The Interpreter’s Toolkit: Intragloss - a useful glossary-building tool for interpreters

Intragloss particularly excels for its glossary-building tools, which make preparing for a conference fast and easy. In this article, I’ll discuss some of its strengths and limitations.

Intragloss is a professional glossary maker that gives you everything you need to prepare for assignments. While I find the claim to be slightly hyperbolic – I did some research beforehand over the course of this article – Intragloss is indeed a robust, time-saving tool.

Intragloss is one of the most expensive pieces of interpreting software I use; at $49 per month, $99 for three months or $269 per year, an Intragloss subscription is rather pricey. Nevertheless, Intragloss is a versatile, easy-to-use program that significantly decreases my preparation time. Despite a few minor bugs, it’s my go-to tool when preparing for nearly every interpreting assignment.

A quick overview

Intragloss is organized hierarchically, into domains and assignments. Domains generally reflect specializations, and assignments usually represent a single interpreting job. For example, from the user’s manual, “Cell Phones,” “Cars,” and “Psychology” are domains, while “Paris Expo 2015” and “Madrid Expo 2015” are examples of individual assignments.

Intragloss is available for Mac computers; a Windows version is in the works. Intragloss supports over 180 languages and is Unix-like compatible, which means it can handle encodings, special characters, and non-ASCII languages like Russian and Hebrew. The software includes a user’s guide and fast customer support via email.

Every Intragloss assignment can include one or more documents, such as the “Mobile phones” PDF in the example above. I usually import everything I receive from conference organizers and any other materials I find while preparing for an assignment into Intragloss, and use these documents to develop term lists and bilingual glossaries. In theory, Intragloss supports several input formats, including PDF, Word, PowerPoint, Pages and Keynote. In my experience, however, the software often struggles with formats other than PDF, so I tend to convert all my documents to PDF format before importing them.

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Intragloss also offers search features to quickly pull up terms while in the booth, but these pull-ups are inconsistent. When I’m testing this feature, I found Intragloss does a pretty good job of finding the term I’m looking for. In the case of the article “Interpreters’ Help Interpreters,” I found the terms “producer” and “director” fairly quickly.

Building glossaries using the online search function

Building glossaries with Intragloss is quick and easy. Create a new assignment (and a new domain if needed), open any related documents or websites in that assignment, and start reading through your documents and filling out your glossary. Intragloss offers two different tools for building glossaries: online terminology search and terminology extraction from parallel documents.

The online search function, shown here, demonstrates the online terminology search function works.

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I also found that Intragloss creates duplicates entries in the glossary when the same source language term appears in two assignments. For example, if I input “attache” -> “attachée” in the English-French “Paris Expo 2015” assignment and “attachée” -> “documents adjoint” in the English-Spanish “Madrid Expo 2015” assignment, instead of copying them into a single bilingual entry in the domain glossary, Intragloss creates two separate bilingual entries in the domain glossary. If you work with multilingual glossaries often, this can get on your nerves. My workaround is to create a bilingual glossary with one or more trilingual entries and merge these entries into the trilingual glossary.

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Finally, you can search an assignment glossary by order of appearance or synchronize your document(s) to see where the terms appear. Intragloss is handy for seeing a term in context, but the search feature is slow, and alignment in parallel documents is often off.

Tabular mode displays all the terms, acronyms and remarks in your glossary. You can also search all the entries, acronyms and remarks in your glossary. You can also search all the entries, acronyms and remarks in any language; in practice, I've found this feature to be buggy, since the terms in one language sometimes incorrectly appear in another. I would also appreciate the option to hide the "acronyms" and "remarks" columns while in tabular mode.

Intragloss can import Word (.doc or .docx, although .docx is preferred), Excel (.xlsx) and text (.txt) files. Column headers can be language names, ISO codes, acronyms (e.g. "English Acronym") or remarks (e.g. "English Remark").

Comparing documents is probably my favorite part of Intragloss, and it's the feature I use most frequently. It works nearly flawlessly, although I have occasionally found a slight glitch in the scrolling feature. Of course, comparing documents is even better with more screen real estate, so I especially love using this feature to prepare on my desktop at home. But what I love on the train is the ability to scroll up and down in both documents simultaneously. This feature is useful when preparing glossaries and even more helpful when a speaker quotes from a text and you can pull up the original and translation side by side.

Creating a monolingual terminology list

If you're translating a document yourself, but don't have much time available, you can use Intragloss to create a monolingual terminology list. Simply highlight a term, click "entry," and your term is added to your monolingual vocabulary list. You can then download and print out this list, which is useful if you want to look up terms before a formal talk or discussion begins with colleagues.

