THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGES ON THE ONLINE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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This paper deals with an analysis of the English language, as lingua franca of the Internet, mainly online business environment. If a business has already developed a Web site, it is important to translate the site into the target language of a particular foreign market. It sounds easy, but is a literal translation all that's required for a different culture? We shall see in the next parts of this paper. Indeed, nowadays, the whole humanity has at its disposal an exceptional, very powerful medium. The new communications technology is causing a revolution in many aspects of our lives, and its future effects are still unforeseeable English is an integral part of business communication, job opportunities and globalization. Cultural translation goes beyond mere linguistic translation, since it involves designing a Web site that is sensitive to the cultural differences, between the originated country and the target country. If you ask any search marketer what the main issue is when trying to optimize website(s) for Europe he will tell you: language.

Keywords: English, languages, Internet, global, business transaction, culture, e-commerce, localization

JEL code Z 19

1. English- lingua franca of the Internet

Firstly, English is an effective method to communicate business transactions for a successful career. There are various ways of communication such as verbal and written form. Verbal communication conducted through phone can be used for telemarketing. For example, Ford Motor Company, American Express. Call centres in banks also use written form of communication. For example, the ABN AMRO bank, in spite of being a Dutch bank it has established itself in more than 53 countries and it is conducting business transactions in English.

English is the most commonly used language of international commerce, politics, science, diplomacy, and the most commonly used language on the Internet. It is a "lingua franca", or vehicular language, i.e. a language spoken and utilized outside of the country or countries of its origin, as opposed to a vernacular language, i.e. a language spoken within and amongst native speakers in the country of origin. English, like other lingua franca of the past, is often used as a second language to effect common communication for a specific purpose (such as diplomacy) between people for whom the lingua franca is not their first language.

English is one of the most widely used languages in today's world and has a great impact on a successful career and also online transactions(marketers, on the one hand, and consumers, on the other hand). Due to rapid modernization and westernisation, the popularity of the English language has increased. It is internationally used and globally accepted. "English is being recreated every minute of every day, in billions of conversations in every country on earth; in countless books, films, television and radio programs, on the internet—recreated organically: that is, in ways that grow out of its extraordinarily, perhaps incomparably, rich history and flexibility."(*Robert Dessaix, 21/01/2006*) English is an integral part of business communication, job opportunities and globalization. Although some say that English is not a commonly used language, statistics prove that increase in business transactions, job opportunities and advancement in globalization are due to the wide influence of the most commonly spoken

language, English. These two phenomena - the advanced computer technology and English with its status as a world language - are brought together in one whole and form something that is really exceptional and unique, something that is multinational and the most global thing ever in the whole of human history: they form the Network-of-networks, the Internet, and English as its lingua franca appears to be the network's inseparable part.

2. Importance of Going Global
With the ability of the Web to instantaneously reach a global audience, many e-commerce and e-business companies have attempted, or are attempting, to expand their markets beyond their home countries. As the number of Internet users grows at an exponential rate around the globe, there are great opportunities for companies to grab a share of the global market through the Web. Currently about 49% of the Internet population is estimated to be non-English speakers.

Expanding business through the Web may not require physically setting up offices physically in different regions or countries. If a business has already developed a Web site, it is important to translate the site into the target language of a particular foreign market. It sounds easy, but is a literal translation all that's required for a different culture?

According to Adam Jones, director of customer programs at SimulTrans, a translation company based in Silicon Valley, there are five basic localization strategies:

1. Use only U.S. English;
2. Translate portions of a given Web site into a target language;
3. Translate the entire Web site into a target language;
4. Culturally localize the site for a target audience; and,
5. Develop content in a target country, independent of the U.S. site.

The first three strategies involve linguistic translation of Web sites whereas the last two strategies involve cultural translation. Cultural translation goes beyond mere linguistic translation since it involves designing a Web site that is sensitive to the cultural differences between the originated country and the target country.

Localization of an e-commerce site also goes beyond the localization of a mere Web site. It involves more than just files residing on a server; it involves the entire infrastructure necessary for transaction, distribution, and customer services, which is often unique to a specific country and tied to a specific culture. Each country in the world has a distinct social system and culture. Nothing cannot be generalized in discussing specific localization strategies for a particular country.

3. Is English still present in international electronic commerce, is it still relevant to other cultures?!
It is important for all businesses to establish trusting relationships with their consumers. Companies
with established reputations in the physical world often create trust, by ensuring that consumers know who they are. These businesses can rely on their established brand names, to create trust on the web.

New companies that want to establish online businesses face a more difficult challenge, because a kind of anonymity exists for companies trying to establish a web presence.

Most companies now realize that the only way to do business effectively in other cultures is to adapt to those cultures. The phrase "think globally, act locally" is often used to describe this approach. The first step that a web business usually takes to reach potential consumers in other countries, and thus in other cultures, is to provide local language versions of its website. This may mean translating the website into another language or regional dialect. Researchers have

found that consumers are far more likely to buy products and services from websites in their own language, even if they can read English well.

Only 370 million of the world's 6 billion people learned English as their native language.

An important element of business trust is anticipating how the other party to a transaction will act in

specific circumstances. That is one reason why companies with established brands can build online

businesses more quickly and easily than a new company, without a reputation. The brand conveys some expectations about how the company will behave. For example, a potential buyer might like to know how the seller would react to a claim by the buyer that the seller misrepresented the quality of the goods sold. Part of this knowledge derives from the buyer and seller sharing a common language and common customs. Business partners ideally have a common legal structure for resolving disputes. The combination of language and customs is often called culture. Most researchers agree that culture varies across national boundaries and, in many cases, varies across regions within nations. All companies must be aware of the differences in language and customs that make up the culture of any region in which they intend to do business. Businesses that successfully meet the challenges posed by trust, language, and culture issues still face the challenges posed by variations and inadequacies in the infrastructure that supports the internet throughout the world. Internet infrastructure includes the computers and software connected to the internet and the communications networks over which the message packets travel. In many countries other than the United States, the telecommunications industry is either government owned or heavily regulated by the government. In many cases, regulations in these countries have inhibited the development of the telecommunications infrastructure or limited the expansion of that infrastructure to a size that cannot reliably support internet data packet traffic. English has always been the dominant language of the Web and electronic commerce, with an estimated 63.5% share of the world's online population. But a significant number of internet users either do not speak English or prefer to use their native language for Web transactions. According to Euro-Marketing Associates(EMA), a consulting firm specializing in multilingual marketing, non-English speakers also represent" the fastest-growing group of people online today." EMA estimates that 55.7 million people are part of the non-English segment, including millions of U.S. and Canadian residents who switch to Spanish, French, or some other languages at home.

One of the surprises in the Euro-Marketing statistics is that just two languages- Spanish and Japanese make up almost half of the non-English Web marketplace, a ratio that differs significantly from the actual number of native speakers for these languages.

4. The European online business environment is more than just using different languages
If you ask any search marketer what the main issue is when trying to optimize website(s) for Europe he will tell you: **language**. Europe consists of fifty countries. The European countries which are part of the European Union together already have 23 official languages.

Europe has many countries and many languages. Some say there are over 200 official languages to take in account. Others also look at the dialects and then count over a 1000. So language really is a big issue when optimizing sites for Europeans. The Europeans have different lifestyles, which means they also have different online behavior. One thing you have to keep in mind is that every country in Europe has its own culture. And though they might speak the same language, they feel they are completely different. Let's combine the two issues discussed above: language and culture.

There are more countries in Europe with that issue: in both Germany and Austria for example they speak German. But the language barrier is bigger than just the differences within the language. For example, when targeting Austria, which is located just below Germany, it's tempting to set up a German site and use it to target the Austrians also. After all, the language is

quite similar. However, chances are you will not get much traffic from Austrians. Why? Simply because the Austrians do not trust the German websites. If they see the shop is on a German .de domain they will be more reluctant to buy a product than when it's on an Austrian domain. Just because they have a different culture. The same might go for trying to sell products to a Dutchman and targeting him with a Belgian site.

In some countries there are even differences within the country. Take for example Spain, where Basques and Catalan really are living their own lives and where most feel not connected, even hostile in some cases, towards the country itself. A quick example to show how much: last year the Spanish national soccer team won the European Championships. Where in Madrid people were celebrating on the streets, in Barcelona it was relatively quiet. It was after all the Spanish team which had won, not the Catalan team.

The "problem" of focusing exclusively on languages in Europe is that its not one country, one language. It's one country, many languages. Take the Netherlands for example. With only 17 million people living on a little piece of ground which the official language is Dutch, but Frisian is also accepted as a official language. Next to that there are about 8 or 9 dialects, but when optimizing for websites you don't have to take those in account.

How to handle all of these language and cultural differences when optimizing for Europe? According to Bas van den Beld, a well-known web strategist, each search marketer should research the differences in languages, by knowing the history of the areas one is targeting and getting domains and writing sites for every specific country. We would like to add that in our opinion language is the most important asset of a website, if it is not understood by the online consumers, eventually the market share could sometimes fall dramatically.

