
Information Exchange

Resources

Language and Documentation is an independent bimonthly magazine for both scientists and professionals. info@crux.be. Source: T News International, issue number 24, 2000. Information from Fred Klein.

The SIETAR International Journal: A Professional Journal Addressing Intercultural Education, Training & Research; www.sietarinternational.org/ and www.sietarusa.org. Information from John Osborne.

TC-FORUM (Technical Communicator's Forum) distributes information on international technical communication. Visit the INTECOM web site www.intecom.org, and **subscribe** to the quarterly TC-FORUM newsletter. **Subscribe** also to the TCF list server, a medium for discussing international issues with more than 400 technical communicators around the world. Information from Peter Sandford.

Educational opportunities

A workshop to further the work on evaluation of machine translation will be held in conjunction with MT Summit VIII listed under *Networking*. Sandra.Manzi@issco.unige.ch. Source tcf-gen. Information from Fred Klein.

Employment

For listings of jobs worldwide visit www.infotechcs.com/csglobal.html. Information from Michael Klinger.

The STC web site, www.stc-va.org/fjobstart.htm, has listings of job openings worldwide.

Networking

ACM SIGDOC 2001. *Communicating in the New Millenium*. Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 21 to 24. **Proposals are due April 6**. Topics to be addressed at the conference include national language support in all forms of documentation, migrating to multilingual web sites, cultural issues for international audiences, making documentation available in multiple formats, and fundamental design principles that transcend the medium. www.cs.ucr.edu/~stilley/sigdoc2001. Information from Scott Tilley.

MT Summit VIII (Machine Translation). Santiago de Compostela, Spain, September 18 to 22. Contact: Gisella.Ansbach@issco.unige.ch. Source: T News International, issue number 24, 2000. Information from Fred Klein.



STC society for technical communication

Global Talk

Newsletter of the International Technical Communication SIG

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For previous issues please visit the SIG web site, accessible from <http://www.stc-va.org>.

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Designing the future of technical communication



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Global Talk

Newsletter of the International Technical Communication SIG

New series Volume 2 Number 1 Spring 2001

Online identity

Kirk St Amant

As developments in online communication continue to erode barriers of physical distance, technical communicators find themselves increasingly interacting with individuals from other nations and other cultures. The online environment makes it possible for individuals to assume a false or altered identity. Cultural differences related to identity can cause miscommunication in online exchanges. Depending on the culture, identity gives cues as to how to interact, whether to trust the message, and how to respond. While online identity can be ambiguous, the following steps can help meet the identity-related criteria essential to effective intercultural communication.

1. Initiate online correspondence by introducing yourself. Be sure to include: your full name (given and family name), your company and geographic location, and your job title or position. For example: My name is John Smith, and I am a technical writer in the Communications Department at This Company, Inc., Any Town, USA.
2. Use the most descriptive e-mail address you have, for example, an address with a company name rather than a service provider such as America Online or Compuserve.
3. In all messages, use tag lines that include your name, your title or position, and the name and geographic location of the company, for example:
John Smith
Technical Writer, Communications Department
This Company, Inc., Any Town, USA
4. Ask an intermediary familiar with both parties to perform a formal online introduction before making initial contact with persons from other cultures. Make sure that you receive confirmation that contact is welcome before actually sending a message to this individual.
5. Forward entire online postings rather than cutting and pasting portions of an online message into a new e-mail or other online message. This avoids clouding someone else's identity. In the forwarded message include indicators of where the original message starts and stops, whom the message was from and to, and when the message was sent. For example:

```
----- Forwarded Message Starts Here -----  
From: JohnQPublic@OurCompany.com  
Date: Fri, 12 May 2000 17:10:01 -0700 (PDT)  
To: Pat Smith  
Subject: Revised work order
```

By following these steps when interacting online, technical communicators can improve the chances that audiences from other cultures will correctly interpret a given online message.

Kirk St. Amant (stam0032@tc.umn.edu) is working on a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Scientific and Technical Communication at the University of Minnesota. For background on why online identities may be unclear, and the cultural implications, see Kirk's article "Problems of online identity" on the SIG web site.

Meeting notice

The International Technical Communication SIG is scheduled to meet Monday, May 14, from 2:00 to 3:30 PM at the STC Annual Conference in Chicago (May 13 to 16). A SIG Open House will also be held. Please check the conference materials for details.

Opportunities

A leader for the **SIG bibliography project** and a **liaison to Canada** are needed. If you would like to volunteer, contact manager Carolyn Luttrell, the_oboist@yahoo.com.

The SIG is starting a **student section**. Contact the leader, Kirk St. Amant, stam0032@tc.umn.edu.

Contribute to *Global Talk*. Send notices of meetings and programs; recommend a book, article, or web site; or summarize an *Idea* you find useful. Send contributions to the editor, alw@relex.com.

To contribute articles for the **translation kit**, contact Charlene Nagy, cnagy@ncs-pubs.com. Informal articles are welcome. MS Word format is preferred.

Ideas

Our SIG manager Carolyn Luttrell rides a horse. She can ride any horse trained in the English riding system, which gives commands (stop, start, canter and so on) to the horse through body language. Not every country uses the English riding system, however, and she would not feel comfortable riding alone on a horse trained in another system because her commands could be misinterpreted. **How do cultural differences affect the activities that interest you?**



Newsletter of the International Technical Communication Special Interest Group (SIG)

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Letters to the editor

With regard to the "crazy spelling" and pronunciations in English, there are actually seven ways to pronounce "OUGH." I found this out in a lecture, where the professor considered there to be five, but as people called out words, he was surprised to find seven distinct pronunciations written on the board. In addition to the five given ("off," "oh," "ow," "uff," and "oo,") there are "aw" (thought) and "uh" (thorough). *Richard L. Tuft* (Richard.Tuft@iint.com).

Message from the manager

Carolyn Luttrell

Through a series of mix-ups, I ended up mailing out most copies of the winter edition of *Global Talk*. Getting the nearly 1,000 newsletters ready for the mail seemed as if it would take forever. Since I was using my eyes and both hands, and had to stay in one place to get the job done, I decided to use the time productively by listening to several CDs that I had received as gifts, but never opened. I got through six full-length operas and one solo artist recording before the work was completed! During the exciting and dramatic parts, I stuffed and stamped in time to the music, so a few labels got a bit lopsided. Sorry!

As people guess from my e-mail address, I play the oboe. Listening to the recordings made me think of the **similarities between opera (or music of any sort) and technical communication** in the early 21st century. The result will appear in the Winter issue—my article "Music and international technical communication."

Technical communicators and musicians have a lot in common. Musicians have to learn new music; technical communicators have to learn new methods and tools. Both must keep up their proficiency. Musicians must practice each day. Both go to seminars and conventions to keep up on new developments in the field. With their colleagues, both can commiserate on problems, discuss who makes the best instruments or tools, where to find the best price, who does the best repair work or provides the best support, and the like. The **STC Annual Conference in Chicago, May 13 to 16**, is our opportunity to network and learn.

In mailing the winter issue, I handled each copy several times, so I got to know our SIG membership quite well on paper. We are a diverse group from many industries and backgrounds. Our leadership team knows some members; others we have never met or had any contact with, even through e-mail. We hope to rectify that if you are attending the annual conference this year. This year's conference has many international sessions. We will hold the International Technical Communication SIG business meeting and an open house. An "International Members Reception" takes place Sunday night May 13, from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. Please stop by these events if you are at the annual conference.

Message from the editor

Ann L. Wiley

We receive more material than we can print each quarter, and are actively expanding efforts to keep up to date on the regions and organizations to which we have liaisons. Soon informative material will be posted on our web site, including additional articles and timely announcements.

Thanks to Carolyn Luttrell for handling production and mailing for this issue, and to the growing number of members who are contributing to *Global Talk*. Please send contributions and messages any time.

Machine translation primer

Carolyn Luttrell

Machine Translation (MT) is an indispensable software partner. As with any partnership, each member must have realistic expectations of what can be achieved and live up to roles and responsibilities. In the case of the technical communicator and MT, one partner is human and the other a computer. The computer partner's output is only as good as the human partner's input.

What MT is

Machine translation, in the broadest context, is the use of a computer to translate text from one natural language (for example, Spanish, Chinese) to another.

Producing perfect translation was one of the earliest objectives in computer science, but it still has not been achieved.(3) Realistically, it probably never will be, because a machine does not have the human dimension required for dealing accurately with nuances of natural language. However, today many MT products that produce a reasonable level of quality and accuracy are available in cost-effective versions.

How MT Works

Translation software converts natural language texts from a source language into a target language. The languages involved are paired, for example, Japanese into French, Russian into German. In general, the software analyzes a sentence in one language and builds a sentence with the same meaning in another language using various types of logic and approaches.(1) The program builds its vocabulary through additions to customized dictionaries.(2)

Translation software programs are available for under \$100, but you can pay much more. You can often do free translations on the internet. The higher-priced package produces a higher quality translation. The lower-priced or free package may be the right one to use if it does what you need.

When to use MT

Machine translation can meet many basic needs. Among them are:

- To get the general meaning or gist of document such as a patent or email
- To understand simple instructions
- To review content to determine if a document merits a high quality translation by a better MT system or a professional human translator, or a combination
- To save time and money on translating clearly written, straightforward, large technical documents that contain a lot of repetition

When not to use MT

Realistically, MT should be used either with extreme caution or avoided entirely when abstract thought is involved, specific connotations are necessary, or the consequences of misunderstanding are too great.(2) Marketing communications, advertising, non-computer training materials, and legal briefs are generally not candidates for machine translation unless you want to risk a catastrophe or have some humor on the job, or both.

The human dimension

Some of the better and more expensive programs produce text that is highly accurate. However, there is one big caveat with any MT product: *Virtually no system will give completely perfect and usable text.* Human translators are still needed for post-translation editing. The first translation systems disappointed many users because they believed (or were led to believe) that the system would produce perfect translations regardless of the input.(3) This was not and is not the case.

Selecting an MT system

The computer partner to be selected depends on your needs. Here are some questions to ask.

Quality and accuracy: How accurate must the translation be? What level of quality is required?

Source and target language: Who is to be the recipient of the translation? You, or someone who does not understand the language you speak?

Purpose: Are you translating to get a rough idea of the document's content? Are you translating to sell your product or provide instructions to the end-user?

Size: How large is the document?

Volume: Is this a one-time job or the start of a series of translations? Has a version of the document been translated before?

Content: How much repetition does the document contain? Are there long, complex sentences?

Audience: What source and target languages are you dealing with? What language pairs are needed?

Cost: What is your budget for machine translation and post-translation editing? Remember: A cheap translation that is a bad translation is **worthless**, and reflects poorly on you and your company.

Time: Have you allotted the proper amount of time for creating good documentation, doing *thorough* pre-translation editing, using machine translation, and doing *thorough* post-translation editing?

Technical considerations: What type of hardware, memory, operating system, source text requirements, source text entry, output appearance, dictionaries and speed are involved?(4)

Continued on the next page

Using an MT system

A human translator often can and will turn poorly written text into something readable. A computer system can not. As with any computer system, the quality of the output depends on the quality of the input. Following basic rules of good technical communication helps ensure success, as does use of a controlled language. Limits on vocabulary, writing style, format, punctuation, and syntax give the system a better chance of doing an accurate translation.

Summary and Conclusion

Machine translation can significantly reduce time and save money. It can be a wonderful partner if the correct system is chosen and used properly.

References

- (1) Freivalds, John, "The Technology of Translation" in *Management Review*, New York, Jul/Aug 1999.
- (2) *Computer Aided Translation (CAT): Selecting the Right CAT Tool*, Language Partners International, Inc., Evanston, IL, 1998.

- (3) Hutchins, W. J., *Machine Translation: Past, Present, Future*, Halsted Press, New York, 1986.
- (4) Desau, Ralph B., "Machine Translation Evaluation Criteria" in *Proceedings of a Workshop Sponsored by the National Science Foundation*, San Diego, CA, November 1992.
- (5) Somers, Harold L., "The Current State of Machine Translation," in *Machine Translation Summit IV Proceedings*, San Diego, CA, 1997.

Reports from the liaisons

SIETAR

John Osborne

Society for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research

www.sietarinternational.org/ and www.sietarusa.org

SIETAR is an interdisciplinary professional and service organization whose purpose is to implement and promote cooperative interactions and effective communications among peoples of diverse cultures, races and ethnic groups. Its objective is to encourage the development and application of the knowledge, values and skills which underlie effective intercultural, interracial and interethnic actions at the individual, group, organization and community levels.

SIETAR started in 1968 in the US with former Peace Corps volunteers. The organization is now more international than American. There are 14 chapters around the world, with four chapters in the US and two in Canada. For more information, visit the SIETAR web sites, especially the history pages.

Regular publications include a journal, *Communique*, and the SIETAR newsletter. SIETAR USA is located at 573 Bayview Street, Yarmouth, Maine 04096 USA. Telephone: +1-207-846-9598; Fax: +1-207-846-0763; E-mail: SIETARUSA@AOL.com.

INTECOM

Peter Sandford

International Council for Technical Communication

www.intecom.org

INTECOM is a federation of professional technical communication organizations around the world. The main activity of INTECOM is promotion of an international forum for the exchange of ideas and techniques in technical communication.

