About the author: Graham P. Oxtoby is a professional lexicographer/terminologist and author and chief-editor of numerous standard (technical) dictionaries in the Benelux (published by Kluwer and the SDU). Graham also works as a software developer and language consultant. He is currently owner of a publishing company specializing in patent translations, technical dictionaries and linguistic software.

The benefits of terminology management

As a professional terminologist and lexicographer, I read with great interest the article on this site written by Joost Oliver Zetsche entitled Tool Kit * terminology Management. I can only underline the recommendations made by Joost for translators to conduct more terminology management work. The consistent use of terminology and terminology management are primary ingredients for maintaining consistency and quality in translations, particularly if a translator is specialized in a certain field or set of (related) fields.

Translators who use CAT tools can choose to manage their terminology by using the built-in terminology management features of their tool and create so-called termbases. Most CAT tools have this built-in terminology feature and enable the collection of terms as you translate (often with the use of hotkeys). Terminology management can also be performed quite easily by using MS Office software like Excel and Access or by using any other terminology software that is able to import and export to and from various exchangeable formats. Surprisingly enough, there are still translators who never use the termbase features of their CAT tool or any other tool, but prefer to use dictionaries or online resources for referencing terms and their meanings in specific contexts. There are reasons for this.

Some may find terminology management a rather cumbersome and time-consuming activity and would prefer to focus on the translation process instead of spending too much of their time collecting terms and managing their termbases. Another reason is that termbase management tools in CAT software do not always provide an adequate or efficient means to perform the task as one would perhaps like to. There are also translators who choose to collect their terminology only after the translation is completed (if they can spare the time...) and in some cases not at all and often rely purely on their TMs (translation memories) to produce terminologically correct translations. While this method may work well for certain translation assignments, e.g. those that are adequately covered by extensive TMs in specific fields, it is not always a wise thing to do. TMs may be borrowed from other sources or may contain unverified or incorrect terminology. Relying purely on TMs also makes the translator less versatile when it comes to style and choice of terms (text). The use of TMs for selecting appropriate terminology is therefore limited only to the content of the TM being used. In the long term, TMs used in conjunction with contextual terminology become much more effective and the benefits for the
translator are much greater. For example, if properly managed, termbases can provide alternative translations (synonyms, equivalent or similar terms, related terms, preferred phrases, additional context hits in TMs etc.) and this may have a much more positive effect on the style and consistency of translations in specific fields. Combining the use of TMs with extensive termbases therefore provides a much richer set of resources for the translator to work with. It’s for this reason that I personally believe that terminology tools are highly under-valued considering the improvements and benefits they can bring to translators and their clients.

The time factor

Another drawback of terminology management as far as most translators are concerned is the ‘time’ factor. Because translation work is often driven by short deadlines imposed by clients or by the focus of the translator on achieving high output rates in order to generate sufficient income, time is always an important issue and something you can’t simply neglect. Sadly, this is also the reason why many translators do not invest more time and effort in building their own terminology resources. On the other hand, there are also translators who view terminology work as a crucial part of their work. They have discovered the benefits of the time they invest and enjoy terminology work, as well as the research (and learning process) that goes with it.

Some surveys have indicated that there is still a relatively large number of translators who do not do any terminology work at all, for various reasons. What is clear to me is that many translators are not benefiting from terminology work as much as they could be or don’t even have the right tools to work with, even the simplest of tools. They are sometimes still unaware of the fact that they already have some very good tools on their computers (e.g. Excel, Access) but have never used them for terminology work. In fact, all that is required from them is to organize and plan their work differently and to invest a little more time and effort. More importantly, terminology work should not be postponed or set aside for a rainy day many months later (i.e. when it is not actually needed and often too late to use!) so that it is eventually forgotten. The more time one invests in terminology work as it presents itself (i.e. during the actual process of translation or immediately after the completion of an assignment), the greater the benefits will be in the long term. This is without a doubt.

