



STAR Transit: The Next Generation

By Michael Schubert

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Swiss STAR Group was founded in 1984 as a technical editing and translation services company and now has 48 locations in 31 countries. STAR initially developed Transit as its in-house translation tool and began marketing it worldwide in 1991. The latest version, STAR Transit NXT Version 4.0, was released in November 2008.

The 150 MB download installed in under five minutes (no reboot required) and uninstalled quickly and cleanly. Comprehensive PDF user manuals are available in German or English (of sorts). The program user interface can be displayed in British English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Czech, Swedish, Chinese, or Japanese.

Layout

STAR Transit NXT is a standalone application with an integrated user interface made up of dockable windows for source text, target text, terminology, markup, and reference material matches (see Figure 1 on page 25). Source files are imported from their native format into this uniform working environment and then

exported into a target-language version in the original format.

The Transit button, Quick Access toolbar, and Ribbon bar all mimic the MS Office 2007 interface in their layout and functionalities. This is

Twelve standard roles, including Translator, Reviewer, and Project Manager, act as function filters that adjust the view, hide unnecessary windows, and gray-out unneeded functions from the interface. The

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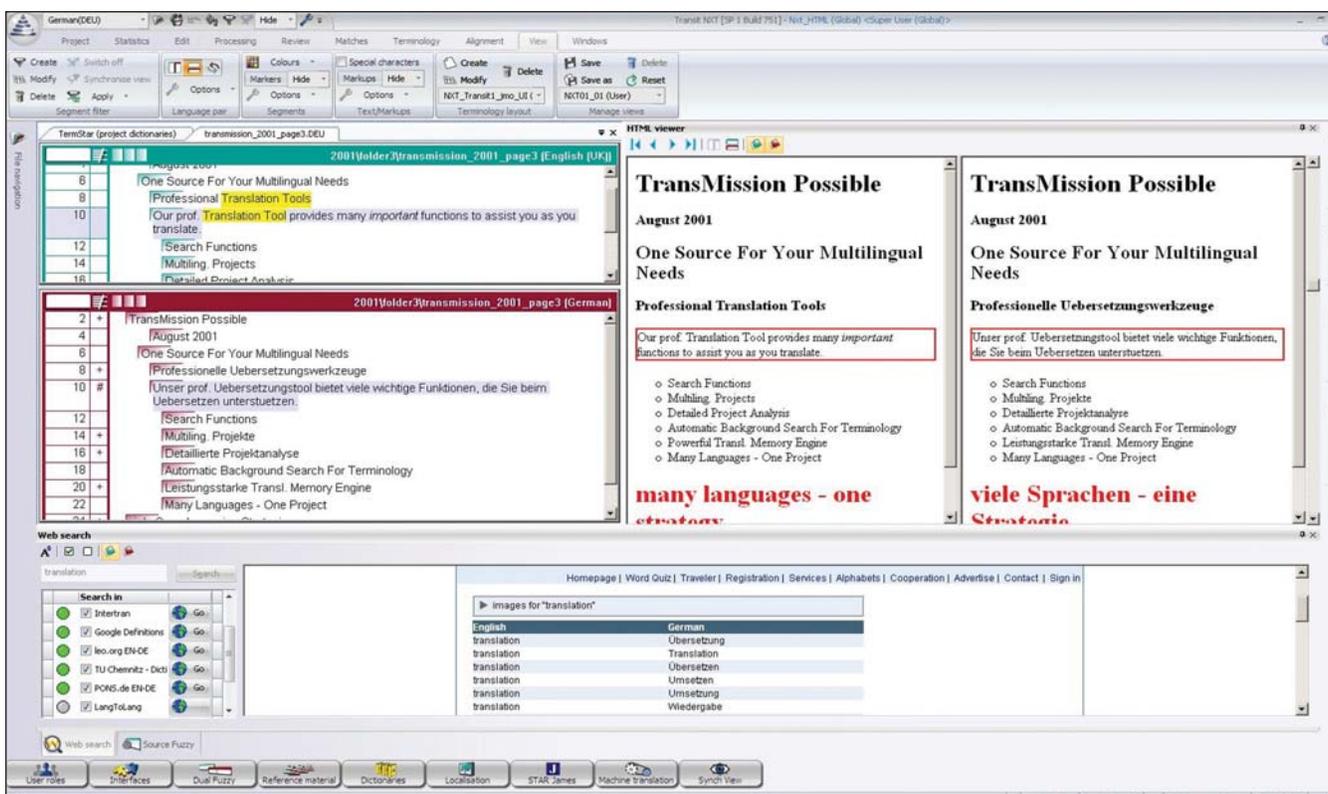
For those who prefer to translate in the source file environment—without any computer-assisted translation tool or with a macro tool such as Trados Workbench or Wordfast Classic that allow you to translate MS Word files directly in Word—an integrated proprietary user interface with its colorful functional hubbub may seem cluttered and alienating, but the efficiency gains and growth potential offered by such uniformity and integration more than compensate.

component windows can be closed, resized, or moved (for instance, to a second screen) to suit your preferences. Source and target text windows can be filtered to display only specific segment types, such as untranslated segments. Certain elements, such as the preview windows, are configured by default as “floating windows” that appear when appropriate and then disappear again afterward (unless you click the thumbtack icon to pin them in place).

Working in STAR Transit NXT

STAR Transit NXT uses a project-based approach. A project collects all the settings and files associated with a

Figure 1: STAR Transit NXT User Interface



job, including original files, working files in the Transit format, a translation memory (“reference material” in Transit), one or more glossaries or termbases (“dictionaries”), and formatting information to enable target file export. You can create your own projects and exchange project “packages” with other Transit users throughout the translation chain. You can also extract and exchange subsets of files (e.g., removing internal repetitions or previously translated segments).

