

From the 198th Tool Kit newsletter
(<http://www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit/>)

The X-Less Standard

At what point do you know that there is a real need for something in the language technology space? When three different organizations start to work on (almost) the same project completely independently of each other.

This is what happened with the "[Linport](#)" project. Linport stands for "Language Interoperability Portfolio" and it's the next logical step in the evolution of data exchangeability. Right now we have standards such as TMX for the exchange of translation memories, TBX for termbase exchange, and XLIFF for the exchange of the actual translation file (and I know that you are getting tired of reading this again and again, but bear with me for just a little bit longer).

The reality is that these three different file types are often not exchanged as individual files but as part of a package. These packages are typically compressed files that follow the .zip format without making this particularly obvious (the extensions are typically something tool-specific.) The idea is good: It makes it easier for the project manager to send off just one file and receive back just one file rather than lots and lots of different files. And for the translator it's essentially the same thing: Rather than wasting time sorting out which files to place and where and how to process them, the package essentially opens in the corresponding TEnT and the translation can be immediately launched.

The problem lies in the "corresponding" part of the statement above. While all tools support the common exchange standards, the packaging system is essentially a way to sidestep the exchange of data because only the savviest of translators knows how to get into the data contained in the packages to translate it with another tool. And in case you're wondering which tools use the packaging method of exchanging data (typically as one of the possible options to send data), they include *Trados 2007*, *Trados Studio*, *Déjà Vu*, *Star Transit*, *memoQ*, and others.

The idea of Linport is essentially to provide one standard way to send .linport packages around that can be opened by any tool that supports this format. The .linport packages would actually be ZIP files that contain a folder structure for the different components of the project, and the folders would contain things like the translation file, translation memory and termbase (ideally all in the corresponding exchange formats), as well as information about the project. This information would include anything from such no-brainers as target language and delivery date to less obvious things like other supporting documents, target audience, or other parameters.

Two of the groups that are working on a packaging standard -- the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission; and a group that was formed after the demise of LISA a few months ago and is now represented by GALA, FIT, and the Translation Research Group at BYU -- have already joined forces and are pressing ahead with the Linport standard. The third group -- [Interoperability Now](#) -- which counts among its members Kilgray, Andrae ontram, and

Welocalize -- is presently conducting talks considering whether to join the other effort (please do!).

Interestingly, things are moving along astonishingly fast with all of this. Alan Melby presented Linport for the first time to the general public last week at the FIT conference and asked for comments (they were overwhelmingly positive), and the [*1st Linport symposium*](#) is already scheduled for September 27 of this year in Luxembourg (everyone is welcome).

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