

Computer Assisted Translation

With our modern global economy, the ability to quickly and accurately translate important information into multiple languages has become a critical part of doing business. Computer-assisted translation involves the use of software programs to translate both verbal and written texts from one language to another. CAT is basically translation completed with the aid of a software tool, which helps a human translator work more quickly and accurately.

Definition

Computer-assisted translation tools work by giving the software either a document or a string of text. The software then removes anything that is not text, such as pictures or tables, and simply takes what is left over and translates it into the language of choice.

How Does Computer-Assisted Translation Work?

CAT software works by breaking the source text into smaller, translatable segments. The CAT software then saves the translated segments and source segments in a translation database. Search capabilities in CAT software lets a human translator access saved segments of translated fragments at any given time to be re-used either in the same document or in a different one or used when two segments do not match completely. The process helps ensure that the terminology and writing style of the original source material is translated accurately.

The best CAT software also includes these other features:

- **Autosuggest** – This feature provides recurring words and phrases and eliminates the need to retype them every time they appear.
- **Quality assurance** – These functions check the translation for omissions and numerical inconsistencies, and proofs the translation using target language standards.
- **Side-by-side alignment** – This feature lets a translator compare source segments and target text in a side-by-side presentation, helping to maintain workflow by preventing the translator from getting lost between two documents.

Pros and Cons of Computer-Assisted Translation

Pros

- **Saves Time** – The most important advantage to CAT is that it can save time. A translator doesn't have to spend hours reading dictionaries to translate words. Instead, the software can translate content quickly and provide a quality output in less time than it would take a human translator. Another way CAT software can save time is its search capability, which can help speed the translation of repeated text.
- **Reduces Errors** – CAT software can help reduce errors introduced by manual translation by saving the translated segments along with the source phrase. Because translated text is stored in a database in segments, a human translator can quickly search for and find saved translated segments without having to retranslate them manually.
- **Ensures Consistency** – The availability of translated segments also ensures consistency when using certain terms, especially technical terms.
- **Speeds Up Large Translations** – CAT software is especially helpful for large translation projects, as the speed of the process reduces the time it takes to translate texts materials that are very long.
- **Speeds Up Highly Technical Translations** – Technical translations tend to be very time-consuming because the translator must constantly switch back and forth between a list of specific technical terms and the translated document. CAT software can be programmed to automatically identify places in a document where specific terminology must be used.
- **Widely Available** – There are many CAT software programs available on the Internet, making it easier to find than a professional translator. As these programs have become popular, their translated outputs are also becoming more compatible with each other, making it easier to switch between CAT software programs.

- **Relatively Inexpensive** – CAT software is not expensive. The most popular CAT software costs around \$500-800 for individual translators, making it a good business investment. Some CAT software is also cheaper than that or even free.

Cons

- **It's Just a Tool** – It's important to remember that CAT software is simply a tool that assists a human translator. The user (the human translator) controls the tool and is responsible for reviewing the translated output. In addition, the original settings of the software may not be ideal for every translation project; the translator must be an expert user of the software and be able to modify it to suit each project. Thus, the effectiveness of CAT software really depends on the skill of the translator using it.
- **Poor Accuracy** – CAT software provides literal word-for-word translation. It cannot understand the nuances and complexities of language. CAT software can only convey a general idea of what the text is about. To be really useful, text translated by CAT absolutely must be reviewed and edited by a skilled human translator.
- **Cannot Understand Context** – CAT software understands context and stumbles when faced with ambiguity. Slang, colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions can only be truly understood by a professional translator, who brings a depth of human experience and understanding to translation that CAT software cannot.
- **Is Your Translation Secure?** – Like a lot of software, CAT software cannot guarantee the confidentiality of your translation. The same security issues exist with CAT software that exist with any software, especially web-based software. If your translation project includes sensitive corporate or personal information, you are better off using a professional human translator.
- **Not Great for Creative Material** – Books and marketing copy are creative works with a lot of artistic expression and less technical language. These kinds of translation really require a human translator.