Translation Commons: A Community for Language Professionals

Translation Commons is a nonprofit, volunteer-based online community designed to facilitate collaboration among diverse sectors and stakeholders of the language industry and encourage transparency, trust, and free knowledge sharing. It was established with the idea that translated data and memories truly belong to the translators who create them and that they should be the ones to benefit from their work. By offering free access to open source tools and other resources, Translation Commons facilitates community-driven projects, aims to help empower linguists, and allows the sharing of educational and language assets.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Translation Commons didn't happen in a vacuum. I first heard the catch phrase "collaborative commons" in 2014, and the concept of collaboration within the language community struck a very deep chord. How could that become a reality and how would everyone benefit? Would the platform for this collaboration offer collective translation memories and data, or perhaps merely serve as a means of talking to each other? Maybe it could serve both functions?

I discussed the idea at many conferences and networking events with language professionals, mostly in Silicon Valley, but I also had many online conversations through various LinkedIn groups. In December 2014, I created a LinkedIn group to determine the interest level for an online community serving all language professionals. I was very surprised by the positive response: within just 20 days after stating the LinkedIn group, there were already 1,000 members. I felt that as far as feasibility studies go, this was a runaway success and demonstrated that there was a need for such a community waiting to be fulfilled.

I've always been in the language business with my husband, so after just a brief discussion we were both committed to take Translation Commons to the next level. We started

a corporation and applied for nonprofit status. A few months later, to our surprise, the IRS not only granted us nonprofit status, but also determined that we could be categorized as a public charity benefiting the larger community, not just our linguistic members.

After many discussions, we managed to pin down and crystalize our objectives. In a nutshell, Translation Commons is concerned with helping all language professionals achieve due recognition for their work. More specifically, Translation Commons' vision is to help the language industry by building an infrastructure to:

- Help our language students by bridging the gap between academia and industry.

- Facilitate collaboration and mentoring.

- Organize language resources from around the world.

- Grow the visibility and importance of our community and gain recognition.

DESIGNING THE PLATFORM

Our first task was to create an advisory board consisting of high-profile professionals from many diverse sectors who could represent their interests and guide the community. We've been able to assemble an amazing group that's still growing.

The next step was to move on from LinkedIn and start building our own online platform. Thankfully, we teamed up with Prompsit, an amazing engineering

company in Spain that understood and shared our vision. We've been working with them for nearly two years now and have managed to expand the offerings on the website.

I would like to clarify that building such a platform is a vast undertaking. Although we now have a fully functional website, there's still a lot to do. So far, the site architecture consists of Linux and Windows servers, 10 language applications (both proprietary and open source), docker containers (allowing applications to run virtually anywhere), MySQL, wikis, application programming interfaces, G Suite apps, and single sign-on integration.

To address all the issues in our mission, we've divided the Translation Commons online platform into three modules: Translate, Share, and Learn.

Translate: The Translate module offers translation tools and applications, both open source and proprietary, most of them on our servers with a few cloud applications integrated with our single sign-on integration. The goal is to create a seamless platform with all available applications. This is an extremely important endeavor as it helps students and those beginning their professional careers familiarize themselves with tools that they might not normally be able to access. We've found that quite a few of our members who are recent graduates are unfamiliar with the variety of tools available to help them work more effectively. By offering open source tools and free trials to proprietary applications, we hope to increase their skill set and knowledge of technology.

Share: The Share module is the main portal for all community sharing activities, including think tanks, language industry initiatives, group discussions, and working groups. This is also where any member of the community can start a new project or group and ask people to join. Because we know how difficult it is for small project groups to develop an online platform for collaboration, we offer them

the tools to do exactly that: a website, mailing list, calendar, task page, and a drive and document uploader to gather their volunteers and work effectively. We also offer members the entire Google G Suite, which was donated to Translation Commons due to its nonprofit status. Currently, there are around 60 apps available to all members.

Learn: The Learn module offers a Learning Center, tutorials, skill development programs, online courses, and group webinars. Links to our free resources (both online and offline) are available in the Translation Hub. These resources include terminology databases and glossaries. Of course, this is a work in progress and we ask for everybody's help to upload links to any free online resources to which they have access (e.g., tips, insights, and guides). We're also talking with proprietary automation toolmakers that offer free trials and asking them to add their links in the Translation Hub. Finally, we've inherited and are hosting the eCoLo Project (electronic content localization), which provides useful training materials for both students and teachers to help improve skills in different areas of computer-assisted translation (e.g., translation memory, software localization, project management, and terminology). You'll also find multilingual material, training kits, training scenarios, and full courses on various translation and localization techniques.

WORKING GROUPS

The working groups have been created from within the community. We call our groups Think Tanks because their mission is to identify areas that need improvement and the gaps that need to be filled.

Mentoring: This was the first Think Tank to emerge from the original LinkedIn group. There are some very good mentoring programs available through associations and other organizations in the U.S. and Europe (including ATA's program) that have managed to capture the essence of mentoring and have a great group of people managing them. However, our mentoring group conducted a global

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survey and found that many of the freelance translators who responded were unaware of existing mentoring programs or didn't have a clear understanding of how to get involved. Respondents also stated that expectations and responsibilities are issues of concern when agreeing on mentoring on a one-on-one basis. After analyzing the survey results, the mentoring group decided to create guidelines for freelance mentors who wish to take on freelance mentees. Under the guidance of Nancy Matis, an experienced project manager and teacher, we now have a thriving group that has written an extensive document, "Mentoring Guidelines for Freelancers," which is currently available for download from the Translation Commons website. The group is also creating a list of mentoring programs so that graduates have somewhere to start their search for mentors.

Technology: The Technology Think Tank is an integral part of Translation Commons. Our commitment to open source resources allows us to make language and the work of translators a priority. Led by Mikel Forcada, a professor of computer science in Alicante, Spain, and with representatives from other translation platforms that include Apertium, Moses, Omega T, Mojito, Okapi, and Translate5, the goal is to catalogue all language-related open source applications and facilitate their adoption.

Interpreting: The Interpreting Think Tank is led by Barbara Werderitsch and ATA Member Arturo Bobea, who have created a very active LinkedIn group. They conducted a survey on interpreter's knowledge and adoption of technology and are currently preparing the results. Their reports on various technology providers and new interpreting delivery platforms are also available on the Translation Commons website.

In addition to the working groups, we also host and facilitate volunteer groups that any member can create. Under the expert guidance of Gabriella Laszlo, who worked on Google's Localization Operations and who now designs backend workflows for Translation Commons, we're able to offer collaborative volunteer initiatives related to language.

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the Translation Commons community. Their passion for language and expertise in technology are the cornerstones of our initiatives. Their commitment and clear vision of the roadmap that our industry needs to follow are a testament to the merit of a united global language community.

We invite everyone to join and register at www.translationcommons.org and to participate in the LinkedIn groups. Do you have an idea that would benefit the community? Do you want to become a mentor to the next generation of language professionals? Do you want to share your expertise, links, material, tutorials, or articles? Are you part of a small initiative and need more exposure? Then please share your knowledge with all of us! ◉

Remember, if you have any ideas and/or suggestions regarding helpful resources or tools you would like to see featured, please e-mail Jost Zetzsche at jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.

Jeannette Stewart is a co-founder of Translation Commons. She has a BS in business administration and her early career was in advertising and marketing. She is the founder and former chief executive officer of CommuniCare, a translation company specializing in life sciences. She created a series of workshops on language specialization and participates in industry associations and conferences as a speaker and advocate for the language industry. She writes articles on language community initiatives for *Multilingual Magazine*. Contact: jeannette@translationcommons.org.