You can also use the "merge" feature to create documents where these terms are highlighted, providing context if you'd like to ask a colleague or the speaker about difficult terms.

Comparing documents and building glossaries from parallel documents

You can create a glossary from parallel documents in no time flat. But when I'm on the road or in the booth, it can still be a godsend. Comparing documents is probably my favorite part of Intragloss, and it's the feature I use most frequently. It works nearly flawlessly, although I have occasionally found a slight glitch in the scrolling feature. Of course, comparing documents is even better with more screen real estate, so I especially love using this feature to prepare on my desktop at home. But what I love on the train is the ability to scroll up and down in both documents simultaneously. This feature is useful when preparing glossaries and even more helpful when a speaker quotes from a text and you can pull up the original and translation side by side.

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Although synchronized search might be useful at times, I generally find that Intragloss' search features aren't up to the job. Intragloss doesn't ignore diacritics when searching, slowing you down even more, since you have to type out every accent and umlaut. Columns cannot be reordered, and you can't easily search across multiple documents at once. Intragloss' operators offer these features, which is why I find Intragloss for preparing glossaries, but other tools for searching through them while on assignment.

Quickly preparing an assignment glossary

Once you have imported one or more documents into Intragloss, the program automatically highlights all the terms that are already in your domain glossary and creates an assignment glossary including all those terms and their translations. Click on a term to see it in context, scroll through and search this glossary, see a glossary for a single document, or extract this glossary – essentially a tool for quickly deriving a small, assignment-specific glossary from a much larger one.

Automatically extracting terms from a document to create a searchable assignment glossary

This feature is relatively fast, too. I tested this out with my 500- and 1000-term glossaries on a series of different real-world documents. Intragloss prepared these assignment glossaries in 16 and 29 seconds, respectively (about 0.03 seconds/term) – regardless of the length of the document!

The screenshot above is from a 73-page background paper. Intragloss processed the document and extracted a 334-term assignment glossary from it in fewer than 30 seconds – impressive indeed!

Merging documents with glossaries for simultaneous with text or sight translation

Imagine being sent a speech that will be read out during a meeting, but with translations for all of the key terms provided. That's what Intragloss' merge feature aims to do – annotate a document to include the translations of every term in your glossary.

Here's a screenshot from the Intragloss demo video:

To put Intragloss through its paces, I took my 500- and 1000-word glossaries and tested out the merge feature with two speeches, Intragloss created assignment glossaries with between 45 and 95 terms. I then hit the "merge" button, and – the results were mixed.

Intragloss took an average of 0.75 seconds per term (and 0.25 seconds per unique term) to merge these documents, which since I measured between 38 and 60 seconds per speech to prepare the document, and a lot of other essential clicking. All in all, Intragloss took anywhere between 90 and 180 seconds to split and merge these simultaneously.

And it wasn't particularly accurate either. Although Intragloss identified hundreds of unique terms, it only came up with their translations 32% of the time.

The merge feature identified tons of terms, but often didn't propose their translations

As you can see from the images above, this feature can be exceptionally useful when it pulls up a translation that might not roll off the tip of your tongue. But Intragloss struggled with multi-word terms (e.g. officers vs. prison officers), polysemy (e.g. report as a verb vs. report as a noun), singular vs. plural forms (worker vs. workers), and long phrases. It was inconsistent, coming up with the correct translation at times, but omitting it at others. It also occasionally missed the original text before the original and the translated equivalent it.

I think that the merge feature has great potential, but would encourage the developers to fine-tune the algorithm so this feature is more reliable. For the moment, it's still somewhat helpful if you have the time to run the speech through the program, but faster, more accurate processing would make this feature an incredible tool.

Conclusions

Intragloss sets its sights high, and is packed with tons of useful features. Given the breadth of these features, and the rich implementation of many of them, it is not an surprise that positioners and researchers alike consider Intragloss one of the leading glossary tools for interpreters (Drechsel 2016; Rütten 2015; Costa, Corpas and Durán 2014).

Personally, I think Intragloss' strengths lie in the suite of features for reading and comparing documents, identifying terms, searching for synonyms online, and creating term lists and multilingual glossaries. These work well, are well-designed, and can directly prepare glossaries in seconds.

However, the glossary search features in Intragloss are weaker and buggier than those in other software on the market, and implementation in other languages is inconsistent. While Intragloss' most innovative feature: the assignment glossary tool is killer, while the merge and annotate functions are inconsistent and potentially slow and spotty. Despite these minor glitches, I'd strongly recommend Intragloss. It does what it claims to do: cut down preparation time significantly, and make it easier to prepare glossaries for an assignment. And what busy interpreter doesn’t want to prepare faster, smarter and better?

References

