



Translation Memories

You've just completed the translation of your website, product specifications or user manual into several languages and the authors of the content send you a new version. Or worse, a change or update is made to the source documents during the translation process. Do you have to pay for the whole translation again?

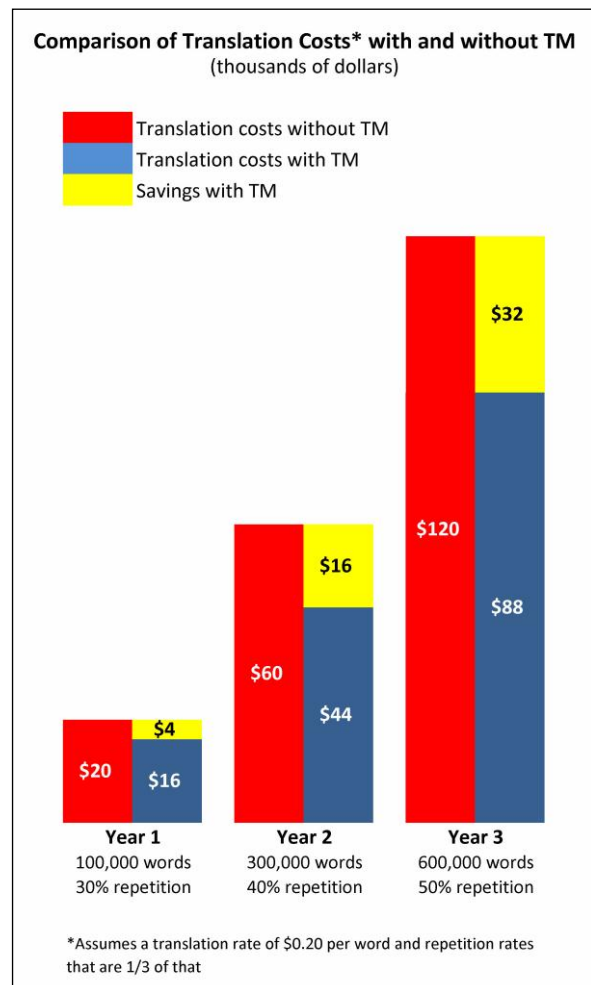
Not if your translation provider uses up-to-date computer translation tools. Here are the translation tools that we use to deal with these types of issues.

Translation Memory

The single most important and useful translation tool is a translation memory (TM). A TM is a database that stores segments (sentences, headings, list elements, etc.) and their corresponding translations as the document is translated. It correlates target segments and source segments so that an existing translation can simply be recovered from the database and only new material needs to be translated. For example, let's consider the worst possible scenario: The source document needs to be changed while the translation is in progress. Without a TM, the translator either has to spend time locating each change in the original document and then finding and changing the corresponding segment in the translated document – or simply start over – in either case, it is a time-consuming and expensive process.

But, if the translation has been started using a TM, the TM can do the work of locating the changes. The TM system will look at each segment of the new source document and compare it to what is already in the database. If there is an exact match, the previous translation is automatically used. If a segment is almost the same as the original (a "fuzzy match"), the translation is reused with a note generated to the translator to check and edit it. Once the new document has been run through the TM, the translator just has to scan for untranslated content and fuzzy matches. The translation work that was already done does not have to be repeated.

The figure to the right shows the kinds of savings that can be generated by using a TM for large amounts of translation involving substantial repetition. Over time, as more segments are added to the database, repetition tends to be larger and cost savings correspondingly greater.



Translations done by a TM are not cost free. The translation service has to cover the costs of the software, of maintaining the TM, and of time spent reviewing the fuzzy matches and



untranslated segments. However, the cost per word for repetitions is usually a fraction of the normal charge.

Note: Clients with large volumes of translation should also look into content management and authoring systems that provide support for translation. They can help increase speed and reduce costs even further by focusing only on content that has changed and by making it easier to export text to be translated and to reimport translation changes into the foreign-language versions.

Terminology Management

Another feature of many TM systems is a terminology manager. This feature helps translators to be consistent in their word choice throughout and across documents. Using terms consistently within a given project is critical to achieving a high quality of translation. Instead of relying on notes or their own memories, the translator can use terminology management software to create glossaries. Each word with a unique meaning and usage in a particular context can be placed in the glossary. The glossary can be assigned to a subject matter, a project or a client so that the translator will remember the proper translation for words within a given context. Glossaries are especially useful when working on large and complex projects that require more than one translator to work in parallel.

Together, translation memories and terminology management tools allow translators to be much more productive – saving clients money, completing projects faster, and radically reducing error rates. This does *not* mean that translation providers that use TMs will give you the cheapest rates. Translators who do not invest in such tools may offer cheaper per word rates on your initial translation, but over time your losses in retranslation costs, delays and quality problems may dwarf those savings quickly.