ESPACENET: THE DATABASES OF THE EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE
Reviewed by Françoise Herrmann

The European Patent Convention (EPC) offers inventors a uniform application procedure that enables them to seek patent protection in up to 40 European countries. Supervised by the Administrative Council, the European Patent Office (EPO) is the executive branch of the European Patent Organization. The EPO examines patent applications and grants European patents. The EPO works in close cooperation with the patent offices of the 38 member states of the European Patent Organization and other countries around the world.

Patent Searches Using Espacenet
Espacenet is a free tool offered by the EPO that provides access to more than 90 million patent documents worldwide, containing information about inventions and technical developments from 1836 to the present. It has a user-friendly interface available in almost all European languages.

The EPO website provides cross-references and the full text of European patent laws and regulations, patent news, patent statistics, and access to patents in English, French, and German (the official languages of the EPO).[1] The upper right corner of the screen enables visitors to choose one of the three EPO official languages at *any* location on the site. (For example, see the orange arrow in Figure 1.) Each of the national Espacenet European patent databases is also searchable separately (e.g., all the national French patents, all the U.K. patents, or all the Italian patents).

The following is a short overview of how you can use Espacenet to find the information you need.

Links to Electronic Copies of Patents
In general, expert patent translators recommend that you always use an electronic copy of a patent.[2] Why? Because when you use an electronic copy, you can, for example, search the document for occurrences of terms to keep all the terminology consistent.

For inventions involving multiple parts (e.g., instrumentation patents), the drawings and figures will be numbered.

So, if you've downloaded a copy of the patent, you will be able to search the document for the numbers and then create a key for the most complete drawing with all the terminology found in the patent. This way, for example, you will always be using "tip (18)" for "pointe (18)" and "extremity (22)" for "extrémité (22)" throughout the translation. This example may sound trivial, but if the invention has hundreds of parts that are disclosed on 100 pages or more, you will definitely want to use an electronic copy of the patent with at least one keyed and glossed drawing for reference.

Searching an Electronic Patent Copy
To search for a web page or document on a web page, press Ctrl F (Windows) or Command F (Apple) and type your search item in the pop-up window. To use your own local desktop search tools, Espacenet allows you to retrieve and download patent documents. This is where the left Espacenet toolbar starts to become particularly useful for translators.

Using the Left Espacenet Search Toolbar
The left Espacenet toolbar appears every time a specific patent is opened on the EPO website after it is retrieved from the Espacenet databases. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of this search toolbar on a page for Patent EP 2531264 ("Wheeled shoes or undersoles for enabling fast walking"). There is a yellow arrow pointing to the toolbar in question, appearing in a grey box.

Figure 1: The left Espacenet search toolbar (yellow arrow), upper right corner language toggle options (orange arrow) and abstract PatentTranslate function (blue arrow)
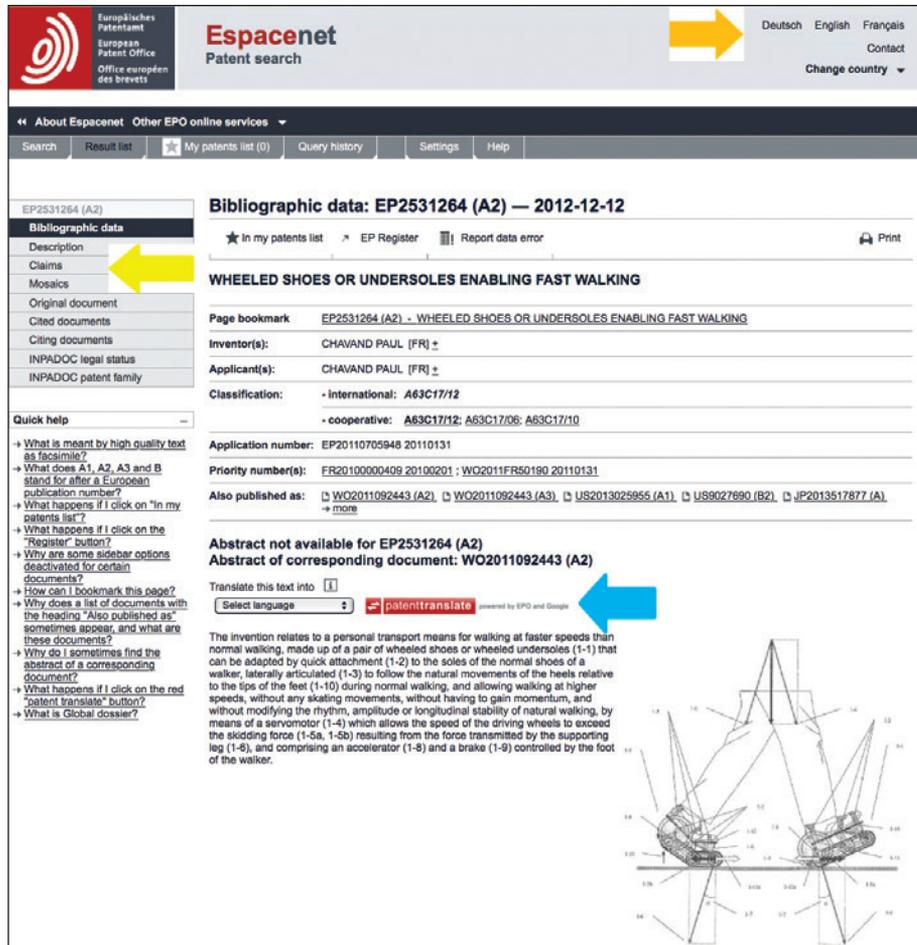
Figure 2: Espacenet Claims Tree function

