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

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

Intragloss is organized hierarchically, into domains and assignments. Domains generally reflect specializations, and assignments usually represent a single interpreting job. In the example above, 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 one of the most expensive pieces of interpreting software I use. In the example above, 899.84 per year. An Intragloss subscription is rather pricey. I am able to manage the language pairs for conferences, especially if you are willing to shell out $3,097 for a three-year subscription. Before you take the plunge, try out the demo video.

Intragloss also offers a hefty discount for students enrolled in interpreting programs.

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Every Intragloss assignment is by default bilingual, and includes a bilingual assignment glossary. Each assignment glossary has at least two columns, for the source and target language terms. You can customize your assignment glossary to include columns with acronyms and remarks in both the source and target languages.

Intragloss has a search feature, which is automatically populated from the individual assignment glossaries in the domain. Since a domain can include assignments with different language pairs, a domain glossary can be multilingual.

Every Intragloss assignment can include one or more documents, such as the “Mobile phone.pdf” file in the example above. I usually import everything I receive from conference organizers and any other materials I find while preparing an assignment into Intragloss, and use these documents to develop term lists and multilingual glossaries. In memory, Intragloss supports several input formats, including PDF, Word, Prez, PowerPoint, Pages, Keynote. In my experience, however, the software often struggles with formats other than PDF.

Intragloss has a document annotation feature, which allows you to add source and target language remarks to your document. In this way, Intragloss allows you to customize your glossary to suit your needs.

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

Sometimes temporarily disappear. I would also appreciate the option to hide the “acronyms” and “remarks” columns while in tabular mode.

Intragloss' online search feature makes the process of searching for a term and adding entries, translations, acronyms and remarks even faster. It is also cleverly programmed so it eliminates unnecessary punctuation when you enter a term (although it would be even better if it could remove articles, e.g., the “in French,” and didn’t occasionally remove spaces between words).

Intragloss’ keyboard shortcut feature makes it easy 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 reading through a document you’re reviewing, but don’t have much time available, you can easily 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 read and print out this list, which is useful if you want to look up terms later on or discuss them 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 adding a translation from a parallel document
With Intragloss, you can build a glossary from parallel documents in no time flat. After you attach a translated file to a document you’ve imported, Intragloss displays the original and translated files side by side.

The process for adding a term is similar to the one described above. Highlight a given term and click “entry.” Then highlight the translation in the parallel document and click “translation,” and voila – you’ve created a glossary entry without extensive copying and pasting or jumping back and forth between programs.

Intragloss also allows you to import pre-existing glossaries. Since these are imported as domain glossaries, you can import multilingual lists, too.

Intragloss can import Word (.doc or .docx), although it prefers (and is more reliable) Excel (.xls or .xlsx) files. Columns headers can be in language names, two-letter ISO 639-1 language codes, acronyms (e.g. “English Acronym”) or remarks (e.g. “English Remark”).

I counted the Import glossary feature using a 500 word and a 5000 word glossary I had created for previous assignments. Intragloss imported the 500 word glossary in 26 seconds and the 5000 word glossary in 52 seconds, for an average import speed of 26.9 seconds per term in both cases. Regardless of whether I labeled column headers using language names or ISO codes, Intragloss correctly read and imported these headers.

Importing glossaries
You can download assignment and domain glossaries from Intragloss with just a few clicks.

This program exports glossaries in .txt and .doc formats, which the developers claim are “spreadsheet- and word-processing compatible.”

Second, although spreadsheet software can open .txt files, this format isn’t generally used in third party applications. I would love to see downloading glossaries in .xls, .csv or even .rtf format – which are compatible with other glossary management tools, like Interpreters’ Help – instead of offering to convert the format before I can open my glossaries in another application.

Saving, sorting, and viewing through glossaries
You can view domain glossaries in flat and tabular layouts. Examples of both (from the Intragloss user’s guide) are reproduced below.

In flat mode, click on any given term to see its translation in all the languages in your glossary. (The Spanish and French translations of “attention” are displayed in the example above.) You can also search for a full or partial entry, acronyms or remarks – although your search is limited to the language displayed on the screen (in this case, English).
Synchronized search with parallel documents in an assignment glossary

Although synchronized search might be useful at times, I generally find that Intragloss' search features aren't up to par. 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 domains at once. Intragloss doesn't offer these features, which is why I use Intragloss for preparing glossaries, but other tools for searching through them while on assignment.

Quickly preparing an assignment glossary

Once you have imported one of your pre-existing glossaries, you can take advantage of two innovative features: quickly preparing an assignment glossary and merging translations of terms into documents you have received to create annotated PDFs for sight translation or simultaneous with text.

By default, when you import 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 these 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 – an incredibly useful 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, one with 589 and the other with 1903 words. Intragloss took an average of 0.75 seconds per term (and 0.25 seconds per unique term) to merge these documents, which inserted 45 and 95 terms per merged document – on average the 16 – 29 seconds to import the document, and a lot of other assorted clicking. All in all, Intragloss took anywhere between 90 and 180 seconds to spit out these annotated documents.

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.

I think that the merge feature has great potential, but would encourage the developers to fine-tune the algorithm so this feature can operate much faster, more accurately, and the results more reliably.

Conclusions

Intragloss sets its sights high, and is packed with tons of useful features. Given the breadth of these features, and the strong implementation of many of them, it serves as no surprise that practitioners 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 equivalents online, and creating term lists and multilingual glossaries. These work well, are well-designed, and certainly prepare the interpreter very significantly.

However, the glossary search features in Intragloss are modest and hindered by the need to either turn off software on the machine, and implementation is inconsistent for some of Intragloss' most innovative features: the assignment glossary tool is killer, while the merge and annotation features are top-notch but too slow and spotty to use on a daily basis.

Despite these minor glitches, I would 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