5. The European Commission's policy regarding the role of languages in Europe's business environment

The Commission defines language as an integral part of a person's identity and culture. It argues that learning foreign languages also necessitates understanding other people and their way of thinking to oppose intolerance, xenophobia and racism.

Progress towards the "**mother tongue plus two foreign languages'"**goal is slow. Half of the EU citizens polled in a recent Euro barometer survey say they can hold a conversation in at least one language other than their mother tongue. At the top of the class come the Luxembourgers (99%), Latvians and Maltese (93%) and Lithuanians (90%), while Hungarians (71%), citizens in the UK (70%), Spain, Italy and Portugal (64% each) tend to master only their mother tongue.The Commission also suggests that higher education institutions play a more active role in promoting multilingualism among students and staff as well as the wider local community. It warns that the trend in non-English-speaking countries towards teaching through the medium of English instead of through the national or regional language may have "unforeseen consequences" for the vitality of those languages.

The role of intercultural communication skills in global marketing and sales strategies is growing. Reacting to evidence that European companies are losing business because they cannot speak their customers' languages, the Commission published a study on the impact of the shortage of language skills on the EU economy in December 2006.

The study clearly revealed the link between languages and export sales, indicating that a language strategy is a significant element of the overall success of every European business. The Commission is well aware of the importance of effective language policies in supporting business development, and calls for language certification to be standardised throughout the EU.

More recently, a report presented by European business leaders in July 2008, entitled 'Languages mean business: companies work better with languages', found that EU businesses risk losing competitiveness as other countries start outperforming them in language skills.

The report, presented by the Business Forum for Multilingualism, chaired by former EU Commissioner Viscount Etienne Davignon of Suez-Tractabel, found that emerging economies,

primarily in Asia and Latin America, are quickly acquiring the solid language skills necessary to compete successfully.

Europe will thus have to promote formal and informal language learning more effectively to keep up, it says, estimating that as much as 11% of European SMEs lose business every year as a direct result of linguistic and intercultural weaknesses.

On a more positive note, the EU's language industry is worth €8.4bn and is set to grow by 10% annually over the next few years after having recorded one of the highest growth rates of any industrial sector despite the economic crisis, according to a European Commission-backed study published in November 2009 (EuRActiv 30.11.2009).

6. Conclusions

If the earliest days of the Websites, at the onset of the 1990s, were dominated by English-language content as well as users, this situation is rapidly changing. In the mercurial world of the Web, where sites appear and disappear overnight and where not even the major web portals individually or collectively can provide access to all the available pages, it is impossible to be precise as to how many individual languages are represented currently on the Web. The New Babel: Language Barriers on the World Wide Web and the Babel Team results revealed a dominant position for English; nevertheless, close to two home pages out of ten were in some other language. When the enormous number of pages available on the Web is taken into account, another figure about which no precise estimate can be offered, but certainly well in excess of one billion (for a discussion of the problems of estimating the Web's size (Dahn 2000) this nevertheless represents a vast amount of information unavailable in English. German, Japanese, French, and Spanish all accounted for more than one percent.

A later analysis was conducted by FUNREDES: the Networks and Development Foundation. It estimated that English accounted for around 60 percent of web pages, a considerable decline from the earlier Babel study. On this basis, it then estimates the percentages for six other European languages. In all cases, their presence on the Web is proportionately higher than in the Babel study. All but one account for more than two percent of web pages. Furthermore, more than 19 percent of web pages are in languages other than these top seven:

Position Language %
       1. English 60
       2. German 6.3
       3. Spanish 4.85
       4. French 4.39
       5. Italian 2.77
       6. Portuguese 2.14
       7. Romanian 0.19
       Other 19.36

The EU's new multilingualism strategy, published on 18 September 2008 and entitled 'Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment', emphasised the importance of language skills in addressing challenges as diverse as globalisation and increased mobility and immigration. It sought to mainstream EU language policy across a number of existing policy areas, including the education, media, research, social inclusion and competitiveness fields.

The strategy highlighted the importance of language skills in improving the EU's social cohesion and prosperity in the context of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

Recognising the growing importance of emerging markets for EU companies, the communication stressed the need for workforces to possess knowledge of the language of the regions in which they operate. It also highlighted the role of language skills in improving the employability of Europeans.

Moreover, given that 2008 was designated European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the strategy emphasised the role of languages in removing barriers to interaction between cultures. We have

already mentioned that cultural translation goes beyond mere linguistic translation, since it involves designing a Web site that is sensitive to the cultural differences, between the originated country and the target country. All the companies must be aware of the differences in language and customs that make up the culture of any region in which they intend to do business.

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