

# Cloud control

## *Five translators explain how language technology is helping bring consistency to their company's communications*

The Language Services team at Avaloq is (L to R):

**Zoë Morrow**, Deputy Head of Language Services, works from German, French and Spanish to English

**Michaela Schnetzer**, Language Services Specialist, works from English and French to German

**Carina Freitag**, Head of Language Services, works from English and French to German

**Emma Gledhill MITI**, Language Services Specialist, works from German, French and Dutch to English

**Esther Scowen-Bolz**, Language Services Specialist, works from English and French to German.

In 2020, the Language Services department at the Swiss company Avaloq (a global leader in digital banking solutions, core banking software and wealth management technology) set about introducing new language technologies, starting with Acrolinx.

This is an authoring platform that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to check a range of language aspects: spelling, grammar, terminology, style, clarity and tone. It is a cloud-based service that comes with a terminology database and content guidelines that users can configure and customise so that they can provide consistency across their content. Being based on AI means that the more feedback users provide, the more the system will learn and the better it will get. Acrolinx also has a powerful analytics dashboard, which makes it possible to find out how closely your content meets your goals.

### Bringing Acrolinx to Avaloq

We decided on this technology because our company employs over 2,000 people, using almost every variety of English there is. The Language Services team, which translates and proofreads company documents, has been working on

standardising its corporate language for several years. As professional linguists providing translation and proofreading services, we are acutely aware of the quality standards expected of our services. We have compiled an English style guide and we curate the company glossary, but we were also interested in finding a platform that could help us to achieve consistency throughout the company in our use of English and ultimately promote one consistent voice.

From a professional point of view, we also wanted a solution that would enable us to save on translation and proofreading costs by improving the quality of source texts from the outset. Any translator knows that it takes a lot more time and effort to translate an unclear text – and time is money. The higher the quality of the original text, the more efficient we can be and the more material we can work on. We also wanted to make the content creation process more efficient in general, by giving writers a way to produce a higher-quality first draft needing fewer revisions. We liked the fact that Acrolinx combined different resources such as the company glossary and style guides and integrated these directly into different applications including MS Office and our technical authoring tool. Not having to switch between multiple windows and applications in search of the right term or style saves a lot of time. It was also easy to use, both for us and for non-linguists, with colour-coded issue cards, a scoring system and one-click corrections.

### Getting the new system up and running

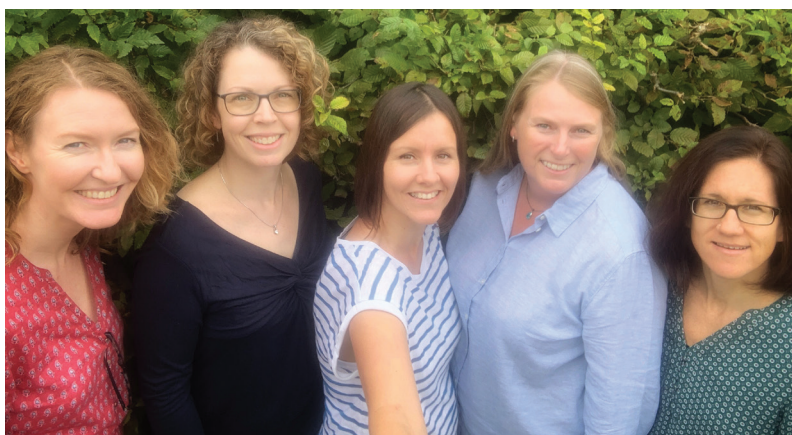
We had initially planned a three-month implementation phase, which turned out to be a little optimistic. Technical hiccups, an increase in demand for our services, and the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic meant it took slightly longer: just over four months.

We started by compiling a large and varied body of Avaloq content and sending it to Acrolinx for analysis. Alongside this, we worked with our in-house IT engineers and

the IT architects at Acrolinx on the technical set-up and how to make it available to our users. We also trained as Acrolinx administrators ourselves, with 11 formal sessions; and we worked closely with Acrolinx's IT architect to import our QTerm-based company glossary into Acrolinx. (This also meant we could clear out obsolete or unnecessary terms from our glossary too.)

We finally launched in mid-May 2020, starting with a small group of approximately 50 users from different departments who write or manage content aimed at our clients, partners and the wider public. We wrote a short guide and created a how-to video for them explaining how to install and use the software. However, we soon realised we would have to promote Acrolinx more actively if we actually wanted our colleagues to use it, so we also created a workshop to help get our target users started, and we delivered it online several times. As a result, user engagement increased significantly; almost half of our initial user group had registered and used the Acrolinx sidebar to run content checks by the end of June.

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The team members have nearly a century of experience between them, which they draw on to provide translations and to proofread company documents. They also curate the corporate terminology, provide language consultancy for natural language processing and localisation projects, and have implemented and use a wide range of language technology solutions.

### User feedback and results so far

So far, we've had quite positive feedback from our Acrolinx users. They find it very easy to use and are impressed by how accurate most of the suggested corrections are. They have told us how, even within the first month of roll-out, the platform has made them aware of deviations from the correct use of our corporate terminology. They also like the fact that it sets out the required house style across the company, cutting out heated debates about how to write certain words or which style to use. They also appreciate the flexibility that Acrolinx gives them to ignore suggested corrections if these aren't appropriate and to check content in confidential mode (data is then not stored in the cloud). Users who manage a large volume of content have told us they particularly like the ability to run checks in batches.

From our point of view, it removes a lot of the legwork involved in proofreading documents and translations. Given that our corporate language is English, but a large amount of written content is generated by non-native speakers, a solution that can correct capitalisation errors, for example, at the click of a mouse enables us to focus our energy on creativity instead of mere mechanics. Longer term, it is also improving our writing at first draft stage. Within our own team, we are now sufficiently familiar with the system that we know, even before putting fingers to keyboard, what will generate flags, so we can already write with that in mind. For example, those who tend to write very long sentences are now splitting them earlier. And while we writers and translators are training Acrolinx all the time, it is also training us to write more concisely and effectively.

However, there's no doubt that implementing and rolling out Acrolinx has been a steep learning curve for us all. The first and most painful lesson was that the project was huge – significantly larger than we had anticipated. Even allowing for COVID-19 striking in the middle of the implementation process, it consumed an inordinate amount of time and, in particular, headspace. This was largely because of the amount and range of initial calibration and testing that was required (particularly for translators, for whom being picky is a professional requirement). But the reality is that this is not software you can use 'straight out of the box'. It is complex precisely because it can be customised so extensively. Only three months after the launch, it had become clear to us that there will always be a certain amount of calibration to do, and that the bigger our user group becomes, the more we will have to adapt Acrolinx to the different types of content we produce. Initially, we were a bit disappointed with some of the errors Acrolinx was – or was not – flagging, despite our weeks of calibration. Indeed, at one point we were raising so many support tickets that we were accused of trying to break it. But we are pleased that our feedback is incorporated into the platform to improve it. Learning how it 'thinks' and its strengths and limitations is helping us get to grips with both the platform and how to get the best out of it.

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We have also realised that getting this software used across the entire company is going to take a lot of internal advertising, so that everyone understands why we need to use the same high-quality standards. We are promoting this change by regularly communicating with our user groups and leveraging the user analytics. We need our users to understand the need for continual adjustment and calibration so that they are patient, and give the system time, without just rejecting it after a few erroneous cards in the sidebar. Furthermore, they need to contribute to the system's learning by reporting issues to us so we can adjust guidelines or terminology settings, exclude certain content types (such as programming code) from checks or simply add terms to the terminology database. Establishing regular communication is always a challenge, but we have set up systems to help our users communicate with us. And we ourselves need to be extremely familiar with the content our users produce or manage so that we can initially configure the system to handle the wide range of content at Avaloq.

### Overall conclusions and advice to others

Our biggest piece of advice to Acrolinx users in general is to get familiar with using the correct styles in MS Word (or the equivalent in technical authoring tools) because the accuracy of a number of checks depends on it. (And make sure that you're not using an outdated MS Word template.) When Acrolinx is configured, the styles in the corporate template are assigned to document features like 'title' and 'heading' so that the system knows which guidelines to apply.

It's also imperative to keep contributing to the platform, because that means it is continually improving. Users should propose terms to be added to the terminology database whenever Acrolinx does not

recognise a word. They should also tell us whenever they don't understand why it is showing a particular error card or suggesting a correction that seems wrong. We can then either resolve the issue, and stop the card from being shown in future, or explain the cause of the issue based on the company's glossary or English style rules.

We also stress the importance of having a clear understanding of where the limits lie with Acrolinx and what it can't do. It's essential for our users to understand that it isn't a writer and that it can't completely reformulate sentences or restructure documents. It can't yet understand nuances or connotations and suggest a more positive (or negative) word choice. If users are aware of these limitations, they can adjust their expectations accordingly and not give way to confusion and frustration.

For us, embracing Acrolinx is a matter of course, especially given Avaloq's globalisation in the last decade and the need for our company to produce high-quality and impactful content. It's a very good example of new technologies that complement the work of humans by allowing them to focus on the areas where their key strengths lie. Creativity, after all, is something a machine cannot replace. 