STAR Transit NXT relies not on a centralized segment-based translation memory (TM), but on decentralized “reference material,” consisting of linked, indexed file pairs. Reference material in the Transit-specific format can be created by importing TMX files (TM exports from other tools) or aligning source and target reference files. You can associate any number of reference files with a particular project and even specify the priority with which they are searched based on various criteria. New project-specific reference material is generated as you translate.

Transit successfully converted my

SDL Trados TMX into multiple bilingual reference files. Unfortunately, the Transit import does not include text and attribute fields, which is a major disappointment to anyone hoping to harvest legacy data when migrating to Transit from another tool. Another problem I experienced was that segments from my legacy TM applied during translation ran together without inter-sentence spaces. I suspect this is because these spaces are not maintained between segments, as in Trados, but as part of the segment. This means that when you export a file in which TM matches of Trados origin were applied, you end up with spacing problems. I tried to adjust the QA settings to correct this, but to no avail. The only workaround I found was to insert a space at the end of each segment applied from a legacy TM, but this is not a feasible solution.

The key advantages touted for a decentralized approach using reference material over a centralized TM approach are greater agility and the retention of segments in their original context. This must be weighed against

the drawback of having an ever-increasing array of reference files spread about in disparate project folders, which you then must seek out and define as reference material for subsequent projects.

Features

Fuzzy Matches: The concept of source text fuzzy matches is well known. If the segment to be translated bears a similarity above a certain threshold to a segment previously captured in the TM, the user is prompted with that earlier translation (with the differences highlighted). STAR’s Dual Fuzzy innovation adds a target text fuzzy search—essentially a dynamic search of the reference material’s target segments as you type, akin to the autocomplete entries that are increasingly common in Internet browser address bars, search boxes, online help indexes, etc. As soon as the typed text produces a manageable number of matches, those matches are shown and can be selected to relieve the user of additional input. The more you type, the more exclusive the choices. Target fuzzy matches appear in “bubble windows,” which is ➡

another concept borrowed from MS Office 2007. Bubble windows disappear as soon as the user clicks on a selection or moves on to the next segment. This feature can save time during input and helps ensure a consistency of content in the target text despite varying formulations in the source text that thwart source-text matches.

Layout Viewers: Transit offers viewers that show the layout of the text you are translating. A PDF viewer displays a static preview of source files in QuarkXPress, InDesign, FrameMaker, and PowerPoint formats. An HTML/XML viewer displays dynamic previews that update each time you confirm a segment translation. A media viewer shows images, sounds, and videos contained in the files. The Synch View feature ensures that all these previews open at the current cursor position. Symbols in the source and target text editor windows also indicate a segment's hierarchy in the text format, but these symbols are not intuitive and do not enhance the visual clarity.

Markup: Markup refers to formatting instructions (tags) in the text. In a crucial move, Transit avoided the fatal flaw of many of its competitors by not requiring source and target markup to match. This means you can ignore source markup and/or add additional target markup. You can also translate the text and apply markup in separate processes.

Import Options: Transit offers a nice import option that allows you to remove a whole range of language-specific special characters that typically should not be carried over from source to target. These include page breaks, column breaks, line breaks, optional hyphens, revision bars, and letter spacing/

kerning. Depending on your settings, any or all of these characters are removed during import and not reinserted during export. Another import option lets you define abbreviations—on a project or global level—that should not be interpreted as indicating the end of a segment. In my testing, however, this feature worked poorly, flagging all sorts of unabbreviated words for reasons that were not clear.

Resource Editor: Transit's editor lacks some of the niceties and necessities to which one has become accustomed in modern word processing. There is drag-and-drop functionality, but it is not “smart,” in that it does not adjust spacing automatically. Apostrophes and quotation marks are straight, not formatted. Some special characters are available from a selection box in the Ribbon bar, but my attempts to insert the “€” symbol, for example, yielded no results.

Segment Joining: Segment joining is used to render multiple source sentences as a single target sentence or to correct incorrectly segmented source text. Transit's join function comes up short on two fronts. First, the multi-step process is overly complex and counter-intuitive. Second, the join is only virtual, meaning the expanded segment is not rechecked for possible matches in the reference material.

Whenever you open an untranslated segment, Transit automatically inserts the source text into the target box. You then “push ahead” the source text by typing in the target text. A “delete to end of segment” option will then remove this source text automatically when you confirm your translation and close the segment. This can be a nice option, but can also be visually distracting. Unfortunately, Transit does not allow you to have an

empty target box open.

Concordance Search: The concordance search function is fast, covers both source and target, and even identifies the file in which the match is found. “Dynamic linking” is an enhanced concordance feature, allowing you to find all reference material segments containing a particular source term coupled with a particular target term. Regrettably, though, there is no keyboard shortcut defined for the concordance search and no option to add one without creating your own macro.

No Spellcheck Dictionary: Amazingly, Transit lacks a built-in spellcheck dictionary. Instead, the translated text is checked against the reference files and/or dictionaries, according to your settings. Any word found there is accepted (even if misspelled!), and any word not found there (however common) is flagged. There is a circuitous procedure for importing third-party spellcheck dictionaries, but this option does not excuse STAR's failure to integrate such a basic function.

Additional Resources

Transit NXT includes TermStar NXT, the companion terminology management application. TermStar interfaces with Transit through the Terminology window and supports the use of multiple dictionaries.

STAR offers online tutorials to help you learn Transit NXT, but they are extremely rudimentary with a decidedly “homemade” character. A password-protected user area provides access to many more tutorials, albeit of the same depth and quality. See www.star-transit.net for complete information and downloads.