At this time, INTECOM includes the following organizations:

- ASTC Victoria, Australian Society for Technical Communication (Australia)
- SQRP, Société Québécoise de la Rédaction Professionnelle (Canada)
- STD, Finnish Technical Communications Society (Finland)
- CRT, Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques (France)
- tekom, Gesellschaft für technische Kommunikation e.V. (Germany)
- STIC, Studiekring voor Technische Informatie & Kommunikatie/The Dutch Society for Technical Information and Communication (The Netherlands)
- NFTI, Norsk Forening for Teknisk Information (Norway)
- FTI, Föreningen Teknisk Information (Sweden)
- TECOM Schweiz (Switzerland)
- ISTC, Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (United Kingdom)
- IEEE/PCS, Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Inc. (USA)
- CPTSC, The Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (USA)
- STC, Society for Technical Communication (USA)

INTECOM is an organization through which international or national bodies can have direct access to expertise in technical communication. As a member of STC, you have access to the facilities provided by INTECOM's member organizations, for example, meetings and publications.

The INTECOM web site (<http://www.intecom.org>) provides links to the member organizations' web sites. INTECOM also directly sponsors the Forum and the TC-Forum. Information about these activities may be found on the INTECOM web site. TC-Forum is described in the *Resources* column of this issue.

SIG News

Membership news

As of January 30, 2001 the International Technical Communication SIG had 1342 members.

From October 2000 through January 2001 the SIG gained 236 members, representing the following countries:

Australia (1), Belgium (3), Canada (26), Finland (1), France (1), Germany (1), India (5), Israel (6), Japan (1), Netherlands (2), New Zealand (3), Portugal (1), Singapore (1), Switzerland (2), Thailand (1), United Kingdom (1), United States (180).

Leadership team update

We have one new member of the leadership team, **SIETAR Liaison John Osborne**, member, Puget Sound Chapter

Current job: Technical Writer, eCharge Corporation, an online billing provider

Previous jobs: English teacher, college science teacher (biology and environmental science), environmental scientist, teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL)

Other STC service: Currently a program planner for the Puget Sound Chapter

Educational background: BA, Zoology and MS, Oceanography

Society News

"Around the World" at the STC Annual Conference

Preliminary program information lists 15 speakers from outside the US and one from Puerto Rico. The speakers are from Australia, Belgium, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The following presentations are listed in the "Around the World" stream in the preliminary program of the annual conference.

Monday May 14

- MG 3D Managing People and Projects Remotely
- MG 3X Global Communication Town Meeting, Part I
- MG 4T Sister Chapters: Building a Bridge Between Ohio and Japan
- TR 2R Intercultural Research on Design and Text Structure
- WE 2S Crossing Borders—Tips for Preparing Your Writing for Subsequent Translation
- WE 3Y Working with Technical Translators
- WE 3CC Communicating Globally—But in Which Medium, When?

Tuesday May 15

- ET 6T Global Perspectives 2001: Interdisciplinary Classroom Approaches to Global Communication
- MG 7U Global Communication Town Meeting, Part II
- MG 8Q Cultural Issues in Multinational Organizations
- TR 5Z Research on Global Communication
- TR 6P Designing and Testing for the Global Market
- TR 7X Reaching Global Audiences
- WE 5AA Successfully Globalizing Content
- WE 7W The Impact of Global Communication Issues on the Bottom Line
- WE 8R Surviving the Time-Consuming, All-Encompassing, Complex Project

Wednesday May 16

- MG 9T Global Communication Town Meeting, Part III
- WE 9V Living and Working in China: Understanding Communication Requirements

Thursday May 17 (Post Conference)

- PC 3 Otherwise, the Results are Unpredictable: Successfully Globalizing Content
- PC 6 More than Translation: Developing Products for the International Audience

STC Board report

At the winter 2001 meeting, held in San Diego, California, the STC Board approved formation of three new chapters including the Australia Chapter in Region 5.

Membership in the Society, projected to reach 26,000 by the end of March 2001, is distributed as follows: USA 87.2%, Canada 8.6%, other countries (the greatest area of growth) 11.7%.

Assistant to the president for SIGs Raymond Urgo reports most of the SIGs have a status of good or excellent, and the STC Office receives very few complaints about SIGs. The Board applauded this statement.

STC Annual Conference Chicago, Illinois, USA May 13 to 16, 2001

- Many international sessions
- International Technical Communication SIG business meeting
- SIG open house
- "International Members Reception" Sunday night, May 13, 6:00 to 7:00 PM