Manage your terminology with Interplex

The goal is to offer interpreters an easy-to-use, rapid fire product for quick glossary consultation in the booth.

Virtually all interpreters produce glossaries to help them prepare for meetings. Some colleagues keep their nuggets of information stored on scraps of paper which they can hopefully find in their moment of need.

Others have taken to producing glossaries on their computers, either to be printed out before going to the meeting, or kept on a laptop which they can actually use while they are on the job.

There are a number of computer programmes that can be used to compile vocabulary lists or expressions and which can be used for consulting or searching. Most of the professional programmes developed for translators, however, are far too complicated and detailed for use in the booth by interpreters. Some colleagues are happy to produce word lists in Word or Excel, both of which present many advantages but are too slow for actual checking of words in the heat of battle.

I have been working on the development of glossary programmes for several years with the aim of coming up with an easy-to-use, rapid fire product for quick consultation in the booth. A first DOS-based version came out about 15 years ago. I shared it with my students at ETI, many of whom asked if it could not be re-designed and made more Windows-compatible. This prompted me to team up with a computer programmer in the US to produce a completely revamped version.

The new version has several user-friendly features. Searching for words or expressions, for example, has been made so simple that it can be carried out even while working. Glossaries stored in a format such as Word or Excel always require entering the search function. In Word, for example, this involves holding the Control key down and pressing the letter F (find), or clicking on “Edit” with the mouse and then on “Find”. The problem with this is that only the first occurrence of the word or expression will be returned. If this is not the word you are looking for, the process described above has to be repeated, wasting that limited resource - time.

In Interplex, the search function stays on until it is switched off, and entering the word to be searched and pressing the Enter key will produce all occurrences of the word, even if that word is embedded in another word (such as “bed” in “embedded). Unless the user changes the standard setting, the programme will search across all the languages used in the glossary, but it is possible to
limit the search to a particular language.

Figure 2: Search on halibut – all results are shown

The programme has also been designed to ignore accents, umlauts and tildes, so that looking for words in French, Spanish or German becomes even easier. Whether you type the word with the accent or not, the search function will find the word you are looking for.

Sometimes it can be useful to search for a word across all glossaries. This comes in particularly handy when you cannot remember which glossary contains the word you are looking for, or when you have several different meanings for a word in different glossaries and you need to compare them.

Interplex includes a “multi-glossary search”. This means that the programme will run through all your glossaries and list each occurrence of the word or words being searched. Double-click on one of the hits, and that glossary will open at the word you have selected. Even with a large number of glossaries - I have over 200 glossaries, some with as many as 18000 expressions in three or four languages - the search is completed in less than 30 seconds.

Figure 3: In multiglossary search mode, entering word “agio” returns all occurrences, including words like “disagio” that contain the string.

Changing the order of the language columns is child’s play. The left-hand column is always in alphabetical order. Suppose the next speaker is Spanish-speaking and you want to have the Spanish in alphabetical order. All you need to do is to place the mouse on the column containing the expressions in Spanish, click and hold down the mouse button, drag the column across to the left-hand position and let go. The programme will also remember your last choice the next time you open the glossary. The other language columns can also be moved about in the same way.

It may happen that a glossary will contain several languages, but only two or three are actually being used in a particular meeting. To make things easier to read on the screen, the non-used languages can be hidden from view by holding the Control key down and typing the number of the column you wish to hide. Additional languages can also be added to or deleted from an existing glossary.

The programme will also let you import from and export to other formats. In other words, all the glossaries you may already have in a Word document or Excel spreadsheet can be directly copied into the programme without any need for retyping, and by the same token, Interplex can produce a Word or Excel version of any glossary.

Other features include merge and print functions. Merging can be useful if you have two glossaries on the same subject which you may wish to combine temporarily for a particularly meeting or permanently. Similarly, it is possible to leave the original glossaries separate and create a new “megaglossary” containing all your entries in a particular subject area. The print function allows you to choose the order in which the languages will be printed and to omit any languages you do not wish to have on paper.

A help file explains all the programme’s features. In addition, there is a three-page mini-manual which can be printed out for easy reference; it explains how to create, merge or print glossaries, how to use the search functions, etc. However, the programme is very intuitive and many functions can be activated in a variety of different ways. For example, glossaries can be opened by double-clicking on their name in the index or on a shortcut icon or by pressing the Enter button.
The programmer, Eric Hartner, has put a lot of hard work into producing a product which I believe is a very fast, easy-to-use tool which can help interpreters relegate to the past the heaps of paper on which they have scribbled their vocabulary lists.

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Recommended citation format: