



Success Story: Consistent terminology for all employees of ZF Friedrichshafen AG

The initial situation and our task

ZF Friedrichshafen AG is represented in approximately 40 countries – and communicates in almost as many languages, both internally and externally. The company provides its employees with an innovative machine translation platform. This also grants them access to the company’s in-house terminology.



Terminology refers to the body of concepts and terms used within a company or area of expertise. When setting up corporate terminology, the specialist terms to be used in internal and external communication are defined precisely. This can be done for all languages that are relevant for worldwide communication.

As is true for all automated processes, when it comes to language solutions: only well-maintained resources produce high-quality results. ZF was well aware of this requirement. After a stringent selection process through a call for tender, the company decided to entrust exact! with the maintenance of its terminology in several languages.

Over decades, a comprehensive terminology database had accumulated at ZF with contributions from employees in numerous fields and countries. This diversity is reflected in the database entries. Their topics range from automotive engineering and production all the way to environmental protection and compliance. The terms for the respective concepts were rarely present in all of the required languages. Definitions were often missing.

Our task was then to assess, organise, refine and complete this multilingual terminology – so that all ZF employees could have the confidence of always knowing exactly what concept was meant in any country.



The machine translation platform is overseen from the company headquarters in Friedrichshafen, Germany.

Founded in 1915, ZF Friedrichshafen AG has evolved from a supplier specializing in aviation technology into a global enterprise in mobility engineering. With its comprehensive technology portfolio, the company offers integrated solutions for established vehicle manufacturers, mobility providers and start-up companies in the fields of transportation and mobility. ZF continually enhances its systems in the areas of digital connectivity and automation in order to allow vehicles to see, think and act. The company has a global workforce of 149,000 with approximately 230 locations worldwide.

Our approach

The aim of terminology work is to thematically differentiate concepts from one another and represent them in various languages. This activity is of a different nature and requires different processes than translation. To put it simply: The right term can only be found by someone who has thoroughly researched and understood the matter at hand.

Intense research

For this reason, our employees began working on the ZF project by compiling definitions in English and German – the languages understood by everyone involved. Equipped with terminology guidelines in which ZF had laid out their requirements, we at exact! worked through the database entries in a structured manner according to subject area. We conducted the associated intense research in-house so that we could guarantee the quality at all times. Cases of doubt and questions were settled in regular exchanges with ZF. In this manner, we were able to ensure that the terminologists for the remaining languages were presented with precise, verified definitions.

Our next step at exact! was to create precise templates and instructions for the preparation of terminology in the languages we could not cover internally with native speakers. We set a multistage procedure for the selection of external service providers, either freelancers or agencies. The final commission was granted only once exact! had conducted an internal quality control on a partial delivery. During the ongoing contract as well, our employees carefully checked every delivery from external service providers in order to meet the high requirements of ZF. In the final step, we imported the terms into ZF's database.



Terms such as “Antriebseinheit” are additionally illustrated with images in the terminology database.

Preserving the established lexicon

A particular challenge came in the drafting of criteria for determining a preferred term in every language. In a company as steeped in tradition as ZF, a special internal lexicon had developed over the years which plays an important role and must be preserved. At the same time, the terminology database should also be laid out such that it could be made available to customers and interested parties at some point in the future.

“In my prior function as terminology manager for foreign languages in the Global Language Center, I had overall responsibility for the collaboration with exact! when the project began. I always found exact! a reliable and competent point of contact. My colleague Anika Kulisch has now taken over the role and can rely on timely deliveries, valuable consultation and high-quality terminology work.”



Maren Matthes,
Translations & Interpreting,
ZF Friedrichshafen AG

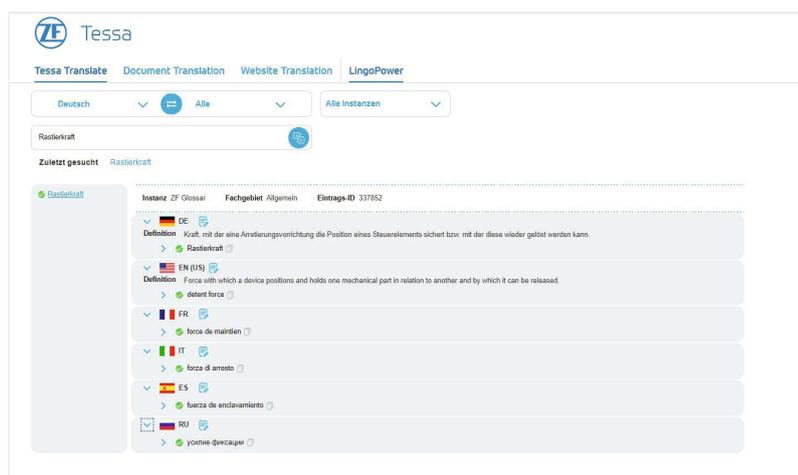
Benefits for ZF

Clarity in company communications

Thanks to the overhauled terminology database, ZF employees now have a reliable resource at their disposal for the retrieval of verified terms both in their native language and others. This enables seamless communication while saving time, money – and headaches. Standardised language reduces the need for queries and help avoid misunderstandings.

Resources for machine translation

Technical progress continues apace. With uniform terminology work, ZF is perfectly prepared for the future of machine translation. exact! continues to support the company in the maintenance and further development of its standardised terminology.



Example from the terminology database. The term “detent force” is defined and shown in its various language uses.



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