



# The Definitive Guide to Translation Memories

Build Consistency While Reducing Cost and  
Translation Time

A background image showing a smartphone screen with various national flags (Spain, China, UK, Japan, Germany, Portugal, South Korea, Hungary, India, Turkey, Israel, France) and a laptop keyboard.

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## Introduction

Do you utilize multiple translation vendors across your organization? Is vendor management monitored or centralized? If the answer to the first question is “Yes,” this means that you use a variable approach to the translation process, and you are likely bearing unnecessary costs for repeated translations of the same content. Your organization could also be delivering inconsistent translations, which can be at best confusing, at worst risky, and always have the potential to tarnish your brand. Build consistency, save costs and streamline processes by utilizing the latest in translation tools and technologies, including translation memories (TMs).

## History



*Translation memories offer organizations the ability to leverage previously translated material in order to build a more mature and streamlined approach to global content. TMs also help to ensure consistency and quality in translations while reducing cost and translation time. The good news is that you can readily harness the benefits of a translation memory if you use the services of the right language service provider (LSP).*



## What is a Translation Memory?

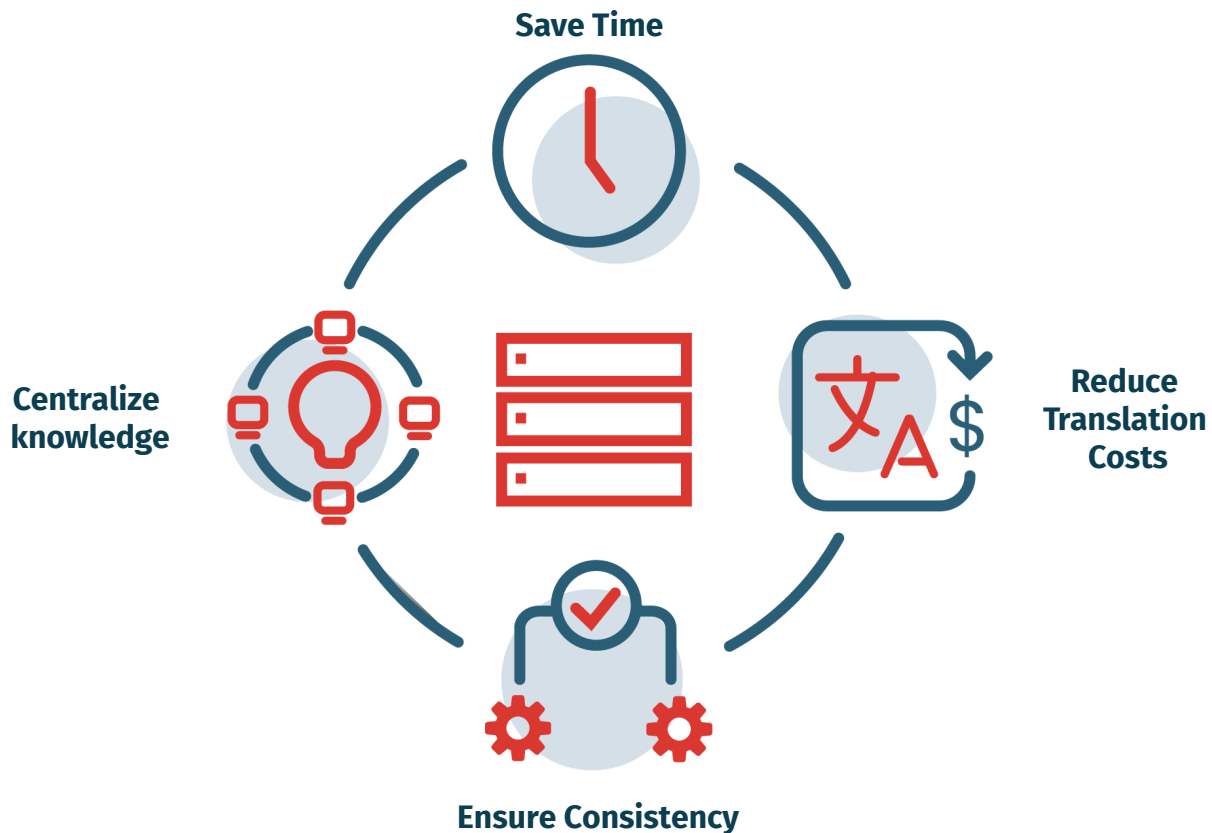
A translation memory is a database of content that has been previously translated by a professional linguist, verified by editors and proofreaders, and approved by internal teams. It's an organic, living database of content that is unique to your organization—or even to a specific department within your organization—and is a valuable asset that saves time, ensures consistency, centralizes knowledge and reduces translation costs. Once built, translators, editors and quality assurance analysts will utilize your TM with each batch of your content that they process.

The benefits of maintaining a pristine translation memory environment are many, and are applicable across your organization and its varied business units. For marketing teams, the use of TMs ensures uniformity of messaging across global operations, giving your multicultural brand ambassadors confidence that branded content is consistently aligned and designed to deliver rapid results.