Here is a breakdown of each of the left toolbar search options shown in Figure 1 (e.g., Bibliographic Data, Description, Claims, Mosaic, etc.):

- **Bibliographic Data:** Opens Espacenet's Bibliographic Data page, where you will find a listing of the various items contained in the hardcopy cover sheet of a patent (e.g., title, publication number, application number, international patent classification), some of which are hyperlinked. The hyperlinked information includes priority publication links and links to patent family documents. These links allow you to see whether an English version of the patent you have retrieved is available. Since the patent numbers are hyperlinked, you can click to the bibliographic data of the linked patent.

    The abstract also appears on the Bibliographic Data page with an EPO PatentTranslate function (blue arrow in Figure 1), allowing you to access the machine translation for the abstract and to see whether the abstract already appears in English or your target language. (The PatentTranslate function was developed jointly by the EPO and Google.)

- **Description:** Opens the searchable specification section of the patent. Use it to get to the background and prior art information and to check the language in which the patent is available. Even though the title may be translated into English and the patent retrieved using the English title, the description may not always be in the same language.

- **Claims:** Opens the searchable claims section of the patent. The claims are the part of the patent that define the scope of the legal protection sought for the invention.

    Click on the "Claims Tree Button" to view a hierarchical tree representation of the independent claims and their dependent or multiple-dependent claims. (See Figure 2.) Click on the + (plus) sign next to the claim number (yellow arrow) to expand the claims view and see how the dependent claims are related hierarchically. You can also find the language in which the claims are available.

    Pursuant to the year 2000 London Agreement on the application of Article 65 of the EPC, in some European patents, the claims are available in two languages (English and the national language of the originating country).

Again, even though the patent title may be translated into English, the claims are not always in the same language.

- **Mosaic:** Opens a collection of thumbnail images of the pages of a patent document containing figures or drawings. You will have the option to view the images in their original size or download them. Downloading this information is highly useful because you will be able to print the files and key the drawings with the terminology found in the description. Your annotations will then help you to keep the terminology very consistent as you translate. You might also access the drawings separately to better understand the patent, or for a quick source of documentation, without having to download and consult the entire patent.

- **Original Document:** Provides you with a complete original version of the patent. Use it to find whether there is an attached prior art search report for guidelines in your documentary research. You can also print or save a copy of the document for offline searching and archiving. (This feature is particularly useful if your client did not provide you with an original copy of the source text.) Abstracts are provided in at least one of the EPO official languages, along with the national filing language if it is different. So, you might find valuable information on the original document that will help you throughout the translation.

- **Cited Documents:** Provides a list of all the documents cited either during any procedures of the EPO patent review process (e.g., search, examination, opposition, limitation, revocation, or appeal), or by the applicant. This list appears as a new hyperlinked list of Espacenet search results. This search is very useful for finding additional related patents for use as model translations or sources of documentation, especially if one happens to be written in the target language. It also saves you the trouble of hunting for citations inside the original document.

- **Citing Documents:** Provides a list of all the other patents or applications citing the particular patent on which you are working. This list appears as a new hyperlinked list of Espacenet search results. This search is also very useful for finding additional related patents for use as models or documentary information, especially when the citing patents are in the target language.

- **International Patent Documentation (INPADOC) Legal Status:** Provides you with worldwide legal status data on the events occurring during the life cycle of a patent application, retrieved from 40 different national patent offices. For example, you can find the countries in which your patent will be covered, one of which might be English-speaking. Or you might find a patent application examination report with specific requests for modification, one of which might be of particular linguistic relevance.

- **International Patent Documentation (INPADOC) Patent Family:** Returns a new list of hyperlinked Espacenet search results with the entire series of patents connected to a specific patent. This is a potentially valuable source of models and documentary information to assist you with understanding the invention or finding specific patent-related terminology.

A Great Resource for Patent Translators

Beyond the vastness of the content available on the EPO website, the ability to search for information in three languages is enough to place it on a translator's preferred list of patent resource search tools. Just toggling from one language to another will provide all translators with an amazingly consistent and user-friendly experience, complete with official translation and links to additional documentation.

The ability to search for information on patents in English, German, and French may not have been designed specifically to address patent translation processes, but this hardly matters. There are countless uses to which the EPO website, and the available functions of the left Espacenet toolbar, may be put to facilitate patent translation tasks. Just click on the links to try them yourself the next time you are translating a patent and visiting the EPO website! ⚙

NOTES

1. European Patent Convention, http://bit.ly/European-Patent-Convention.

2. Popp, Bruce. "Using Patents to Find the Terminology You Need," *The ATA Chronicle* (May 2009), 16–23, http://bit.ly/Popp-Chronicle.

Also see: Vitek, Steve. "Internet Resources for the Translation of Patents into English," *In The Patent Translator's Handbook* (American Translators Association, 2007), 41–48.

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