Present and future needs in the CAT world

Matthias Heyn
TRADOS Benelux S.A.
303 avenue de Tervueren
1150 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: 32 (0) 2771 69 60; Fax: 32 (0) 2771 7043
email: matthias@trados.com

Whereas in the past, automation of the professional translation process was most often connected to the use of machine translation (MT), this has significantly changed in the past five years. Today, the keyword for professional translators are "computer aided translation tools (CAT-Tools)" and notably a key-composant: the "translation memory". Modern CAT-Tools - in most cases - an integration of several functionalities into one "workbench" are gaming more and more ground as a standard tool in the hand of professional translators.

This success may be explained by several factors:

- the processing power of modern computers are enabling functionalities that had not been available in the past;
- new technologies have been introduced for the handling of error-tolerant retrieval;
- usability and flexibility of CAT-Tools have been adapted to the requirements of standard software;
- the integration into the software environment of translators has significantly improved;
- CAT-Tools are aiming at supporting translators and not at replacing them. This leads to a broader acceptance;
- the knowledge of end users on possible benefits is steadily growing.

CAT-Tools have predominantly been used in the past by a specific group of translators. This group can be described as "translators translating manuals of software products" and have therefore been close to software in general. This group is commonly addressed as the "localisation industry".

As a recent development, we can observe a broadening of the user profile. Except for literary translation, the usage of CAT-Tools has been extended to nearly every type of translation work. This includes political, administration, technical, biographical etc. texts as well as specific needs in terminography covered by CAT-Tools.

This paper will therefore classify different user profiles and addresses their specific needs towards CAT-Tools. We will show that two of the main factors for the acceptance of CAT-Tools are a broader flexibility and a close integration into several software environments.

Starting from this classification, we will have a look into the influence of technical innovations in the IT-World. Interesting relations between Internet/Intranet and CAT-Tools as well as mass data handling on client/server architectures will be considered.