Spending just a few hours a week on terminology can, after only a few months, have an enormous impact on the production rate, efficiency, consistency, style and quality of translation work, depending of course on how much time the translator is willing
to invest. The *payback period* is much shorter than one could imagine. Also, translators with minimal or limited terminology resources do not generally produce the standard or quality of work they could be producing. Nor are they exploiting the tools they already have as well as they could. It is a fact that translators who do have access to extensive terminology resources – also proprietary terminology collected from client assignments in specific domains - generally produce a higher standard of work in terms of consistency, style and correct use of terminology. They also make a much better impression on their clients and on new clients!

Terminology work is not just a matter of collecting terms in a database. It entails a lot more than that. Terminology must be verified or be collected from reliable sources. Many ‘industry terms’ will not be found in dictionaries unless those dictionaries are highly specialized and have been compiled in close consultation with those working in the relevant field. Correct terminology needs to be collected from reliable sources, preferably from documentation in the industry itself or from persons working in those industries. This is an ongoing task that doesn’t simply end after a translation has been submitted to a client. If that’s the view of the translator, then that would be much like selling motor cars without offering customers the option to buy spare parts if something goes terribly wrong.

Also, if terminology work is neglected, translation work can become dull, cumbersome and much more time-consuming, especially when new assignment opportunities arise. We all know how it feels when you know you’ve translated a similar text in the past but don’t have the terminology to use because you’ve not recorded it or anticipated its use in new assignments. Perhaps even an assignment from the same client just weeks or months later. Of course, you can always revert to previous translations and then look up the terms you need, but that also takes time. Time you could have spent collecting and recording terms in a database weeks before. So, in my view, translators should become more involved in terminology work and view it as a crucial part of their job. It can greatly improve the standard of work and, in the long run, increase one’s overall output as well as client satisfaction. In a highly competitive market like translation, *client-binding* can be very important for your survival as a freelancer, so there is much to be gained from investing more time in regular terminology work. It can mean the difference between securing an assignment or missing out altogether if you’re not properly equipped or don’t know where to start.

**Introducing TermX**

In an attempt to make terminology work more attractive and to get more people involved, some months ago I decided to design a new Windows software package that I call **TermX**. TermX has various built-in features that translators can benefit from. Some of these features are even *time-savers.*
TermX is built around two widely used software packages that most translators will probably already have if they use MS Office. There was a specific reason for this choice. MS Access includes the option of applying SQL (query) commands (e.g. search commands, sorting commands etc.) to manipulate data contained in standard databases and because translators have it in MS Office, from a programming point of view it seemed to be the most obvious choice. The spreadsheet program MS Excel also seemed an obvious choice because Excel can be used as an intermediary between existing termbases in CAT tools and MS Access. This means that terminology data can be edited and manipulated outside of TermX and still be used in TermX in an open, non-proprietary format. Another added advantage is that the practical use of these programs provides the translator with an insight into how this software can be used in other ways to create extensive terminology repositories. Terminology collected and managed in TermX can be easily exported to various other formats.

**Underlying database structure**

The TermX database (an MDB file), comprising 4 different tables, is based upon a very simple data model, so that it can be used quickly and efficiently to produce extendable termbases (e.g. for use in CAT tools) or standalone terminology repositories for translators. Although it is not intended to be a fully-fledged terminology management or lexicographic system for professionals (like Uniterm, Dictionary Workbench, Tshwane etc.) it can still be used quite elegantly to produce output files that can be further manipulated for online or hardcopy glossary production, even for databases on ASP (Net) servers. It not only allows for the exchange of data to and from TermX and MS Office software and formats like RTF and PDF, but can also be used to produce other more complex file formats like SGML, XML, HTML etc. Additionally, any data you collect in TermX can be shared with others on a server (website) that provides for ASP or PHP scripting (based either on an SQL database for PHP or an MS Access database for ASP). **ASP is a web application framework developed and marketed by Microsoft to allow programmers to build dynamic web sites, web applications and web services.** This means that any terminology collected in TermX can also be used to build both static (PHP/HTML) or dynamic (ASP) glossary websites. This makes TermX a highly versatile terminology tool. TermX is a software package that can be used both by independent translators and translation agencies to build extensive domain-specific terminology repositories.

