



Spricht Ihr Computer Hawaiian?

Why browse through a dictionary to find a translation when you can easily and quickly translate single words, phrases, and sentences using the new information technologies available on the Internet? How clever could a machine be when trying to translate a word or phrase in the context of a sentence, a paragraph, or an article?

Translations for a fee or for free

Some commercial programs use complex technology that interprets the structure of sentences in the source language and generates a translation based on the rules of the target language. A high-end translation program called NeuroTran from Translation Experts applies advanced artificial intelligence rules to translate sentence-by-sentence (1). It understands which word is a subject, predicate, or object and translates it in the context of the whole sentence. It can also choose an appropriate translation for any word depending on whether the text is technical or medical or has another context. The user can choose alternative translations between English and German, French, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, Croatian, Bosnian, or Serbian.

The InterTran Web Site Translation Server (2) is a subscription service that uses Word Translator technology or, for a slightly higher fee, NeuroTran technology. This service works best when it is programmed for the topic of the material being translated. Using dictionaries targeted to a company and industry increases the quality of the translation. Integrating these customized programs into Internet or communication applications increases the effectiveness of cross-language communication, collaboration, and Web site access for users.

Many Web sites offer free translations from a wide selection of languages. With Systran (3), the translation technology pioneer behind Alta Vista's software Babel Fish (4), you can translate your personal files and keep the formatting of the original documents. The 21 subject-specific dictionaries offer a high level of translation accuracy. Babel Fish can be used to translate text passages up to about 40 sentences at a time, as well as entire Web sites. Sites that use standard grammar and language (e.g., newspapers) provide the most accurate translations.

Travlang.com's foreign languages for travelers make it possible to translate a single word into multiple languages (5), and the Web site offers dictionaries for many languages (6). You can hear words and phrases in more than 65 languages and participate in chat group-like translation exchanges.

FreeTranslation.com is an easy-to-use site for rapid translations of text and Web pages (7). You can also use a portal for accessing foreign language translation services such as the one at Translate-Free.com (8). Babylon.com offers a try-it-for-free option, along with software you can download, a selec-

tion of glossaries and dictionaries, and the capability to build your own glossary (9).

Help for chemists

Chemical names can be translated into some of the European languages at Europa, the Web site for the European Union (10). You can search equivalents of German or English acronyms at the Web site for the Institut für Chemie im Fachbereich Biologie, Chemie, Pharmazie der Freien Universität Berlin (11).

The Beilstein Dictionary (German-English and vice versa) is available online courtesy of the Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Library at Stanford University (12). With about 2100 entries, it contains most German words occurring in the *Beilstein Handbook of Organic Chemistry*, as well as common abbreviations, alphabetically listed with their English equivalents.

Online dictionaries

No matter how good the intelligent machine translators are, sometimes you need a dictionary. Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA, provides a selection of dictionaries sorted by language category (13). YourDictionary.com provides a general dictionary and thesaurus and links to an assortment of specialty dictionaries (14). Word2word links to translation Web sites for 162 languages, from Abadani to Yombe, and provides a list of links to other language-related Web sites (15).

My experience is that you should know a bit of both languages to put the translated words or phrases in the context of the whole article. The output might not get you an A in a language class, but you could certainly understand what was written.

References

- (1) www.tranexp.com/win/NeuroTra.htm
- (2) www.translation-experts.com/intertran.htm
- (3) www.systransoft.com
- (4) <http://babelfish.altavista.com>
- (5) www.travlang.com/languages
- (6) <http://dictionaries.travlang.com>
- (7) www.freetranslation.com
- (8) <http://translate-free.com>
- (9) www.babylon.com
- (10) http://europa.eu.int/comm/taxation_customs/dds/en/translat.htm
- (11) www.chemie.fu-berlin.de/cgi-bin/abbscomp
- (12) www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/swain/beilstein/bedict1.html
- (13) <http://coral.bucknell.edu/~rbeard/diction3.html>
- (14) www.yourdictionary.com/index.shtml
- (15) www.word2word.com/dictionary.html

Note: All of the URLs were last accessed in May 2001.

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