For procurement teams and budget holders, utilizing TMs in translations drastically reduces cost and streamlines operations. Using translation memories can help organizations save on costs when translating repeated content. For legal, compliance, and human resources teams, using translation memories also ensures that sensitive content is ‘locked down’ and kept free from errors and or omissions.

In short, translation memories offer organizations the opportunity to take a more holistic and strategic approach to their language assets by building and leveraging a trusted database of approved multilingual content.

**Your translation memory is specific and unique to your organization. It is a living database of text, terminology, phrases, and grammatical rules based on previously translated content, enabling you to:**



## Section 1 - How Do Translation Memories Work

A translation memory is part of a computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool that analyzes text to determine whether words, phrases and sentences contained in that text have been previously translated. It's important to note that this is a wholly different process than machine translation. With translation memories, text that has been translated before will be identified for the human translator, and suggestions will be made from that bank of previously translated content. The translator will review those suggestions, and decide if they wish to incorporate the existing text from the TM into their new translation. When analyzing new content, the CAT tool generates a report that indicates how much of the content has been translated before and how much is entirely new, and will need translated from scratch:



Exact or 100% matches are words, phrases or sentences that have been previously translated, edited, approved and stored in the translation memory. In some specific instances, your translation vendor may be able to offer you a reduced per-word rate for content that falls into this category.



New content is text that has either not been translated before or is dissimilar to any previously translated text. In this case, translations are completed, edited, proofread, approved, and stored in the memory for future use.



'Fuzzy' matches indicate text that is similar to previously translated content, but has some changes to certain words or punctuation. This text is reviewed and may be translated as new, or may be partially translated and partially constructed from existing content in the translation memory at the linguist's discretion.



## Cost, Consistency — and Speed

Using translation memories has benefits with respect to turnaround time as well. By utilizing existing content, it may be possible to reduce the time needed to complete large projects. Take, for example, a project of 5,000 words that needs to be translated into multiple languages by the end of the week. If 4,000 words of that text are already stored in your translation memory, then that deadline may suddenly become much more achievable.

## Section 2 - Translation is Equal Parts Art and Science

Your content is a valuable asset. Any new content—like language itself—is equal parts art and science. That is why it takes valuable time and resources to launch new marketing campaigns or implement corporate branding globally. Precious time is spent creating, rewriting, and approving this new content in English, involving multiple internal stakeholders. Even customers and focus groups are part of this process as well. Once finalized, that content needs to be translated into multiple languages, often under tight deadlines. How can you be sure your translated content will resonate across languages and cultures? How can you maintain this high level of quality while sticking to tight budgets and timeframes?

**By leveraging your previously translated content, a translation memory will enable you to:**



### **Maintain Quality and Consistency**

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Outsourcing projects to multiple translators for rapid turnaround not only costs a lot of money, but it also risks compromising quality and consistency. There's simply no way that different translators at different language service providers are going to translate your content the same way, choosing exactly the same words and phrasing. Translation memories enable organizations to provide the same level of attention to their translations as they did to their original English text, especially with respect to maintaining a consistent tone and voice. TMs harness your previously translated content to ensure standardized and consistent use of key terms and words, and save time in the translation process that you can use instead for internal reviews and quality control.



## **Avoid Recreating the Wheel**

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You have already invested time and resources developing a slogan, billboard, or ad copy, so the last thing you want is another agency to recreate that process for each local language, potentially interfering with your carefully-curated content. The same applies to all content across your organization, from branding to contracts. If you give two different translators the same project, or even an individual translator a similar task twice, you will invariably receive two different versions of that translated content. Leveraging previously-translated content through a translation memory is a simple and effective way to avoid unnecessary duplication, inconsistency, and possible confusion or discrepancies in your branding.



## **Streamline Operations**

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Typically, different departments or business units within large global organizations will use multiple translation suppliers or even different groups of individuals for translation work. The result, of course, is that they're paying a higher rate for ad hoc projects and creating all kinds of opportunities for inconsistency. Building a translation memory via a single global language service provider means that you will not only capture data and build synergies, but also be able to proactively audit your supplier and reduce budgets while streamlining the translation process.



## **Safeguard Your Organization**

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If you work in a regulated space such as healthcare or other technical fields, it is crucial to minimize the risk of mistranslation (for example, in licensing agreements or employee contracts). A relevant example here is healthcare enrollment. We have seen examples of companies being put at risk due to mistranslations of co-pay terms and incorrect benefit information. The US healthcare system is challenging to understand, and mistakes can happen, but once errors are in writing, they become challenging to track and correct, and can lead to massive financial exposure and risks for providers and patients alike. Translation tools and technologies minimize that risk, so important legal, contractual and corporate definitions are locked down and marked as sensitive text that translators cannot amend without prior approval.



## How to Get Started

Streamline your translation processes and optimize the translation memory environment for your organization using the following key steps:



### Step 1 : Audit Your Translation Processes

Assess how different departments manage translations currently. For example, how many diverse individuals or local suppliers do they use? Centralizing translations with one preferred supplier will provide you with the tools and data you need to create a consistent translation memory while saving time and money and streamlining operations.