**The input screen**

Each individual entry in TermX can be assigned various types of information, for example: a homonym number for repeated source terms, a specific language attribute (editable in a separate database table), a domain or group of related domains (editable in a separate database table), context information (relating to the
use of the term in a specific context), source information (how and where the term was collected) and 1-6 translation for each individual source term entry (although 2-3 would normally be more than adequate). If required, the user can also enter additional editor's notes.

**Screenshot of main screen in TermX Pro**

The main input screen includes scrollable entries on the left, with a search option and editing section on the right for translations and any other information relating to the source term and translations. Entry fields include: user name, edit date, amend date, source term, language attributes, domains, homonym number, context, source information, editor's notes and an additional checkbox to designate that an entry is verified and complete. Numerous language attributes and domains are already included in the database but the user can edit these entries and add new entries as required. A special characters selector is available from the main menu of TermX.
TermX Pro also comes with an additional utility called the **external desktop viewer**. This utility can be docked on the program bar and be used in all Windows software and CAT tools to look up terms contained in the TermX terminology database (see example below). The viewer can be used in conjunction with any CAT tool (see screenshot below).

**Screenshot of TermX Viewer used in MemoQ**

For ease of use, the software also includes 3 different editing modes: (a) an extensive editing mode (b) a very basic Quick Edit mode (with minimal entry fields) and (c) an extended Quick Edit mode that can also be used separately and as an independent utility from the desktop without the need to start the full version of TermX Pro. All three programs use the same underlying database structure, i.e. they communicate with the same database and database tables.
**Screenshot of the extended Quick Edit utility (separate desktop utility)**

Entry fields include: source term, homonym number, language attributes, domains, context and target terms.

The very basic Quick Edit mode (see screenshot below) in TermX enables the user to enter only the most essential data (source terms and translations), without the need to add additional information such as language attributes, domains etc. This is particularly handy if you want to collect and record terms very quickly and add more detailed information at a later date, i.e. when you have more time.
Screenshot of the very basic Quick Edit mode (built-in utility)

Yet another convenient feature of TermX Pro is the ability to use the software to browse various internet (glossary) resources directly from the main menu. This feature is built-in, so users aren’t required to start their browser first or to enter the URL of those resources in a separate browser address field. This feature is built around the widely used MS Internet Explorer. Resource links include: Google, Google Translate, Wikipedia, Wordweb, the Oxford Dictionary online, LEO, IATE and various others). These resources can be used for referencing data directly from your desktop as you collect and record new terminology. Terms and translations can also be e-mailed directly from TermX.

TermX also enables other files (bilingual text files, MemoQ 2-column RTF files etc.) to be loaded directly from the user’s computer in order to collect terminology from existing documents (in Word, PDF, RTF, Excel etc.) and/or previous translations.
TermX Pro in a nutshell...

TermX is compatible with all current Windows versions, including Windows Vista and Windows 7. It can be used as a simple, reliable and affordable terminology management system for collecting general or specific terminology in various user-defined domains. The export features included in TermX allow the user to export data to PDF, RTF, XLS and TXT formats in order to manipulate that data using MS Excel and/or MS Access or to convert that data to various other formats like XML, HTML etc. Conversely, existing termbases in CAT tools can be easily imported into TermX through MS Access and/or MS Excel so that TermX can be used as the central terminology repository for all of your CAT termbases. This is explained in the extensive help files. TermX also has an attractive interface that is easy to understand and use.

Other versions of TermX include: TBEdit (a very simple termbase editor), TBViewer (standalone termbase viewer utility), TermX Desktop (a simplified version of TermX Pro). Several TC members have beta-tested the software and are already using this new tool to collect and manage their own terminology.

Hopefully, this short article will inspire you as a member of our community to view your work from a different perspective and to acknowledge the need for a more personal involvement in terminology work. It can be a very enjoyable activity and also one which will eventually result in obtaining more translation assignments in your chosen specialization.

For more information, you are welcome to visit my website at: http://www.translex.co.uk/ProEd.html where this software is described in more detail (including help files to get you started).