

Measuring the user experience of computer-aided translation tools

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Translation is a form of human-computer interaction (O'Brien 2012), and technology has been increasingly used in the translation process. Together with machine translation, computer-aided translation (CAT) nowadays has become very common in the language industry and is widely taught in translation programs (see Chan, 2015). Currently, there are dozens of CAT tools on the market. In China, for example, besides European CAT tools such as SDL Trados and MemoQ, local CAT tools and cloud-based MT platforms are emerging. A problem for translators and CAT course instructors is: which CAT tools are easy to use and learn? This involves the evaluation of user experience and software usability.

This study chooses to compare four CAT tools in terms of their user experience, including SDL Trados, MemoQ, Snowman, and Tmxmall, the latter two of which are based in China and first appeared a few years ago. Over 60 graduate students in translation and interpreting in Beijing, who had taken the CAT course and learned the use of these four tools in class in the 2019 Spring semester, participated in this study for the final project of the course. They used the four tools to finish the same batch of tasks involving the use of alignment, translation memory, termbase, project management, and concordancing while recording their computer screen. They then filled out the System Usability Scale questionnaire online, which was developed by John Brooke in 1986 and is one of the most widely used tools for assessing the perceived usability of a system in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, satisfaction and learnability (cf. Krüger, 2019). Participants also reported what problems they encountered when they were using each tool to finish the task and what strengths and shortcomings they found each tool to have.

This study combines quantitative and qualitative analyses and reports on the findings of the survey. The initial analysis shows that the order of the tools in terms of user experience from satisfactory to less satisfactory is Tmxmall, Snowman, SDL Trados, and MemoQ. Suggestions for improving user experience of CAT tools and reducing “cognitive frictions” are provided.

References

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