### Step 2 : Set up Your Translation Memory

Most LSPs utilize translation technology, but not all providers offer the same quality of service, and few actually maintain a pristine data environment for their clients. Choose a supplier that will manage the creation of a translation memory on your behalf by importing and reviewing previous translations, and providing training and TM maintenance as required. When built correctly, translation memories offer organizations a pristine environment from which to leverage their future translations. While there are no hurdles or barriers to creating your translation memory, but choosing the right supplier to help you will take time and is an important decision.

### Step 3 : Update Processes to Harness the Power of your Translation Memory

This third step is easier to achieve than it may sound. By centralizing translations with one supplier, you can ensure that all new content is first passed through the translation memory to identify exact matches, new content, and fuzzy matches for review. Once you have a clear picture of the results, you can decide how to manage the remaining text. Discuss and agree with your vendor in advance on who will take responsibility for the manual review of similar matches. For example, do you have internal reviewers or would you like to utilize the vendor's linguists for this task?

For more information and targeted advice, contact our team today at [sales@isitrans.com](mailto:sales@isitrans.com).

## Section 3 - Answers to FAQs

**Setting up a translation memory is easy once you have the right language partner in place. Here are answers to some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):**

### **How Long Does it Take to Create a Translation Memory?**

Translation memories are living databases, so once you have one in place it will naturally expand and evolve over time. As a first step, your chosen LSP should upload all previously translated content and any text or sentences (branding, legal, or otherwise) that should be 'locked in', as a means to block any future unauthorized translations.

### **What Technology Do I Need to Use?**

Your LSP should provide and manage the translation memory software on your behalf, providing access to the memory as needed.

### **Is a Translation Memory Expensive? Why Can't I Use Excel or a Free Tool?**

It is common for some organizations to manage their legacy terminology using Word documents, Excel files, or Smartsheets. However, such files can quickly become difficult to navigate as more content is added, changes are made, preferences evolve, and so on. Personal preferences and personnel changes can also have a dramatic impact on consistency, as decisions about content can often be subjective and time dependent. Translation memories help to control and streamline that process by capturing and harnessing large volumes of content into an easy-to-use and fully auditable system.

### **How Can I Ensure it Won't Harm Creativity or Quality?**

In any system, the quality of the output is dependent on the quality of the data with which you begin. However, translation memories do not provide a finished product that must be used. Instead, they allow a quick and simple analysis against text translated to date, enabling organizations and their translators to review those matches to amend or correct as relevant. This helps to avoid error propagation in the translation process.

### **Is a Translation Memory the Same as Machine Translation?**

No, machine translation is not the same. While our professionals do use computer-assisted translation technology to expedite the translation processes, we never rely solely on machine translation for client work. There are many reasons for this, the main one being that machine translations can not provide the level of nuance or cultural understanding needed to check and control the quality of the content they deliver. A translation is more complicated than simply switching one word for another. While CAT tools can facilitate this process, accredited, polished and professional human translators play an invaluable role in creating original translations and making creative decisions based on context, cultural awareness, and knowledge of the client and their objectives.

### **Is it the Same as a Translation Glossary?**

A translation glossary is a list of terminology used by translators, language leads, and other stakeholders to manage usage of specific words and terms, and is one important component of a translation technology ecosystem. Commonly, glossaries are used to capture preferred translations of commonly-used words that clients want translated in exactly the same way each time they are found in the source text. In many languages a single word may have many meanings, and glossaries help to ensure all linguists and stakeholders use and translate key words in exactly the same way.

### **What If my Business Unit uses a Different Approach to Translation Than Other Departments in my Organization?**

Differences in language, tone and terminology or approach can all be captured in a translation memory. Importantly, the creation of a translation memory will enable you and your organization to audit how different departments currently manage translations, and to capture and review the rationale behind any differences.

### **How do I Maintain a Translation Memory?**

The proper maintenance of a translation memory is crucial, and there should be a dedicated team responsible for updates, changes, and overall ongoing maintenance. A translation memory should be updated anytime there are changes from the client on a project, updates to legacy terminology, a change to global business rules, or other similar changes. Such changes need to be updated directly into the TM prior to the start of the next translation project. Your translation assets are organic, and will need to be continually cultivated and managed.

## Section 4 - Why work with ISI Language Solutions

Part of the BIG Language Solutions, ISI Language Solutions is a professional translation and interpretation service provider, and leader in industry-specific language access and localization solutions. Through its dedicated team of project managers and linguists, ISI Language Solutions supports clients with the latest proven technologies to eliminate repetitive translation tasks, leverage repetition, and ensure consistency.

**Founded in 1982, ISI Language Solutions has developed a deep-rooted understanding of client processes, business objectives, annual calendars, and project-based workflows, ensuring both flexibility and scalability in meeting the varied needs of our clients.**

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**SECURE. UNIFIED. EFFECTIVE.**

Our family of companies includes BIG IP, ISI Language Solutions, Protranslating, and DWL bringing a combined 150 years of expertise with offices in 26 cities across the world. Through our portfolio, we customize and deliver language services in more than 240 languages and dialects.