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To Upgrade or Not to Upgrade

by Jost Zetzsche

With SDL's [announcement](#) not to honor promotion-priced upgrades for versions of *Trados 6.5* and earlier come April 2008, many *Trados* users see themselves faced with tough decisions in these last days of March. Should you pay for an upgrade simply to avoid falling out of the upgrade cycle, or should you start to consider one of the competing products?

There's no better time than now to take a look at the competing TEnT (Translation Environment Tool) products and ask two questions: 1. How do they measure up? 2. Perhaps just as important, how compatible are they with *Trados* input and output formats that we receive from clients? To answer the first question, a partner and I have recently created a website at www.translatorstraining.com where we compare all the available tools in the form of short video tutorials. This article attempts to answer the second question.

Of course, there's no easy answer: there are a number of different ways that tools can be compatible with each other. So let's break it down step by step.

First, there is the translation file format. The two most common formats that *Trados* files are delivered in are bilingual *Word* files and bilingual .ttx files. Since this is the most obvious area in which compatibility can be achieved, the vast majority of other TEnTs allow you to work with these files. This table shows you which tools support the two different *Trados* translation formats:

	.ttx <i>TagEditor</i> files	Bilingual <i>Word</i> /RTF files	TMX files (see below)
<i>Déjà Vu</i>	X	X	X
<i>Heartsome</i>	X	X	X
<i>JIVEFusion</i>		X	X
<i>MemoQ</i>	X	X	X
<i>MetaTaxis</i>	X	X	X
<i>MultiTrans</i>		X	X
<i>SDLX</i>	X	X	X
<i>Similis</i>	X	X	X

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<i>Star Transit</i>	X		X
<i>Swordfish</i>	X	X	X
<i>Wordfast</i>		X	X

Furthermore, bilingual *Word* and *.ttx* files can be relatively easily converted to and fro with the help of a free macro from [Terminology Matters](#). So, in effect, these formats have become exchange formats that can be used by the majority of TEnTs.

Note: One exception to this is the translation packages that can be sent with the new SDL Synergy product. These are compressed files that are encrypted and can be opened only by Synergy. . . .

Second, there is the question of offline translation memories. To my knowledge, no tool (except *Trados*, of course) can directly support the binary, unconverted translation memory format; however, various tools support the exported *Trados* TM *.txt* format, and virtually all TEnTs support the TMX files that can be exported from *Trados* (see the table above).

Third, there are offline *MultiTerm* termbases. This is a little trickier. Though it is possible to export the *MultiTerm* termbases into an XML or *Excel* format that can be read by other tools, a) it is relatively involved and b) quite a bit of information will be lost in the process. If you want only bilingual glossaries, you can quickly transfer those from *MultiTerm* into other tools, but complex terminology databases with graphics, cross-references, and the accompanying fields are a different matter. As long as TBX—the termbase exchange format—is not better supported, this will remain difficult.

Fourth, there are the online, server-based TMs and terminology databases. And this is where the real problems start. As far as I know, these are not accessible with any product other than *Trados* (or *SDLX*), and if your client requires you to use and access those as you translate, you're stuck.

Finally, there is feature compatibility. There are two features in particular that are not directly compatible.

One is the *Trados PerfectMatch* feature. This feature allows you to leverage content from previous versions of *.ttx* files in context and locks these matches because they are considered to be in-content exact matches. While almost all other TEnTs offer a feature like this, the exact workings are often different and it is difficult to exactly emulate this with another set of tools.

The second feature is the QA check for *.ttx* files. Again, almost every TEnT offers QA checks, often in the same areas as the *Trados* QA module. However, if your client has very specific instructions on how to check a finalized *.ttx* file with *Trados*, you will again be hard pressed to completely emulate this.

So, are there alternatives to *Trados*? Certainly, when it comes to the basic translation file, translation memory, and terminology database formats—and these are the areas where compatibility usually counts. But there are also other areas where compatibility might become a little trickier. The answer ends up depending on you and the projects you receive. If any of the problematic areas above apply to your projects, you might want to talk to your clients and see whether there are workarounds. And if there are no workarounds? Well, you can always drop a client. Or bite the bullet and buy the spendy *Trados* upgrade.

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