle most of the health needs. We will strive to satisfy these needs as we continue to spread more knowledge to more people around the world.

contact

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is Program Director for Translators without Borders. Previously she was a board member for two years and served on the executive committee as the head of marketing and communications.



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tcworld calendar

when	what	where
Oct 9 – 11, 2013	Localization World Silicon Valley www.localizationworld.com	San Jose, CA, USA
Oct 14 – 15, 2013	TAUS User Conference www.translationautomation.com/conferences/taus-user-conference-2013	Portland, OR, USA
Nov 6 – 8, 2013	tcworld conference/ tekcom Annual Conference 2013 conferences.tekom.de/tcworld13	Wiesbaden, Germany
Nov 21 – 22, 2013	Nordic Translation Industry Forum www.ntif.se	Stockholm, Sweden
Dec 3 – 5, 2013	Gilbane 2013 gilbaneconference.com	Boston, MA, USA
Feb 20 – 21, 2014	tcworld India conference conferences.tekom.de	Bangalore, India
Feb 26 – 28, 2014	Intelligent Content 2014 www.intelligentcontentconference.com	San Jose, CA, USA
Mar 23 – 26, 2014	GALA 2014 www.gala-global.org/conference	Istanbul, Turkey
Apr 13 – 15, 2014	MadWorld 2014 www.madcapsoftware.com/events/madworld	San Diego, CA, USA
June 3 – 6, 2014	Localization World Dublin www.localizationworld.com	Dublin, Ireland
Nov 11 – 13, 2014	tcworld conference/ tekcom Annual Conference 2014 conferences.tekom.de/tcworld-conference-2014/	Stuttgart, Germany

Incredible India:

tcworld India conference 2014

Technical Writers of India (TWIN) and tekcom are pleased to announce their fourth annual tcworld India conference, which will be held from February 19-21, 2014 at the Taj Vivanta, MG Road, Bangalore. The previous tcworld India conferences have been highly successful and valuable. Within a short time, TWIN and tekcom succeeded in establishing this event as the leading conference for professional technical communicators and language professionals.

We are expecting more than 400 technical communicators, documentation managers, technical editors, entrepreneurs, and language professionals from across the country to participate in the 2014 conference. In addition, international thought leaders from Europe, the US, Australia, and India will share their insights into emerging trends, technologies and best practices.

Among others the conference addresses topics such as content management, video documentation, HTML5, DITA, and structured authoring. A special track for documentation managers and directors focuses on topics related to content strategy, information management, career paths, and more.

This conference provides ample opportunities for business networking with India-based tc and language professionals. It also offers the best platform in India for showcasing your products and services to the Indian market and to find local business partners. The Indian economy is currently suffering from a rising fiscal deficit and a steep fall of the Indian currency. However, the currency devaluation also presents huge economic benefits to those who are looking to move their documentation and translation teams to India, and to businesses that are servicing clients from India.

The timing cannot be better to tap into this vast English-speaking talent pool. And, the tcworld India conference is the right place to start, because it is the only platform that brings together Indian professionals and international experts.

technical communication
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